

# **FELT SENSES OF SELF AND NO-SELF IN THERAPY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis develops Gendlin's concept of the felt sense in two directions, and introduces parallel concepts of self. It starts by examining western and eastern cultural contexts, neuroscientific conceptualisations and linguistic issues as they relate to self, using the lens of Gendlin's two ways of relating to the world – interpreting according to the unit model and thinking beyond patterns, to point out conceptual confusions. Buddhist philosophy and practice are discussed as methods of undoing such conceptual confusions in order to relieve suffering, with self as an independent, stable, substantial entity being the primary example of such a confusion. Dualism is identified as the basic misconception from which suffering ensues. Non-duality is investigated as a spiritual endstate, an integral part of the goals of humanistic therapies and an intrinsic element in 'carrying forward', then compared with Gendlin's implicit intricacy, Sartre's Being-in-itself and intersubjective theories. A small qualitative study investigates what happens when felt senses of self are intentionally produced or accessed by focusing. A continuum of experiences is described, ranging from self to no-self, with trauma proving a major block to both self and no-self experiencings. The felt sense is re-defined in two ways, as an extending boundary and as a direct referent. A sense of self is also considered both as a boundary drawing exercise, and a direct referent. Self may function in either of these forms on a relative level, constructively or destructively, according to circumstances and conditions, while on an ontological level no such single entity may be proven to exist. The conclusion is drawn that self and no-self form a kind of twisting human thread, which shows, at any one moment, just one side of a duality. These sides are conceptually, rather than actually, distinct.

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To study the buddha way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things.

When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away.

No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.

(Dogen, 1233)



# INTRODUCTION

## SECTION ONE – PERSPECTIVES AND MOTIVATION

My investigation springs from engagement as a therapist with the problem of suffering and the search for relief. This search lies at the heart of both therapeutic and spiritual practices, and in both kinds of practices 'self' is persistently mentioned, and conceptually central. In western contexts self appears as a bringer of relief and carrier of existential meaning, while in Buddhist contexts it appears as the very *source* of suffering.

My perspective is that of a British counsellor/therapist, trained in the Person Centred Approach, practicing Gendlin's method of focusing, and also studying and practicing Mahayanan Buddhism. I have been living and working in Poland, using the Polish language, since 1997, and working and living in a different language and culture has added a dimension of fluidity and a strong contextual awareness to my thinking.

As I engage in both therapy and Buddhist practices, I find the recurring paradoxes hinging on the goals of 'finding' the self or 'losing' the self, ever more intriguing. This sense of intrigue led me to investigate the matter more deeply, and Gendlin's philosophy of the Implicit and practice of felt sensing formed a third thread which helped me, while examining the various concepts of 'self' and 'no-self', to zig zag back to intuitions I had about self which did *not* fit neatly inside any of the concepts, and to articulate them.

I investigate how the concepts of self and of no-self arise in the interactions of multiple contexts – cultural, social, linguistic, philosophical, neuroscientific and spiritual. I take a perspective informed by Buddhist views and infused with insights from phenomenology, embodied neurophilosophy and intersubjectivity theories,

returning repeatedly to the question of how these conceptual insights/creations firstly might be causing suffering and secondly, might help to *relieve* suffering, through the practices of meditation and therapy.

The thesis should be of interest to therapists, clients or both, who are interested in Buddhism or other meditation practices and/or focusing. During its attempt to elucidate the self/no-self issue, the thesis throws light on how Buddhist and focusing approaches relate to each other, making explicit both often-assumed or intuited common areas and salient differences. I hope I have provided enough background information for those who are unfamiliar with Gendlin's philosophy, or with Buddhism, to be able to follow.

I ask three interlocking questions: How is the concept of self understood in the theory and practice of therapy? Does the concept of self work to reduce, or to produce suffering? Is there value in using 'finding', or 'losing' the self, as guiding principles of therapy?

While brief indications of what the implications of the arguments within the thesis might be for therapeutic practice are given, I believe that once the concepts of self and no-self are untangled, the implications can be taken in many directions – I leave readers to carry forward the ideas presented in their own way.

## **SECTION TWO – BACKGROUND TO THE QUESTION**

'Self' is a nebulous concept which has been defined in myriad ways. Reinforced by a long tradition of western philosophical, religious and political practices, and backed up more recently by psychological theories of development (Kohut, 1971), it may just as easily be deconstructed by philosophical, and/or postmodern analysis (Derrida, 1974; Giles 1993; Tomhave, 2010; Zweig, 1995), sociology (Goffman, 1956), neuroscientific research (Damasio, 2010; Metzinger, 2003) or the tenets of Buddhism. All these perspectives consider self not as an essential, stable entity but

as a construct, maintained in order to enjoy some sense of stability and security. Notably, when Buddha was asked about the existence of the self, he kept silent. He could see no way of answering the question without reinforcing a wrong view (Ñanamoli, 1972). This difficulty seems to point to a misconception in the question itself.

Maybe 'self' is not the kind of thing that can exist or not exist, but rather something which we make and use. This concept of self, that tends to slip from the grasp of all definitions, is hard to prove or fix, yet it seems to have a strong and intimate hold on us – something like the concept of 'love' maybe, which refers, in individual uses, to an infinitely varied range of experiences, yet is readily used as a universal. As a prime example of what Gendlin calls 'public language' (Gendlin, 1997c), it never captures the intricacy of lived experience. In fact we tend to stick it over the top of multiple different experiences in order to serve various purposes. This may sound a sloppy or pointless exercise, but there is a very real kind of drive or desire to do this – it is behaviour that has sense and meaning for us.

So what is the drive towards 'self'? Is it less of a drive and more of a default assumption? Is it no more than our answer to possibly misconceived questions (e.g. who am I really? What is there about me that lasts, that makes me who I am?) and if so, is the misconception behind the question something that people repeatedly re-create because it has meaning, or is it simply a linguistic misconception which serves to trap us – in which case, why should the delusion be so very difficult to remove?

Looking from my experience as a therapist, 'self' is a concept that appears as people talk about their personal experience, usually to mark a lack. Perhaps it is only when something is missing, deficient, or not strong enough, that we feel a need for it and call out for it. And the 'it' which is missing, is what many clients coming to therapy often explicitly state in terms of self: 'I've come because I've lost myself', 'I don't feel like myself anymore', 'I just don't like myself', or 'I need to find my real self'. These experiences, conceptualised as 'lost self,' seem to express fear and anxiety,

on an existential level.

Use of the word 'self' may function as a signifier that we are not living fully, that something feels blocked or has not been taken into account. There may be a sense that everything is going well, yet there's a lack of meaning. We do not feel as secure or as happy as we once did, or sense that we might, or that other people do. There's just something *wrong*. How has the concept 'self' come to carry so much?

## **SECTION THREE – CHAPTER OVERVIEWS**

Each chapter tackles its subject on two 'levels' (Gendlin's Unit Model/ Implicit Intricacy; the Buddhist relative/absolute) and the paradox presented by the way in which two seemingly mutually exclusive conceptual levels are actually ever-present in each other. Each level may also be conceptually placed, respectively, at the starting and finishing points of a continuum leading from 'ordinary life' to 'mystical experience', as we move from units to intricacy, from public language to naked saying, from the relative to the absolute.

Therapy takes place 'inbetween' – at the places along the continuum where we get stuck. We may move in either direction – in therapy we tend to move towards 'ordinary life' and in spiritual practice towards 'mystical experience'.

## **CHAPTER ONE – CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

Although often referred to as a concept which is somehow essentially beyond culture, self is in practice inextricable from cultural contexts.

My aim is not to provide a comprehensive overview of all possible concepts of self but to clarify western background assumptions, provide examples of different assumptions/contexts, historically and cross-culturally, and substantiate the point that there is no 'one' way that a self should be.

I argue that:

- The western concept of the self is as culturally specific as any other, and to assume that this is not the case is not only inaccurate but limiting to all and particularly harmful to people (including those within western culture) whose experience and values do not fit inside it
- many constructions of 'self' are possible
- there is no inherent ontological truth in one form or another
- there does seem to be some concept of a personal 'self' in most cultures
- 'self' is a hotly debated field, which is in no sense value free.

## **INTRODUCTION TO GENDLIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE IMPLICIT AND FOCUSING**

At this point, I introduce in more detail the work of Gendlin, and the concepts which will thread through and support the thesis from then on. If the reader comes across a term or point from Gendlin later in the text which they find unclear, they will be able to refer back to this brief guide to the main concepts.

Two crucial concepts for the thesis are the Unit Model and the Implicit Intricacy. The unit model initially refers to the seventeenth century philosophical model, which conceptualised the world as a set of inanimate, independent units which could be combined in various ways by someone from an external position. The implicit intricacy originates in Gendlin's Process Model, which moves from the principle 'interaction first' (interaction is always prior to the separate objects created by the unit model way of conceptualising) and describes our living, thinking and speaking as a complex, yet naturally and responsively ordered, mass of processes.

The other important concepts taken from Gendlin come from the practice of Focusing (Gendlin, 1981). The 'direct referent' (Gendlin, 1997a; Gendlin 1997b) is a

directly felt meaning that can be conceptualised as a special kind of object inside, and it has, I argue, salient similarities with sense of self. 'Carrying forward' (Gendlin, 1981) – what happens when stopped processes resume in a different, more complex way, often after we have directed attention to the direct referent, has similarities with senses of 'no-self'.

## **CHAPTER TWO – SELF AS ORGANISM – NEUROSCIENCE AND THERAPY**

Neuroscience has become an important context in which to think about self, due to the predominance of the western scientific model, as a way in which to understand the world, and how it plugs into the old Cartesian narrative according to which meaning lies 'inside our heads'. Neuroscientific conceptions of self have become extremely influential and require critical examination.

Conceptual confusions in these neuroscientific conceptions of self have been caused by a few persistent assumptions – the main one being that the truth is 'in here', the real world is 'out there' and the twain shall meet only via various kinds of representation. This conception is seriously undermined by contemporary currents in neuroscience itself, such as embodied cognition and neurophilosophy, which situate us as parts of our environment, seamlessly interacting with it.

Neuroscience's valuable attempts to work out what happens when something 'goes wrong' (e.g. brain damage) have led to unfortunate attempts to build theories of how things normally work, based on the abnormal case. These theories have effects on people as they try to make sense of their lives, and on the way in which therapy is conducted. The waters are further muddied by the power of the pharmaceutical industry to influence science, medicine and concepts of ill-health and well-being.

I argue that:

- conceptual confusions are reinforced by neuroscience as it functions culturally/conceptually today. This causes superfluous suffering for people as they attempt to fit their experience into schemes which are, at best,

irrelevant, and at worst actively harmful

- these confusions also structure therapeutic treatments, leading to conceptions of people as primarily bearers of conditions which may be fixed by medication rather than humans living in complex situations which require examination
- embodied neuroscience and research into extreme and/or beneficial states of functioning, such as those experienced during meditation, can help us take knowledge forward and relieve suffering rather than trying to track down 'normality.'

### **CHAPTER THREE – SELF AS LANGUAGE AND LIFE PROCESS**

Chapter Three investigates the word self in the English language. Language is considered both as a part of the unit model, as 'public language' and as a part of our natural living process. I compile a list of commonly used expressions in the English language today referring to self and group them under guiding themes which emerge in how the concept functions and the constellations of meanings it brings. It becomes clear that there are fundamental conceptual misunderstandings about self implicitly active in people's living. I go on to explore both social context and Gendlin's concept of 'naked saying' (Gendlin, 1991), speaking spontaneously 'beyond' conceptual schemes, using the example of my own therapeutic work in a second language, Polish. I also consider languages as complex and multiple phenomena, existing in the context of a non-linguistic dimension.

I argue that:

- self as a concept is inextricable from language, but not dependent on it
- there are processes we could call pre-linguistic, post-linguistic or a-linguistic that function intricately within normal life
- the word self is sometimes no more than a superfluous linguistic device; sometimes linguistic uses of self actively mislead us; and sometimes self functions in language to point to something that cannot be said any other

way. Various kinds of meaningful experience are pointed at by these uses

- the word self is often used to signal morals, meanings and values within complex situations
- language may open up creative ways of living through 'naked saying'
- our lives are also inextricable from language but not dependent on it.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – NO-SELF/SELF AS CARRYING FORWARD – BUDDHISM AND THE PROCESS MODEL**

Early analytical Buddhism dismantles the concept of self as an independent, lasting identity. The next stage in the development of Buddhism, the Mahayana tradition, posits an ever-present dimension of absolute reality, beyond concepts, in which we all share an essentially good Buddhanature. The third stage holds concepts and non-conceptual realities to be equally true, hence self and no-self co-exist. I liken this third stage view to Gendlin's Process model (Gendlin, 1997a), in which both the unit model and implicit intricacy function at the same time.

I argue that:

- the self as a permanent, stable, separate entity is effectively dismantled by early Buddhist analysis
- the diagnosis of the 'three poisons', the human tendencies to attachment, aversion and ignorance, effectively elucidates how people maintain a state of permanent stress or dissatisfaction. The process of producing stress or 'extra' suffering begins with attaching to our selves as permanent, separate entities
- Later schools of Buddhism offer a way in which concepts and no-concepts may be simultaneously held. Gendlin's Process model also offers such a way, the difference being that it has a sense of forward direction, whereas the Buddhist schools point out that time itself is just another concept
- self and no-self may be seen as two aspects of the same reality, appearing as called for in specific situations.



## **CHAPTER FIVE – COMPARING GOALS – THERAPY AND BUDDHISM**

Chapter Five compares the often confused and conflated goals and strategies of therapy and Buddhism, coming to the conclusion that while the search for an end to suffering within the minds and lives of the people who are suffering, rather than outside them, is common to both practices, Buddhism contains a very distinct dimension that goes beyond the remit of therapy.

I argue that:

- significant common ground can be found in the effects of both therapy and Eastern spiritual practices (Buddhist, Advaita Vedanta, Taoist) in the area characterised on the western therapy side as flow, and on the eastern side as wu-wei, i.e. effortless action
- in a sense both therapy and spiritual practices aim at a return to a state conceptualised as natural, and it is only when problems arise that we need to use them
- the aims of therapy and spiritual practice cover similar ground but are actually distinct, the aims of spiritual practices going beyond those of therapy
- the extra dimension 'beyond therapy' should not be incorporated into therapy but should remain 'beyond concepts'. Clients looking for wellbeing in the everyday world have entirely legitimate aims, and those searching for enlightenment should not be enticed into thinking that it is synonymous with wellbeing.

## **CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION**

Chapter Six brings together the threads of previous contexts and discoveries, and develops Gendlin's concept of the felt sense.

I argue that:

- use of the term 'self' is analogous to the use of the term 'felt sense' in two different ways
- one self/felt sense works 'outwards,' to cover 'all of that'
- the other works 'inwards' and creates a 'direct referent' or 'thing' that I can relate to, and use in various ways
- the term no-self works in analogous directions, outwards and inwards
- these terms (self and no-self) become useful to conceptualise what we do in everyday life *only* when problems, or creative opportunities, arise
- we move through self and no-self conceptualisations in a kind of dynamic spiral, with each aspect coming to the fore in different conditions
- this movement itself might form some kind of thread we could identify as self
- it is important not to cling compulsively to any one conceptualisation. I agree with Buddhist analysis that this is the root cause of suffering
- reality has an ever-present, non-dual aspect, hence self/no-self are only ever provisional designations, or things that we 'do'.

## APPENDIX

The appendix contains a list of everyday expressions which include the word self, elucidates the picture conjured by each expression and interprets it as helpful, unhelpful or superfluous.

# **CHAPTER ONE – CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

## **SECTION ONE – WESTERN CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

Contemporary western society is based on an understanding of people as individual, autonomous agents acting in their own self-interest. Ownership and possession are fundamental structuring principles of western societies, and there are few places on earth left untouched by global capitalism and its basic assumptions – that we are what we own and what we consume, and that our growth must necessarily be at the expense of others. Not only do we own money and material goods, but we are the possessors of bodies, rights, personal qualities, skills, and free choices, which come to define us. We are what we own. We own our selves, and we have rights and duties to protect and enhance them.

### **1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The roots of these deep seated assumptions start way back in the western historical narrative, with what Taylor calls 'the inward turn', a cumulative process the start of which he pinpoints with Augustine (Taylor, 1989 p.127-143). According to the narrative identified by Taylor, in the times of antiquity, people acted as parts of a cosmic order, with roles to play that made sense only as elements in the functioning of the whole. Deities, standing above and apart from human beings, governed events. The duty of human beings was to follow fate, destiny or the will of God. What 'they wanted' as individuals was not a concern that was valued, or even named, in society, and as introspective thoughts were not written down, we cannot definitively know whether they existed.

Plato depicts a world in which ideals are the main 'moral goods' (as Taylor names the fundamental values in a given society), a world in which our physical bodies are animated by a divine soul, which lives in the body like the captain of a ship and

survives death. The sense of a split between spirit and matter, now conceptualised as 'mind and matter,' remains to this day. Aristotle brought a more holistic view, that soul and body are related as *form* and matter, making up an indivisible whole, i.e. the human organism is animated by a psyche or soul – simply, what causes an organism to be alive – also possessed by plants and animals.

The Epicurean and Stoic traditions in ancient Greece are often overlooked in the western narrative, but their worldviews seem particularly relevant today, and often strike common notes with Buddhism (Bowman, 2014; O'Connor, 1993). The Epicurean notion of ataxaria represents a positive value and means freedom from disturbance, i.e. from entanglements and desires ("Ataxaria" 2015). The Stoic 'apatheia' translates as 'without desire', meaning not depression but peace of mind and equilibrium ("Stoicism," n.d.). Epicurean philosophy fits well with the modern assumption that moral goods are intrinsically linked to pleasure, although the modern version of pleasure is more desire-fuelled. Both views regard the human organism as a part of the natural world up until the moment of death, which for Epicureans was the moment of dispersion of the atoms that had come together, due to a variety of causes and conditions, to temporarily form consciousness (reminiscent of Buddhist analysis). Hence death is the extinction of consciousness and with it, the soul. The equation of soul with consciousness is a typical modern conclusion.

To return to the more conventional main narrative, the inward turn came, according to Taylor, with Augustine. Augustine communicated with God within his own soul, and considered the soul to be indivisible from the body (hence the body would also be resurrected on Judgement Day). Communicating with God *within* the soul was the start of introspection as a recorded human activity, and was assigned a specific spiritual value.

From that moment on moral goods and the source of meaning became, according to Taylor, located within individuals themselves, in their own personal conscience. A world view based on various understandings of the social contract, stemming from

Enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes (1909), Locke (2003; 1690) and Rousseau (1987), in a sense conflicts with this. According to this contractual view, moral goods, although based on self-interest, are not considered matters of individual conscience but defined as questions of rights and duties which must be upheld in order to maintain a civil society. This view of free and equal individuals making up a rationally ordered society for the common benefit was presented as the alternative to blind obedience to those in power (be they Gods or feudal Lords). Civil society, according to Hobbes, saves the individual from a 'state of Nature' which is brutal, while according to Rousseau the state of nature, while having positive qualities, should nonetheless be further developed using an ethical and rational commitment to the general good of all, with scant reference to any small voice inside. Much as the value of the 'small voice' might be exalted in art and psychology, the world is in increasing alignment with the 'contract model', which now feeds neatly into the capitalist one. One of the problems with this joint model, securely grounded in global capitalism, is that while it allows you to protect yourself from exploitation by others, it does not in itself offer any meaningful rewards. The sense of 'common good' has been eroded. The sphere of meaning has been split off into arts, psychology, 'personal growth' and religious practices, forming a specialist area divorced from 'real life'. Does 'self' reside in the specialist area or in 'real life'? Does it have to be confined to one or the other? It seems vital to expand the concept so it both encompasses and transgresses these two separate realms, breaking up their rigid distinctions.

This expansion need not involve only a movement into the future but also a look back at the past. The western view of history as beginning with a divine order, according to which people acted in accordance with their assigned roles without any sense of interiority, does not stretch back to the very start. Studies of hunter-gatherer (pre-agrarian) societies, both historical and contemporary, show a quite different picture of the roots of human culture (Lee, 1988; Hill and Hurtado, 1996). There is a consensus view that hunter-gatherer societies did not/do not live according to hierarchical roles or obeying the whims of gods but as mobile, co-operative groups adapting to changing environments along explicit principles of

non-ownership and a morality based on equality. They are 'fiercely egalitarian' (Lee, 1988) to the extent that anyone who stands out from the group, e.g. hunts more meat than the others, is 'brought down to earth' as a matter of principle, since pride or 'self-esteem' as something distinguishing one person from others, is considered potentially harmful to the whole group. There is no ownership, either of land or of people, labour is not bought and sold – and there is a great deal of plurality in sexual practices. (Ryan and Jetha, 2010; Hill and Hurtado, 1996)

The western historical narrative misleads us into thinking that 'primitive people' were basically warlike, unintelligent and in need of civilising. It is certainly in the moral interests of colonisers to think so. In fact, extensive research suggests that the foundations of humanity actually lie in child-rearing practices based on loving attachment rather than individualism and punishment, in principles of fierce egalitarianism and playfulness (Gray, 2009). These values and practices seem specifically designed to undermine any sense of a separate self, needing to exert control over itself and others. I go on to give a more detailed account of attachment-based child-rearing practices later in the chapter.

Despite the considerable scope of this research however (Fiske, 1991; Shultziner, 2010), the dominant western narrative remains one of unremitting progress from dark unformed chaos to bright rationality, as savages are saved from a state of constant war by the imposition of the nation state (e.g. Pinker, 2011; Diamond, 2012). The story is that we have moved from this realm of chaos within and Gods above, to take the power of the gods inside, thus becoming like them – autonomous, all-powerful rational agents, steering our selves and the world around us. Destroying 'primitive' cultures, according to the 'brutal savage' myth therefore becomes an integral part of the 'progress' enterprise (Corry, 2013). A rare counter-example is presented by Daniel Everett, a missionary who was converted to atheism by contact with the Piraha tribe in the Amazon. (Everett, 2008)

The word 'self' can be traced back to the tenth century when it appeared as a pronoun that gradually evolved into 'itself', or 'the thing itself'. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

according to Hacker, 'self started to be used to mean what a person is at a particular time, extending to cover more than just the 'same as me' and include different and potentially conflicting elements, such as my 'former self', my 'old self', or 'my true self' (Hacker, 2010). Nevertheless, all these 'selves' are understood to be in some important, implicit sense, the same. Locke in 1690 identified self as precisely this – the *unifying* aspect of consciousness, linking our memories together as having happened to the same person (Locke, 1690). This is an example of abstract thought encroaching on everyday life and reifying certain aspects of it. People were clearly not unaware that they remained one living person from birth onwards, before the word 'self' demarcated the fact as worthy of particular note.

Self, understood as what it is that links our memories, carries a clear association with mental activity. In 1637, Descartes had already associated self not with soul but with the mind, and the activity of thinking (Descartes, 1637). The soul that had previously been assumed to animate the person, was personal, individual and immortal, bestowed by God. This soul became replaced by the mind as the personal, individual source of worth and meaning, as what makes a person unique and valuable – and it is no longer necessarily immortal. A more important difference is that awareness, consciousness *itself*, becomes the kernel of our worth. It is the activity of thinking alone that proves the existence of the thinker, and presents him as the centre of the universe, which he may then think about.

In contrast to Descartes, Hume was strikingly unable to prove the existence of an 'I' by introspection ('thinking'). In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume, 1739) he made the famous statement that it was impossible for him to find any element he could isolate as a 'self' independently of what was happening at the moment of introspection:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but

the perception.... If anyone, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls himself; though I am certain there is no such principle in me. (Hume, 1739 Nature, I, IV, sec. 6.)

What we call a self is just a person's identification with their perceptions. This was the birth of the 'bundle' theory approach to self, which states that self is what holds together a collection of phenomena appearing in the same consciousness, or, less controversially, to one individual person.

It fell to Nietzsche to officially declare not only the death of God but also of the self, as any kind of substance. He refers to 'the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum: but it is we who first created the 'similarity' of these states; our adjusting them and making them similar is the fact, not their similarity, which ought rather to be denied' (Nietzsche, 1901 p.269). With flourish and prescience he wrote, at the end of the nineteenth century, about 'the absurd overestimation of consciousness' which we have made 'into a unity, an entity: 'spirit', 'soul', something that feels, thinks, wills' (Nietzsche, 1901 p.285). 'One acquires degrees of being, one loses that which has being' (Nietzsche, 1901 p.268). At a stroke we have lost substance, subject and object.

Nietzsche's radical view overturned the religious and moral philosophies of his day, with their foundation in rationality, ordering the world according to what people have in common, their rights and duties as equal subjects. Kant's moral philosophy, for example, assumed that each person owned a free self-governing will and the duty to exercise it, according to the moral law which might well work against an individual view of self-interest. The self, morally speaking, was a site of conflict.

Kant's view of consciousness, however, allows for a much more fluid



conceptualisation of self. His transcendental consciousness is one without content, and he also argues that 'the thinking or the existence of the thought and the existence of my own self are one and the same' (Kant, 1772 p.75). This argument is in accordance with the position Strawson later calls 'radically Cartesian' – that there may be no real distinction to be made between the total experiential field and the self, only a conceptual one. (Strawson, 2009 p.387)

Freud at the start of the twentieth century, depicted self as an intensified site of conflict, as if all the previously identified philosophical currents were now held within the structure of a self which could no longer contain them. Freud identified within the person three substantial and separable 'essences' – the id (reminiscent of Hobbes' brute state of nature, and also of Nietzsche's amoral life force), the ego (which participates in the social contract and in negotiations of self-interest) and the super-ego (the moral imperative to do one's duty) (Freud, 1923). Later he added the death drive to the life force (Freud, 1955), forcing a Nietzschean landscape of powerful, amoral wills and drives deep down inside a psychic container which could not possibly hold them, the price of this repression being guilt, neurosis and constant tension. His pushing of all instincts, drives, dreams, sex, creativity, the irrational and inexplicable into an unspecified location he called the unconscious, imploded however, with the appearance of deconstructionist, post-colonial and feminist theories.

## **2. FOUCAULT**

Freud's concept of the person is of a self irrevocably divided against itself, and the symptoms his psychoanalytic method was designed to partially relieve were caused by relations of force within the subject.

Foucault in his late essay 'The Subject and Power' (Foucault, 1983) explains the central aim of his work – to create a history of how the human being came to be objectified as a subject. This process begins through modes of enquiry that call

themselves scientific – here Foucault includes grammar, economics and 'the objectivising of the sheer fact of being alive in natural history or biology' (Foucault, 1983 p.208). Subsequently, humans are objectified into subjects by 'dividing practices', i.e. the creation of binary oppositions such as mad and sane, criminal and good, unconscious and ego. Finally, a human being objectivises himself (sic) as a 'subject' in particular areas, according to particular perceived qualities, isolating himself from the whole field of interaction – e.g. the male considers himself to be the subject of sexuality and acts accordingly.

Foucault's historical analysis of subjectification in modern western states starts in a similar place to Taylor's, with the internalisation turn in Christianity. Foucault calls it the technique of 'pastoral power', which is

salvation oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblique (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked with a production of truth — the truth of the individual himself. (Foucault, 1983 p.214)

This religious technique became a generalised 'individualizing tactic' working throughout the whole of society, from family life, through education into medicine, etc. The aim is no longer salvation in the next life but wellbeing, health, security and happiness in this one. The individual is now held up as 'a truth' in a distracting move from the state of affairs in which our possibilities are as limited as they ever were by power structures. This issue comes to the fore when examining everyday uses of the word 'self' in Chapter Three. Self is clearly involved in questions of meaning and truth, in a sense which masks the power structures inherent in our situations. Hence, as Foucault suggests:

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind' which is the simultaneous individualisation and

totalisation of modern power structures [...] We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (Foucault, 1983 p.216)

This imposition is a question of power, which Foucault defines as follows:

a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions, it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult, in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. (Foucault, 1983 p.220)

Power relations are, then, rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted 'above' society as a 'supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of (Foucault, 1983). They are constantly reproduced by those who are not well-served by them, in a way which breaks up any simple division into powerful and powerless, perpetrators and victims. It is within these structures of power relations, explicitly taking account of them in this way, that feminist, deconstructionist and narrative analyses take up Foucault's call to 'promote new forms of subjectivity'.

### **3. POSTCOLONIAL AND FEMINIST APPROACHES**

Said (1978) introduced the term 'othering' to refer to the western strategy of using people from eastern countries to function as receptacles for everything in human experience that does not fit into the sphere of the rational, autonomous, all-controlling free agent. 'The other' performs a similar function to Freud's unconscious. Feelings, bodies, mortality, uncertainty, pleasure, instinct, all potentially disturbing factors may be safely placed there. These uncomfortable elements of life cannot be changed. It is in their nature to be the way they are, and they fulfill a valuable function for 'us', the default people – 'we' can define ourselves

against 'them'. 'Their' qualities are, however, clearly threatening, so 'they' need to be kept in a subservient position.

Women have quite evidently been 'othered' in patriarchal societies (Beauvoir, 1949). Feminist responses to this can be broadly characterised according to a few trends. First wave feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fought for the rights of women to be respected as autonomous citizens on equal terms to men, e.g. fighting for the right to vote. Second wave feminism in the 1960-80's took on the slogan 'the personal is political' and concerned itself with reproductive rights, domestic labour, etc. Third wave feminism (Walker, 1995) is partly a reaction to a perceived white middle class predominance in second wave feminism; Black feminists, among others, use the term intersectionality to elucidate how sexism, class oppression and racism are inextricably bound together (Crenshaw, 2014; hooks, 1981). Queer and sex positive theorists stress that sexuality is another intersection in which 'othering' practices take place, often within the mainstream feminist movement itself (Butler, 1990). French feminism has traditionally celebrated 'difference', claiming the qualities of 'otherness' as uniquely valuable (Marks, 1980). They lie open, however, to charges of essentialism by associating transgressive, creative qualities exclusively with a biologically female body. Transgender theorists challenge such essentialism at every turn. Othering in practice, and even within one individual, is clearly more complex than a single binary division, and there is nothing simple or self-evident about identifying with our body, gender, race, class or any other factor.

A more relational sense of self (Chodorow, 1981) can be construed as an obvious foundation, rather than a theoretical development, for women across cultures. Carrying and giving birth to children is an experience which is intrinsically, intimately relational. In patriarchal cultures, social roles are such that women are considered responsible for family and relationship matters, leaving men free to control religious and state institutions, to write philosophy and history. The relational self can, therefore, be regarded on two levels, the theoretical and the practical. Women generally do more caring for others (e.g. children, older people),

and it is arguable that they factor others, e.g. children or partners, into their identities to a greater extent than men. This, according to the autonomous independent subject model, is inevitably a threat to their independence, but according to the relational model, relationships can also be drawn upon as a source and sign of strength.

However, socialisation of women to care for others and to hang their sense of worth entirely on this, creates a limited structure of possibilities for their lives, and so prepares the ground for possible exploitation and abuse. An often-used tactic to undermine someone's 'sense of self' starts with isolating the person from other connections and relationships, and ends with the abuser treating the other as if she were 'nothing' – often literally telling her that she is. By then, the relational self has been undermined to such an extent that the victim may find it impossible not to agree.

This is an example, in Foucault's analysis, of power structures working to limit the possibilities of action. A person acting according to a relational sense of self, hence not confined to either subject or object position, once isolated from their network and forced into a binary relation with a person who has decided to be the 'subject' of the relation, is easily pushed into the position of object.

#### **4. NARRATIVES, DECONSTRUCTIONISM AND THE DIALOGICAL SELF**

Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* (Lyotard, 1979), expressed an 'incredulity' towards 'metanarratives', such as those of religion, the Enlightenment, or political ideologies. The defining characteristic of these metanarratives is the assumption that one unified truth may be told about the world. Their structures are based on binary oppositions i.e. opposing concepts coupled together so that each makes sense only in terms of the other (e.g. darkness and light, good and evil, rational and emotional). These structures may be deconstructed by their own internal contradictions.

Self is a narrative to be deconstructed like any other. The 'grand narrative self' is characterised by Sampson as a 'centralised, equilibrium structure' (Sampson, 1985, p.1203) with the 'I' narrating, holding together and interpreting the actions of the 'me', to use James' distinction (James, 1890). The 'I' is the knower, the thinker, or 'pure ego' and the 'me' is the known. The 'I' is also in a sense the 'haver' and the 'me' is what is 'had'. The 'me' was further split by James into three: the material, social and spiritual selves, the social self being the most thoroughly investigated in the western cultural context.

According to Goffman's sociological perspective the self is like an actor on stage, not in control of the whole narrative, or indeed, of their own script, but putting on various masks and behaviours in order to maintain a role, fit in with others on the stage and control the impression that others have of him (Goffman, 1956). People attempt conscious control of *their* part of the narrative, but at the same time the performance depends entirely on social agreement about the rules. All characters suspend disbelief to a certain extent when regarding others, each presents themselves according to their own interests and their skills. The actors are always acting when on stage, but they also make up the audience for others. Interestingly, there is an offstage place where people can 'be themselves', in which they are not concerned about how they appear to others, and hence not playing any particular role.

This theatrical metaphor fits neatly with James' concept. 'Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognise him and carry an image of him in their mind' (James, 1890 p.180). These social selves are presented, in various contexts, in order to impress others, achieve particular personal gains or simply fit in with the group. The concept of self as performative is also central to many queer theorists, e.g. Butler. She argues that cultural pressure and power structures produce the conviction that we have an essential self/identity, linked to our biology, and this illusive identity needs to be consciously subverted, as a political act (Butler, 1990). While Goffman's actors do have an offstage place in which they do not have to be acting, Butler's performing selves do not have a 'real'

self apart from those they choose to perform as a creative act of resistance. The roots of these performative accounts may be found at the start of the twentieth century, in existentialism. Sartre referred to a locus of sheer existence, preceding any kind of essence, or qualities that might be combined into an 'ego', i.e. a self made up of particular qualities or features. In 'La Transcendence de L'Ego' (Sartre, 1966) he makes a strong case for the primacy of a pre-reflective ego, which has no possibility of saying 'I'. The moment a person starts to think reflexively, and only at this moment, the ego appears, as an object. Ego cannot be both subject and object, it appears only when reflecting back on experience later. From 'ipseity', i.e. the 'selfness' of the being of things, the ego may arise, as an object, a reflective creation, then dissipate again. 'Ipseity' is what may remain behind the curtain, when we are not onstage.

The concept of the narrative self, similar to the performative kind, but seemingly unwilling to entirely let go of the sense of a centre, has been developed extensively in philosophy by Dennett. He argues that the self is no more nor less than a 'centre of narrative gravity' (Dennett, 1992 p.103). This form of narrative self is akin to the 'grand narrative' self, but divested of its substance. The metaphor works, Dennett claims, because a centre of gravity, like a self, is not a material thing or place but a principle, used to facilitate operations, predictions, or interpretations. It is a perfect abstraction, a convenient fiction that enables us to interpret our experiences as cohering around a centre, to characterise ourselves and predict future possibilities.

Is it really the case, however, that these narratives and their abstract centre, on which we hang our sense of meaning, cover all of our experience? Firstly, it seems improbable that there is really one single voice able to make sense of everything. Secondly, it may be precisely the 'more' of our experience, implicit in what there is now, and surpassing the story, that holds possibilities for creativity and healing. This 'more' is a similar notion to Dennett's 'indeterminacy'. While we may not be aware of what all our potentialities are until the situation calls for them, they are implicit in the kind of fiction we are writing. 'In this way matters which are indeterminate at one time can become determined later by a creative step' (Dennett, 1992 p.5). This

process is illustrated by Dennett's example of a novelist who can write a sequel in which he finds out new aspects or features of his characters. It is not that he knew these details before, or had them all written down somewhere, but within the world of a different novel, he knows what it is possible for his character to be and do. It would also be possible for readers to disagree, to say, 'no! He would never do that!'

Maybe in therapy we can write ourselves different kinds of sequels, and maybe we also need the input of our readers. Deconstruction of simplified, binary narratives, and the issue of the insidious nature of power raised by Foucault, meet and mutually inform each other in the creation of narrative therapy by White and Epston (White and Epston, 1990). Narrative therapy offers:

opportunities for people to challenge the dominant notions of identity in Western culture that are associated with the construction of an encapsulated self, one that emphasizes norms about self-possession, self-containment, self-reliance, self-actualisation, and self-motivation. These contemporary Western social and cultural forces that promote isolated, single-voiced identities actually provide the context that generates many of the problems for which people seek therapy. (White, 2007 p.137)

The opportunities offered are many different types of conversation, all 'shaped by the conception that identity is founded upon an 'association of life' rather than on a core self' (White, 2007 p.129). This core-self would be a 'single-voiced identity', one of the 'passive recipient' conceptions of identity that cause unnecessary suffering to people by conceptualising them as separate from the communities and relationships that are actually constitutive of their lives.

The conversations which undermine, interrogate, or reframe the stories we tell about ourselves, include 'externalising conversations' between the person and the problem, or written conversations, e.g. between the client and their problems,



others in their lives or the therapist. Scenes are also set up to generate new contexts for direct communication (e.g. witnesses are asked to relate what they saw to the participants in the scene) in order to break up solid, monolithic narratives – which are always maintained in the interests of the powerful, be they the state, the dominant group in society, an abuser, or the phobia, trauma or addiction ruling someone's life. Once these narratives are broken up, it is not clear whether a new narrative must necessarily replace them, with the self inhering in this new narrative, or whether breaking out of the narratives into new possibilities is the whole point, making the re-creation of self unnecessary, and new stories necessarily multi-linear.

The concept of the dialogical self developed by Hermans (1992; 2001), and dialogical therapy, which extended it, work along similar lines by encouraging direct conversations between different 'positions' within the self. The self is conceptualised as a fluid dynamic balance of voices, speaking from different 'I positions' and always 'to' someone. The roots of the approach lie in James' distinction between the 'me' and the 'I' (attributing to 'me' everything which we consider to be our own), and in Bakhtin, the Russian literary theorist who analysed Dostoevsky's novels as polyphonic, so each character, like each self in the real world, is 'unfinalisable', ultimately unknowable, not able to be encompassed by a definition. In certain threshold situations, conventions and definitions are overturned and the characters come to dialogue with each other in fresh and new ways – this Bakhtin called 'carnival' – delightful and meaningful in itself. There is a sense of monolithic structures being cracked open, and fresh air rushing in. No narrator can contain or explain events. Life is larger and richer than the apparent logical meanings in statements, each statement is made by a person in relation, and is full of implicit meanings that multiply anew in each interaction (Bakhtin, 1981). The characters lose the control they were endowed with by sociological, performative concepts of the self. In dialogical therapy, there is a deliberate invention of such 'meetings' between positions and voices within the self or with others (e.g. the therapist). The act of breaking through the concept of the self as isolated monologue is a crucial first step towards any kind of forward movement.

## **5. CURRENTS IN THE WESTERN PERSPECTIVE**

Historical analysis, particularly of religious narratives, shows how the western sense of self has developed from the internalisation of powers that used to be experienced as external. This brings us into a potentially uneasy situation, in which we look for a locus of meaning, continuity and identity within, while our everyday lives do not necessarily provide such certainty. Performative accounts of self as a construct make more sense of our everyday lives; postmodernism questions any such loci of singular meaning, continuity and identity; and inter-subjective, narrative and dialogical accounts take full account of the social and cultural contexts of our everyday lives and how we are not ultimately separable entities from others – an ultimate conclusion that radically re-defines self. This also takes us out of the realm of transcendent being and places us firmly within structures of economic and power relations. These structures, and the self that more or less successfully adapts to them, may seem inevitable but explorations of pre-agrarian 'primitive' societies demonstrate that very different power and economic structures are possible, and consequently, different structures of self, to which the concept of individual interest may be alien.

The contemporary tendency to consider self as primarily a question of consciousness is examined in Chapter Two.

## **SECTION TWO – NON-WESTERN CONTEXTS**

In this section I outline senses of self identified in studies of African, Vietnamese, Japanese and Chinese cultures. I then investigate the sphere of child rearing, to illustrate the diversity of implicit understanding of individuals within differing cultures and to offer an insight into the very beginnings of the different senses of self on an individual level.

## 1. AFRICA

Researchers making comparative studies of senses of self between eastern and western contexts tend to place significant cross-cultural differences on a spectrum between collectivist and individualist cultures. Writers in African Studies have objected to characterizations of an African self that imply 'collectivism', a notion which sounds suspiciously like a case of othering: more a projection of Western categories than a reflection of the constructions of self that actually prevail in African settings (Shaw, 2000). They contend that notions like 'collectivist self' fail to recognize the individual humanity of African persons, deny agency to African selves, and perpetuate stereotypes about 'tribal Africa' that justify Western imperialism. (Adams and Dzokoto, 2003; Appiah, 1992)

Instead, the terms 'relational self' (Piot, 1999) or 'relational individualism' (Shaw, 2000) are used to stress the fact that self and identity in many different African contexts share the characteristic of being primarily and fundamentally part of a web of relationships (Piot, 1999; Shaw, 2000; Jackson, 1989). These relationships include not only the living but also the dead; places; spiritual forces; and an experience of built-in order (Fiske, 1991; Tengan, 1991). People and events are not connected at random, but exist in relation to an ordered universe in which hierarchy, place, and destiny are inherent features (Adams and Dzokoto, 2003). One could say that the whole environment is taken to be the 'self', as a structuring principle, an enduring constant.

This sense of the person as inextricable from a web of relationships is not romanticised (or at least, only by westerners looking at it as an alternative to their own view based on isolation). Interdependency entails very real risks and dangers, such as having enemies (Adams and Dzokoto, 2003). While the environment may be understood in a sense as one big self, which structures experience, within this there are separate selves, connected so strongly that it is impossible for one not to be

influenced by others. Hence the enemy can be defined as someone like me yet against me. The belief in the power of enemies underlies practices of divination (Jackson, 1989; Tengan, 1991), infant seclusion (the practice of hiding mother and newborn child for several days to protect against envious observers) and sorcery, an arsenal of techniques for sending harm to enemies or defending oneself against such harm. (Evans-Pritchard, 1937)

Interdependency may be fundamentally more a practical reality for the lives of many than a distinctive value or belief.

People in many African settings share food from a common bowl, rather than eat from individual plates; share space in a common bed, rather than sleep in a private room; share transportation in a common vehicle, rather than ride alone in a private car; and inhabit rooms that are six times more densely populated than those inhabited by most people in North America. (Ingoldsby and Smith, 1995 p.417)

These practical factors are clearly constitutive of the ways we think of ourselves, although we rarely explicitly consider them, unless we have had significant cross-cultural experiences. I personally confronted many cultural differences while travelling in North Africa – most people were simply baffled by the fact that I should choose to travel alone, and the fact elicited a great deal of sympathy.

Much of the cross-cultural work that distinguishes between collectivist and relational varieties of an interdependent self takes the stance that while western anthropologists are oriented towards seeing difference, in fact a sense of self is a human universal, and people in all cultures are active deciders, always juggling a multiplicity of different perspectives and cultural/personal constraints. Human struggles that emerge in very different circumstances and settings may be classified as 'the same' struggles, and while we may be unable to grasp the specific cultural nuances of the strangers we meet, the same eyes seem to look back at us, people have a similar sense of being someone responsible for their part in the situations

they live in. (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Cross et al., 2000)

## 2. VIETNAM

Vietnam provides another instance of a culture which does not sign up to the western model in which self-esteem is achieved by putting one's own interests first and carving out personal space, in metaphorical and physical senses, from others (Marr, 2000). The word 'individual' only appeared in the Vietnamese language in the first decades of the twentieth century, and was considered 'merely an irreducible human unit belonging to something else more significant.' (Marr, 2000 p.769)

This does not mean, however, that people have no senses of 'self'. Marr points out that there are two words in Vietnamese, *than* and *tam*, which derive from classical Chinese, and refer to two different experiences of the self.

*Than* can be translated as 'body-person', the animate, sensual self, often counterpoised with *the*, the physical, objective, instrumental body [...] and with *nhan* or *ngu'o'i* meaning the other person or humans in general [...] *Tam*, on the other hand can be translated as 'heart-mind', 'the bearer of inner awareness, sentiment, knowledge and moral judgement. (Marr, 2000 p.769-770)

*Than* is dependent on its environment and physical needs, whereas *Tam* has an element of volition, and most crucially of all, 'unlike most other concepts derived from the Chinese classics, *tam* is not bound by hierarchy: the heart-mind of even the lowliest person on the Vietnamese social ladder is able to commune with other heart-minds, with nature, the spirits, the universe at large' (Marr, 2000 p.770). This heart-mind has much in common with the African worldview, not being confined by the physical body, yet co-existing with a system in which people are bound by relations of power with others (hence 'enemies' in African culture and the strict hierarchy of Vietnamese culture mentioned by the authors discussed here) to a very confining extent.

The body-person and the heart-mind tend to communicate with each other through poetry. This appears to be the only place in literature in which the *tam* is let loose. Marr presents Vietnamese autobiography – the seemingly obvious place (to the western mind) in which to explore the self – as an arena in which the individual praises *others* and delivers wisdom, without mentioning his (sic) inner feelings or personal, emotional life.

### **3. CHINA, JAPAN AND KOREA**

A relational sense of self is also clearly present in China and Japan, where it is to a lesser extent connected to material realities and represents more of a cultural norm. Appropriate behavior in Japanese cultural contexts requires explicitly referencing the expectations and desires of others, and the recognition of social responsibilities is likely to play an important role in conceptualizing future behaviour. Research on the neural correlates of intentional thoughts about self and mother showed that they are identical for Chinese people, while Westerners use different neural circuits when thinking about themselves as opposed (sic!) to their mother. Not only do the thoughts have different neural correlates, but thoughts about self are better remembered by Westerners than those about the mother (Zhu et al., 2006). Mother, in the case of the Chinese respondents, seems to be treated as a part of the self, at least as far as neural activity is concerned.

Japanese conceptions of well-being are distinctive. They are based on a 'minimalist' sense of self and of virtue, in which reality is understood to be 'fundamentally fluid, incomprehensible, and transitory' (Kan et al., 2009 p.301). Recognition of these qualities leads to a sense of gratitude that we are alive at all, and this sense of gratitude, along with peace and calmness, are understood to emerge from 'immersion in nothingness' rather than expanding or developing our selves. Uchida and Kitayama argue that should this form of happiness, socially sanctioned in the Japanese context, be accurately measured, then the usual results obtained by researchers comparing cross-cultural happiness levels – that Americans are happier –

could be overturned. Uchida and Kitayama in a study on happiness amongst American undergraduates, distinguished three main categories, in order of occurrence: firstly the 'hedonic state' – felt qualities, such as joy and excitement; secondly, 'independence' – personal achievements, possessions and accomplishments; and firmly in last place, 'interdependence' – feelings involving others, empathy, sympathy, etc (Uchida and Kitayama, 2007). These categories clearly do not map onto Japanese values.

Other studies show that Koreans, in contrast to Americans, do not show any preference for self-concept consistency. The fact that they may show contradictory characteristics is not a problem or source of conflict, in fact being able to adapt flexibly to different contexts, changing 'yourself' in the process, is associated with wellbeing (Suh, 2002). This is a trait noticeable in cultures with an 'interdependent self-construal' rather than the western 'independent self-construal' (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). This immediately removes much of the effort involved, for westerners, in pretending, paying selective attention, and keeping up appearances, either internally or for others. Chinese people also tend to be more comfortable with having both 'positive' and 'negative' traits, and do not consider consistency to be of utmost importance, as Americans do. (Young-Hoon et al., 2007).

#### **4. CHILD REARING PRACTICES**

Looking from a cross-cultural perspective, we might ask how it is possible that so many people in the USA and many regions of Europe manage to experience themselves as so separate from the world. Common child-rearing practices there seem designed to train babies to be separate, independent agents long before they are equipped to manage – hence early weaning of babies from the breast, if they are breastfed at all, and a proliferation of strategies to help babies sleep all through the night in their own cots, which, within the perspective of world history seems to be something human beings are not used to doing.

Liedloff, from her anthropological studies of Yequana Indians, notes a way of child-

rearing that she sees as a part of humans' naturally evolving instincts over time (Liedloff, 1975). It includes much skin to skin contact, carrying, sleeping together, instant response to distress, long-term breastfeeding, and not focusing attention particularly on children. She noticed that children brought up in this way showed absolutely none of the behavioural tendencies we see as 'natural' in the west – whining, tantrums, 'terrible twos' etc., no problems with 'getting my own way' (or not). When western parents take up attachment parenting practices they tend to leave out the element of 'not paying much specific attention to the child'. This may lead to children being even more 'self-centred' (Liedloff, 1994) than those brought up by the 'separation' methods of conventional western culture. Liedloff interprets the disturbed behaviour of the 'self-centred' child as anxiety about being given control by the parent, who effectively abdicates their role and does not keep the child safe. Anxiety and disturbance could also simply be interpreted as the effects of focusing attention on a separate self as if it were the most important thing in the world, rather than one element, amongst others, of an interconnected whole, in which everyone is playing their part.

This over-focus on the individual is far more likely to happen in western culture, irrespective of the values held by the parents, due to the practicalities of living arrangements. If the whole culture, on a day to day basis is, effectively, the parent who stays at home with the child, it is small wonder that they each end up being 'the world' for the other, with the stress that this entails. Studies on multiple caretaking make this point, e.g. Efe infants, while instantly responded to and carried at all times, are also cared for by many different people, generally about fourteen, which makes them not only secure, but socially adept and not 'demanding' (Tronick et al., 1987). When seen in proper perspective, 'the continuum of an individual is whole, yet forms part of the continuum of his family, which in turn is part of his clan's, community's, and species' continua, just as the continuum of the human species forms part of that of all life' (Liedloff, 1975). When we feel we are part of a continuum rather than tiny gods, life is easier and we feel more supported.

Small, in an extensive study of parenting studies (Small, 1998), describes an



astonishing range of practices that people perform in order to meet the needs of their own practical realities and cultures and bring up children according to the values of a given society – e.g. in Japan a child is seen as 'a pure spirit, essentially good by design, and in need of being incorporated into the maternal self [...]' Japanese mothers are not interested in making sure their babies become independent but rather in making sure they become part of the mother, a connected social being; she sees the baby as an extension of herself and wants to intensify and foster the connection' (Shwalb and Shoji, 1996). Understanding of this kind of language also relies on an understanding of the Japanese sense of self – if an American mother talked of her baby 'as an extension of herself' it would imply incorporation of one person into another, and the use of 'self' as a source of pride, whereas the more minimal take on self in Japan (Kan et al., 2009) allows for the spirit of the baby to be welcomed into the human world through connection with the closest human, moving towards a similarly minimal sense of self of its own as it grows.

In different cultures, children are raised towards different 'possible selves'. In middle-class America, the smallest train in 'The Little Engine That Could' conquers the mountain through optimism, determination and industry, while sleepy toddlers in Chile learn that storybook characters like La Tenquita realize their potential by accepting and embracing their family responsibilities. In Japan, tales of the struggles of the one-inch-tall Issunboshi suggest that individual development and strength arise from knowing and accepting one's potential weaknesses (Unemori et al., 2004). These culture-specific images and ideas about the nature and process of personal development are likely to become threads of the self-concepts that individuals weave for themselves. In addition to incorporating key cultural ideas and values, 'selfways' (Markus et al., 1997) represent contextualized senses of how to be a 'good', 'mature', or 'successful' person, as well as ways in which one can be 'bad', 'an outcast' or 'a failure.' European American selfways, for example, emphasize individuality and independence, while in more relational cultures, such as Japan, a context-sensitive self, as opposed to a context-invariant self is actively valued. (Kashima et al., 2004)

The very idea of a context-invariant self seems untenable in a world of constantly changing contexts. A self which is non-adaptable and inflexible on principle has to try to change the world around it to suit its own ends. This principle of organising the world around the self has far-reaching consequences, as pointed out by 'deep ecology' philosophers. 'Deep ecology' (Naess, 1977), drawing on traditional native understandings of the world, such as the Native American philosophy of the earth as an interconnected, interdependent, dynamic system with a wisdom of its own, critiques the assumption of separate selves, and the placing of living beings in a hierarchy, and holds this false assumption responsible for the misuse of the resources on the planet. Eco-feminism, in particular, stresses how these deep ecological issues are intertwined with mistaken conceptions of the self, and how this separate self, put in charge of the inchoate forces of nature, is typically assumed to be male. (Gaard and Gruen, 1993)

## **5. CURRENTS IN NON-WESTERN PERSPECTIVES**

In this sketch of some non-western senses of self, we see a solid context of interconnection and inter-dependency, within which an individual self is neither glorified nor held responsible for carrying the meaning which inheres in a whole system. A system may extend to the social group or as far as to include the spirits of places and ancestors. Child-rearing practices are crucial factors in the formation of senses of self that are not founded on isolation and pressures to be self-sufficient. Happiness tends not to be associated with personal achievements or hedonic states, but with playing a part in the whole, accepting what happens and, in the case of Japan, being peacefully disengaged. At the same time, researchers point out that people all around the world have similar struggles and find themselves in situations in which they have to actively juggle different roles and cultural pressures. The default assumptions which may be struggled against, however, undoubtedly vary widely.

### SECTION THREE – SELF-ESTEEM, INBETWEEN CONTEXTS

In this section I explore senses of self as they arise in my experience as a British therapist in Poland, and present the case of a society which shares many but by no means all of the default 'western' assumptions about what a self is like and should be. The experiences referred to here are mainly from the early 2000s.

In the Polish language the word 'self' does not appear. So actually what I translate as 'low self-esteem' is literally 'low sense of own worth', and 'self-esteem' as a concept is literally rendered as 'own-worth'. So within the word we have two crucial aspects: ownership, and isolation. What is lacking in the word is the sense of an actual entity who 'owns the sense of ownership' of experience. This makes the translation of my research question problematic. I have to resort to formulations like '*I*' or '*not I*' – which seem to imply that, rather than asking whether I possess an essentially separate existence or not, I am asking whether I could be another person.

There is no word for 'self' either in French, which like Polish has a reflexive particle (*se* in French, *się* in Polish) for use when an action refers back to the person doing it. Polish is an inflected language and the reflexive particle in the genitive and instrumental cases refers back to the person in question.

The use of the word self seems to point to an underlying need for unity, for a sort of metaphysical continuity that 'means' something 'more' than the simply the person in question. In the flux of constant change we try our best to assert that at least one thing is permanent and reliable – whatever happens I have myself!

While the need to be something permanent, reliable and *identifiable* may be there for all humans, there is an element of a new western cultural pressure in my clients' needs to be assertive, clearly boundaried, separate selves with individual opinions which mark them out from the crowd, identifying them, and providing security and admiration. This need is felt, yet it conflicts with other needs.

While 'being different' is now promoted as a value in Poland, at least in some media and in urban centres, society as a whole presents few opportunities to cultivate individuality. For example, personal opinions and creativity are far from encouraged in the classroom culture, where little interaction during lessons, co-operation or discussion between pupils is allowed – few activities take place during which differences in opinion can arise and be honed. There is also (especially in rural areas) a high level of social dependence on the church, which does not encourage independence of thought either. Families tend to retain a traditional patriarchal model while the homogeneous nature of society post WWII, and a history of oppression, can lead to a fear of difference.

Among the face to face clients who attend my private practice, in a rural, fairly deprived area of Poland, I notice a lot of clients mention a 'lack of self-esteem', which seems to appear largely when in contact with others, and be connected with not knowing how they 'fit in', or what they think. When alone, unless they are anxiously ruminating on other situations, they do not have problems with not knowing who they are, the question does not arise. 'Self-esteem' appears to be a part of social experience and of public language, pointing to something we only need to arise in interpersonal situations.

A further layer of the 'lack of self-esteem' problem, e.g. feeling ashamed, unsure of what to say, anxious about being judged, or inferior to others, comes about when this social anxiety becomes a part of the person's experience *also* when alone. So when safe and comfortable, someone who feels social anxiety (which seems to have a large cross-over with self-diagnosed 'lack of self-esteem') will re-run uncomfortable situations in their minds/bodies, perpetuating their experience of themselves as 'a person with a lack of self-esteem'. This repetition of situations in the mind in a very partial, specially interpreted way not only leads the body to behave as if such situations were real, making anxiety a deeply engrained 'body habit', but also leads the person with 'low self-esteem' to, in a way reminiscent of those with extra 'high self-esteem', devote nearly all of their attention to

themselves. This is a state which, as well as presenting an obvious paradox, is far from conducive to well-being. It seems as if the very fact of having one's attention predominantly skewed towards 'yourself' as an object is a part of the problem, irrespective of the content of the thoughts about that 'self'.

Self-focused attention, also thought of as self-absorption, has been linked to a variety of affective states and clinical syndromes, including depression, panic disorder, social anxiety, schizophrenia, and alcoholism. Ingram (1990b) has suggested that self-focus may be 'a nonspecific process' that is common across psychopathologies (Woodruff-Borden et al., 1999). Diagnoses of personality disorders, e.g. narcissistic personality disorder or borderline also refer to states of discomfort and disorder involving paying too much attention to 'oneself'. A lack of 'self-consciousness' is also an integral part of the flow state identified as the peak of well-being by Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) extensive cross-cultural research on happiness.

So in cases of both low and high self esteem the self will not 'get out of the way'. In the case of 'low self-esteem', the 'self' is conceived of as a deficient object – a 'thing' which can be teased out of experience and behaviour, a 'thing' which may be compared to other things. The fact that a self is a thing, is of course in English a grammatical fact, and 'grammar tells us what kind of object anything is.'  
(Wittgenstein, 1953, no.373)

An example of self-preoccupation getting in the way of well-being is when a client says, 'I tried to talk to her, but she was completely uninterested in what I had to say, I could tell she thought I was just in her way and what I was saying was stupid,' without considering the circumstances of the encounter, which might have clearly pointed to other possible interpretations – say the person who was apparently uninterested was also in a terrible hurry, or was preoccupied with personal problems or unwell. All these possibilities might have been picked up had the client actually listened to the other person! This is a phenomenon referred to by all clients of mine who have been socially anxious - they feel unable to listen to others except

to note points of comparison with themselves. Realisation of this tendency in therapy can lead to more self-condemnation for 'being selfish' (sic), but generally in my experience tends to lead to some feeling of relief, or even to laughter. This bodily release of tension is reminiscent of a 'felt shift' in focusing. It seems as if putting words to this important dimension of the problem, which had gone hitherto unnoticed, carries the situation forward. There are some very important processes implicit in the situation of isolating yourself from others, while imagining that it is they who are abandoning you. Once we really experience the absurdity of our behaviour we are free to act differently. Laughter may also be a response to the untying of a tight conceptual knot that had very much been relied on – suddenly seeing the other side of your own beliefs can feel liberating.

These biased interpretations, bringing complex interactions repeatedly into the frame of 'self', may lead to what Gendlin calls 'structure bound experiencing' (Gendlin, 1964). In structure-bound experiencing we are not free to allow things to happen as they happen and react to them in a flexible way. We react in a prejudiced way to whatever comes up – structured by our own view of what the possibilities are – and what, indeed, *has* to happen in accordance with the structure that provides some sense and security in our lives. Subsequently, this security never comes without the tension provoked by the compulsive element that it *must* be like this. The 'self' may be the ultimate example of structure-bound experiencing, and even a temporary let-up in the relentless maintenance of this structure might feel like a real liberation.

The phrase 'self-esteem' sounds – feels to me as a listener – like an invasion of general, conceptual public language into direct specific, inter-personal experiences, or an invasion of a 'solid' concept into the experiential flux, yet it refers to some common element identified in various experiences that is felt as true. The phrase also feels like an imposition from an individualistic western culture on a society which is in the process of rapid change from a traditional, extended-family based, religious community, politically united in opposition to oppressors, to a more 'psychologised', individualised, secular, consumerist one. The Dalai Lama when

asked at the Mind and Life conference in 1997 about the problem of low self-esteem, was famously unable to understand what the concept meant (Goleman, 2004). It seems not to be necessary in Tibet. The vast majority of my clients who suffer from 'low self esteem' are of the younger generation. They probably find the 'self-esteem' language serves a purpose in expressing experiences that are culturally 'new', that their grandparents would not understand.

Some of the new demands on people which may cause them to feel inadequate, might be expressed with the metaphor that an individual is now required to act like a state, in a similar analysis to that of Foucault (Samuels, 2010). The individual may now feel required to manage all the responsibilities and tensions that used to be shared amongst family, church and nation, in an isolated individual space, with the only available 'reward' being the prize of 'high self-esteem'. This may be not only a feeling, but actually the case.

An example of a new individual requirement, is the requirement to have one's own opinion. While I, brought up in a western context, might feel that opinions are natural outgrowths of my individual living experience, my clients have a more collective historical experience of opinions as almost absorbed from the air around them, a part of belonging to the group that ensures the individual's survival. This experience of unquestioned collective values functions implicitly in their experience now, but often as a lack. Mixed cultural messages (the media sometimes reads quite indistinguishably from the western media while cultural realities differ) now imply that any lack of certainty must be the fault of the individual for not fitting in well enough with either the new ideology, or the traditional group. A young male client of mine, emerging from paralysing anxiety and lack of self esteem, referred to the 'social unconscious', made up of bodily-perceived messages (blocks, heavinesses, tensions) which he articulated as 'individual fulfilment is wrong, happy people are selfish and stupid, you will only fail if you try too hard'.

Polish culture lies somewhere in the middle ground of the two extremes of social/cultural self usually studied by social/cultural psychologists and

neuroscientists. All individuals, wherever they live, are at different points on the continuum between individual and relational, and as processes of migration and globalisation intensify, more of us fall somewhere between the cracks of monolithic cultures than not. Older generations in more individualistic cultures may be likely to act in accordance with the values of less individualistic cultures, while not necessarily holding them as explicit values. For example, older Polish generations might not relate to the association of aesthetic beauty with peaceful disengagement in Japan, but their historical experience of war and the communist regime may lead to a fatalistic sense of the world and an attitude of resignation that resembles peaceful disengagement.

## **SECTION FOUR – CONCLUSION**

While contemporary western theories tend to aim at decentring and breaking up the confining concept of a unitary self, in practice the assumption of a single, autonomous agent who is in charge is alive and well. The achievement of a 'real' or 'balanced' self is a central goal and value in western cultures, and the achievement of happiness is intimately entwined with it. The experiences of people in different cultural contexts, from the level of different countries to different social groups and genders, show that it does not have to be this way – there can be strong senses of self based on particular group ties, ties to spirits, places, etc.

I think it is the case, both across and within cultures, that 'self' is experienced and regarded in various ways according to different circumstances. Different 'self' understandings, e.g. single agent, relational or multiple/more-than selves, may all co-exist in one person's experience in a kind of dynamic spiral, confronting each other, flipping around so on some occasions one is dominant, and then as circumstances change, another takes over. In some cultural conditions, it is very likely that one specific type of concept will be dominant, because there will not be many opportunities for the others to emerge. It is hard to feel autonomous when you are in oppressive circumstances with no control over the physical conditions of



your life. But, particularly in cultures which are fairly mixed and open, self may manifest one way or the other, as light photons take the form of waves or particles, depending on what the experimental conditions evoke. (Peruzzo, 2012)

A kind of intuition often appears, however, leading us to imagine that the question of 'self' and who I really am, is a deeper question. Issues of the soul, of immortality, that used to be taken care of by religion, are now open questions to which the issue of 'self' seems to point. This kind of 'absolute' being (Sartre's 'being-for itself', or the 'absolute' in Buddhism), if it exists, is by its very nature not culture-specific.

Being-in-itself could not be unified with any context, or even with itself, without disappearing entirely into 'what is' without trace. It may be the case that this intuition is mistaken and there is no such thing as a realm 'beyond' the culturally specific forms which we create and live, or it may be the case that there *is* a possibility of escaping all forms and contexts. I go on to investigate this intuition in Chapters Four and Five, which deal with Buddhism, the Process Model, and various conceptions of the absolute.

The implications for therapy practice are that a vast range of conceptions of self are possible, none of them essentially given, but some with more power behind them than others. For those who have been 'othered' by the dominant narrative, it may be imperative to reclaim or to create their own narrative. For those who fit into the dominant narrative, it is I think crucial to remember just how far from inevitable it really is. Becoming aware and constantly refreshing our awareness of how people in different cultures and different positions of power within our own cultures understand and experience the concept of self is a vital part of ethical practice, so as not to unreflectively add to the pressure already on clients to conform to an assumed norm, or to judge their experiences in relation to it.

# INTRODUCTION TO GENDLIN

The work of the philosopher and therapist Eugene Gendlin constitutes a pivotal underlying thread in the thesis. He particularly informs my understanding of the scientific model and its relationship with everyday life, of the nature and complexity of this everyday life, and how complex senses that don't fit the categories we normally use might be conceptualised and used to further understanding and shift stuck situations.

Here is a short introduction to the main concepts of Gendlin's philosophy that I will be using in the work.

## 1. THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE IMPLICIT

The Philosophy of the Implicit, as most fully explicated in the **Process Model** (Gendlin, 1997a) works from the principle '**interaction first**'. This principle radically posits that no essentially separate entities exist. There are only interacting processes. Separate entities, as we know them, are conceptual derivations from patterns of interaction. These patterns range from basic biological and chemical processes to complex psychological ones; they meet, interaffect, may partially stop or continue slightly differently.

**Implicit** in every process is a direction, if not a specific goal, e.g. food is implicit in hunger. As therapists know, the answer to a dilemma is implicit in the dilemma itself. The implicit for Gendlin does not mean something which is hidden, or logically demanded, but rather the ever-present effects of all the processes which have interacted with the processes we call 'the situation', continuing to function within each other, even if they appear to have been stopped, e.g. hunger functions differently when no food is available, and differently again when only disliked food is available. Crossing happens when two processes meet, and each one continues on its trajectory, yet is changed by the encounter, and takes some of the elements

of the other process with it. Of course 'two processes meeting' is already an abstraction from the multiple processes always interacting at the same time.

All these crossing, inter-affecting processes make up what Gendlin calls the **Implicit intricacy**. It is incredibly complex, but this does not mean we are either helpless or lost in abstraction. 'The living body always implies its right next step' (Gendlin, 1993 p.32). This is not necessarily a reification of the body. It can also be read as a statement of the fact that just by being alive, and being the kind of creatures we are, there is a direction that we are going in, made out of the stuff of our genetics, biology, history, relationships, culture, dreams, etc., all of these factors intersecting at a given moment in time in a specific way. Although the factors are uncountable, this only means that we cannot decide the next step using solely logic (or indeed, solely emotions, or solely anything). The next step is implied by the *whole* of our living.

Living processes work according to the 'ev-ev' principle – that everything affects everything. If we consider every process in the universe that has ever taken place, from the big bang onwards, this makes for an immense complexity. Attempting to fully explain any one aspect of a given situation would mean separating out every element of the whole complexity. Hence a multiplicity of processes all function at the same time, yet are not divided into different strands of cause and effect, continuities etc., unless we *choose* to separate some of them out for a specific purpose. This is what Gendlin calls the **unseparated multiplicity**.

Out of the unseparated multiplicity, situations arise. The notion of a situation, as opposed to a simple event, is a set of processes meeting and inter-affecting ('crossing') in such a way that a change is implied that is relevant to someone or a group of people. A concept crosses with the intricacy from which it is made, and each change implies changes in the action possibilities of all the processes involved. All situations, as networks of processes, necessarily cross with other situations, each one made up of processes with their own implicit components. Every time situations cross, new meanings arise. This creates a non-linear sense of time, as the

new meanings make a new sense of the past (as it functions in the present) as well as of possible futures.

Life was not always experienced like this. The Process Model is an evolutionary one. It elucidates how animals use simple behaviour, which evolves into gestures, and then, in the human case, into symbolic communication. Symbols do not only refer to the previous 'reality', but they also refer to themselves. At this point our reality becomes 'thicker' and living becomes less 'automatic' and more creative. Symbolic thinking opens many new possibilities, e.g. mathematical and technological thinking, and along with these new possibilities comes more complex living; situations arise in which we don't know what to do next, as conventional gestures/rituals no longer cover every possibility.

This paying attention to the feel of the whole experiencing process – the previous ways of experiencing along with the bodily feel of symbolic living and the interactions between them all – is the mode of being called '**direct reference**'. Experiencing is understood as 'a *felt* process' (Gendlin, 1964 p.7 online version). When we are not fully engaged in the felt process of our lives, our experiencing becomes 'structure-bound' (Gendlin, 1964 p.18, online version). Without direct reference to our own felt meanings, we may function primarily according to the symbolic meanings, by which experience might be interpreted and organised, behaving in accordance with the maintenance of a logically coherent structure. However, 'at any moment one wishes, one can refer directly to an inwardly felt datum. Experiencing, in the mode of being directly referred to in this way, I term the '**direct referent**'. '(Gendlin, 1964 p.8 online version)

Direct experiencing as an ongoing interaction process, is what constitutes a full 'self-process' (Gendlin, 1964,p.26). This is particularly visible in contrast with extreme structure-bound modes of experiencing, such as dreaming, hypnosis, hallucinations etc, which share an element of 'loss of self'. 'The self exists to the extent that the individual can carry his felt process forward by means of his own symbols, behaviours, or attention' (Gendlin, 1964, p.27 of online version). This felt process is

an interactive one, and it is the interactional dimension which is noticeably missing in the vivid, yet not direct, modes of experiencing listed above.

Later, in the Process Model (1997), the term 'direct referent' is not used so much to indicate a mode of experiencing that can be engaged in at will, but rather as a new kind of 'something' that drops *out of* a sequence of experiencing, into a new kind of space. This space is created by our pausing the sequence of events making up our situation, and generating a particular kind of attention, within which the referent may 'form', or 'come'. The direct referent becomes 'the having and feeling of the whole situation as a directly felt unclear whole' (Gendlin 1997, VIII-A, b). Contact with this sense of a 'whole' enables the situation to carry forward freshly. We may grasp a physical sense of this 'perfect feedback object' (Gendlin, 1997 p.236), communicate with it, and attempt to make aspects of it explicit, e.g. we can check various words against it, asking, is this word right? Does it fit? Or maybe this? By virtue of the things we can do with it – find it, ask it, etc, the direct referent fills the role of a tangible entity in a newly generated space, which contains interactions between us and our felt meanings.

The self is seen here, in contrast to the Theory of Personality Change, as what is aware of and separate from the referent ('self is 'separate' from the context being carried forward [...] The direct Referent, the new datum, the new object, is there, I am here' (Gendlin, 1997 p.254)). I think these distinct versions of the direct referent and its relationship to the concept of self are both valid, and develop this in Chapter Six.

The ability to check and interact with a sense of the whole situation, that contains far more than is immediately obvious or conceptually graspable, is a natural human one, but some people are better 'direct experiencers' than others. Gendlin and colleagues' discovery of this ability as the statistically significant factor in producing positive change in therapy (Gendlin, 1968), unfortunately unrelated to the course of therapy itself, led him to formulate the practice of focusing, to make this ability teachable.

## 2. THE PRACTICE OF FOCUSING

Gendlin formulated the technique of **focusing** in order to facilitate the process of checking for rightness and relevancy for those to whom it does not come easily. He separated out the concept of focusing from the situation of therapy, in which it was always implicit. In practice and research on therapy effectiveness (Gendlin et al., 1968) Gendlin and co-researchers noticed that clients who made good use of therapy and felt better afterwards were naturally slowing down, pausing and groping for exactly the right way to express something, checking it against a vague sense they had until they had 'got it'. He formulated exactly what they were doing and made a separate concept and set of steps for others to follow.

A felt sense is characterised by murkiness and vagueness. It occupies a territory which is made up of precisely what cannot be identified distinctly as either a thought, a feeling or a physical sense. It is a complex registering of an entire situation, of 'all of that' – of more than could possibly be made explicit, due to the limitations of time and space. We are aware of far more of the implicit intricacy than we can explicitly handle. Some of it will be relevant to any discomfort we are experiencing now. The focusing steps are as follows:

**Clearing a space** – in order to get a clear sense of the felt sense we need to **clear a space**, putting aside everything that explicitly arises for us when we place our attention on our situation, e.g. thoughts, feelings or physical sensations. According to Gendlin's original focusing instructions, we should place our attention inside our bodies, but there is a new emphasis emerging in the focusing community on pausing the situation rather than searching 'inside'. This step, identifying thoughts, feelings, etc and finding a way to place them on one side for a while, whether through visualisations such as putting 'things' in boxes, or a more kinaesthetic process, has elements in common with meditation practices and can often be

helpful in itself.

Some kind of sense arises in the space. If it can't be clearly identified as a thought, feeling or simple physical sensation, then we treat it as a **felt sense**. Interacting with the felt sense, as if it were an object, yet one characterised by responsiveness, brings new words, and a new situation.

**A handle word** is a word which expresses something about 'what it is like' – the phenomenological feel of the felt sense. It cannot be invented, it has to arise 'by itself'. Once it has arisen, it can be used to keep us in contact with the felt sense, expressing something essential about it.

**Resonating** is the process by which we check whether the word is exactly right. We check directly with the felt sense, by repeating the word and waiting to see if there is a sense of response, of rightness, or not. When we have it just right, we do the next step – asking.

**Asking** the felt sense a question, such as 'what do you need?' is possible because the felt sense is responsive. The unknownness, unclearness about the felt sense may be experienced as a 'wanting to say', and a question brings a form for this.

**A felt shift** occurs when there is a response which 'works'. It is a 'yes, that's it!' moment. There is no doubt about it. There is always, however slight, a physiological sense of relief.

**Carrying Forward** – this is what happens when a blocked process resumes. It is not actually the same process starting up again but a new, changed process emerging, a new way, 'a more intricate continuity' which takes more implicit crossings into account (Gendlin, 2013). In this new way, the past is retrospectively changed. For example, we can no longer go on as the person who was a victim of their childhood, once we have truly experienced that the situation was more

complex than we as children could understand. When we look back, the memories are different, they have a different feel and meaning, even if the events recalled are the same. We are no longer the person who had *that* childhood.

### 3. TWO WAYS OF CONCEPTUALISING

I use this division in my investigations concerning neuroscience (Chapter Two) and language (Chapter Three), and it forms an interesting counterpart to the absolute and relative ways of functioning according to Buddhism, investigated in theory and practice in Chapters Four and Five.

**The Unit Model** explains the culturally dominant way of thinking in the western world. Science and technology work according to this model, which pulls out separate units from the intricate mesh of processes making up our living. These separate units can be counted, compared, measured, etc. In order for these operations to take place, the complexity of the rest of the situation, in which everything affects everything, has to be in a sense bracketed. This is what Gendlin refers to as the creation of an empty conceptual space, a place intentionally emptied of the implicit intricacy in order to allow mechanical processes to be observed or facilitated – units to be described or manipulated as if they were not connected to implicit meanings. (Gendlin, 2013)

With its roots in seventeenth century science, the unit model remains functional to this day, although science has been through many paradigm changes. Clearly the unit model, which carves the world up into discrete concepts or objects, then manipulates them in an imaginary empty space, does not apply to quantum physics. However quantum physics applies to one level of reality (that of sub-atomic particles) leaving the Newtonian laws, to which larger objects are subject, intact. The Newtonian picture of objects and forces having predictable effects on each other is not only valuable, but indispensable for many purposes. It would be absurd not to acknowledge the value of this model; we would not want a surgeon or an



engineer to work in any other way. As Gendlin remarks, it's hard not to laugh at those who deride science in papers written on computers and delivered at conferences to which the authors flew by plane.

**Thinking Beyond Patterns** – is the way in which we naturally think, talk and perceive, a way which exceeds the patterns, forms and conceptual distinctions imposed by the unit model (Gendlin, 1991). Gendlin argues that this way of thinking, *along with* the implicit/experiential intricacy, rather than bracketing it aside as if it did not exist, is our natural way of living. Language, bodies and situations all already function in a way which far exceeds the forms that theoretically contain them and divide them from each other. In a further step, we can consciously and precisely think, speak and live *from* this excess. It is not a non-verbal, senseless mass, but brings forth its own intricate and precise order. This is not an imposed order, but a responsive one, it talks back.

## 4. LANGUAGE IN THE TWO WAYS

In Chapter Three, on the linguistic functioning of 'self', I use Gendlin's concepts of public language and naked saying. (Gendlin, 1991)

### a. Public Language

This unit model approach to language is present in the western concept of what a language is – a set of written rules and codified grammar, abstracted out of the diverse mass of spoken language(s) in a world in which multi-lingualism is the norm. Good examples of public language words are love, and self. They are common currency, while covering a huge variety of possible implications and meanings, which are bracketed and put aside.

## **b. Naked Saying**

Naked saying happens when we say something which is not covered by public meanings, and quite possibly unit model grammar does not apply either. Gendlin stresses the importance, in creative or healing conversations, of finding a way of saying something which will force others to ask 'what do you *mean*?' This finding of a way of saying something which is both exact and slightly strange is a part of the technique of focusing – finding a handle word which functions to bring the felt sense sharply into our attention. When we are asked what we *mean*, we need to hold to the felt sense, the vague murky edge of the whole meaning-situation, and keep track of it as we talk to make sure we have not lost that 'meaning', i.e. the relevancy, the point. When we are in touch with this, all the strands of different processes implicit in it come alive. It is not a question of expressing something accurately, but a question of a speaking which is alive in all directions at once, which could not have been planned in advance, whose newness is very precise, it must be exactly as it is. Naked saying is not about expressing any single element but is an expression of the entire implicit context, because it *only* makes sense precisely in that context.

When we live 'beyond patterns', dipping into our felt sense of whole situations and keeping a sense of contact with a direct referent, while, or rather *because* the whole of human history is in the implicit intricacy already, what we say will be something which has never been said before. There has never been a situation quite like this one, hence the more implicit elements of the situation we bring to bear on what we say and what we do, the more unique our expression of/within/from it will be. The more contextual the phrase or action is, the more unique. It is not a chaotic flow but extremely precisely ordered – more so than the unit model could ever make it using the principle of logic, which depends on the prior distinguishing, defining and ordering of things (and the placing aside of many more things). (Gendlin, 2011)

## 5. IMPLICIT PRECISION

The fact that there is an implicit order in situations is not explicable by some kind of cause or sense standing behind or prior to situations, it is inseparable from the workings of the whole. Gendlin's answer to the question of *why* there should be order seems to be to point to nature, to the intricate order understood by birds building nests, innately, just because they do.

Trust in this implicit precision, an underlying faith (from experience) that we are not destined to live either in a world of fixed, set meanings which do not fit with the entirety of the situation that we sense and know, or in a chaotic flux of meaninglessness, seems to me to be crucial to the kind of basic wellbeing we search for, whether we conceptualise it as trying to be fully ourselves in therapy, or to lose ourselves in spiritual practice. By explicating the way in which human life carries forward all by itself in an implicitly *precise* way, a way that generates logical precision rather than opposing it, Gendlin provides the missing piece.

## **CHAPTER TWO – SELF AS ORGANISM – NEUROSCIENCE AND THERAPY**

**You aren't neurology, neurology is graph paper (Gendlin, 2006)**

**The human body is the best picture of the human soul  
(Wittgenstein, 1953, 281)**

The scientific method is the dominant method of investigating reality in contemporary western culture. Not only empirical but ontological and existential questions have come to be investigated in this way. These questions go to the heart of issues central to therapy – the relief of suffering and the search for meaning.

The 'self' has been explicitly and intensively searched for in contemporary neuroscientific research and philosophy, as the answer to existential dilemmas in societies in which religious frameworks are no longer dominant. In secular societies, increasingly, the 'immortal soul' can no longer explain who we are, or supply our lives with meaning – although a resurgence of religious fundamentalism could also be understood as a reaction against this overall tendency.

The challenge for those doing, or interpreting neuroscience is to keep these levels – the unit model and the implicit intricacy, the graph paper and the living body – clearly distinct.

### **SECTION ONE – MAIN PROBLEMATIC CONCEPTS**

There are a few deeply problematic assumptions, which persistently recur in the field of doing, thinking and writing about neuroscience and have repercussions for how people think and feel about themselves. I am going to lay out the most persistently occurring assumptions briefly here, so we can recognise them when they occur.

## 1. MATTER PLUS MYSTERY

The misleading picture goes like this: human beings are made, like everything else, out of matter, and can be understood according to the same rules.

It is clearly true that to be alive in the way that we are, we rely on complex physical processes which can be isolated, observed, measured and represented in various ways by science. We cannot, however, isolate, observe, measure or represent life itself, our actual experience at any given moment. It is also clear that no human situation could ever be exactly replicated. Some scientists might say that we have simply not yet got to the point at which this is possible, but there would be no logical problem in doing so. Others would reply that what we need to isolate, measure, and get a handle on, are the underlying 'rules', from which complex situations arise. Complexity emerges by itself from the underlying principles governing living systems.

How experience might 'emerge' from matter is the problem. There seems to be a missing link that science cannot provide. Hence, due to the assumption that science must explain everything, the idea of an insoluble, amazing 'mystery' is produced. Popular science accounts abound with statements about the incredible nature of a world in which symphonies, the wonders of sunsets, etc., are produced by a kilo or so of meat (the brain).

Now we no longer understand ourselves as souls travelling in bodies like the captains of ships, it seems that all we are must 'come out of' the flesh and bone we are made of. The mystery is called 'consciousness'. How it is actually different from the 'soul' (apart from the fact that it is not assumed to survive after death) is unclear. The next level of mystery is how it is that we can understand everything that we do, or how we can *learn* how to do everything that we do – as if there were no possibility of naturally doing and being.

'Consciousness' is then called upon to fill the explanatory gap between mind and

matter. According to Block, consciousness may be divided into *phenomenal consciousness* – what it is like to be me (Nagel, 1974), and *access consciousness*, what it is that makes access to an actually existing world possible for us. (Block, 1988; Block, 2007)

Access consciousness refers to our ability to introspect, remember, (Nachev et al., 2008) and perform other mental acts that do not involve phenomenal consciousness. This access is changed by degree, e.g. when we are dreaming, or in a coma. There is nothing that 'it is like' to remember something or decide something, but these are acts that we perform, and little is gained by implying that they take place in some kind of fluid medium called 'consciousness'. The concept of 'access' is based on the perceptual model – there is an assumption that we are isolated from the world and require a kind of bridge or translation.

This mistaken stress on perception is what Gendlin refers to as 'the perceptual split' (Gendlin, 2011) – the division of our living processes into 'inside stuff' which comes into contact with an external reality only via the medium of perception. Without perception there can be no contact. Yet 'perception is never first, and never alone.' (Gendlin, 2011)

The fundamental role played by perception in this model leads phenomenal consciousness to gain a peculiar importance. A further extraneous layer is created, composed of 'qualia.' Qualia is a term that identifies the phenomenological qualities of our experience with things as properties of the things themselves. Qualia are said to give our experiences of things (seeing, hearing or touching them, etc) their particular, qualitative, subjective feel, and the fact that an experience possesses qualia is what makes it a phenomenally conscious experience (Tye, 2015). So the fact that seeing a table is different to seeing a chair is due to some essence of tableness emanating from the table, and chairness from the chair.

Yet, as Sartre points out:

a table is not in consciousness - not even in the capacity of a representation. A table is in space, beside the window, etc. The existence of the table in fact is a center of opacity for consciousness; it would require an infinite process to inventory the total contents of a thing. To introduce this opacity into consciousness would be to refer to infinity the inventory which it can make of itself, to make consciousness a thing [...] The first procedure of a philosophy ought to be to expel things from consciousness and to reestablish its true connection with the world, to know that consciousness is a positional consciousness of the world. (Sartre, 1956, p. li)

The table is not inside a realm called our consciousness, our consciousness is not a place which is full of the contents of the things around us. The table is in the world and so are we, we are in different positions, we are we and the table is a table.

There is, within our western frame of reference, nothing it is 'like' for us to be in deep sleep or a coma, and we are unable to use access consciousness to reflect on these states. These are crucial states for eastern philosophy, providing proof of an unbroken stream of being or Self, irrespective of degrees of waking consciousness (Deutsch and Dalvi, 2004). Noë discusses the dilemma faced by relatives of people in deep vegetative states, revolving around the impossibility of knowing for sure what the links between measurable brain activity, consciousness and 'being yourself'/'really there' are (Noë, 2009 p. 34-35). Nachev and Hacker examine conceptual confusions around Persistent Vegetative State, stressing that a measured equivalence in recorded brain activity in PVS patients and non-brain damaged people (Owen and Coleman, 2008) has been overstated. Empirically, a correlation in a measure of brain activity is both over-general – e.g. there is barely any neural difference between making and withholding a movement (Curtis et al 2005, p) and 'activation that attends speech is largely indifferent to the content of what is said or meant and to whether it is spoken or merely mentally rehearsed (Nachev and Hacker, 2010 p. 70) – and also too specific and limited to be a sign of 'consciousness' or intentional activity in a PVS patient. Consciousness is a continuum of responsiveness and any signs of neural activity in people with brain

damage must be analysed on a case by case basis. Otherwise we run the risk of treating correlates of neural activity, at the extent that we are presently able to measure them, as if they held the 'truth' of the matter of consciousness, and as if consciousness itself were an all or nothing affair.

Whether it is the case that consciousness is a 'positional consciousness' of an external world, or that consciousness arises, along with objects, temporarily out of nothingness (Kurak 2003), or out of an unbroken stream of consciousness which is the basic substance of the universe (Easwaran 1989) – it is a natural inseparable part of the living process, rather than a mysterious gift bestowed on a material world, and it is not reducible to correlations of neural activity with thoughts or actions.

The mystery is pushed further, into what it is that causes someone to be alive, or to be dead. This question cannot be answered by science. An extension of attention might yield answers – the *entire* situation includes all possibilities of being and non-being. At this point we hit the absolute dimension, within which Buddhist methods are more appropriate to explore the terrain.

## **1. MIND/BODY DIVISION**

Descartes' statement, 'I think therefore I am', forms the initial philosophical ground for the entrenched western assumption that thinking is primary. For Descartes, the mind, which is the only proof of human existence, is not purely cognitive, but includes emotions and all our experiencing. This experiencing, or subjective awareness, is placed centre stage, and all other supports are removed. 'Res cogitans', the realm of the mind, of immaterial thought, is opposed to 'res extensa' the realm of extension, of matter, of the outer world. This isolation of mind from matter places us in a position of estrangement from the world, and at the same time, in a position of complete control over our lives, a position previously reserved for God.

In later interpretations, the initial mind and matter division becomes a mind/body



division, as mind is increasingly identified with rationality, autonomy, will and control, and the body with matter, replete with physiological sensations, emotions etc., yet all subordinate to reason. Reason, in Enlightenment times, became conceived of as an entirely mental process. As Damasio points out in *Descartes' Error* (Damasio 1994), we cut off everything associated with 'happening in the body' as a source of information about our situations.

The assumption of a mind/body division remains basic in everyday life. We are not exactly mistaken, because living according to this belief has real effects, which may reinforce an experienced 'separation' of mind and body. Clients often come to therapy with a kind of inarticulate emotional tension, pain or sadness, which is experienced physically, e.g. anxiety, insomnia, panic attacks, inexplicable pains and fatigue, etc. Very often the ways in which clients have tried to manage emotional pain or reduce an unbearable level of anxiety are also physical, ranging from eating disorders and addictions to self harm. This is interpreted, according to the mind/matter division, as the body showing signs that something is happening which has not been controlled by the mind. Matter has started to rebel and must be punished and brought back under control.

Clients may try to gain mastery over the pain and anxiety felt in the body with their supposedly all-powerful rational minds, but the pain is often overwhelming. The body seems to function – like the unconscious in Freud's analysis – as the place into which pain gets pushed. This may be, in a sense, an easier kind of pain to deal with (as evidenced by self-harm). In various neurotic or delusional patterns, such as hypochondriac behaviour, people long for there to be something wrong with their bodies, as that would be a 'real', manageable and/or fixable thing to be wrong. Things 'only in the head' can't be taken seriously by definition. At the same time, there is *only* what happens in our heads. A multitude of conflicting messages collide.

The division of our being into mind and body is at best unnecessary and at worst an imposed ideological division that carves people's experience up, creating

unnecessary conflict.

### 3. THE BRAIN AS AGENT

The mind and matter division leads us to feel both that we are trapped in our minds, isolated from others and from an alien world around, and also that we are in charge. So, who exactly is in charge of what?

The search for a homunculus, a centre of executive control inside us, like a little man inside our heads, is tempting, yet appears to lead to an infinite regress. How does *he* know what to do, who is telling *him*? Some theorists have seen a way out of infinite regress by positing the entire brain as controller, stressing how distributed networks of neural activity create habitual patterns and it is these processes and patterns that are the 'bottom line' – they constitute a system that gathers information, creates our perceived world and controls our actions in response to that creation.

What you see is not what is really there; it is what your brain believes is there...Your brain makes the best interpretation it can according to its previous experience and the limited and ambiguous information provided by your eyes...[...] (Crick, 1995 p.30)

It is hard to see how infinite regress is actually avoided here. An entity, called 'the brain', is still believing and making an interpretation, hence acting with intention and control. Where exactly we place the boundaries around the control centre and whether we conceptualise it as an entity or a set of de-centralised distributed processes, makes no essential difference to the assumption of an agent behind our lives. Positing 'the brain' as the creator of reality and initiator of action for the whole person is a prime example of a mereological fallacy – i.e. the taking of the actions of a part for the actions of the whole. (Bennet et al. 2007; Bennet and Hacker, 2003)

The brain is often talked about in neuroscientific literature as if it were an agent, directing and organising the actions, thoughts and feelings of the whole person. This is a compulsive kind of picture, it seems hard for us at this historical moment to avoid conceptualising matters in these terms. As Blakemore writes:

*We seem driven to say that such neurons [as respond in a highly specific manner to, e.g. line orientation] have knowledge. They have intelligence, for they are able to estimate the probability of outside events [...] Neurons present arguments to the brain based on the specific features that they detect, arguments on which the brain constructs its hypothesis of perception. (Blakemore, 1977, p. 91, italics mine)*

Why should we be driven to say this? It is obvious that the brain contains physical mechanisms without which we could not direct or organise anything. But equally we could not decide to stand up and walk somewhere without legs. Neurons cannot make arguments. Isolated from the whole they can do nothing at all, and a whole person without an environment could do nothing either. It is the whole person, always in a particular situation, who thinks, feels and decides.

Rather than investigating the neural activity that occurs when we do things, which is a potentially useful source of information, the situation is flipped around and the question becomes how the brain makes us do what we do. This is an extremely significant flip, with far-reaching consequences. The brain does indeed provide important causes and conditions which shape and form an integral part of what we do. But they are by no means even a specially isolated and privileged set of conditions, let alone an autonomous entity. As noted in Chapter One, we have come to invest ultimate meaning in the 'self' – so if we go on to locate that 'self' in the brain, this means that we are placing ultimate meaning into physical matter. It is little wonder that we feel uncomfortable with this.

#### 4. INNER/OUTER DIVISION

The appearances which manifest the existent are neither interior nor exterior; they are all equal, they all refer to other appearances, and none of them is privileged. Force, for example, is not a metaphysical conatus of an unknown kind which hides behind its effects (accelerations, deviations, etc.); it is the totality of these effects. Similarly an electric current does not have a secret reverse side; it is nothing but the totality of the physical-chemical actions which manifest it [...]. No one of these actions alone is sufficient to reveal it. But no action indicates anything which is *behind itself*; it indicates only itself and the total series. (Sartre, 1956 p.xIV)

The above quote draws attention to how very entrenched in the western scientific model of the world is the idea of an inner and outer division and a hidden agent (e.g. 'forces') inside, working with conscious intention towards a goal. When related to the self, this inner/outer division is closely linked to the mind/body division, as the belief that what happens in our heads orchestrates the rest, and hence is what *really* matters. Even if we take mind and body as an integral whole, the division between 'my organism' and 'the rest of the world' remains.

This division may be reinforced by neuroscience, when it isolates, for the purposes of measurement, certain feedback loops and systems that work to maintain homeostasis, i.e. keep the body within the narrow set of parameters needed for it to stay alive. The inner/outer division is particularly pernicious when it comes to the self – once we place it somewhere inside, and posit that we must have special access to it, or that it may be blocked or lost or hidden, then we end up trapped in a picture which leaves us ultimately completely isolated. The picture of an inner self controlling outer behaviour is neither helpful nor accurate in an intersubjective world, in which our 'selves' and 'inner experience' are co-constituted with others.

## 5. MODELS/REPRESENTATION /PERCEPTION

Neuroscientific research often portrays human functioning as working on the basis of internal models of the external world, held inside the brain. There can be no direct contact with the world 'outside', we interact with it only through the medium of perception, performed by the brain, like a feat of translation. The convoluted processes of perception posited by this kind of picture are epitomised by the example of the analysis of the process of seeing, as first having an upside down image on the retina that 'we', that is our brains, then turn around. (Noë 2009; O'Regan and Noë, 2001). The self has also notably been associated with models – the Personal Self Model is the concept of a model of the whole body stored within the brain (Metzinger, 2009a). This picture once more serves to mystify the natural interactive co-existence of ourselves and the world, explained in neuroscientific terms by the second wave of embodied neuroscience, which I go on to investigate in Section Four. But the common picture perpetuated by the media presentation of research, fitting neatly into the mainstream of western culture, is that of an isolated 'someone' inside having to rely on proper technological equipment in order to have any chance of making contact with an alien world. No baby actually arrives in the world in this position.

## 6. MAPPING

Minds emerge when the activity of small circuits is organized across large networks so as to compose momentary patterns. The patterns represent things and events located outside the brain, either in the body or in the external world, but some patterns also represent the brain's own processing of other patterns. The term *map* applies to all those representational patterns, some of which are coarse, while others are very refined, some concrete, others abstract. In brief, the brain maps the world around it and maps its own doings. (Damasio, 2010 p.18)

The concept of mapping has two main flaws – firstly, it assumes that the brain is an agent (see problematic issue no.3), and secondly it assumes a set of conventions that would give the map meaning. Such conventions would be a matter of social agreement. The metaphor of mapping arises constantly within neuroscience as a co-ordination of various processes occurring within the brain. This image of interconnecting processes with a kind of discernible order is a development from the idea that what we do depends on 'things' or capacities that exist in particular areas of the brain, and make other things happen. The map remains however an abstract pattern of habitual connections between processes. Neural circuits may be observed in experimental situations, but they are drawn by third-person observers on the basis of the data elicited, rather than actually existing phenomena inside which might yield the meaning of situations to us. Whenever patterns are discerned we tend to assume that they have been authored by somebody, and that somebody inside is assumed to be the self. The self, however, is unlikely to be either a map-maker, or a map.

Rather than being a matter of convention created by 'the brain itself' for its own use, the correlations of neural activities within the brain are causal connections. 'The cells are not arranged in accordance with conventions at all, and the correlation between their firing and the features of the perceptual field is not a conventional but a *causal* one' (Bennet and Hacker, 2003 p.). The brain does not need to understand the self-invented conventions of its own representation in order to interpret the world. The brain does not understand anything. Neurons firing in particular places enable the regulatory processes to happen – no extra interpretation is required.

All of these problematic concepts share a couple of salient characteristics, the imposition of divisions and the proliferation of layers. These tendencies towards 'dividing practices', as Foucault calls them, can be seen everywhere – not just in science but in everyday attempts to understand ourselves, and in the problems people bring to therapy when those attempts break down.

## SECTION TWO – A SHORT WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

Before looking at the ways in which neuroscientific and therapeutic communities have enquired into the nature of the self, I think it is necessary to sketch in a little of the appropriate western philosophical background to bring into focus exactly the kind of self which is being searched for (the cultural context was more extensively discussed in Chapter One).

The target of the search seems well defined by Strawson as 'a single, mental thing' (Strawson 2009). While postmodernist theories describe us as fractured, multiple subjects, sites of conflicting narratives and/or identities, it seems that in practice most of us do feel a certain itch to define, locate or understand 'who we really are'. What we want to 'find' is not the whole person, the 'thick, whole creature use of the term subject of experience' (Strawson, 2009) but precisely some *thing*, a kind of mental unity, a persisting entity, which would theoretically be capable of existing independently of experience. The best candidate for this persisting unity, Strawson argues, is the brain system, but that doesn't make the grade as a real, substantial and independently existing object. Unwilling to be deterred, Strawson argues that since we persistently refer to our selves as single, mental things in our everyday and philosophical discourses, there is a good deal of sense in searching for something that might fulfil those criteria. After a detailed process of elimination, he comes up with a 'thin' subject, which cannot be ultimately separated from the whole experiential field, and yet is distinct from it.

Moving on from Kant's, 'the thinking of the thought and the existence of my own self are one and the same' (Kant, 1772, p.136), Strawson poses the possibility of a 'radical Cartesian proposal... that there isn't a real distinction between the thin subject unity and the experiential field unity, only a conceptual distinction' (Strawson, 2009 p.387). This implies that in the final analysis, following Spinoza, there is only one subject, the universe itself. This is a far-reaching implication of Strawson's conclusion that the majority of people would not sign up to, but the

'single mental thing' seems nonetheless a fair characterisation of what most people are 'after' and the thin version of it, inextricable, yet different, from the experiential field, sounds very much like what we call consciousness.

Zahavi points out a basic foundation within the whole phenomenological tradition stating that there can be no consciousness which is not self-consciousness, from Husserl ('to be a subject is to be in the mode of being aware of oneself') through Heidegger ('every consciousness is also self-consciousness') to Sartre who claimed that 'the mode of being of intentional consciousness is to be for-itself (pour soi) that is, self-conscious' (Zahavi, 2005b p.11-12). Is it really necessary for there to be a 'something which it is like to be' me? Issue one, 'Matter plus Mystery', arises here. We do not usually have a running commentary telling us 'I am walking, I am drinking'. If asked who is walking or drinking, we will dutifully answer 'I am' – but it would seem a nonsensical question.

The contemporary phenomenological take on self-awareness is even more minimalist. Zahavi maintains that self is no more nor less than the first-person perspective, which is structurally built into experience (Zahavi, 2005b), the first-person givenness of my experience as mine. It is neither a thing in a location, nor a process which might be separated in any practical or theoretical sense from the whole person. It is not a recognisable object to be examined and reflected upon. 'It is not something added to the experience, an additional mental state, but rather an intrinsic feature of the experience (Zahavi, 2005b p.20). We *can* of course consider ourselves as objects and reflect on ourselves from an external position, but this is an 'extra' activity. The intrinsic first-person givenness of our experience already constitutes 'being someone' in a meaningful way, as underlined in Zahavi's reply to Metzinger's 'Being No-one' entitled 'Being Someone' (Zahavi, 2005a). While this 'someone' seems spread out across the entire field of our experience like a drop of a chemical in a solution, the much sought-after 'single mental thing' is firmly planted on one side of what is commonly known (perhaps unfairly to Descartes) as the Cartesian divide between mind (rational, controlling agent) and body (matter, unruly or inert). The mind, as the seat of thought, reason and will, becomes



conflated with the brain, and it is the brain that has come to be seen as the producer of consciousness. Hence the huge impetus and energy behind the technological development of neuroscience today.

### **SECTION THREE – THE FIRST WAVE OF NEUROPHILOSOPHY**

The discipline of cognitive science was born in 1943, as cybernetics, and its first phase of intensive development lasted until 1953. The new discipline used mathematical logic to build information-processing machines and created systems theory, information theory and the first principles of self-organising systems (Varela et al., 1991 p.51). This extraordinary rush of new theories was then applied to the brain, newly conceptualised as an information-processing machine, a computational system.

The mind/matter division quickly reared its head. It was not at all clear how this understanding of information-processing possibilities might match our actual experience. Consciousness remained a mystery – as Jackendoff terms it, 'the mind mind problem' (Varela et al., 1991 p.52). How could computational systems produce conscious experience? Concepts such as 'self' or 'consciousness' became strongly linked with the physical properties or processes most amenable to the form of the search. Measurable, locatable things were sought after, unsurprisingly, within the field of possibilities of measurable things and locatable places.

This search continues to the present day. Consciousness is now the primary mystery to be solved, the 'thing' in which our essence resides, the 'thing' that makes us who we are, as the underlying assumption persists that some 'thing' must. It does not fit any of our categories, while making them all possible. 'The mythical image of mind is one of a quasi-spatial thing that retains an enduring integrity as an absolute property of its nature' (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992 p.10). This mythical status for the mind is achieved through 'the reifications of various dimensions of subjectivity... which confer upon experience one or another of the properties ordinarily attributed

to things on the plane of material reality, for example, spatial location, extension, enduring substantiality, and the like. The mind thus takes its place as a thing among things.' (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992 p.11)

The *whole* brain is the 'thing' that makes us who we are and makes consciousness possible. Explicit proponents of this view are eminent philosophers of neuroscience such as Churchland, who writes, 'The weight of evidence now implies that it is the brain, rather than some non-physical stuff, that feels, thinks, decides' (Churchland, 2002 p.1). Hood in 'The Self Illusion' writes, 'Every feeling, bit of knowledge and experience you have or plan to have is possible because of the cascading activation of neurons. *Everything we are, can do or will do is nothing more than this* [italics mine]. Otherwise we would need ghosts in the brain and so far none have been found' (Hood, 2012 p.8). This latter quote exposes some ungrounded assumptions – how does it follow from the fact that neural activity is necessary for experience, that everything we do is reduced to precisely this, and in what sense would the addition of an extra ghost planning it help?

Here we have a clear case of Issue no.2 – Brain as Agent. To avoid the obvious crudity of the homunculus concept, 'self' is often more subtly referred to as a set of co-ordinating functions. The principle and practice of representation is fundamental to the brain, according to the conventional 'first wave' neuroscientific view stated clearly by Hood, 'our brain constructs models of the external world. It can weave experiences into a coherent story that enables us to interpret and predict what we should do next. Our brain simulates the world in order to survive in it.' (Hood, 2012 p.xi)

The problem, however, persistently reiterates itself – *who* exactly is doing the weaving, and *where* are the models and the simulations? Why is it that actions cannot take place without being first imagined and theoretically projected, then repeated according to the previous design?

The brain is a fearsomely complex organ. 'If you just took 500 neurons all connected

together so that each neuron could either be in a state of on or off, the total number of different patterns is  $2^{500}$ , a number that exceeds the total number of atoms in the observable universe' (Hood, 2012, p.10). And there are billions of them in our brains, creating distributed patterns, indeed parallel patterns, because every neuron can participate in more than one activity (Hood, 2012). The level of complexity of the movements of electricity within the brain far surpasses any kind of simple understanding or two dimensional map. Patterns of neural activity as measured by fMRI scans have not so far been found to be tied to any site of occurrence that might qualify as a 'self-site' (Legrand and Ruby, 2009). One problem is that it is hard to isolate exactly when it is that we are 'doing self stuff'. This points up the artificial nature of the research question. There are areas, or rather patterns of activation involving certain areas, which can be observed when we explicitly consider ourselves, but this is a very particular, not to say peculiar, form of activity. It is not the case that this area is constantly alive with our 'being ourselves,' but rather that it activates under specific conditions when we direct our attention in certain ways. These areas/patterns may also activate when we think of others, as some cross-cultural studies have found. (Zhu et al., 2006)

This whole direction of enquiry also seems a little strange as we consider that measuring when 'self sites' or circuits are active, implies that sometimes they are not – that there are moments when we are not being selves at all – which is a little outside the conceptual box. The search for the self in the brain is also hampered by the variety of definitions of self used (Vogeley and Gallagher, 2011). The most basic division seems to be between the 'mimimal self', a pre-reflective part of our first-person perspective which we might expect to be 'on' all the time, hence would be hard to isolate, and the 'narrative self' to which our conscious thinking capacities are attributed, which is certainly a complex matter involving many different processes.

The PET scan and fMRI technology used to execute such self-site studies show two-dimensional colourful pictures that seem easy to grasp, and it is seductive to believe that they really are maps of processes in the brain. Yet, as neurophilosopher Noë

reminds us, 'Brain scans [...] represent the mind at three steps of removal: they represent physical magnitudes correlated to blood flow; the blood flow in turn is correlated to neural activity; the neural activity in turn is supposed to correlate to mental activity' (Noë, 2009 p.24). And, of course, correlations are notoriously hard to interpret, being neither causes nor results. As an experiment involving a dead Atlantic salmon showed, with some flair, an insufficiently complex approach to statistical analysis can lead to 'proof' of which areas of the brain of a dead salmon are active while it completes 'an open-ended mentalizing task'! (Bennet et al. 2009 p.2)

In the case of the aforementioned salmon, the conventions of statistical analysis that would have rendered the 'map' meaningful were not followed thoroughly enough – leading to a pattern of correlations that was perfectly internally coherent but which, when applied to reality, had no sense whatsoever. Correlations can show neither cause and effect nor actual processes, let alone the whole context of the experiencing body, or any kind of 'self'. If 'self' is defined as the map-maker, the marker of patterns of correlation, then it becomes precisely what is outside the system. Yet the observer cannot be separated from the system.

There are patterns of neural activity which recur, neural habits and routines, neurons, in the words of neurophysiologist Hebb, 'firing together and wiring together' (Hood, 2012 p.5). But these are impossible to interpret with any real degree of certainty.

To take a simple example, noticing in the lab that some neurons seem to be active every time a zebrafish sees a moving pattern, we might conclude initially that those neurons are encoding something related to visual processing. But when we take into account that the same stimulus also causes the animal to swim, it may turn out that some of the 'motion-detection' neurons are actually 'swimming-induction' neurons. The picture is complicated further when we realize that the swimming is modulated by other aspects of the behavioral state of the animal, controlled by still other

sets of neurons. (Marcus et al., 2014 p.11)

Neurophilosopher Metzinger, who stridently denies the existence of self as any kind of thing, nonetheless makes the case that a 'self-model' of our whole bodies is indispensable, a pattern of neurons which fire and wire together (or rather a set of habits, which observed from the outside look like a pattern) to make up a representation of ourselves. Metzinger refers to this model as a 'map' of our physical bodies 'held' or constantly re-created, by the brain (Metzinger, 2009a). This is an obvious instance of Issue 5 – Models and Representation. Gendlin's 'graph paper' analogy – 'you aren't neurology, neurology is graph paper' (Gendlin, 2008) – moves right inside the body. Issue 6, Mapping, also arises here, with its connotations of a brain agent 'doing' something and the question of where such a 'thing' might be.

The fact that we can perceive ourselves as a whole, irrespective of physical facts, is well supported by experiments on phantom limb experiences, out of body states, etc (Metzinger, 2009b), and the building of robots which can adjust their movements to compensate for a lost limb possibly supports the idea that such perceptual maps can function independently of the human organism (Metzinger, 2009a), although this is debatable (it may well be that the robot needs something like a map, whereas the person does not, because they may use habitual patterns of interaction with the world, formed when they had a limb). However, despite Metzinger's intention to dispel the illusion of an essential self, the self-model seems to fulfil the criteria that Strawson boils the self down to – a 'single mental thing' – perfectly. Within the whole organism, how could a self-model be anything *other* than a single, mental thing?

## **SECTION FOUR – SECOND WAVE NEUROPHILOSOPHY, EMBODIMENT AND EXTENDED COGNITION**

The entire history of the brain has to do with one simple fundamental

thing, which is sensory-motor correlation linked to motion. No motion, no nervous system. No motion, no behaviour. No sensory-motor correlation, no brain. No brain, no pain. (Hayward and Varela, 1992)

A second wave of neurophilosophers and scientists see no mystery in the lack of an inner, single, mental thing. They study human life as a set of interactive processes growing naturally out of survival needs (Damasio 1999; Campbell; and Garcia 1994; Noë 2009; Sheets-Johnstone, 2009; Varela et al., 1991; Lutz and Thompson, 2003). It could be argued that they shoot themselves in the foot somewhat, terminologically, by calling the approach 'embodied', which implies once more an ethereal thing *inhabiting* the body, but the intention is to point out that we are always-already embodied – hence there could be no such entity as a disembodied self.

Researchers in the field of embodiment might be placed along a continuum: at one end those who believe that our being springs from movement and our embeddedness in the physical environment, with our 'higher functions' growing seamlessly from this (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009); and at the other end those who recognise our dependence on bodily survival mechanisms but posit a system of levels, the upper ones appearing mysteriously in 'mind out of matter' fashion, although they do work together with the lower levels, which exert a great deal of influence. (Damasio, 1999)

The field of embodiment stretches into ever new disciplines. In neuroanthropology, emotional embodiment is studied as a part of the evolution of culture, bringing anthropology from an antagonistic relationship with 'reductionist' neuroscience into a holistic, integrated one. Embodiment is considered by Campbell and Garcia as a 'somatic mood', which can be correlated with activity in specific areas of the brain. They point to 'the integration of somatosensory, homeostatic and emotional information within the insula' (Campbell and Garcia, 1994). Neural activity in the insular and anterior cingulate cortex is implicated in ritual spiritual practices, yoga (Kakigi et al. 2005), shamanic practices (Riba et al. 2006), meditation (Lazar et al.,

2005; Lutz, 2009) and also in romantic love (Jankowiak and Fischer, 1992; Aron et al., 2005). All these practices/experiences are in some sense concerned with the experiential expansion of the boundaries of self, and loosening of rational control. Hence we can surmise that there are patterns of neural activity correlated with experiences of being 'more than' the self contained by the boundaries of our skin/our own life histories, with expansion, or merging (with a loved one, all of humanity, or God) and with senses of this self just disappearing. It may be easier to isolate a 'no-self' network, as these experiences are unusual for most people, than a 'self-network' which would be everywhere and nowhere, because 'on' all the time.

Schore posits a 'right brain implicit self' composed precisely from a co-ordination of 'non-rational' processes (Schore, 2010), which tend to be associated with activity in the right side of the brain. Schore pinpointed a paradigm shift within neuroscience, a pendulum swing from interest in computational metaphors and rational control, to interest in how emotions structure our actions and experience.

Contemporary researchers concerned with embodied cognition tend to lay less stress on the 'left/right' division, and be more concerned with the top/bottom axis, and the body schema. The 'bottom' of the brain contains the 'reptilian' areas activated along with basic instincts, fears etc., the next stage 'up', the limbic system, is activated when emotions are felt, and the upper regions, which appeared much later in evolution, such as the pre-frontal cortex, activate during rational thinking. These researchers reverse the tendency to assume that while we have animal bodies, everything which is really interesting about us comes from above, from 'elsewhere' – across the mysterious divide. In this traditional model, language, self-consciousness and all kinds of specifically human intelligence developed at a certain point in evolution and can be studied only within their own terms.

Embodied cognition researchers investigate how we may trace the natural evolution of the main capacities associated with concepts of 'self' in humans, the 'higher' capacities e.g. 'consciousness' and language, from survival needs, movement and relationships. Sheets-Johnstone provides an intricate account of

how movement is primary in human life – not the word, not thoughts, but the movements which have constituted our sense of being since we were in the womb (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009). There is no point at which a mysterious disconnect occurs, no separate object or process to call 'self' or consciousness. This evolutionary process can be observed in detail, happening 'live,' during research studies on babies, who are by no means just inert matter until their brains develop. From the very start they enter into reciprocal relationships with their caregivers (Meltzoff, 1998; Meltzoff and Moore, 1977), precisely the kinds of relationships that are conventionally assumed to necessarily entail selves or 'self-awareness'. Gallagher argues that this research radically undermines psychoanalytic concepts of babies living in a state of non-differentiation, merged with the mother, from which they only emerge once they acquire a body schema, or even later at Lacan's mirror stage, when they can observe themselves from an 'exterior' perspective as an object. In fact, Gallagher argues, babies have a proprioceptive awareness, which, while necessarily based around the perspective of their own bodies, is inherently responsive to others (Gallagher, 2005). Hence, before there is anything 'it is like' to be in a relationship, babies *are* in relationship. Consciousness is as consciousness does!

For Gallagher, proprioceptive awareness is a part of what he calls prenoetic structuring, a term for the ways in which sensory-motor processes work together to give us a sense of our body, both from the inside and in space. A prenoetic sense of self, the sense of our whole organism, is the foundation not only of who we think we are, but who we *actually* are in terms of our physical existence and possibilities. It involves the issue of a 'body map' but is different from Metzinger's concept of a self-model, which is a representation 'in the brain'. The map is not stored, but is a way of conceptualising our ongoing co-ordination of implicit data about our environment, and what our possibilities are, so we can concentrate on other things, e.g. what we want to do.

Hence, while we are performing thousands of tiny adjustments and actions, on many levels, e.g. when we reach out to grasp a glass of water, if asked exactly what



we are doing, we can't answer. Explicit knowledge is unnecessary, and the question would be intrusive, bringing in a conceptual level which would obstruct our seamless doing. In normal life, we would say 'I'm taking the glass'. Without a very precise sense of where we are in relation to the glass and the possible range of our fingers' movements, we would not be able to do that – there is implicit knowledge of our possibilities and position in space, centring us in a first-person perspective that changes with every movement we make and every change in the things around us. This is a deeper, more responsive picture than that of a map. We do not perform actions by making a precise plan and carrying it out – consciously measuring how far it is to reach the glass would make life very difficult.

Gallagher gives the case example of Ian Waterman (Gallagher, 2005 p.43), a man with acute sensory neuropathy, who had to do just this – learn to move using only visual perceptions and conscious control. What Gallagher refers to as the body schema, the interior sense of where our bodies are in space due to systems of feedback with the environment, totally failed for Waterman. It was possible for him to work out how to move, but this entailed a great deal of effort. With no proprioceptive feedback, only visual feedback, he was reliant on volition and control – which he could keep up as long as conditions were good, although if e.g. he had a head cold, he was unable to muster the mental energy required for movement at all. Campbell and Garcia (1994) suggested that Ian Waterman was functioning in an allocentric frame of reference, not on emotional/psychological levels (as Austin suggests we do during meditation, more on this in Section Eight), but on a basic physical level. He treated himself as a thing among other things, thereby disproving the more extreme embodiment theses that we cannot be coherent selves at all without a continuous kinaesthetic sense of bodily agency (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009). While Waterman shows that it is possible to be a person with a normally functioning sense of self *without* such a bodily sense, his case underlines how in normal life we rely on our experience being structured by bodily/environmental interactions.

The issues raised by Waterman undermine the concept that we learn about 'other

minds' as children through inference, an accepted part of development theory until very recently. There is research showing, once more, that working with conscious control and effort is what we do when things go *wrong* – people with autism do indeed need to construct a theory of other minds (the very thing they are said to lack!) (Hobson, 2011). But when our bodies (in this term I include the brain, which is very much a part of the body) are functioning smoothly, we have a way of being in the world which seamlessly takes into account where we are, how big we are, and what our capacities are, in strict relation to where others are and what their capacities are. This is what Neisser calls the 'ecological self' (Neisser, 1993). According to Gallagher, our prenoetic structuring of consciousness is the primary shaper of our sense of self. This moving and interacting body, active on all levels, from the guts to the most sophisticated form of thought, is, fundamentally, who we mean when we say 'I'.

This research overturns traditional concepts of a purely mental self, which more or less successfully directs the emotions/the body. In a slightly different vein, research on the extended mind (Clark and Chalmers, 1998; Clark, 2006) shows our 'mental activity' to be distributed over many different locations – from the everyday example of 'thinking on paper' and how our diaries or phones function as parts of our own brains, to more complex feats of technological processing. Clark's extended mind theory shows that the feedback loops used as we live our lives are not enclosed within our heads but dispersed – the theory breaks down the inner/outer division that we are used to, yet extends the view of brain processes to include *more* of the world, not undermining the concept of the brain as an information processing machine that thinks and decides.

In contrast, Alva Noë argues, from a radically environmentally-based ground, that you are not inside your mind at all, consciousness is just not produced there, however many tools may be added on to it (Noë, 2009). Brain, body and world are a constant working together, ultimately your mind and the situation are inextricable. This does not mean that the situation is made up by the brain, it means that the habits, constraints and feedback of the actual world are co-constituents of the way

we think, feel, speak, and do. Consciousness, the fact that, as Noë puts it, 'we think, feel, and the world shows up for us' (Noë, 2009 p.10), is not a substance produced by the brain, so there is no meaningful boundary around it, that might seal off one kind of 'stuff' – like consciousness or 'me' – from other kind of stuff, e.g. the outside world. It is not a question of difficulty in drawing the boundary line because of the extent to which we are dispersed, or mixed up with the environment, but a more radical question, of whether there is any such thing as an entity that generates any such thing as consciousness, at all.

## **SECTION FIVE – HUMANISTIC THERAPY AND THE ORGANISM**

Humanistic therapy holds a foundational belief that a person is best understood, and therefore best helped, as a whole person, and the person is often conceptualised as an *organism*, containing various elements/levels/parts which need to work together holistically in order to meet the individual's needs for survival and growth. The development of each person fits a particular environmental niche.

Rogers' 19 propositions outline the ways in which an organism perceives and reacts to its environment (Rogers, 1951 p.483-523). While the organism cannot exist independently from its environment, it is still in the final analysis separate from it, as the environment exists prior to it. In his later theory Rogers describes how what he calls the 'actualising tendency' strives to achieve fulfilment of the organism's needs. The actualising tendency originates as a biological need for growth, and in human organisms develops into more subtle territories of emotional, mental or spiritual growth.

This model is consistent with embodied neurophilosophy/neuroscience as previously discussed. It fits particularly closely to Damasio's model, which consists of three levels, each given the title of self: proto-self, core self and autobiographical self (Damasio, 1999). The levels range from the physiological to the psychologically

subtle, and the self does not reside in any *one* of the levels. The hierarchy works from the bottom up. When all is functioning well, the selves form a seamless whole experience.

The proto-self, at the bottom, is the most important, in the sense that without it, the other two selves cannot survive. This is a version of Gallagher's 'pre-noetic self' – the co-ordination of processes in order to maintain a state of homeostasis.

The next level 'up' in Damasio's system is the core-self. It builds on the proto-self, in an evolutionary process; hence some living organisms develop it, and some do not. The marker of the presence of the core self is the 'feeling of what happens' (Damasio, 1999). There is a distinction made between a sense of the thing that is happening and its impact on the organism and an additional sense that this is happening to *me*.

I have discussed some problems with Nagel's 'what it is like to be' concept at the start of this chapter. The sense of core self could be simply the illusory creation, or retrospective inference, of a separate sense of 'what it is like to be me'.

Alternatively, the core-self could be about experiences being 'mine', subsequently incorporated into 'me'. In terms of child development, from my personal observations it would seem that a sense of 'mineness' comes well before a concept of 'me'. In 2010, I carried out a small informal study on early self-identification by asking 15 acquaintances with small children, mostly by email, some in person, how their children initially started to refer to themselves as subjects. Twelve of the children started to refer to themselves by name, e.g. 'Daisy wants to go to the park'. Three children correctly used the pronoun 'I' to refer to themselves. Two children called themselves 'me', e.g. 'me want to go to the park'. One child referred to himself in the third person as 'he', and one child referred to herself as 'you'! It seems that 'I' is not referred to as essentially different from the rest of the world, 'I am just different as a person among others, 'Julie wants to go to the park, Mark wants to stay at home'. Children do, however, very early on, certainly in western

cultures, show particular attachment to certain people and things and consider them as 'mine'.

The next level of human 'being' according to Damasio is the autobiographical self, who 'writes' the story of our lives, looks into the past and future, edits, imagines, regrets, hides and distorts experience. This self uses language and is capable of reflexive thought. It can cling, grasp, and create a self-concept. It is 'who we think we are', but also the set of capacities which allow us to become, in Rogers' terms, 'fully functioning' – hence able to *let go* of the self-concept as a defended object.

Damasio's system of levels, like other theories built on a neuroscientific base, is pertinent and useful in elucidating what happens when capacities are lost, e.g. through brain damage. The concept of levels clearly helps to elucidate situations, such as the case of David, cited by Damasio (Damasio, 1999 p. 43-47), who functions normally, both socially and linguistically, during short windows of time but has no memory of his past life, or who people are, beyond those short time-frames. David could be seen to have had his capacity to create an 'autobiographical self' erased, leaving his core self intact – not as a phenomenological feel but as a set of abilities enabling him to function in a smooth integrated social way as a person among others, albeit without 'information' about himself – a first-person perspective without the contents of the person. In coma states the core self is also lost, and only the proto-self functions. The theory helps make sense of an intuitive conviction that people in various reduced states of functioning are still in an important sense 'selves'.

Neuroscience, like early, analytical Buddhism, seems to work well on a negative principle. The various phenomena elucidated with these methods can be understood 'backwards', stripped back layer by layer – e.g. if you take away the functioning of various brain areas, by cutting off blood supply, for example, certain skills corresponding to the functioning of those areas will no longer work. In extreme cases, we may be unable to talk, or no longer know 'who we are'. In Buddhism too, we experiment with removing various levels of attachment in order

to see 'who is there' at the root. The conclusions of Buddhist and neuroscientific routes are identical – no-one.

It is tempting yet misleading to explain how the world works 'forwards' by what happens when we go 'backwards', e.g. if we need an area to function in order to speak, we assume that not only is speaking materially dependent on this area, but it must somehow exist there. Or that this place is what our speaking essentially 'is'. 'Who we are', is, according to this interpretation, a collection of these brain capacities and what they can do. This is obviously reductive, so the familiar dimension of mystery is 'added' – as what we can't explain *yet*.

## **1. THE INNER/OUTER DIVISION IN THERAPY**

Motschnig-Pitrik and Lux compare Rogers' 19 propositions (Rogers, 1951 p.483-524) with Damasio's theories (Motschnig-Pitrik and Lux, 2008). The comparison throws some light on similar limitations in approach, e.g. their shared assumption of an inner-outer division that both neuroscientific and therapeutic inquiries are now in a strong position to radically undermine. The assumption is not merely theoretical, it creates a sense of unnecessary estrangement and isolation.

The first point of accord between Rogers and Damasio is the starting point – that 'every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the centre' (Rogers, 1951 p.483). Rogers goes on to posit a private inner world, unknowable to others:

no matter how we attempt to measure the perceiving organism – whether by psychometric tests or by physiological calibrations – it is still true that the individual is the only one who can know how the experience was perceived.  
(Rogers, 1951 p.484)

This is true in a narrow sense. Only the individual knows exactly 'how an experience

was perceived,' but reflecting on 'how an experience was perceived' is quite a rare and subtle form of activity. It is rarely necessary to do so. We cannot extrapolate from the fact that our experience encompasses many implicit elements, unique to us and which cannot be captured by 'unit model' measures, that we live in isolated individual bubbles and nobody can possibly truly understand us. This is an extreme characterisation, which Rogers, with his emphasis on the powers of empathy, wouldn't sign up to, but it is a logical implication of the common assumption that we are essentially alone in private worlds.

This concept of a private, invisible, ever-separate mind resonates with Damasio, who reminds us that correlations between mind and behaviour can be made, but 'mind and behaviour are different. This is why, in all likelihood, I will never know your thoughts unless you tell me, and you will never know mine until I tell you.' (Damasio, 1999 p.309)

So if, following Damasio, we ask someone to reveal their inner world to us by asking them what they think – will the curtain be dropped and their inner world explained to us? Of course asking someone what they think will, if the person is sincere, lead them to tell you what it is that they define and explicitly formulate as thoughts, at least the ones which seem to them appropriate within the possibilities and constraints of the situation in which they are talking with you. It is not the case, however, that there is a set of fixed contents which may be expressed, or not. My 'inner world' when I am with you is a different 'inner world' to that which I experience with someone else. It is also a different one than it was five minutes ago. I may try to keep track of themes, note what I recognise occurring in patterns, and I might call these themes and patterns 'self', but this is a specific kind of activity leading to a specific result, and it takes place within a situation in which there is always more, and in that *more* are many things I have not explicitly formulated yet.

What happens in our heads is not private, it is unspoken, that's all. We all know what it's like to live in the stifling atmosphere of what is unsaid.

(Jeanette Winterson, The Guardian, 23.08.2014)

Purton, in his discussion of the issue of 'inner/outer' in person centred therapy gives the example of jealousy, in which someone displaying jealous behaviour is 'not aware' of it (Purton, 2014). Others have noticed, but the person concerned has not worked out this meaning explicitly. In interaction with others, he acquires data which it had been in his interests not to pay attention to. Aspects of the 'more', once sensed, are things that I can pay attention to or not, express or not – and these choices are themselves complicated interactions between explicit, implicit factors and those on the edge – they are not something ready-made that I can just look inside and discover.

There is undoubtedly a case in which we have thoughts we do not express, and which cannot be reliably observed or intuited by others, and a case such as therapy, when we pay specific attention to what we have not conceptualised, expressed or said in our lives so far, and 'tell our thoughts' to someone with the purpose of working something out. This is not, however, the primary case on which all human functioning is modelled, and insistence on the fundamental nature of this kind of experience is culturally specific. More importantly, not only is it inaccurate, but this modelling of human functioning produces a superfluous built-in alienation.

This ostensibly 'ontological' aloneness (Mijuscovic, 1988), which ignores the constitutive role of the relationship to the other in a person's having any experience at all, attributes universality to a quite particular subjective state characterised by a sense of imprisoning estrangement from others. (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992 p.9)

## **SECTION SIX – BEYOND THE INNER/OUTER DIVISION – THE INTERSUBJECTIVE FIELD**

The concept of intersubjectivity has roots in Husserl (who, relevantly to the contemporary current, posited that perception of another human body was the



foundation of empathy, the start of the sense that someone else exists like I do). According to neurobiological research, (Thompson and Cosmelli, 2010; Meltzoff and Moore, 1977) this sense is fundamental – *someone existing like I do* is inextricable from *'me' existing like me* – as a foundational structure rather than a further developed reflective thought.

Merleau-Ponty continued this strain of phenomenology with his concentration on the 'Lebenswelt'. It is senseless to consider an individual in abstraction from their life-world. The subject-object relation needs to be overcome theoretically – because practically speaking they are inseparable.

Stolorow and Atwood merge intersubjectivity with dynamic systems theory in their psychoanalytic work. They define the 'myth of the isolated mind' as a founding myth of contemporary western society, based on three alienations: from nature, social life and subjectivity. From the neurobiological perspective, alienation from nature is the most damaging of the features, as it strikes at our own roots. From a perspective in which our language, sense of self and other phenomena are natural outgrowths of our physical being, to deny our bodily experience and mortality is to deny the basis of everything we are – doing ourselves real violence (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992). We are co-constructors of the common sense by which we live, and, one step further, co-constructors of each other. You cannot meaningfully talk of a single subjective reality which is not already an interaction between other subjective realities.

Gendlin elucidates how languages, bodies and situations are all, in a sense, made of the same 'stuff' – they are different crossings of processes (Gendlin, 1991). When processes cross, words 'come' which were not there before the moment of crossing. They were not 'in there' waiting to be found, they were created, in action. This doesn't mean that we are constantly creating novel responses, the game may have been played many times before (e.g. 'how are you?' 'fine thanks'). Still, while not impossible, it would be decidedly unusual to plan such an utterance in advance, hold it inside and then express it. This is the problem we have when public speaking,

or learning a second language as an adult. We are forced into using the unit model where it does not usually apply. If we are skilled enough, we will reach a level of proficiency at which we will no longer need to use the unit model – e.g. the new language will become implicit in what we want to say. If we are native speakers our words 'just come', unless we are crippled with anxiety, however conventional or unconventional they may be. Breaking down the inner/outer division in our experience is like becoming native speakers of ourselves rather than placing the language 'in here' or 'out there' or as a translation between the two.

In the act of 'telling you', thinking and speaking happen at the same time and are co-constitutive of each other in implicitly structured patterns of relations, which Wittgenstein called language games. By 'implicitly structured' I mean structured by a complex set of rules which we could not explicitly list were we asked to, yet we take into account as we play. We know them implicitly in the sense that we act according to their constraints, and are aware of the rules which are most immediately appropriate to our specific situations. Language games are interactive in a deep sense, maybe even intersubjective. From the act of 'telling you', could we remove the thinking from the equation, or the telling, or the you?

Damasio posits that the individual *can* be removed, and the individual's existence is primary. He quotes Spinoza, 'The human Mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing except through the ideas of the modification (affectations) of its own body.' (Spinoza, 1677 Prop. XXVI)

This seems at best a convoluted way of expressing the fact that we are interactive beings, whose experience of anything is already an interaction with it, if not an expression of the obvious fact that were we not alive we could not experience anything at all (in the way we understand 'experience'). The convolution is due to the insistence that there must be an internally consistent being and an external world, in a continuous, compulsive juggling action, trying to match up with each other. Given that this is a primary assumption, we are then forced to argue that everything is perceived through 'effects within us'. This insistence is a basic instance

of 'the idolatry of the autonomous mind'.

## **SECTION SEVEN – THIRD WAVE OF NEUROSCIENCE**

An engaged branch of neuroscience currently brings together eastern and western methods to investigate ways of loosening the habitual patterns that keep us feeling estranged and stuck in our 'isolated minds'. Scientific methods prove inadequate, as do introspective philosophical accounts based on phenomenological 'feels'. The present Dalai Lama points to the usefulness of co-operation between third-person perspective science and first-person perspective meditation techniques in order to get a fuller picture of what consciousness is – always with the aim of reducing suffering – and supports such collaboration in the bi-annual Mind and Life conferences (Dalai Lama, 2005). A fast-growing body of research uses advanced meditators as experts in matters of directing consciousness in order to bring benefit. This is of direct relevance to therapy, and to our notions of what a self is.

Buddhist meditation practices, practices of directing consciousness, can be grouped into two general directions. I will investigate them more thoroughly in Chapters Four and Five; for now this general categorisation will suffice.

Samadhi, or concentration meditation, involves developing the capacity for calmness and steadying the mind, and the cultivation of particular states of absorption (jhanas) through concentration on an object, typically the breath (Khena, 1997). Vipassana, or wisdom meditation, refers to cultivation of awareness encompassing the movements of thoughts, perceptions, feelings, etc., as they arise and dissipate. It is a way in which we can experience transience and the lack of a solid substrate against which thoughts appear, and the aim is to gain insight rather than to calm the mind. (Goldstein, 1976)

An example of research on the effects of meditation practices is the work of neuroscientist and Zen practitioner James Austin, who distinguishes allocentric

(other-directed) from egocentric (self-directed) neural networks, and investigates ways in which to optimise the use of allocentric processing for the well-being of the person concerned and others.

Austin conceptualises our normal way of being as follows. We create a 'psychic self', which is a product of survival mechanisms such as responses to threat (hard-wired instinctual drives that work, for obvious reasons, very quickly), emotions that are experienced using the limbic system (influencing and being influenced by hormonal and chemical balances), and cognitive dissonances which require activity 'higher up' in the cortex, such as interpreting events and attaching meanings to them – often in ever-decreasing circles, e.g. producing more of a sense of threat or more difficult emotions, thus perpetuating the loop. Oscillations between the thalamus and the cortex take place through the limbic system, a set up which Austin sees as correlated with 'the cognitive dissonances, emotional valences and hard-wired instinctual drives that lend dynamic qualities to our *psychic* Self.' (Austin, 2011 p. 91)

Austin states that it is possible to deactivate the firing of these habitual circuits through meditation practice. Physiologically this occurs through GABA nerve cells, which work to inhibit the thalamus – cortex oscillations and 'shift our usual physiological bias [...] to keep our two frames of Self/other reference always tilted towards expressing our most Self-centred functions' (Austin, 2011 p.92). This is reminiscent of Rogers' picture of the organism as an organised whole around a centre, in the centre of a perceptual field organised in turn around itself. The difference is that Austin points out that this is not inevitable, and may even be dysfunctional.

With the shift that prevents the nuclei of the thalamus overfiring:

the new mental field could open out into a seemingly new dimension of OTHER-consciousness [...] emptied of all prior maladaptive limbic associations linked to the old, overconditioned I-Me-Mine. (Austin, 2011 p.93)

We might then see things as they are, not skewed by our own emotional propaganda, which impresses upon us repeatedly that whatever happens which concerns *us* personally is of incredibly high importance.

Austin notes that egocentric and allocentric networks function simultaneously in everyday life, we just pay more attention to the self-oriented one. This provides an interesting angle on 'buddhanature' (the concept of a basically enlightened nature shared by all, discussed at length in Chapter 4). It seems that the seeing of 'things as they are' without skewing them towards our personal perspective is a normal capacity after all, and not even a hidden one, simply not prioritised. Hence we may possess buddhanature, the capacity to see things as they are, without attachment, aversion or ignorance, all the time, even while functioning in a self-centred way.

Siegel uses this physiological information with children who experience 'overfiring' of the limbic system – that is, they have mood swings during which rational regulation, which requires a freely functioning pre-frontal cortex, is just not possible. He tells them that they need to make some 'GABA – goo', inhibitory nerve cells, which calm excitation responses, by using mindfulness and relaxation techniques. (Siegel, 2010)

Where 'gaba goo' helps people calm down and regain perspective, Austin takes the view that a total shift into allocentric processing, which is physically possible, may well be what happens during experiences of the exceptional, 'enlightened' states of kensho or satori – or 'no-self'. The terms are taken from the Zen tradition. Kensho translates as 'seeing into one's own nature', it is an initial insight into non-duality, and satori is a more lasting realisation.

It seems that the shift to allocentric processing noticed in meditators can deactivate strong emotional reactions such as fear and sadness, with meditators shown to be less emotionally reactive (Lutz et al. 2008), and there are studies in which experienced practitioners show an almost total absence of signs of fear, as

measured by the startle reflex to loud noises (Levenson et al., 2012). Austin argues that loss of fear and loss of sense of time are correlated with observable changes in brain function (Austin, 2011 p.195-196). Loss of fear and loss of sense of time are signs of 'kensho'.

A sense of time is intimately connected to our normal sense of self, which locates us in both time and space. We define ourselves as what we remember, what we wish to carry into the future, and what lasts. Experiences of timelessness however are not associated with any kind of disintegration of the people concerned. They continue to exist, in the present moment, with working memory intact, but without the personal attachment to time, the structuring of their experience in terms of time, which forms such an inextricable part of normal everyday lives.

As well as lessening the grip of fear and time, unity and wholeness are experienced. Study of the brain activity of Tibetan monks when meditating resulted in the paper entitled , 'Long-Term Meditators Self-Induce High-Amplitude Gamma Synchrony during Mental Practice' ' (Lutz, A et al., 2004). This brain activity is characteristically observed when perceptions of unity and wholeness are experienced. Metzinger quotes Ulrich Ott, Germany's leading meditation researcher, who asks the question, 'could deep meditation be the process, perhaps the only process, in which human beings can sometimes turn the global background into the gestalt, the dominating feature of consciousness itself?' (Metzinger, 2009a p.32)

## **1. THERAPY IMPLICATIONS**

According to Gendlin, the task of the therapist is an apparent paradox – to 'get out of the way' while simultaneously being fully available. By 'getting out of the way,' the therapist is not becoming absent; they could be, in Austin's terms, shifting their processing from the egocentric to the allocentric by using some form of attentional skill such as the 'clearing a space' step in focusing.

Therapists remove 'themselves' as explicit content, getting out of their own way before getting out of the client's, in order to be *more* present with their implicit intricacy, providing many more possible crossings with the client, in a new and fertile kind of interaction. David Brazier points out that this state of non-concentration on self, or rather non-making of self, may be the most healing aspect of therapy and it seems unfortunate that it is the therapist who learns the healing skill rather than the client (Brazier, 1993). If we take intersubjectivity seriously, though, we see that skills are used as we are 'being' together – the client's process will interact with the way of being of the therapist without need for explicit instruction.

Explicit information, however, is sometimes helpful. Some knowledge, e.g. about brain networks which may be 'over-firing' or under-firing in problematic situations, can give people an 'access point' to the whole intersecting web of processes which make up their situation, and in a further step, mindfulness skills (e.g. observing without judgement), as well as new forms of interaction with the therapist, change habits and loosen constricted ways of being. It makes sense that sometimes the discomfort or stuckness that spreads through our lives belongs to a process which we have never named before, and that reinforcing loops of habitual activity, also on a neural level, e.g. by talking endlessly about problematic feelings, may sometimes be less helpful than the introduction of a new perspective.

## **2. ETHICAL ISSUES**

It is unrealistic to imagine that therapy takes place in an enclave, or that it works entirely according to its own model. Powerful interests structure the possibilities available to us. Rose's 'neurochemical selves' (Rose, 2003) clearly elucidate an obvious tendency for us to interpret our lives in terms of neurochemical factors. The prevalence of anti-depressant medication prescription by doctors, for a very wide range of different complaints, illustrates the conditions for this tendency to grow. Rose expands on the dangers of how reductionist conceptions of ourselves/our distress are exploited, reinforced, and exploited some more. If we

spend our lives taking various drugs to alter our states of mind in different ways, obvious questions arise about 'who we are'.

Other short term changes in our states may be effected by direct intervention in neural processing. There is evidence to suggest that when a transcranial magnetic stimulation is used on the temporal lobes, the sense of a religious experience, or 'sensed presence' is often produced (Persinger, 2001; Persinger, 1984), and Persinger designed a helmet which can be purchased and used for this purpose. Attempts to replicate Persinger's numerous studies have led to the conclusion that suggestibility amongst the subjects was a salient factor (Granqvist et al., 2005); however Persinger replies that the major studies showing sensed presence to be experienced were double blind (Persinger and Kore, 2005). The debate continues. There is less controversial evidence that out-of-body experiences, amongst other unusual states of consciousness, can be intentionally, directly, stimulated through electrical stimulation of the right angular gyrus (Blanke et al., 2002). Our most intimate experiences of something 'beyond' us may seem reduced to illusions produced by the matter of our brains, but it seems misguided to draw reductive conclusions about complex and unquantifiable phenomena on the basis of neural correlates of experiences we characterise as similar.

The interaction between the unit and process models goes both ways. Not only do people attempt to reduce their experience to fit what they know of science, but the technological and scientific world as it develops, takes on many characteristics of the 'inter-personal', lived world. The development of artificial intelligence is a prime example.

We have not, however, suddenly been transported to another planet. We are the ones who create technology, and as we merge it more and more into human relationships, communication and our intimate lives, we start to co-constitute with it in ways which are slightly different from the ways we co-constitute with the biological world. When we use tools skillfully, they become in a sense a part of what we are doing, a part of us, and to an even greater extent we cannot 'just use'



information technology. Our relationships become more disembodied, our attention spans shorter, our senses of our own limits, boundaries and possibilities extend to include our phones, the internet, and all the information, places and people to which they connect. Our selves seem to spread out in space and the narrative self can be elaborated as never before, as we constantly explicitly create our stories, e.g. via social media.

These developments are easily observable over generations, with the youngest generation using technology in an intimate and instinctual way which is quite foreign to older generations. While older people have to learn how to operate computers in the way adults learn a second language, children seem born with the ability to operate an iPhone – they are native speakers. The technologically-based ecological niche is increasingly the place where relationships are constructed and maintained, and it can be manipulated (e.g. 'neuromarketing') in a more insidious and far-reaching way than other ecological niches we have inhabited in the past. There has been a great deal of scaremongering about 'changes in the brain' due to technology, for instance Greenfield talks of 're-wiring' in the brain due to technology being as much of a danger to humanity as climate change (Greenfield, 2014), although her claims have been robustly rebutted by other neuroscientists who find that she repeatedly conflates correlation and causation (Bell, 2014), making media-friendly and possibly damaging pronouncements such as a link between internet use and the rise of autism, which do not appear to have any proper evidence base. (Bishop, 2014)

Re-wiring does not seem to pose a monolithic danger, as the plasticity of the brain clearly works both ways – changes are not limitations set in stone, we can always change again, given different conditions. It seems to me that the danger lies rather in the construction of tenacious habits concerning our own attention. Metzinger, among others, argues that directed attention is the prime source of our power and agency and points out that this attention is 'a finite commodity' and that it is under attack. 'New medial environments may create a new form of waking consciousness that resembles weakly subjective states – a mixture of dreaming, dementia,

intoxication, and infantilisation' (Metzinger, 2009a p.235). This state is the opposite of being present with mindfulness.

Metzinger's proposal for countering this danger is the teaching of meditation in schools – not in order to release the grip of illusions of the self, but to empower the individual with skills to appreciate, enjoy and use their attention to maintain dignity and autonomy (Metzinger, 2009a p.236-240). He proposes teaching meditation and relaxation techniques as well as techniques of dream recall and lucidity, and 'media hygiene'. It seems ever more acutely obvious that attention is now our most precious human resource, a point also made by Gendlin. (Gendlin, 2006)

When this resource is valued and developed – attention given to attention – we may not only function better but also discover something about the nature of the world and our selves which goes beyond the habitual splits we experience. We may discover that while our 'contents', features and habits are ever-more open to change (through medication, or newly expanding technological horizons), there is something in our ability to direct attention, which you might say is 'ours'. In a sense we are free to make that first basic decision. Sartre would call it the choice to take the attitude of engagement rather than disengagement. From this first step of regaining autonomy through directing our attention, we can move in different directions. From an intersubjective perspective, the process of correcting discomfort through emotional regulation and regaining personal balance may perpetuate the illusory sense of existence of a solid and separate self which was the source of the fundamental problem in the first place. Ways of regulating the organism to achieve balance and harmony do not transcend the dualistic ways of thinking/being which keep us stuck. Alternatively, we might choose to move in the direction of allocentric processing marked out by Austin.

## SECTION EIGHT – CONCLUSION

The very 'mystery' posed by traditional western conceptions of the self – full of theories that explain everything except how it is that we explain at all – may cause a sense of wonder, but may also cause suffering, or at the very least an underlying disquiet. Defined as 'matter plus mystery', equipped with our special, inexplicable consciousness, we may feel the tension of not being quite a part of things, of not being able to understand what we think should be obvious, not quite able to be how we want to be. In fact, in everyday life we usually *do* understand what we are doing, but we are often informed by holders of expert knowledge, e.g. scientists and psychotherapists, that this cannot really be the case – our everyday experience is mysterious. This can make us feel inspired or unsafe, depending on our general level of feeling safe in the world. If we don't feel safe, we might imagine that security is available through twisting our experience to fit theories. If we do not succeed, that means there is either something wrong with us, or a fundamental lack of meaning in the world. Within the conventional conceptual framework, we have no way of 'getting at' our basic discomfort. We are caught between warring thoughts, or thoughts warring with feelings, or mind warring with body, all the wars caused by the assumption and maintenance of imposed divisions.

The interpretations of neuroscientific research presented by popular media are liable to reinforce this sense of internal division and corresponding sense of powerlessness. If it is our brains which tell us what to do, then 'we' as whole people seem to have been officially removed from the equation. If we are split into measurable, material units that we ourselves do not understand (few of us, for example, can point to our amygdala), from there it's a short leap to imagining that we can only be 'fixed' by procedures that we don't understand either. Hence the proliferation of drugs used in the treatment of anxiety and depression and a general dependence on professionals. This is of course not only a philosophical matter but one of power that can easily gather in the hands of 'experts' and those who sell

their services in an ever more ruthless global market. It is a political issue, e.g. who gets funding, which results are propagated by the media, in education, etc., how they are interpreted and to what ends they are used.

I do not believe it is inevitable, however, that neuroscientific research and its interpretations contribute to internal division, alienation and exploitation. Such research as that undertaken by Lutz et al is an example of how neuroscientific investigations can helpfully cross domains – in this case ancient zen wisdom and present day science, and provide a clear view of the vast range of human potentials, in the different 'languages' of spiritual practices and of brain functioning.

As long as we do not start to imagine that neural correlates are causative, or can tell us what is important, or believe that people who can measure them know more about us we do, then it seems to me that the more processes we pay attention to, the more creativity there is in finding solutions to distress, and the more insights we get into what kind of selves we might be.

It seems that the different conceptualisations of self thrown up by neuroscientific enquiries fit into different levels, physical, phenomenological and narrative conceptions. They each tend to extend metaphorically to cover territory that is not their own, and this is where we run into problems. In fact, all levels work at the same time, in a dynamic process, coming forward as units if needed, in order to be measured, and also available with all their implicit 'more' should we pay the appropriate kinds of attention, like light photons appearing as waves or particles depending on the experiment (Peruzzo et al., 2012). The gift of neuroscience may well be in the area of making explicitly new concepts for the ways we might pay attention, concepts that can function more strongly once made explicit, and that might lead to a reduction in suffering. Maybe one day the underlying paradigm will be one which undercuts the distinctions that presently slice up our experience and cause alienation and conflict, and supports actual experience of directing attention/consciousness in healthy ways. When we routinely experience this, 'self' as any kind of problematic question may not arise.

## **CHAPTER THREE – SELF AS LANGUAGE AND LIFE PROCESS**

**The questions, 'What is length?' 'What is meaning?', 'What is the number one?' etc, produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it. (Wittgenstein, 1958 p.1)**

**Language is implicit in our muscular movements and in every organ. It is implicit in what rouses or spoils our appetites, and in what disturbs our sleep. (Gendlin, 2004 p.133)**

### **SECTION ONE – THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE**

At the risk of stating the obvious, self is a word. A precise equivalent for it does not exist in all languages, so it is clearly a particular cultural and linguistic phenomenon, rather than a universal human 'thing', like a nose, or a smile. The word implicitly directs us in many different ways, as it connects with a multiplicity of concepts that may well contradict each other. Still the feeling persists, that there must be 'a thing that corresponds'. And that feeling is not an abstract one – a 'mental cramp' is also experienced as implicit in the whole of our lives, 'implicit in what rouses or spoils our appetites'. When we feel that everything fits into place, we sleep better. When we are in conflict with concepts, this is a problem that touches every aspect of our lives.

Studies of the concept of self in various disciplines – psychology, neurology, biology, sociology, philosophy etc – throw up a whole plethora of different concepts. Apart from academic/scientific studies of the self, which would be impossible without

very fine linguistic distinctions, the use of the word in everyday language also contains many and various dimensions and directions. At the same time, there is something 'self-evident' about the concept. Here we notice how 'self' expresses 'what is too obvious to need explanation'.

Maybe the knee-jerk reaction of most English-speakers when asked 'what is your self?' would be 'me, of course!' By 'me' I mean this particular body, history and perspective, so central to my view of the world it seems almost bizarre to call it anything. Thoughts of 'what I am like' or 'am I the same person as I was when I was a baby?' or 'what will survive of me after death?' are secondary to the initial 'it's just me!' As Gestalt theory reminds us, the human organism starts out as non-verbal and functions without confusion in its early stages (Perls et al., 1951). When asked about who we are, what our selves might be, this non-verbal sense may form the first reference point.

The social, cultural aspects of the word 'self' raise many important issues which were dealt with in detail in Chapter One. In this chapter I want to consider not how people might *define* the word when asked to, but what people *do* with the word, in everyday speech. By 'everyday speech' I mean a 'bottom-up', negotiated, consensual understanding. There are various overlapping circles of such understandings, and I am particularly interested in the culture of shared meanings created in the therapy situation, which spread into a wider 'therapy culture'. Language has been central to the discipline from its psychoanalytic origins as 'the talking cure', with its aim of making what is unconscious (and potentially disruptive), conscious and controllable. Therapy seems inevitably biased towards narrative conceptions, although it also deals with the non-linguistic, maybe most strikingly in pre-therapy (Prouty, 2001) and Gestalt. What relationship do the words we use have to the problems we bring to therapy? Do they express them, explain them, or to some degree cause them?

I take the inextricability of language and world as the starting point – life games and language games happen simultaneously, one may be born out of the other and then

the other may carry on differently and go back to throw a new light on its original version. Therapy may function in this way, as we use language to throw new light on what is happening in life situations in which we have become stuck. While we are not born verbal, language is always implicit in our being, from the start, as we interact with caregivers who are using language, and as we ourselves move and use sounds. However languages are different and the forms of written languages, with codified grammars lifted out of them, are further removed from the roots of spoken languages which have not been converted into a set of rules to follow. Exactly how many distinct spoken languages there are in the world is a matter of debate, but 'the most extensive catalog of the world's languages, generally taken to be as authoritative as any, is that of [Ethnologue](#) (published by SIL International), whose detailed classified list as of 2009 included 6,909 distinct languages' (Anderson, 2010, Linguistic Society of America Brochure). Within this extraordinary diversity a comparative handful of languages are dominant in terms of numbers of speakers. It is important to keep this context in mind when talking about 'language' – to remember the huge variety of possible ways of conceptualising the world into words, and the power relations inherent in making some languages more widely spoken and influential than others. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Unit Model has had a particularly strong influence on western languages. Fenollosa in his renowned essay, 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry' (Fenollosa, 1920), contrasts the Chinese language with western languages from a conceptual point of view, pointing out that the grammar which western native speakers assume to be inevitable is actually a very specific construction.

The subject is that about which I am going to talk; the predicate is that which I am going to say about it. The sentence according to this definition is not an attribute of nature but an accident of man as a conversational animal.  
(Fenollosa, 1920 p.274-5)

Of course this view of the grammarians springs from the discredited, or rather the useless, logic of the middle ages. According to this logic, thought deals with abstractions, concepts drawn out of things by a sifting process. These

logicians never inquired how the 'qualities' which they pulled out of things came to be there. The truth of all their little checker-board juggling depended upon the natural order by which these powers or properties or qualities were folded in concrete things, yet they despised the 'thing' as a mere 'particular', or pawn. It was as if Botany should reason from the leaf-patterns woven into our table-cloths. (Fenollosa, 1920 p.275)

Whether or not the logic of the Middle Ages was/is actually 'useless' is a matter of debate, but Fenollosa is right that it does not correspond to nature, and this leads to problems in speaking about our everyday living and considering our 'selves' – because our living, however much conceptual thought we engage in, is a natural process. And when living unreflectively (when examining the world carefully as scientists, if we are not blinkered by the unit model) we swiftly come across the reality that there are no such things as things.

A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things. (Fenollosa, 1920 p.273)

'Farmer pounds rice', the agent and the object are nouns only in so far as they limit a unit of action. 'Farmer' and 'rice' are mere hard terms which define the extremes of the pounding. But in themselves, apart from this sentence-function, they are naturally verbs. The farmer is one who tills the ground, and the rice is a plant which grows in a special way. (Fenollosa, 1920 p.281)

So maybe I am simply a doing of activities, a feeling of feelings, a thinking of thoughts, a grower in a particular way? Abstracting out a subject then putting it in charge of its actions may be a conceptual move that language now forces us to make, which we sometimes feel uncomfortable with. This tension is not to be underestimated.



Words are real, they have real physical effects – we use them to check what is right, what fits, what brings relief. Words do not create an extra, abstract realm into which what is 'really happening' is translated. They do not necessarily have an accompanying inner sensation, but the words we use to live our situations are a crucial *part* of the way we live our situations, so a change in words cannot help but be a change in living, in feeling too.

Language is not placed on top of our ways of thinking, feeling, acting, experiencing. We are languaged to the root and the life-process that comes up from the root (the life process we share, as Gendlin reminds us, with plants) moves inseparably within that language too. Philosophers of embodiment such as Sheets-Johnstone and Johnson, have produced convincing, detailed accounts of how language arises (in evolution and in individual development) from corporeal movement (Sheets-Johnstone 2009; Johnson, 2007). It seems inevitable that some marker of 'my life process' is a part of the linguistic web of the world. But the kind of marker it is, and the kind of language that we live, is dependent on many social/conceptual factors which are brought to bear on language in the same way as they come to bear on every other aspect of thought. Hence Fenollosa's point about the false picture created by the separation of subject and object into power relations within a sentence. Culture and language games maintained by social agreement hold us at one remove from reality.

It is worth noting that 'really me', or 'my true self', in the 'western' cultures I am largely speaking of, is often associated with escape from social agreements, which may come to be experienced as constraints (for a detailed investigation of the difference between eastern and western concepts of self, see Chapter one). What do we really want, in attempting to escape cultures and languages which we *cannot* extricate ourselves from? Is the attempt somehow connected to the estrangement from the way things really are, from the processes of nature, that we intuit in the grammar of every sentence that we speak?

Escape attempts tend to be motivated by a desire for freedom. Freedom might come from no longer feeling language and culture to be an imposition, or by constructing a culture/language which are felt as 'natural', or in tune rather than in active discord with nature. There is, along with the need for freedom, a need for 'more'. In this 'more,' implicit in our lives, are things which have not been put explicitly into words. Maybe some of those 'things' *cannot* be put into words – certainly every aspect of a situation and specific relationship between its aspects or elements could never be made explicit in words, as life is simply too short. Or maybe we sense that the conventional grammatical forms are not going to fit, they make us uneasy, and we conclude that we can't use language to express the 'more' at all, so it must be essentially nonverbal. This nonverbal dimension cannot be a separate realm – for us to notice it at all it must contain the beginnings of an ability to say something that has not been said yet.

If we have an awareness of 'too much to be able to say' and a sense that something needs to happen for us to be able to feel at ease, we may make a 'thing' out of what is lacking. We may demarcate the 'more of the situation' off, as the *really* important thing, the thing which can't be said, and this turns into a definition – what is really important, can't be said. Then we have created a binary system, and by its traditionally conflictual, dualistic logic, we draw the unfortunate conclusion that we need to escape what *can* be said.

Apart from the sense of wanting to escape, there are other senses of things being 'beyond' or 'prior to' language. There are clearly nonverbal/preverbal dimensions implicit in our experience. They come from our bodily existence and, taking a somatic approach, possibly from experiences (the energy flow, of say fear or anger) which have been blocked. This seems consistent with Gendlin's Process model (Gendlin, 1997a), in which stopped processes continue to function implicitly. In Gestalt and somatic approaches, this implicit functioning would be felt as a kind of unease that we might be in the habit of relegating to a 'nonverbal' dimension.

Other nonverbal experiences e.g. arising in meditation, or in various kinds of bliss,

could easily be called 'beyond words', because they are so conceptually paradoxical (e.g. I feel totally present and totally absent) – there might also be 'no need to say'. There are also times of sharp awareness, in which we are aware of far more than can be said at once, and times when we feel something vague and undefined. A felt sense is in a sense 'beyond words' that will pin it down or describe it exactly to others. The 'handle' word works to keep us in touch with it, but the felt sense itself is not a linguistic phenomenon, it sits exactly in that undefined middle ground, neither a thought or a feeling. We have pretty good vocabularies for those. A felt sense is precisely this something else. It is a sense of what we can't say, but hope to soon. It is a forming ability to say, in that it will carry forward, although in different words or actions, as it changes. It is also possible to say 'beyond words' experiences in creative ways, using koans (short paradoxical phrases, meant to burst the bounds of our conceptual understanding) as in Zen practice, or Gendlin's naked saying – a concept which covers what we say when we are 'caught out', naked, with something that does not fit into the well-worn forms of public language. Naked saying can't be planned in advance, it springs out spontaneously, it has not been said before, but it makes sense in its new context in the moment in which it is said. At these times there are no ready-made labels we can stick on – we have to actually speak.

In everyday situations, however, the vast majority of the time, life is adequately articulated through systems of mutual agreement. The ethics and rules we live by are contextual and negotiated within a context of power relations, using language. Even by escaping, we participate. Rules and agreements hold within overlapping cultural circles of varying sizes, from languages to nations to couples. The meaning of the word 'self', like the meaning of any word, does not come from a separate essence which we learn and then combine with others (although the codification of language into grammar works on this level), but is constantly re-created in the context of what we do with it, within a set of rules (often implicit) about what it makes sense to say and what it doesn't. This is how the meanings of words shift over time and how they vary so sharply between different linguistic communities speaking the 'same' language.

One of these cultures within a culture is that of therapy, which has its own language games, most of which involve 'self' in the clients' presenting issues, and in the guiding principles and aims of therapy, regardless of the theoretical orientations of the therapist. I do not want to concentrate here on the proliferation of theoretical concepts concerning self that therapists are taught, but on how 'self' works in practice as an integral kind of organising principle. In one sense this is to say nothing at all – a person obviously goes to therapy to talk about their own lives, so this word is going to come up. This is 'talking about me'. In another sense 'talking about one's self' is a concept bringing a heavy set of implications which need unpicking. Talking about your what? The answer may be 'what is most important to me' or 'what has so far been unexpressed, and would be helpful to express'. Therapy is seen as precisely a place in which a person can concentrate on and take time for his or her self – creating an implicit division between concentration on 'myself' and concentration on the world of others the rest of the time.

Therapy involves a couple of potential self-pictures – either looking 'within myself', or setting an external boundary, like a map of the territory, in a particular place around 'myself' to investigate the issues that lie within that. Therapy definitely involves a choice to pay a particular kind of attention to your life. Maybe the parts of our lives we need to pay attention to are precisely those we talk about as self, or as a block to being ourselves. Taking time for one's self can mean making time and space to talk about what it is that concerns *me* – noticing it, defining it, and making new boundaries, as the shifting gestalts of what I talk and don't talk about make up my 'self' at the moment. 'Self', then, works as a label for shifting territory, which we actively move around within, rather than an inner essence. Implicit relationships between various areas of our lives come out in the specific pattern of what we talk about in therapy, and are made explicit and direct.

## SECTION TWO – SELF-EXPRESSIONS

In Appendix One I investigate the word 'self' by looking at instances of language as they function in particular life games/language games (Wittgenstein, 1953). I list 45 common everyday expressions in the English language involving the word 'self' and try to elucidate how the word functions in each game, categorising each use of the word 'self' as helpful ('Pointing to something'), unhelpful ('Misleading'), or superfluous.

Wittgenstein professed his aim to be the liberation of words from the necessity to refer to a single thing, particular set of things, or even any 'things' at all (although of course sometimes they do) while destroying nothing but our illusions – maybe the crucial illusion is that anything *has to be one way*. 'Philosophy's task is to leave things as they are' (Wittgenstein 1953 #124), and to stop us being taken in or bemused by pictures which lead us astray, not so much by their inaccuracy but by our *compulsive* relation to them. This is a therapeutic method, and its relation to therapy has been well developed and discussed. (Read and Hutchinson, 2010; Heaton, 2010)

I attempt to show how a set of words bearing a 'family resemblance' to each other do actually 'say' what they are doing in everyday speech (as Gendlin emphasises that they can). By 'saying what it is that they are doing,' I mean how the patterns of everyday speech do not trap us but carry forward meanings which both inhere in and exceed the patterns.

An important question here is to what extent we are trapped in the 'public language', doing our best to signal what we mean with ill-fitting words, and to what extent do we communicate perfectly well, the whole context in which we use the words making our point? Wittgenstein created a metaphorical situation in which

everyone has a beetle in a box, and we are not allowed to look into anyone else's box, only our own. People start to talk about the beetle in the box, and we have no problems maintaining a meaningful conversation about our beetles. Examining what precisely everyone is talking about turns out to be irrelevant. 'Self' is the quintessential 'beetle in the box'. In Wittgenstein's terms, if we all have one, is there any point opening the boxes to look at our beetles, as the word beetle is functioning perfectly well? Do 'the terms themselves', isolated from their contexts, only exist through an artificial and unnecessary move? Or is there a kind of continuum, with a tipping point where we feel we are losing the living thread of what we are saying, and are starting to *be said* by the public language?

This is the moment when it's 'not quite like that', the client says 'uuuh...' and the felt sense appears. Gendlin's picture of the client not finding 'what he means' in the public language and stepping out to dip into the 'more' of implicit contexts in order to say, in some new way, what it 'really is', might lead to an unnecessarily polarised picture of people as stranded within public language, needing to find a way out. It is important to stress how, as Wittgenstein showed, we usually manage to carry forward *within* public language, using language games which include, in their complex contexts, what Gendlin calls the implicit intricacy. The need to pause, direct attention and find other words, or other ways of expressing, happens only at moments at which these understandings fail, when there is a breakdown in the norm. Gendlin points to this moment in therapy and in the creative process, Wittgenstein points to it as the instigator of philosophy.

Gendlin goes further in his analysis of the everyday language that we ordinarily use without breakdown; not only, he notes, do Wittgenstein's sets of 'examples' of word use *show* us something – mainly that they are not 'examples' of anything apart from 'how the word is used' – but they *say* things too (Gendlin, 1997d). The fact that the conventional correspondence relation between word and thing is not salvaged as a common denominator between examples does not mean that nothing is said. The words say their meaning, and that meaning – 'what happens when' we say the word – remains intact. This thing is being said because, although we cannot

make the further step of lifting out one common meaning and stating it, in ordinary language use it's quite clear that these are all examples of 'what it is to say' the word concerned (Gendlin, 1991). We can happily compare our beetles and make sense of our whole range of 'beetle experiences' together without ever opening our boxes.

This already undoes a few potential knots in our understanding, and, in perfect accord with Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as therapy, these are also knots which can be clearly and uncomfortably felt in our lives as we try to locate or perfect or destroy the 'thing' which we 'must' be. Maybe we are all suffering from different compulsions, whether they fall into the categories of being, changing or losing ourselves.

## **1. THEMES – WHAT THE SELF-GAMES SAY**

The word self can function as a simple signifier of the fact that an action or state is performed/experienced by the person who is experiencing/doing it. The English language grammatical perspective urges us to consider self as either the subject of a sentence or an object. In either case, self is a noun, a comparable thing in the world amongst others, ultimately standing alone. Within self-games involving 'internal' conflict there are also active and passive, named and un-named elements, often the 'I' and the 'me/myself', implying an entrenched power relation.

It is possible of course to make the case that all these expressions using 'self' are born of misleading or irrelevant linguistic short cuts, or even accidents, and do not necessarily say anything about how life actually is, in the way in which the expressions 'I don't mind' and 'mind the gap' have little light to shed on the nature and philosophy of mind. Many of these instances of self-language are indeed short cuts, *façons de parler*, and the situations to which they refer could be described in other ways, without using the word 'self' at all.

Yet we *do* use the word self in all these cases. Some entity is created, on the level of our thinking and speaking, by these instances (via the common conviction that a word must refer to something), and it then tends to be reacted to as if it were ontologically real. There are also real thematic connections, at least in the examples listed. The expressions involving self do not seem to be random, they always seem to be pointing towards areas that are designated as 'meaningful', or towards our everyday conflicts and notions of how we are living, in ways that consistently fall into a few groups.

Here are the main themes:

***a) Sense of Matching – 'being myself' etc***

A sense that things are in their place, that there is no difference or gap between what we are doing/feeling/saying and something else that we would *like* to be or think we *should* be doing/feeling/saying. A sense of ease and well-being linked to a sense of authenticity, often associated with being accepted, not having to be on your guard, not pretending. A sense of freely using capacities, abilities, and freely expressing thoughts and feelings. A feeling of matching 'ourselves', being in tune with our own values, or desires, so there is no need actually to think about these concepts.

***b) Sense of Not Matching – 'not feeling myself', 'beside myself'***

'Self' also consistently appears at moments when we hit some particular block in our lives/thinking/feeling/experiencing. It can be seen as an indicator of a problem. The sense of needing to concentrate on 'me' arises when things are not running smoothly and we are disoriented. Hence 'self-consciousness,' or the feeling that I don't know or can't manage or accept 'myself'. As I don't match, something sticks out, I am there as an object that needs to be managed somehow. I must be doing something wrong.



***c) Self as goal – 'finding myself', 'getting to know my real self'***

Self here is part of the narrative of a journey to find/uncover treasure, or rather *meaning*, due to the 'inward turn' in western culture which interiorises values and qualities previously invested in external gods or universal forms (Taylor, 1989).

Archetypal, mythical journeys, which belong to rituals and religions, are here recast with 'self' as the hidden treasure, the Holy Grail, the heavenly realm ahead or the garden of Eden from which we have been exiled. We no longer seek heaven, we seek 'ourselves'.

***d) Self as interactive process – 'contradicting myself', 'hiding myself', 'deceiving myself', 'hating myself', 'lying to myself', 'self-harm'***

All these uses involve a split between 'self', used as a touchstone of authenticity – and an un-named 'something,' which might also be assumed to be a part or aspect of 'self', with the whole interaction seemingly to be placed within the conceptual boundaries of what we would, if asked, refer to as ourselves. The whole action or state of self-hatred occurs in us, but we do not call the whole action, or state, 'self' – we don't call it anything. It is just the whole person. Within the person, there are two elements, the un-named, assumed element is the one who is active – the hater in self-hatred. The 'self' element of the conflict is a passive set of imagined contents. The un-named part of the person reacts to them, e.g. hating them. These 'passive contents' may often be precisely the elements in the person which could use names, in order to create a less conflicted situation. The model of an un-named aggressor/controller points to the model of an abusive use of power. Of course the aggression turned on to the 'self' might often be more appropriately directed at others.

This split is also involved in many, if not all, of the previously mentioned cases, e.g. 'finding myself', where we can assume a finder and a found, but in the 'interactions' family a dialogical and often conflictual aspect is foregrounded. 'Contradicting

myself', 'deceiving myself', 'protecting myself' are all ways of conceptualising various struggles about what to do when conflicting interests, thoughts or feelings arise. But is it really possible to be in conflict with yourself?

The idea of inner conflict has been variously interpreted, from 'devils within,' or the Freudian unconscious, to theories of 'parts' and splits in the personality. The phenomenon of self as an interaction site is described by Frankfurt, for whom the ability to form 'second-order desires' is a defining characteristic of being human. (Frankfurt, 1971, p.6)

Besides wanting and choosing and being moved to do this or that, men may also want to have (or not to have) certain desires and motives. They are capable of wanting to be different, in their preferences and purposes, from what they are. (Frankfurt, 1971 p.7)

Second-order volitions are an important defining factor in our being human. To illustrate the term, an addict may want heroin but want not to want it. This does not mean that either desire is unreal, but the second-order volition is more significant, being wider and encompassing the first-order desire.

Internal dialogues without the flavour of overt conflict also come into this category, along with 'self talk'. There is some value in separating the voices of others out from internal dialogues. 'Is that me talking, or is it my mother?' can be a very useful question to ask, opening up a continuum of possible responses e.g. we may hear a remembered voice in a trigger-situation saying 'don't do that!', or realise that we have just got into the habit of reacting a certain way to a situation, e.g. a habit born from our relationship with our mother (we may not actually be anxious about a possible disaster at all, we've just got used to managing our mother's anxiety in that situation – and she is probably carrying that anxiety from *her* mother!)

If it *is* 'me' though, then is it the true voice of my inner self? While there are various degrees to which we have internalised others, ultimately 'others' are inseparable, as

our relationships with people constitute who and how we are. 'Internalising others' sounds as if we swallow other people into our own inner system, where they get digested and become inseparable from our own insides. At the same time, they are identifiable somehow as 'not me' but having been 'made into me' – which is the difference between internalising someone and being affected by them in a relationship. However, in order to say this we must be aware that they are *not* us, or rather what they are saying is not what we want. We have a strong reaction to what the 'internalised' voice is saying. There is a kind of *compulsion* to agree with it.

We are inextricably intersubjective in our normal functioning. There is no need to separate 'others' from ourselves and no way in fact of doing so. It is certainly not the case that once we have cleared away all the troublesome others we will be left in our own perfect, authentic peace. Once more, problems evoke attempts to solve them which give rise to a certain degree of 'overkill'. The fact that I continue to hear my mother's anxious voice and that it controls my behaviour at the age of sixty does not mean that I have swallowed my mother and am controlled by her, but it does form a useful point at which to grasp and dispel my own anxiety, maybe by a loosening question – do I *really* think those tragic events are going to happen? Hearing them in the voice of my mother may be, in Buddhist terms, a skilful means, which works on the relative level, to solve the problem of acting in accordance with a voice that I know, when I am paying attention, that I do not really believe.

The 'self as interactive process' group takes myself to be a companion, opening up the possibility of having a relationship with myself, on a continuum between facilitative and hostile. 'Loving ourselves' and 'self-hatred' are at opposite ends of that spectrum. Instead of having transient experiences, we make their qualities into some kind of essence, which we then feel must be an intimate, true 'thing' about us. The intimacy of this quality renders us prone to remain attached. Once we are attached to this person, ourselves, we react to anything which might threaten them. We defend their integrity and try to keep them consistent with themselves, consistency being of course the number one distinguishing feature of a 'self'. When our 'idea' of ourselves gets caught up with our natural self-preservation instincts, it

is a powerful entanglement.

***e) Self as awareness – 'self-awareness', 'self-consciousness'***

A moment of directing attention towards ourselves can be variously interpreted/experienced, from checking whether we are in accord with some particular essence or thing, to directing attention to the very fact that we are alive. Self-consciousness comes about when attention is directed towards ourselves as objects, intruding on the natural flow of activity. The sheer fact that we are alive can be experienced from two angles, a 'no-self' angle from which the 'sheerness' is experienced, or the 'self' angle from which we pay attention to how we live our *own particular* lives. 'Increasing self-awareness' involves being attentive to more and more of that particularity.

***f) Self as positive value – 'self-respect', 'self-worth', 'self-esteem'***

A part of the unit model, 'self' here is related to the value assigned to me in the communities I belong to. It also circles back to issues of acceptance of what we experience – congruence, not pretending – which were discussed in the 'matching' section.

***g) Self as negative value – 'selfish', 'self-absorbed', 'self-satisfied', 'self-indulgent'***

Here, self is associated with 'lower' impulses/drives. The 'lower' impulses include aggression and pleasure, all impulses that are not driven by rationality but by some kind of desire. 'Self-restraint' needs to be applied – as though my essence must be restrained by, effectively, someone else (the un-named, assumed, rational 'I').

### ***h) Self as individual, in competition with others for scarce resources – 'time for yourself'***

Both pleasure and guilt are associated with 'taking time for yourself'. An economic model of needs, a scarcity model, functions here, according to which if I give to one person, including myself, I necessarily take away from another. Maybe the whole picture of 'time for myself' as a goal is misleading, as if 'myself' wanted only isolation, and when giving to others was not 'itself' at all. More precision is required rather than the blunt distinction 'for others'/'for me'.

## **SECTION THREE – SELF AS TEXT – PUBLIC LANGUAGE AND NAKED SAYING**

Wittgenstein, in *Tractatus*, points to 'what does not belong to the forms' as what it is better not to speak of at all, rather than distort it (Wittgenstein, 1922). This picture creates a realm in which there are no clearly demarcated, logically working concepts, and therefore no speech at all. The supposed existence of this schism provokes a great deal of anxiety, which is visible in the 'self-problems' brought to therapy and grappled with in everyday life.

Sometimes we might try to live as if we ourselves were grammatical forms, clearly demarcated and logically functioning, with all our concepts matching up with the dictionary, fearing that if we were to act ungrammatically we would slide into some kind of unintelligible confusion awaiting underneath.

In Gendlin's terms, we may try to stay within public language (Gendlin, 1991). But 'what does not belong to the forms' is constantly present, and while running the grammatical risk of becoming a place or ethereal kind of thing, is *not* in fact either a thing or a separate 'other realm'. Far from a seething mass of primal confusion, it is a matrix of interconnected possibilities, capacities, potentials, which are more, rather than less, precisely defined than the forms we can explicitly state. And it has,

*is*, language. These implicit interconnections are infused with order, and they are what we use to *make* order, make sense and move forward.

It is out of this intricacy, this living speech, that we may lift certain necessary concepts in order to make them function as consistent units in an imaginary space. So the implicit intricacy, which is primary, can also be regarded as a kind of surplus, as what *escapes* the concept/pattern/unit thinking. When looked at this way, as surplus rather than foundation, this 'excess' of language, thought and living is similar to the concept of excess/surplus which functions in post-modern thinking.

According to Derrida (1967, 1974) the world may be read as a text, resting on the basic illusion that words are signifiers, which refer to things (the signified). The world of named things and logical relations, held tightly by a structure of binary oppositions (e.g. good/bad), could be explained by the grand narrative (monological) stories of history, religion and 'ourselves', but this perception of the world is no longer viable. Derrida sees, instead of the former certainties, an endless chain of signifiers, endlessly deferring meaning. Endless desire for the constantly missing meaning feeds into a process of endless deferral.

'Self' in this textual view is the ultimate deferred meaning, a transcendental signified, a metaphysical remnant belonging to an outdated grand narrative, and it is the surplus/excess of the unsignified, the space where the meaning 'should be', which exposes the text – the contradiction at its heart which unravels what would *mean something*. For Barthes this unravelling, these gaps appearing in the text, create the possibility of *jouissance*, bliss, creative excess, a leap of joy deriving, crucially, from the fracturing of the reader's self. (Barthes, 1973)

What kind of 'meaninglessness' is being celebrated here? It is the basis of a radical critique that can be used to subvert many 'texts' or ways of seeing and acting in the world. White and Epstein, the inventors of narrative therapy (introduced in Chapter One), use the 'world as text' view to open up the field of therapy. Rather than the loss of meaning and certainty being held as a necessarily tragic view, the narrative

school finds new possibilities in a more relational cross-personal kind of text/self/story, a site of creativity rather than a monologue to be accepted or rejected.

In finding not 'my voice' but 'voices' for our experience, we aren't learning about it (producing signifieds) but creating it. We are authors of our lives, but not in the sense of the omniscient author of the nineteenth century novel, with a god's eye view and powers to explain the behaviour of every character. We are now in the territory of the postmodern novel. It is this 'relative indeterminacy of text' that 'allows for a spectrum of actualizations'. And so, 'literary texts initiate performances of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves' (Bruner, 1986 p.13). Just as no God, parent or therapist is the writer of your storyline, you cannot be the single-voiced, all-powerful narrator either. You cannot discover the meaning of your life, neither can you simply invent a new, preferable one. What you can do, and it is the task of therapy to facilitate this, is create a 'subjunctive mood' in which you can experiment with what could be, to act 'as if'. To take an experimental attitude to life in which all voices are allowed to speak. Bruner (1986) is quoted by White on the topic of literary merit:

Stories of literary merit, to be sure, are about events in the real world, but they render that world newly strange, rescue it from obviousness, fill it with gaps that call upon the reader, in Barthes' sense, to become a writer, a composer of a virtual text in response to the actual. (White and Epston, 1990 p.77)

The narrative therapy reading of postmodern theory is a constructive one. Others read it differently – that the 'excess', the pleasure of the text, may be effective in deconstructing illusions, and may be blissful, but gets us nowhere, when we *should* be getting somewhere. Gendlin casts Derrida's view as a 'tragic' one (Gendlin, 1991), I am not sure that this is quite correct. It seems to me that Derrida's view of the 'pointless' is not judgemental, and provides plenty of room for subversion and creativity. The 'nothing' we are left with is one rich with possibilities, that might be

seen to arise out of grasping the truth of the situation. For Gendlin, however, what is more than the patterns is never pointless, quite the reverse, it *is* the point. It is precisely the thread moving through the world, the text, with which we make meaning, from which we can construct. It is What Happens When Wittgenstein Asks 'What Happens When...' (Gendlin, 1997d)

## **SECTION FIVE – BETWEEN LANGUAGES**

Few of us realize that in our own language these very differences once grew up in living articulation; that they still retain life. It is only when the difficulty of placing some odd term arises or when we are forced to translate into some very different language, that we attain for a moment the inner heat of thought, a heat which melts down the parts of speech to recast them at will. (Fenollosa, 1920 p.279)

Much of my work as a therapist is conducted in a second language (Polish). An exact equivalent to the noun 'self' does not exist in Polish, there is rather a plethora of different words used to refer experiences back to the one experiencing them. To give an example, the concepts of self worth and self esteem are easy to talk about, but we are talking directly about 'my worth' rather than the more slippery English process which seems to insert a kind of shadowy object in between me and my experience. The 'self-esteem' language games function basically in the same way in the Polish experience, so we can see that the word 'self' as a noun in English, with its attendant dangers of reification, is not crucial in the game after all. The word 'self' turns out to be irrelevant, what we are really talking about are 'the games that I play in my life'. So clearly we are not the victims of totalitarian grammar or vocabulary. Grammar structures what we are doing, and we may play the same life-games using different linguistic structures. Most interesting to me, however, is the moment when languages do *not* work in parallel, in translation.

As I have written about elsewhere (Luczaj, 2006 ), naked saying often happens



when speaking a second language. And speaking a second language is a very common human experience, ever more common in a fast globalising world. Gendlin's view that people in whom two cultures cross will understand each of them better than a native of just one (Levin, 1997 p.250), is the optimistic view – this new understanding can arise only once a certain balance point has been reached of feeling 'at home' in each culture. The 'making strange' of experience, which can be so illuminating when used in art and in therapy, might be deeply disorienting and disempowering as a forced experience, for immigrants, or refugees. The structure disappears around and within. You are aware of both the impossibility of drawing a clear border, and of the absolutely ruthless nature of the border between those in and out, those with power in this structure of relations, and those without.

Language as a system of agreement, creating a relatively stable meaning-environment, works only for those in the loop, who are competent enough in the language of a place to not have to consciously translate from any other language. An 'outsider' without this competency may come to feel even as if they don't actually exist. Just how constitutive of a sense of 'self' (stability, agency, a set of memories and characteristics) cultural, social and linguistic elements are, may become obvious only when those elements are taken away. A sense of not being able to 'express myself' can lead immigrants to a disturbing sense of isolation and disintegration. The fear is that no-one will be able to know who or how you 'really' are, ( i.e. 'you' in the conditions which once co-constituted you), and the fear deepens – that eventually you will not know yourself anymore, that all sense of stability, continuity and support will be gone.

Yet if some level of stability and mutual understanding is maintained (be it within a small community speaking the native language or through a degree of adaptation to the host society), the 'inbetween' position, in which it is not obvious who I am, can be a creative one, offering insights into many qualities or the experiences we call self, which turn out to be not much more than conventional designations/necessary fictions. Madison studied 'existential migration' (Madison, 2009), interviewing people who left their home countries primarily for 'existential' reasons, not

economic, political, or practical ones. This creative approach to the outsider position is more likely to come about when our basic needs are met; the inbetween position in which someone who is overtly discriminated against, and/or a refugee, is unlikely to be primarily experienced as a creative opportunity.

For nearly everyone in these inbetween situations, there is a degree of the discomfort of having lost an 'authentic', comfortable, unreflective 'self', and the absence of a 'new self' seamlessly adapted to the new conditions. Existential migrants appreciate the loss of an unreflective self that never felt authentic to them, refugees may mourn the loss of a life that felt 'real'. Once a person has adapted to another culture they may feel like 'someone else' in both/all cultures, provoking a sense of absence of a 'real self'. However, the fact that someone may have seemingly irreconcilable qualities and experiences when living in different cultures does not mean that there is no 'real person' there at all. 'I do not believe that he has two just disparate cultural nuances *and nothing else*. There is also the one who was 'proud' of having been able to develop the other culture's self so well, the one who tells us about it.' (Gendlin, in Levin, 1997 p.266)

There are very different kinds of linguistic discomfort – Derrida in 'Le monolinguisme de l'autre' from his position in an Algerian Jewish family who was granted French citizenship and spoke only French, writes about the problem of having only one language, and being extremely attached to its purity, while being aware that it is not *his*. He expresses a felt sense of implicit blocked processes, which cannot be the way they are when said in a given language, yet that language is their form. (Derrida, 1996)

These painfully sharp demarcations between languages only function in linguistic 'mono-cultures' while the global context is multilingualism. There are thousands of languages spoken in the world and very many of them are not codified. Most of the world's people use more than one language, shifting seamlessly from context to context. Africa is a prime example of a continent in which multilingualism is the norm:

13 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding the southern portion of the continent, where Niger-Congo languages coexist side by side with Khoisan languages) are listed with 50 or more living languages. This list includes such countries as Chad (131 languages), Tanzania (128 languages), Ghana (79 languages), Côte d'Ivoire (78 languages), Central African Republic (71 languages), Kenya (69 languages), Burkina Faso (68 languages), Congo (62 languages), Mali (57 languages) and Benin (54 languages). Number three on this list is Democratic Republic of Congo with nearly twice as many languages as Chad (215 languages). Number two is Cameroon with 278 languages. And the top of the list is Nigeria with 514 living languages!' (Pereltsvieg, n.d.)

Many multilingual countries have a lingua franca to facilitate communication between groups, but some do not, e.g. Western Uganda, where 'people are able to create a monolingual state in a given area because everyone is multilingual. That is, people speak their own language in their own domain and speak other peoples' languages when they go to the latter's domains.' (Kaji, 2013 p.1)

The senses of blockage, or alienation, felt by Derrida, or by immigrants into a monolingual society, are not likely to occur in communities where such linguistic shifting is the norm. Once more it seems that duality is the problem – the schism between 'my' language and the 'other', between 'in' and 'out' groups.' This duality can be broken up – there is nothing natural or inevitable about it. There are a relative handful of dominant world languages, codified, with written grammar, widely 'taught'. It is my observation that native speakers of these languages, particularly those in affluent societies, who do not 'have to' learn other languages (e.g. for economic reasons), tend to struggle the most with learning other languages, which may also have something to do with their being wedded to the concept of learning language 'top down', as an abstract conceptual scheme.

I sometimes find a great sense of creative freedom in the use of a language which is not 'mine', hence not necessarily associated with 'me'. It is not a spontaneous

manifestation, neither does it compose me. Or at least, I would like to keep this position, but with time it *does* come to compose me, and I start to manifest it, too. What I say is understandable to my conversation partner, we are creating a new system, ad hoc, based on the level of my linguistic knowledge at the time, my intention to communicate and theirs to understand, probably a large degree of empathy, and an extension of boundaries on both sides. This is what Gendlin refers to as crossing and as he points out, 'the universal human nature is the *can cross*' (Levin, 1997, p.251). Maybe it is always like this, in therapy, or in any conversation in which two people strive to understand each other. My own inner critic makes the pragmatic decision to give up, as the task at hand – living and working together with others – is clearly more important than my sense of self worth as measured in grammatical skills. There is in a sense *more* choice, as there's nothing automatic about the communication, and in a sense no choice at all – what comes is what comes! Any 'extra-layer' thought process of conscious choice between options is pretty much disabled, which I feel as a freeing from constraint, a freedom from judgement. If at this point I become 'self-conscious' then I will be likely to feel a total fool. So this is another 'extra layer', of explicit deliberation, that I cannot afford.

I have to give up on the idea of 'expressing myself' accurately. In a sense we are always 'expressing ourselves', in spoken words, writing, the way we move, the way we breathe, the expressions on our faces, and what we choose to withhold. But a two-tier process creeps back in with the concept of 'what I mean'. Naked saying happens when we speak aloud but we don't say 'what we mean.' Our picture of the smooth simultaneous running of two tracks – what I mean and what I say – is disturbed. We are jolted.

When I say 'that's not what I meant!' I have failed in my project to design myself, I've been thrown off the public language tracks and I may end up articulating somehow exactly what the moment is, rather than what I thought I wanted to say.

When unable to say 'what I mean,' I may say something else, something

accidentally more, or less, which does not refer back either to 'what I mean' or to 'me' in the sense of who I think of myself as, when safely surrounded, and co-constituted, by my own native linguistic and cultural environment. The discomfort is due to a need to 'refer back' which I would not feel if I were *actually* embedded in my own cultural environment. If I *were* embedded in that environment, I would not separate out my own experience of being embedded in an environment in order to speak, regarding myself as an object. It would be an odd and useless move.

'What I mean' was never really something hanging around in my mind, waiting to be held down and forced through in its true form. 'Saying what comes' tends to bring people closer together, as it involves far more shared processes than a simple efficient delivery of 'what I mean,' understood by the other person as 'what people in my linguistic world mean when they say that', which could be a long way from the precise 'thing' the speaker means, say, 'love'.

When people cannot assume they know what I mean, they are forced to pay more attention. When I cannot rely on the apparatus of a well-known language to say the thing I mean *for* me, I also have to pay the fullest attention, both to my conceptual knowledge of the second language, *and* to what it is that I want to articulate. I find it works better when I do not articulate it first in my native language then try to find an equivalent in the other, but when I go straight from my felt sense of what I want to say. Hence not using my native language keeps me in constant touch with my felt sense of the situation (what is most relevant now?), which widens into a felt sense of what kind of words in the other language might articulate this.

Once I become proficient in two or more languages, this process of plugging myself into the implicit intricacy, rather than staying on the level of patterns and comparing them, opens up a creative space from which ever more precise words can come. This is the difference between a 'literal translation' of a work of literature and one which not only articulates the original, but can carry it forward, changing and improving it. When discussing technical matters or giving practical instructions, it will be necessary to have a level of proficiency which allows for the

patterns/concepts to be translated in a simple transaction from one linguistic concept to the other, without recourse to the felt sense, or 'co-articulation'. But in order to have an intimate conversation, it is more fruitful to allow naked saying to happen, as the language which the speaker *does* have interacts with all the other facets of the situation to produce something new. A good therapist response is akin to a 'good translation' – the same but different, carrying it forward.

When articulating what I mean, I could say that I am 'expressing myself'. 'Expressing myself' points to a level of ease, when the language itself does not get in the way. But, while certain physical and communicative acts, say eating, jumping, loving, hating can be commonly understood without words, it is hard to imagine a commonly understood act of 'expressing myself'. It involves a doubling, a matching with something which is unseen, existent as a part of language, as a constellation of commonly understood meanings, and situations. We all find our language use adjusts when we speak with different groups of people in different contexts – normally this is a flawless natural adjustment, although it is not free from considerations of power, one kind of language will be likely to wield more power than the other, making the adjustment potentially uncomfortable. What it is to 'express yourself' varies in accordance with who you are talking to – in some groups it is something you might not mention at all for fear of ridicule (they would find it pretentious) in other groups it might be a matter of status (a 'personal development' group).

The experience of naked saying, on the other hand, with all its fertile possibilities, happens mainly when we mix up the contexts and are jolted from the familiar. We speak directly from the felt sense. Therapy might usefully facilitate this.

## SECTION SIX – POETIC LANGUAGE

Public language makes concepts which facilitate mutual understanding and manipulation of the world for common tasks. Public terms and mutually agreed concepts cannot and do not aim to express a situation in its entirety, they tend to coalesce around consistent elements, the lowest common denominators of an experience, filtering out the unclear, and the bits that don't fit the intention we have for the term – in parallel to how we create our 'self-concept'. And sometimes public terms and mutually agreed concepts are inadequate to express what we need to express – the sense we make of an experience is different from how it 'should be'; or it seems unlikely that it can exist at all (yet it does); or it is extremely hard to articulate using existing terms.

Why do people often say they think only in language? Because we don't tend to count instances of pausing in order to let new meanings come, as thinking. Neither do we call various movements of our emotions, bodies, energy levels, or activities such as writing, painting or dancing, thinking. There is a convention within which we only call talking to ourselves in our heads, in words, as thinking. The more people you ask how they think, the more the initial unspoken definition seems reinforced.

This serves to intensify the dichotomy between 'thinking/feeling', 'body/mind'. It is not just a theoretical dichotomy but a lived one. On one side it looks like this:

When one fears contact with actuality – with flesh and blood people and with one's own sensations and feelings – words are interposed as a screen both between the verbaliser and his environment and between the verbaliser and his own organism. The person attempts to live on words – and then wonders vaguely why something is amiss! (Perls et al., 1951 p.105)

On the other, a person who fears thinking may live with a swamp of feelings 'interposed as a screen' between himself and his environment.

So if we end up lost, stuck on one side or the other, we hit a problem – we are in a situation where we 'do not know our way about'. This is Wittgenstein's definition of a philosophical problem, it is also a good definition of the moment when the need for therapy arises, or a need for artistic expression. We feel no-one can possibly understand us, or we do not understand ourselves, we cannot make sense of our experience. The conventional terms do not show us the way. The urge to create, to understand, or just to feel relief from this particular distress, could be stated as needs to exactly/fully express/hold/articulate a unique, transient experience. This is not the same as 'recording' an experience, or translating it into different terms (from 'life' to 'art').

This kind of recording, or representation, of feelings and thoughts in another form is the public language sense of 'self-expression'. It describes a second-order, clichéd kind of art. There is, according to both mutually agreed definitions of art and the experience of many artists, an important distinction between 'real art,' which is 'universal', touching the lives of very different people over time (e.g. Shakespeare) and the kind of poetry most of us have written in adolescence or after the break up of a love affair, that consists of clichés, or of a sincere expression of our thoughts and feelings, but in some hard to define yet commonly agreed-upon sense, 'nothing more'. It narrows rather than expands.

The 'poetic' is used in language games to do with the ineffable, inexpressible, moments somehow 'beyond' everyday life. Poetry belongs in the realm of the unsayable, along with a certain mystique, romanticism, elitism, as if you have to be a special kind of person to be able to bring the unsayable into language. Actually, however, we *do* understand poetic speech. In fact, we speak it; no one speaks according to the rules of prose. Poetry is finding the words to say an 'it' which carries forward more of the implicit intricacy than words can explain. 'Saying it' does not have to mean explaining it. Saying it directly, we hit on fresh language. The unsayable is so called because the words we need to say it are too precise rather than lacking altogether. In order to say it, we have to dip into the unseparated



multiplicity of meanings in the situation, the implicit intricacy, and that is indeed a kind of skill, which to some comes naturally and to others is part of a practice.

At the same time as the overt words are forming, the poet can maintain the silent awareness of image, feeling, memory, etc., and also the pure attitudes of social communication, clarity and verbal responsibility. Thus instead of being verbal stereotypes, the words are plastically destroyed and combined toward a more vital figure. Poetry is therefore the exact contrary of neurotic verbalizing, for it is speech as an organic problem-solving activity, it is a form of concentration... (Perls et al., 1951 p.323)

The idea is not to lose the initial impulse we are saying by jumping into stereotypes where it stops growing 'richly'. This involves a kind of pausing, as in focusing, and a kind of keeping in touch with the direct referent: the ability to 'maintain silent awareness' of whatever it is that comes. That 'extra' quality of expressive speech has historically been romanticised as coming from the divine, or from some outside inspiration, often associated with the writer being in a kind of trance state, the mere conduit for the words that are writing themselves. The words appear without the need to refer back to an owner or producer.

But is this really a case of transmission from somewhere else, or is it a moment of 'extension' – when more of the 'intersubjective field' than usual is vivid in our awareness? Sometimes this awareness seems to simultaneously flash over many different times and places; or – say in the creation of a character in a novel – there may be a condensation of different people, together with some new element, that creates someone who has never existed before, and yet suddenly does. This setting aside of 'the controller', 'the will', 'the critic', 'the judge', in order to overcome 'writer's block' is well known, from creative exercises to therapeutic work with resistance. 'The basic barrier to full, healthy experiencing is the tendency to accept as one's own only what one does deliberately – that is 'on purpose' (Perls et al., 1951 p.75). Of all one's other actions one tends to be studiously unaware (as elaborated by Fingarette on self deception. (Fingarette, 1998)

Thus, modern man isolates his 'will' from both his organism and his environment and talks about 'will power' as if this were something that he somehow ought to be able to invoke in a fashion that would transcend the limitations of flesh and worldly circumstance. (Perls et al., 1951 p.75)

This 'will' is precisely what needs to be set aside in order to create. When we no longer use it to isolate ourselves, more of what is happening comes to our attention. Condensation of more of the contexts and processes implicit in one moment of life, in one particular body and site of experiencing, at one place in time, results in new phrases, a piece of naked saying that 'has never as yet been said in the history of the world' (Gendlin, 2004, p.131), although there is nothing for it to be made of which was not already there.

It will have the hallmarks of creative work – originality and the ability to move and affect others – to get within their boundary, under their skin, to make them feel something with the sense of 'warmth' or 'intimacy' that James associated with experience of 'self'. Maybe this sense of self as a sense of sheer existence – 'I am alive' – is actually more available to individuals through the works (words, music, art) of *others*. The transience and inseparability of experiences are easier to grasp.

The fact that we do grasp it, 'get it' is because of our position as intersection points of a multiplicity of interconnecting processes, mostly incomprehensible, that haven't been captured into pictures yet, be they the workings of our digestion system, our relationship with our mothers or how the universe began. All our intersection points are unique, yet being one is something we all have in common. Maybe this is what we are pointing to when we talk about the 'mysterious' feeling, the kind of resonance produced by good art.

The main point of therapy may be to find a more accurate way of talking, so we can articulate and carry forward more. *More accurate* is likely to be more poetic, rather than more common-sense language. Creativity, 'self' and therapy may all be

understood as precise articulations of a situation. This is why the fields get muddled up – creative disciplines get mixed up with 'self-discovery', the making and enjoying of art is 'therapeutic', satisfied clients in therapy often describe it as a creative experience. There is a certain tension about 'reducing' one to the other – particularly about reducing art to therapy – but they both consist of articulation, in the same way that thinking, speaking and feeling are parts of the same living process rather than enemies on the same territory, fighting for more space for their own 'correct' version of experience.

It is when poetry is written down (relatively recently in human history, this goes for philosophy, too) that it loses some of the flavour of fresh articulation. The critic/judge/controller is invited in to take a crucial role in the editing process. It is unlikely that the material will be very resonant however, if the critic had not initially stepped out of the way.

## **1. A look at the issues through a poem analysis**

### **AN URGENT REQUEST**

Hello and goodbye,  
flour, vegetables, coffee  
and orange juice.  
A body, a soul, thoughts,  
a moment of freedom.  
Words I am so jealous of your words.

I would like to buy some Polish grammar.  
All of it.

I would like to buy a reusable bag  
for the case endings.  
Please segregate the genitive

from the dative well.

If war were to break out tomorrow  
which of the neighbours would kill us?  
How do they all know what to do?  
How do my friends walk around  
with all they know and feel?  
Why won't they talk to each other?

It's just a question of words –  
the wrong ones got delivered.  
They don't fit.

We fear our words say  
something about us  
instead of using those damned words to speak.

We gravitate irresistibly  
towards the passive.  
Mostly women.

I am furious.

Deliver those words please,  
I cannot wait any longer.

I need not only the perfect  
and imperfect verbs  
and each separate verb-concept  
but a precise dividing line  
between them.

I know that will be more expensive.

I am prepared to pay postage.

Yes, the country I live in  
really exists.

It is called where-I-am-now  
or, for short, my name.

It's even in Europe.

So, you see, it won't cost so much.

This document will most certainly  
even be translated.

I know exactly where I am.

You understand?

First you have to give me the words!

I'm leaning over the desk now  
and my hair is falling over the forms  
and I'm sweating.

Yes, I need prepositions too.

And the cases to which they attach.

I need those little joining wires.

Several thousand of them.

They'll be cheaper if I buy them  
all at once.

I don't need poetry.

I already have a body.

Just give me the words.

(Luczaj, 2009)

My poem 'An Urgent Request' investigates the situation of a frustrated language learner, attempting to buy the language she needs at the post office. With a kind of desperate wishful thinking, she refers to language as if it were a product, that could be bought and sold, consumed and used. As if language belonged entirely to the unit model.

From the 'unit view' of language, comes commercialisation. Units can be assigned a value, defined, bought and sold, and in our contemporary society, if they can be they usually are. Being exiled from the language around her, the poem's speaker feels a mounting, extreme anxiety. In a sense 'getting' these words from the people who own them, is a matter of life and death. The anxiety she experiences is physically felt. It is not a mere 'individual' fear either but one that derives from the logic of separate units – that those who are assigned one language will be forever essentially different from those assigned another, and this misconception – that we are different substances rather than instances of the same living process – could lead to war.

In the middle of the poem a secondary, more relative point, appears: 'we fear that our words say/something about us/ instead of using those damned words to speak'. The fury here felt on behalf of the 'mostly women' who 'gravitate irresistibly towards the passive' is part of a moral narrative. In this picture, language is an integral part of the position we take in the world – whether we are active agents or passive potential victims. This is a simplistic dichotomy, which is why I call the point a 'relative' one, but it is certainly relevant for those who feel/think/act constantly on the passive side, as objects to be judged, rather than subjects who may act and make judgements themselves.

At the end she makes the distinction between the everyday language she needs and poetry which she naturally has access to, as she has her body. She does not need to order, buy, or be given either poetry or a body by anyone else. Poetry is an intimate living process like the ones her body is made up of, so it is a given, while she is alive. What she does *not* have is the vocabulary, the social currency, which is what she needs as a matter of survival in the place where she is, independent of geographical, national, cultural definitions. The place she is writing from is called 'where I am now/or for short my name'. She is her own place and her own definition, but this does not eradicate the need for the public words, which can only be given to her from the outside as part of a social transaction in which power is involved – clearly the woman in the post office who is taking the order is reluctant to comply, maybe she really does not understand the speaker's desperate attempts to communicate, maybe she is pretending not to understand. Public words are power, they can exclude or include, they can render powerless people who know exactly who they are, whose bodies and poetry are intact.

## SECTION SEVEN – CONCLUSION

'Self' as a public word may be used in order to reinforce the power of the social group who define it, it may make people desperate to discover their own meanings, their own bodies, their own poetry, as they constantly sense the imposition of this public word, imposing itself into, of course, the most intimate area, the place we do not necessarily have words 'for' because it is the place from which we speak. All our words may be from the living we call 'self', or none of them – we may feel constantly estranged from that place, feeling that language does not fit us, or that we do not fit. This means that we are uneasy with our *lives*, it does not mean that we have faulty 'selves' which need fixing.

We may need to create new concepts and new theories. It is not a question of escaping all concepts or the public domain but of pausing the situation in order to work out how we are always already making meanings and giving them a moment

to form freshly.

As a final point, my analysis of my own poem here is nothing but teasing out strands of thought implicit in it. I did not write the poem in order to express them and was not aware of many of the implications when writing. This is what a poem (and living body/language) does. As an act of articulation and extension, like useful philosophy or therapy, this kind of speech helps us find our way about.

Do we need to call this articulation, expansion, awareness, 'self'? In this situation it would function to point specifically to our own livingness, rather than to define an entity. Pointing back to the sheerness of being alive is not 'necessary' – but it can add an extra charge, remind us of our mortality, it can stand alone as it does in meditation experiences and sometimes in art, or it can trip us up as a metaphysical compulsion which leads us into judgement, comparison, and away, paradoxically, from that very basic, sheer quality of being alive.



## **CHAPTER FOUR – NO-SELF/SELF AS CARRYING FORWARD – BUDDHISM AND THE PROCESS MODEL**

**No conditions are permanent**

**No conditions are reliable**

**Nothing is self.**

**Buddha (Batchelor, 1997 p.21)**

**To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening.**

**(Dogen, 1233)**

### **SECTION ONE – OVERVIEW OF BUDDHIST THEORY**

The concept/practice/insight of annata, or no-self, is central to Buddhism, but differently interpreted according to different schools. This is not the place for a full analysis of each school, but here I provide a short comparative analysis, with the purpose of clarifying the insights which might be helpful in therapy, and grounding generalised references to 'Buddhism' in relation to therapy in what the tradition actually says.

Placing Buddhist texts within the context of the historical and cultural evolution of Buddhism is helpful in clarifying the different levels at play. The main stages are referred to by later schools as the three Vehicles: the Lower/Hinayana/Theraveda, the Greater/Mahayana, and the Vajrayana/Diamond way, or as the three turnings of the wheel of dharma. I will explore these turnings separately.

## **1. THERAVADA/HINAYANA/THE LOWER VEHICLE**

The Theravedic schools aim, through good conduct, textual analysis and gaining insight (through meditation) into the factors which produce and perpetuate cyclical suffering (within and between life-times, in accordance with the spiritual framework of the times), to stop those factors and enter nibbana ('extinction of the factors'), thereby liberating themselves from future rebirths and future suffering.

The first teaching, or sutra, which Buddha gave after enlightenment, the Dharmacakra Pravartana Sūtra, 'Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma' (Ñanamoli, B 2010) presents what is considered to be the foundation of Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths.

The Abhidharma builds on the noble truths to provide the most thorough and foundational analysis in the early Buddhist canon of the construction of conditions for, and hence the seeds of the extinction of, suffering. Here are some of the main concepts:

### ***a) The Four Noble Truths***

These, in Ñanamoli's translation are as follows:

Suffering, as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering — in short, suffering is the five categories of clinging objects.

The origin of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is the craving that produces renewal of being accompanied by enjoyment and lust, and enjoying this and

that; in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being.

Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is remainderless fading and ceasing, giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting, of that same craving.

The way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is simply the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. (Ñanamoli, 2010, no page ref)

Suffering is a common translation of 'dukkha', a word which captures a kind of basic dissatisfaction, discomfort, a sense of something not being quite right, both when cravings are not satisfied, and when they are. Dukkha is a foundational truth, the central, noble truth. Although the path to the extinction of suffering clearly shows suffering to arise from mistaken ways of living and concepts of life, in a sense it is not a mistake, not something that can be cleared up, leaving everything as it should be. It needs to be faced directly and this is transformational. Suffering is how it is, and suffering is the key to a radical transformation that cuts through and goes beyond pain and pleasure.

Thanissaro translates dukkha as 'stress' (Thanissaro, 2013), Harvey as 'pain' (Harvey, 2012). Ponlop states that 'suffering is fear' (Ponlop, 2003 p.193). While 'pain' and 'suffering' emphasise just how strongly unpleasant the experience is, and 'fear' how viscerally we want to escape it, 'stress' captures the sense in which we create extra problems by resisting or attaching to experiences. Chödrön translates the Tibetan word 'shenpa,' usually translated as attachment, as 'hooked' (Chödrön, 2003), which points to the entrenched nature of our everyday habits of perpetuating pain – getting caught in addictive cycles of reaction to our feelings or thoughts.

Batchelor separates out these two strands of dukkha, translating 'personal experience of the kind of suffering caused by self-centred craving' as 'anguish'

(Batchelor, 1997 p.6) and dukkha as a 'characteristic of the conditions of life' as 'unreliability' or 'uncertainty' (Batchelor, 1997 p. 21). This division of suffering into the inevitable and the self-inflicted makes sense. While sickness, old age and death necessarily involve pain, they do not necessarily involve suffering, which is the extra twist of resistance to what is happening, craving for things to be different.

### ***b) The Eightfold Path***

It is worth stressing that the fundamental way to remove suffering is to follow the eightfold path, that is to follow precepts – not rules. 'Right' points to a direction, in accordance with ethical principles, rather than following a prescription for conduct.

### ***c) Karma – cause and effect***

Karma, a concept much used and mis-used today in the sense of judgement and/or fatalistic determinism, can be simply translated as the law of cause and effect. Everything that we do sows a seed, be it a negative or positive one, for future events. Hence far from being powerless and left to our fate, we are constantly creating conditions for change. We are always influenced, and always influencing. What we do is never without effect.

### ***d) The five skhandas***

The word skandha means 'heap' and is often translated as 'aggregate'. It means the coming together of groups of factors, in this case personality factors, to produce our 'selves' as we call them. A person who talks about his self, is referring to a complex interaction of factors, which can be roughly divided into heaps. The five 'heaps' are:

- 'rupa' – material form, body
- 'vedana' – feeling - whether an experience is pleasant, unpleasant or

neutral

- 'sanna' – cognition – classification, interpretation
- 'sankharas' – constructing activities – including 'cetana', volition, and attention
- 'vinnana' – consciousness or discernment, by sensory or mental awareness (Harvey, 1995 p.4)

Rupa, our body, is perhaps the most obvious factor, but it is not enough to make up a person, a personality, or a self. From this gross material level onwards, the factors become ever more subtle. Feeling arises first, a basic reaction to what happens, of attraction, avoidance, or neutrality. The body is responsive, and the pattern of these reactions start to define us a little more.

Next come three heaps referring to what we might lump into a single 'mental' basket – 'thinking' as distinct from 'feeling', or rational as distinct from emotional. The Buddhist take on the mental level is much more complex. Cognition comes first, as the least subtle of the forms of mental activity. On this level we classify, interpret and analyse what we have so far, i.e. our feeling reactions to situations. We make basic divisions, say good and bad. Next, through constructing activities, we use more refined powers to direct our attention, according to our will, which appears at this point in the model. Here we can influence our experience, thoughts and feelings, by choosing what we pay attention to. The final factor is consciousness or discernment, a more subtle kind of mental activity, an intelligent, reflexive awareness, building on all the other factors. When all these skandhas, or groups of factors, are present, we can say that a self arises, although of course the factors of which it is composed are themselves temporary arisings from other factors. An individual being does temporarily arise. So how is it that this complex being necessarily suffers? This is due to:

### ***e) The three poisons***

- passion
- aversion

- delusion

(Thanissaro, 2010)

The three poisons are also commonly translated as attachment/clinging/greed/craving, hatred/anger, and ignorance/confusion.

Our habitual reactions to everything that happens in our lives fall into three different groups. Every time a situation arises (a 'situation' can be as small as a thought arising) we tend to react either by clinging to it, hence identifying with it and wanting to possess it, or by judging it as bad, hence trying to destroy it, or escape. Ignorance applies in both these cases, as they spring from our mistaken idea that there is actually something present with its own essence and independent reality, which can be clung to or rejected. Sometimes in our confusion we try to do both simultaneously, but the basic mistake is the same. 'Self' is of course the primary example of an illusory thing that we identify with, reject, or are confused about.

### ***f) The twelve links of dependent origination/conditioned arising***

The twelve links of dependent origination explain the process of rebirth, on a large scale, and on a smaller one explain the way in which we perpetuate suffering on an everyday basis. In the same way that the five skandhas explain the processes human beings are composed of, dependent origination explains how people are born and reborn again into cyclical suffering (one more round of sickness, old age and death, kept going by craving, avoidance and confusion). It explains all the factors that have to come together to create life. The list starts with ignorance, because if there were knowledge of the four noble truths, then there would already be liberation.

The twelve links are as follows:

- 'avija'– ignorance (of the four noble truths)
- 'sankharas' – constructing activities, will, attention, etc

- 'vinnana' – discernment
- 'nama-rupa' – mind and body, the sentient body, at the start of a new rebirth
- 'ayantas' – the six sense spheres (the sixth sense is mano, the mind-organ)
- 'phassa' – stimulation – bare awareness of sensory contact
- 'vedana' – feeling
- 'tanha' – craving – the key cause of suffering
- 'upadana' – grasping
- 'bhava' – becoming
- 'jati' – birth
- 'ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair... this whole mass of dukkha'

adapted from Harvey (Harvey, 1995 p.5).

When all these factors are present – we have a human life. The complicated mental factors are given no more importance than the material factors.

### ***g) The three characteristics of all things***

All things in samsara (the realm in which cyclical human rebirths occur, the realm of repetitive suffering) share three characteristics, which perpetuate both their existence, and human suffering. Everything that happens, every form that arises, is:

- anicca - impermanent
- dukkha – suffering
- anatta – nonself

(Sutta Central and Bhikku Bodhi, 2015)

Hence, while things function as solid entities, and look as if they possess their own essences and autonomy, they are all constructed by the previously noted factors – remove one factor and they would no longer exist. Hence they are empty of their

own inherent, essential existence. The most basic and foundational of these objects, the one the closest to us, is the self. Self, like any other situation or object that arises, is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and 'no-self', i.e. without its own independent, lasting essence. The sense in which things do function as solid entities is known as the relative level and the sense in which things are empty is the absolute.

### ***h) Anatta***

Buddha was teaching in the context of the Indian philosophies and spiritual practices of the time (Easwaran, 1989; Deutsch and Dalvi, 2004) affirming Self as ultimate reality and spiritual value – believing that as individuals we are all manifestations of an all-encompassing, eternal Self. So it was important to distinguish the insight he had in his awakening from this underlying assumption, while not falling into the camp of the nihilists who proclaimed that there is only material reality, ending in death.

When asked, 'does the Self exist?', Buddha neither affirmed nor denied – he kept completely silent. The question was therefore placed, in the Pali canon (the collection of early texts recording the words of the Buddha) in the 'unanswered questions' collection. It was not, however, classified as an *unskillful* question (Thanissaro, 2011). Buddha told his assistant that he had found no way of answering without inadvertently supporting either the essentialists or the nihilists. Buddha carefully distinguished between relative and absolute truths, and wanted to avoid the mixing of these categories that an explicit denial of the self might have stirred up.

In the Indian spiritual context of the time, there were specific conditions within which 'being someone' or having a 'self' would have been understood. As in contemporary times, the existence of individual persons is never denied. A strong ethical foundation for all spiritual paths would have been assumed, and so would



what we would call, today, a collectivist culture. The individuality and 'specialness' of Self would not have been an important issue as it is today. The illusion that Buddha was setting out to dispel would be the seeming permanence and continuity of an individual and essential core, more akin to the eternal soul than the psychological self – certainly not the huge edifice we have built around that core today.

Self would be seen not as the final aim to be achieved, but as a basic substance to be perfected. In the Indian culture of the time, the Atman, or perfected self, was a necessary yet relative achievement along the way, after which awareness of the universal Self would arise, not by the destruction but the *expansion* of the Atman, or higher Self. The spiritually developed person, or Arhat, works to improve their actions and character, while ultimately aiming towards full realisation, or direct experience of the fact that they have no stable, permanent, independent essence, that the person, as part of the whole, is not the focus point or owner of its spiritual realisations. In fact, there is nothing but Self, one, pure consciousness.

In early Buddhism, the same insight, that the person does not have any stable, permanent, independent existence/nature, is differently interpreted and experienced. The insight comes through right conduct, and practice, and the practice consists of observing, understanding and dispelling the three forces, of attraction, repulsion and confusion, which keep us trapped in suffering. Liberation is not only a matter of insight, 'getting it', but a matter of working with the emotional forces of attraction and repulsion, learning to loosen and eventually give them up. The problem is not the emotions or tendencies themselves, which will keep naturally arising until we attain the stopping of the factors, but our attachment to them and the compulsive behaviour this produces.

In the first turning of the Buddhist wheel of dharma, then, the main concern is to dismantle the central illusion of a separate self through skilful analysis. The aim is the deconstruction of a concept, through observation and analysis of the processes involved in building up this structure and maintaining it. The method is based on

observation, logical analysis and conceptual thought. The analysis leads to experiential checking – searching for the independently arising, individual self. Experiential checking is the final deciding factor, but nonetheless the method proposed is one that arises from logical, conceptual, dualistic thought.

## 2. MAHAYANA/THE GREAT VEHICLE

**'Form is emptiness, emptiness is form' (Heart Sutra, trans. Hsuan-Tsang, n.d.)**

The second turning of the wheel, 500 years after the first, was performed by Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva associated with, most notably, the Heart Sutra and Lotus Sutra. The concept of a Bodhisattva constituted a significant departure from the Theravada tradition. A bodhisattva is an enlightened/awakened being who vows *not* to attain the individual liberation whose way is staked out in the first turning of the wheel, until liberation is attained for all beings. Mahayana practitioners also take a vow that they will keep returning to cyclical existence, subject to dukkha, illness, old age and death, as long as it takes until every sentient being is liberated.

This turn is an advance on two levels – on the insight level it is understood that the boundaries between people are on the absolute level illusory, so there is a sense in which we can literally say that one person alone cannot attain liberation – one person alone cannot attain anything because there *is* no one person alone.

There is another advance in the sense that boundless compassion naturally arises from this insight, as the last, closest, most vital attachment – to me rather than you – disappears. You become as important as me.

Avalokitesvara in the Heart Sutra states that emptiness is form, and form emptiness. Forms include suffering, the end of suffering, and the path to freedom from suffering – so in effect the sutra states that the foundational teachings of Buddhism, the four noble truths and the eightfold path, no longer apply. 'There is

no suffering, no accumulating, no extinction, no way, and no understanding and no attaining.' (Hsuan-Tsang, n.d.)

The entire universe, in the second turning of the wheel, is always showing us the truth, no matter what's happening. There is no conceptual approach to the entire universe. It just immediately presents itself all the time. (Anderson, 2012 p.10-11)

The Mahayanan model differs from the Theravedan in that rather than presenting a world of suffering to be transcended or escaped from, it presents a world in which life is suffering, but at the same time the world is buddhanature. It is already perfect. There is nowhere to escape to, there is simply a misconception – the fundamental 'self-illusion' that we are separate – and our endless reproduction of suffering due to our attachments, aversions and confusion. Once this misconception, and these habits are dropped, the truth of the matter is not created or achieved but *realised*.

Methods of realisation vary greatly within Mahayanan schools, notably including Tibetan and Zen traditions. The Vajrayana, or Diamond Way school of Tibetan Buddhism takes the insight that we all have/are buddhanature a step further, emphasising the nature of the world as it is, unconstructed, uncreated, pure luminosity, with endless potential for creative manifestations, through practices of chanting and visualisation and tantric practices.

The tantric level is often conceptualised as an intermediate level in Tibetan Buddhism, on the way to the ultimate, absolute, non-dual realisation of the Vajrayana practices of Mahamudra or the Tibetan practices of Dzogchen. It tends to be dismissed, in Zen, as 'makyo', distracting delusions which appear in meditation practice but are not to be attached to. The oldest Tibetan school, Bön, uses three levels of practices: the lower level, with its roots in shamanic practices, which were previously predominant in the area in which the school originated, involves working with nature spirits and physical energies, the second level is tantric; playing with,

manifesting and transforming energies, and the third, Dzogchen, is direct and ultimate being with things as they are.

The Nicheren school uses mantra practices, while some schools of Zen use concentration on koans, i.e. paradoxes or senseless phrases intended to break the conceptual mind open and produce insight/enlightenment. The relationship with a spiritual teacher who transmits the teachings personally is important in almost all traditions, underlining once more that liberation is not a matter of intellectual understanding only, but a matter of relationship, and relationship not on a 'personal' level but an intersubjective one. Buddhist teachers are unlikely to be interested in your personal problems, and are likely to impart wisdom through a kind of transmission which makes sense in terms of an intersubjective field within which both teacher and student exist.

Awakening can happen in an instant of clear-seeing – the zen 'satori', which may or may not be facilitated by particular trainings or practices. It can happen instantly, in this lifetime. This stands in sharp contrast to the Theravedic roots of Buddhism, which stressed the suffering inherent in life and the sense in which nibbana is 'beyond' – an essentially different realm, which we need to work hard to get to – and also from the Pure Land school of Buddhism, which understands human nature as 'bomby', or 'ordinary nature' (Brazier, 2003), imperfect and generating suffering, and the Pure Land as a different realm, entry to which can be gained through practice and faith.

### **3. THE THIRD TURNING**

The third turning of the wheel of dharma commences with the Samdhinirmocana Sutra: The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning, an originally Sanskrit sutra from the second century (Hsuan-Tsang and Keenan, n.d.), in which the Buddha answers questions from bodhisattvas. The first turning had provided a path to liberation, the second refuted the path of conceptual logic, stating that the path

was empty, and the third 'reconstructs logic but based on the understanding that logic is ultimately completely useless' (Anderson, 2012 p.11). In other words, it explicitly presents the interpenetrating existence of relative and absolute truth, and the flavour of it. This represents in extreme form the position which Gendlin elucidates in the Process model, and the position in which we find ourselves today, with texts and practices from every previous historical moment, and many different cultures, available.

In the Samdhinirmocana Sutra, the Buddha is careful to argue that any distinctions based upon language are false.

...the saints, being freed from language through their holy wisdom and insight in this regard, realise the perfect awakening that reality is truly apart from language. It is because they desire to lead others to realise the perfect awakening that they provisionally establish names and concepts and call things conditioned or unconditioned. (Hsuan-Tsang and Keenan, n.d. p.14)

Hence there are, in actuality, no absolute and relative levels, no unconditioned and conditioned, these are just provisional terms used to help people to realise awakening. The sutra refers to the 'first teacher', that is Buddha during the first turning of the wheel, who used the terms 'conditioned' and 'unconditioned' to differentiate the absolute level from the relative awareness with which people normally operate. Once awakening has been realised, there can be no distinctions. Language is no longer relevant.

Encompassing all marks with one taste, ultimate meaning is taught by all Buddhas to be undifferentiated. If one were to discriminate it in those differentiations, one should assuredly be foolish and prideful. (Hsuan-Tsang and Keenan, n.d. p.25)

Time also counts as a differentiation, and without time there is no death either. Those bodhisattvas who 'abandon' and 'abolish' thoughts and all kinds of

meticulously listed erroneous mental constructions and illusions by applying zeal and insight, are, while functioning within the world of distinctions, simultaneously beyond differentiation, language and time. This brings limitless, unshakeable joy and illumination.

The Vajrayana tradition of Tibetan Buddhism is explicitly concerned with the actualisation of this undifferentiated state, the 'vajradhatta/Vajra world', or 'realm of indestructibility'(Ray, 2001 p.1). It builds on and incorporates the previous two turnings of the wheel, then develops into a path of direct initiation. The initiation, or 'abhisheka', is received directly from a teacher, and the contents are kept secret, as they would be too dangerous to share without appropriate readiness and safeguards. The practices often start with visualisations of the practitioner as a deity, proceed to inner yogas, working with subtle energies in the body, and culminate in the 'formless', and highest, practices of Dzogchen (Ponlop, 2003 p.177-236) or Mahamudra (Ponlop, 2003 p.21-177), which lead to the shocking revelation of ourselves as inseparable from the world as it is – that is, entirely non-existent, entirely indestructible. Various stages of clarity, power and bliss appear along the way, and also stages of disturbance such as that described by Trungpa, 'The world is so true and naked and sharp and precise and colourful that it's extraordinarily irritating...' (Ray, 2001, p.287) – yet the reality itself is beyond concepts and descriptions. Trungpa points to it using the words, 'primordial intelligence connected with space and openness' (Ray, 2001, p.269). This space is experienced as bright, radiant, and groundless, with no distinctions whatsoever. Hence it is equally present in dark, dense solidity!

From a conventional point of view, the Vajrayana view is a little bit insane. For example, it does not see any difference between being awake and being asleep. The very experience of sleep is awake. Sleep is nothing but dense clarity. The very experience of emotions is the very experience of enlightenment. [...] Vajrayana practitioners see opportunities for awakening in the nature of all experiences, all emotions, and all environments. There is no awakening outside these very experiences. (Ponlop, 2003 p.15)

In this supremely paradoxical tradition, liberation is always alive right in the midst of suffering, in an extraordinarily direct way.

## **SECTION TWO – METHODS**

### **1. COMPASSION AND ETHICS FIRST**

We should bear in mind that while the goal, relief of suffering, and the diagnosis of the source of suffering as inhering in the mind, are common to Buddhism and psychotherapy, the methods and the meaning of the goal vary significantly between disciplines.

In Buddhism, the cultivation of compassion is the fundamental basis of all methods of removing suffering, and this was so even before the Mahayanan 'turn'. Relief of suffering is pursued as a practice rather than an end-state, it is our task to actively cultivate compassion for others first. From Theravedan practices such as the cultivation of metta, or loving kindness, towards friends, neutral people and enemies, through the Tibetan practices of cultivating warm-hearted bodhicitta, often performed with a visualisation of our greatest enemy right in front of us, to the radically counter-intuitive Tibetan practice of Tonglen, in which we breathe in suffering and breathe out light (Chödrön, 2000) – the theme of compassion is fundamental and primary.

Individualistic cultures perpetuate a deep-rooted tendency to think of suffering, compassion and joy as finite resources. Putting others first, then, necessarily means reducing what we have. Cultivating compassion for others in the Buddhist sense, however, cannot be at our own expense. Compassion is boundless and brings insight. Compassion extended to others is extended to ourselves and vice versa, because there is ultimately no difference between us.

The two main groups of Buddhist methods of relieving suffering are analytical, and direct realisation methods.

## **2. ANALYTICAL METHODS**

According to Rangtong, the analytic school within the Tibetan tradition, the self is an illusion which can be critically pulled apart. The 'Sutra' way is the study of texts in order to intellectually dismantle the suffering inherent in our conventional ways of conceptualising the world. Philosophical questioning was the main method used in the early Pali texts.

The forms of meditation associated with this group are mindfulness – vipassana, and shamatha – concentration methods. In fact these two meditation directions are present in all turnings of the wheel. In Vipassana, the development of insight and wisdom, problems naturally fall away as soon as the situation is seen accurately (just as Wittgenstein's philosophical problems disappear once seen clearly, untangled from their conceptual confusions). Concentration methods lead to 'samadhi', the peaceful state that arises from meditation practice, and a progressive series of absorption states known as the jhanas.

Through mindfulness and insight into the factors creating and perpetuating suffering, from a Theravedan perspective, we can arrive at nibbana – the stopping of the factors, hence the stopping of self-illusion, suffering and re-birth. From a Mahayanan perspective, this is the entrance point into a groundless luminosity which is present right now.

Thanissaro, starting from Buddha's view that ontological questions about the soul are not worthy of an answer, presents 'self' as a strategy used in order to satisfy a need for an illusion of security and permanence, and proposes its replacement with a 'no-self strategy'. This strategy is a systematic practice of disidentifying with the desires which lie at the foundation of our creation of the self structure, in order to



achieve the goal of ending suffering, or as Thanissaro translates *dukkha*, 'stress'. There is necessarily a lot of stress involved in maintaining an illusion.

The no-self strategy of conscious, step by step disidentification includes identifications with views, such as views on the existence of a self, and is far-reaching and thorough, progressing systematically through each of the five skandhas, 'passion and desire for physical form, feeling, perception, mental processes and consciousness' (Thanissaro, 2013, no page ref). Thanissaro translates 'sanna' as 'perception' rather than 'cognition' (as in Harvey's previously quoted translation). Maybe perception is always a form of active cognition? The process of disidentification can be performed with whatever thoughts or feelings may arise, the question can be repeated, 'is this me?' Relief arises from the opening out of the possibility of *not* being our uncomfortable or overwhelming thoughts/feelings. If they are not us, then any judgements which arise need not be personal or painful. The grip of the poisons of clinging and ignorance are loosened.

The practices of mindfulness and vipassana are observation practices, and hence they work on the analytical level, to pick the situation apart into its components, in a nonjudgmental way. They also imply an observer and the observed, events happening within some background space. Questions arise – who is the observer, and what is this 'on-purpose' attention? – and all possible responses seem to move in the direction of a sense of self, self as witness, or 'witness consciousness'.

Albahari posits witness consciousness as part of a no-self doctrine (Albahari, 2011), but it certainly fulfils many of the criteria of a self – a consciousness which appears continuous and with which we may identify. Epstein argues that it is precisely in mindfulness meditation that we see the workings of a healthy ego, noting everything without judging or becoming attached (Epstein, 2007 p. 52). This helps to explain why mindfulness techniques may be lifted out of Buddhist practices and applied in a secular way. I investigate western uses of mindfulness in Chapter Five.

Mindfulness techniques are, however, not intended to improve our functioning in everyday life. They are at heart, and by specific intention, 'not-self' strategies. Self is

precisely what is supposed to last across our present experience back into the past and forward into the future. Absolute concentration on the present moment works against this. Self as an essence involves a whole cluster of judgements, divisions (me/not-me) and attempts to control situations according to a certain pattern. This pattern is held together by anxiety/dukkha, the constant sense of things not being right and needing to be kept in line. Mindfulness purposefully undoes this structure of judgement and control.

'Self' as a structure of judgements and attempts to control our experience functions like Rogers' 'self-concept', a structure built of habits of response to conditional acceptance from important others. Conditional acceptance produces a fundamental sense of threat, the fear of loss of approval, of love (which in the case of young children threatens their very survival). Once the sense of an acceptable self-concept is built up, yet more anxiety and threat are generated by the need to maintain and defend it. 'No-self' in this context is almost synonymous with 'no-stress'.

### **3. DIRECT REALISATION**

If the analytical method is about realising what isn't, the alternative is realising what is. The Tibetan school with this explicit aim is Shengton, which uses visualisation and meditation techniques in which experience of the mind as a transparent luminosity pervades the individual, dissolving artificial barriers between self and object, self and other. This state of emptiness is a state of joy, more life rather than less (Blackstone, 2007; Przybysławski, 2010). Direct realisation of buddhanature or non-duality consciousness may also come about through Zen techniques such as working on koans, through zazen, or 'just sitting'. It may also occur spontaneously, without practice or intention.

Non-duality, not separating experience into mind/body, thoughts/feelings, me/rest of the world, is, in Zen Buddhism, the experience of enlightenment – clear seeing into the nature of the world as it is. This seeing is not something which is

accomplished then possessed as an attribute, but rather a way of living in accordance with a new perspective.

In these awakened states we clearly perceive the absolute nature of emptiness/form, and indeed all the *different* forms, in their 'interbeing' (Nhat Hanh, 1987). Events arise, without individual identity or permanent existence. They could not exist or happen independently, and if any one of the conditions around them were changed, they would also change.

### **SECTION THREE – BUDDHISM AND THE PROCESS MODEL – STILLNESS AND MOVEMENT**

Gendlin's Process Model is basically consistent with the Buddhist model, while differing in some significant ways. They can inform each other in a way which may be particularly helpful in healing and creative processes.

The Process model starts from the principle 'interaction first'. Interaction is *prior* to entities or substances. Organisms and environments are ultimately inseparable from each other. Every interaction process, once started, continues, with knock-on effects, according to the 'ev ev' principle, that everything affects everything. This creates a vast web of interrelated processes, that Gendlin calls the implicit intricacy, or unseparated multiplicity (as it has not been separated out into explicit concepts yet). The web of processes are not separate from each other and neither are they in any sense linear. This implicit intricacy is made up of the interconnections of every interaction that has ever taken place, from the big bang to how we were treated as infants, and all these interactions, sometimes carrying forward and sometimes blocked, make up a network of processes which functions similarly to the Buddhist picture of dependent co-origination, in the sense that everything is a cause and has an effect, and that no independent essence can be isolated from the network. The relationships between the causes and conditions working in every phenomena are prior to the identity of any 'bits' of reality we might artificially isolate for examination.

The Process model explains the evolution of life, from simple organism/environment interactions through the appearance of the symbolic level and language, then onwards, as the appearance of the ability to use concepts to split interactive processes into distinct units enables us to manipulate them. The next stage occurs when a new human potentiality emerges – to pause situations (with all their implicit intricacy) and allow what was previously implicit to carry forward, thereby resuming processes all the way out across the web of inter-relations, back into the past and forward into the future.

The implicit intricacy is primary, 'beyond patterns', yet patterns may be lifted out of it for various symbolic purposes. I think that the 'beyond patterns' and 'patterns' distinctions are in an important sense the same distinctions as those between the absolute and relative levels, or analytical and direct approaches in Buddhism. The absolute is primary and the relative involves working with the processes that make it up.

The co-existence and simultaneous functioning of these two ways corresponds to reality on the scale described by quantum physics. Within the vast field of potentialities, what we call a particle may act as and fulfill the criteria for being either a particle or a wave (Peruzzo et al., 2012). While this coexistence of potentialities exists on the micro-level, the Newtonian laws of physics continue to apply to larger entities. A fluid, constantly shifting interdependence of processes, actually groundless, coalesces into static forms when measured for various purposes.

On a psychological level, once enlightenment is realised, we do not cease to act as if we were solid and separate selves in the world, we do not lose our personal responsibility, boundaries, etc. We remain potential particles and waves, particular situations eliciting different forms.

The implicit intricacy is like this field of potentialities, which may be brought

forward into forms, and once the forms are made explicit, is not separate from them, but at the same time exceeds them, moving where the forms cannot move, in a way in which the forms cannot move. So there are two separate modes of being for life, both of them made up of a practically infinite number of processes, and those which carry-forward are what happens. (Maybe those that do not happen, are 'who we are'?)

While the traditional Buddhist picture contains a moral dimension in the concept of karma, in Gendlin's theory the moral dimension belongs to nature itself – there is always some natural action, which carries forward, and which is the 'right action'. What happens naturally is good because it happens. This is very similar to the Taoist picture of the world, and the notion of wu-wei, which I investigate in more detail in Chapter Five.

## **1. MOVEMENT**

Gendlin's model has an evolutionary feel in its striving to go forward, in its sense of 'more', there is an underlying linearity in the model, conspicuously absent in Zen satori, in which there is nothing to attain. In the Process model too, there is no 'having' of anything, as it immediately unrolls once more into the 'more', but there is a definite sense of positively valued forward motion, as opposed to an ultimate luminous emptiness, which has nowhere to go and just *is*.

Buddhists describe the absolute level as an experience of groundlessness, luminosity, bliss and timelessness. On the absolute level, everything is happening and not-happening all at once. Hence there is no death (Rinpoche Latri Nyima Dakpa 2014). The absolute level is uncreated and unconditioned – beyond dependent co-origination, beyond implicit intricacy.

All schools of Mahayana Buddhism, including Zen, conceive of non-duality as a fundamental, a priori reality, notoriously hard to talk about since the very essence

of Buddhature or original enlightenment is paradox – 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form'. In the groundless interplay of form and emptiness, there is vitality and movement, but no sense of progress, of 'more'. Or, maybe, *everything* is more. In 'original enlightenment' there seems to be a fixed (if infinite!) amount of interpenetrating form and emptiness.

The world of the Process Model moves in a time which is not linear, as carrying forward affects elements of the past. This works in the sense that once we have carried forward a process which had been stuck, say we have explored a problematic family relationship in therapy and come to genuinely forgive our parents, we are no longer the same person who had *that* childhood and *those* parents. When we look back on the past we see it differently, and it functions differently in our experience now. We relate to others with the implicit understanding we have of family relationships today. Nevertheless the general direction of movement in Gendlin's system is clear. As previously mentioned, the Process Model is an evolutionary model, with an assumption that things automatically adjust for the better. There is an underlying dualistic value system – stopping, being stuck, is 'bad', moving forward is 'good'. This value system works, on the relative level, in the Buddhist view too. Being stuck in a 'self' view is not helpful, non attachment to it leads you into 'right action'. Yet on the absolute level, original enlightenment, or mind, is timeless. The ways of becoming nonattached, and moving forward, involve a temporary kind of pause in both models, be it a focusing moment of clearing a space, or a moment of meditation. Stopping our production of stuckness allows the original movement to arise/resume.

This conceptualisation of change and growth as movement and development, the strong valuing of movement over stuckness was also present in Gendlin's early Theory of Personality Change (Gendlin, 1964), in which he contrasts structure-bound experiencing with flow. Being caught in a structure is very similar to the preservation of a self-concept in Rogers' terms, and both these models seem to present a holding still of energy that should be moving. Rogers' fully functioning person is characterised by change. This is clearly consistent with the Buddhist view

that the creation of a solid self where there is none, and the further step of attachment/aversion towards it, is the source of problems.

The model of movement is captured on an individual level in expressions like 'being stuck' in your job, or life, 'moving on' after a relationship or 'going forward' in your life. But if we discover, through moving forward, in the process so memorably described by Dogen – that to study the self is to forget the self and be enlightened by the ten thousand things, then what happens to our stability? I propose that while 'forgetting the self' we are still able to refer back to a stable scheme of co-ordinates, without being attached to them for our very existence or reliant on them to provide meaning, and that we may be 'ourselves' the most strongly when moving and changing in accordance with the ever-changing processes whose ever-changing intersection points we are. In this case, there may not be the time or need to direct attention towards a structure, and the structure may become a kind of extraneous creation, which diverts energy away from the actual business of living.

The Process model and the Zen model share an aspect of 'resultlessness'. In both cases there is no separate goal to attain. Everything is process, whether that process moves infinitely in a kind of zero sum of constant movement, or whether it moves infinitely forwards. Does the distinction matter?

I think it does matter in the sense of explicating with clarity what an individual experiences. Some will use one framework and some another. There will be different skilful means for different people, and for the same people at different times. Whether these frameworks are talking about essentially the 'same' phenomenon is impossible to prove, but if they 'point' in a direction which is of use, then it seems useful to clarify them on their own terms. As Strawson points out, there are people who 'have a self' and those who don't, and this is a matter of temperament (Strawson, 2009 p.15). It is not that one group is right and the other is wrong. This is certainly true for the phenomenological character of our experience, and when talking about 'self' experience, the difference between the way we feel and conceptualise our experience and how it actually is, is maybe particularly

tenuous.

Non-duality realisation undoes layers of boundary-making in order to experience 'suchness' – things as they are, much as Wittgenstein's philosophy works to untangle conceptual confusions in order to leave everything as it is.

Gendlin on the other hand posits the creation of *new* things, concepts which have never been thought of before by anyone in the world. New words that create their own use families, one by one. They are not intentionally designed, and they are not made of entirely 'new stuff' – they are made out of the particular relationships of all the relevant implicit processes that came before them. In fact the new step/word is new in the sense of being a new *relevance*, which has never happened before. The new act of attending to the implicit in *this* body and *this* moment of time as *this* person, creates a unique crossing of the whole implicit intricacy, new in the sense that it could not have happened before. Yet it is not that a thing has been made, which can be used again. Each time we want to use it again and refer 'back' to the felt sense, it necessarily becomes a different thing, new again. Unique.

Dependent origination and karma also imply that every individual is unique, as no two sets of conditions could possibly be the same, but this fact is assumed rather than emphasised, and certainly no positive value is placed upon it. Becoming more individual, more complex, might be seen as a proliferation of complications.

Development lies in subtracting rather than adding. Gendlin states that development opens out like a funnel, situations become more open and more complex. He acknowledges that 'primitive', simple 'wholes' are also good things, and that these continue to function within the new developments/complexities. We need to use more than one way of thinking at once. Yet the valuing of a forward direction, which evolves into complexity, is clear.



## SECTION FOUR – IMPLICATIONS FOR THERAPY

In accordance with the 'forward direction' model, a felt element of stuckness could be said to be maybe the most all-pervasive common factor in situations which are brought to therapy. Even when suffering may be caused by the uncontrollable motion of events (ageing, sickness, death), there is invariably some stuckness in the pattern of our responses, usually related to an inability or refusal to accept changes. On this level, the Buddhist analysis is salient. We cause problems by forcing inappropriate expectations onto reality.

It is well understood by therapists of all orientations that a purely rational re-arrangement of expectations or concepts is not enough to cause someone to 'move' out of stuckness. Therapy effectiveness research suggests that the therapeutic relationship is the most consistently significant factor. (Duncan et al., 2010)

So, what sort of relationship might facilitate movement?

### 1. NO-SELF PRESENCE

Unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence – being authentic, the core conditions posited by Rogers to be necessary and sufficient to ensure positive change, add up to a particular quality of presence in the therapist. Does this mean that a therapist needs to develop a particular kind of self?

Gendlin writes that a therapist does not have to be a special kind of person, but they do need to be able 'to get out of the way'. This implies that when their own mental and emotional explicit 'contents' are removed from the equation, something very important is left, which is facilitative to the other person.

So, when I sit down with someone, I take my troubles and feelings and I put them over here, on one side, close, because I might need them. I

might want to go in there and see something. And I take all the things that I have learnt—client-centered therapy, reflection, focusing, Gestalt, psychoanalytic concepts and everything else (I wish I had even more)—and I put them over here, on my other side, close. Then I am just here, with my eyes, and there is this other being. If they happen to look into my eyes, they will see that I am just a shaky being. I have to tolerate that. They may not look. But if they do, they will see that. They will see the slightly shy, slightly withdrawing, insecure existence that I am, I have learnt that that is O.K. I do not need to be emotionally secure and firmly present. I just need to be present. There are no qualifications for the kind of person I must be. What is wanted for the big therapy process, the big development process is a person who will be present. And so I have gradually become convinced that even I can be that. (Gendlin, 1990 p.205)

In a sense the person centred emphasis on congruence is challenged by Gendlin, at least as it is often understood, i.e. as a chance for the therapist to express their *own* 'material'. There is a sense in which the 'realer' the therapist is, the better, but does this realness have to be expressed in 'content'? In a receptive, accepting, listening silence, each person has a presence which is very much their own. It is difficult to describe what it is that emanates from the person, but it is just as complex, if not more so, than what the person emanates when expressing a particular opinion or emotion. It is hard to pin down, precisely because there is so much of it, it is the implicit, the 'more' of the person. All the interactions, processes and events that have made us how and who we are can be sensed, and better sensed, when we are not strongly expressing or identifying with any 'thing'. When we are this 'shaky being' kind of present, could it be called a state of 'no-self'?

In focusing, the fewer judgements and interpretations the listener makes, the more effective the 'presence' ingredient appears to be. Weiser Cornell, the focusing teacher and theorist, identifies presence as the crucial factor in 'the radical acceptance of everything' she sees as the most important factor in healing (Weiser

Cornell and McGavin, 2005). She defines presence as a certain element of ourselves which accepts all the other elements, no matter how destructive they might be. While presence is typically experienced as something warm and tangible, it is also an *absence* of explicit manifestations of personality. It has no features other than acceptingness. This is often (not always) the case in therapy, maybe particularly with clients who have 'fragile process' (Warner, 2008 p.11-16), as neatly encapsulated by Judy Moore when she writes of a particularly vulnerable client experiencing 'the trustworthiness of the place where, according to my notes, 'she doesn't know who she is or who I am.' (Moore, 2004, p.124)

On the absolute level, the concept of presence is used by some Buddhist teachers interchangeably with emptiness. Meditation on the absolute, in Dzogchen practices, is simply called 'being in presence' (Rinpoche Latri Nyima Dakpa, 2014). This is the only aim and the only way. And it is here already – we are already present – so it is also no aim at all. The concept of emptiness does not have, in the Buddhist context, automatic associations with the absence of things. It is more of a field of potentialities, empty only of specific fixed essences. These never existed anyway – so the absence of imaginary restrictions makes for more of a sense of presence and freedom.

The Japanese Zen masters in Pawle's study, who professed to be living their experience of no-self on an everyday basis, remained very distinct individuals (Pawle, R 2009). Even when people 'get out of their own way' day in day out, they remain idiosyncratic, very much 'themselves'. Everything that is implicit in their being, from genetics to communication styles and personal preferences, continues to function.

There is no necessary contradiction here. If the ever-changing 'material' of life is the interplay of emptiness/form, then we are the complex intersections of these processes. These intersections are very specific, in fact unique. We only pay specific attention to what we might be 'made of' or how it all works, when there are

blockages, problems or suffering (there is no shortage of opportunities!), and in those moments when we break through discomfort and shift forward.

These are moments of 'carrying forward', and in them there is a temporary break in content. There is the possibility of this kind of 'carrying forward' happening all the time, as in the experience of Zen masters, and there is also the possibility of intentionally making a break in our personal content in order to meet with another person not as a firm Presence but just as a shaky person, present. This takes more courage and skill than Gendlin's humble words admit.

## **2) NO-SELF CARRYING FORWARD**

How does the association of 'carrying forward' with breaks in content work? Firstly, how is it that we come to believe that we have contents, inside? As examined in previous chapters, we are certainly heavily supported in thinking so by cultural and linguistic patterns and pressures.

The original Buddhist analysis, from a different time, place, and culture, however, still seems a sound one – the illusion of having separate contents inside us starts with our first act of boundary-making. The drawing of the basic line between me and not-me, or what concerns me and what doesn't, simultaneously creates a pair of opposites, which are inseparable from each other, and a line of possible conflict. A convex line creates a concave line and vice versa, it can't be otherwise. This point is made by Flemons, drawing on Taoism and Bateson, with an emphasis on the fact that a boundary line creates both separation and connection (Flemons, 1991). The boundary of self that we draw, however tightly or loosely we draw it, makes everything else 'not-me'.

As we pay attention to this boundary-making activity, whether intersubjectively through therapy or alone in mindfulness practice, we realise that a boundary is not a thing that exists apart from our creation of it. And as we 'see through' it, the very

real function it performed disappears. Experience becomes without boundary, and therefore timeless, until we start to construct one again. This is, I think, how we can appear to have 'moments' of no-self when a process is shifting and carrying forward. It is not that our self disappears, or that we discover a different layer of reality and then forget it, it is simply that we stop our activity of difference-making for a moment, only to resume it pretty quickly. As we are generally busy, from birth until death, constructing different boundaries between ourselves and others, thoughts and feelings, up and down, right and wrong, etc., it is little wonder that the 'felt shift' moment Gendlin describes, in which we sense a 'life-forward direction' without making any distinctions, is typically accompanied by a sigh, a release of tension, a sense of relief.

The felt shift is a moment in which boundary-making activity ceases. Being aware of boundary-making activity is not part of the focusing 'procedure', but the experience of focusing is a spontaneous, human one, as well as a skill whose aspects have been isolated and operationalised in order to facilitate the process for others. The moment of ceasing to make a boundary, when 'right action' comes about, and we shift and move forwards, typically arises *after* the conscious making of a boundary between me and the felt sense, or 'what it is in me that...'. Identifying a felt sense is a kind of disidentification and carrying forward is a further unhooking from the felt sense we were concentrating on a second ago. This is a process of dismantling ourselves as we previously thought we were (made up of a mass of contradictions, feelings, 'inner objects'), leaving a more spacious sense of presence, which first 'holds it all' and then lets go as it all changes (as everything will, if we do not strive to keep up the illusion of holding things still).

We can talk around the felt shift moment, but it is indescribable. It could be pointed to in Zen terms, as a moment of 'just this'.

### 3) RELEVANCY – CHECKING

Buddha exhorted his followers to check everything he said for themselves. Buddhist ethics are based on a kind of internal checking. How else would we know what 'right speech, right action' etc are? The rightness here is not primarily a question of social norms. During a teaching on reincarnation by Rinpoche Latri Nyima Dakpa (Rinpoche Latri Nyima Dakpa, 2014), Rinpoche was very careful to distinguish between the conceptual question, 'why do you believe in rebirth' and the question he wanted us to answer, 'what it is in you which makes you believe in rebirth?' This is a focusing question. Faith is good, analysis is good, but it must all be checked with your own experience.

This 'checking' is not a question of pulling correct information out of a repository in our true selves, or our bodies, in either Buddhist or focusing models, precisely because of, respectively, the absolute level of reality and the implicit intricacy in which we live. There can be no one, separate place for such information to reside.

Gendlin's model is body-based. The point of direct reference against which any theory or possible action can be checked can usually be bodily sensed, and that is so because patterns of language, behaviour, thoughts and situations are not learned then 'stuck on' to the physical matter of the body, but already patterned in it, just as birds know how to build nests whether they have seen another bird do so or not. These patterns are not 'within' the separate arena of the 'skin envelope' body, but conceptually separable parts of the patterns created by body and environment together. With our lungs we inherit all the actions connected with breathing, and they are quite different depending on whether we are high up a mountain or underwater, relaxed or panicking, etc.

The primacy of inter-relation is equally present in Buddhism (the 'already patterned' behaviour of animals and people is given as evidence for rebirth) but the body as 'base' is not. This 'checking' the rightness of an action specifically with our bodies

would be to regard the body as the last remnant of 'self-ness', as an essentially true, permanent, reliable element which could give us the illusion of security. Hence the body cannot be ruled out of the equation, but neither can it be privileged.

So how do we check, what do we check with? Buddha encouraged followers to check with the results of the practice, placing less emphasis on sensations or signals. The proposed meditation practices are, like focusing, intentionally chosen modes of *attending*. When the self-system drops away, is 'seen through' or ceases to be felt as a constraint, constantly arising senses of newness appear. We are not aware of *everything* in an undifferentiated mass – as some fear may come about during meditation – we do not become 'nothing', either, but a channel in which 'everything' happens. We are always aware of what is *relevant*. This could not be same for any two people. Meditation, and therapy, may be processes of becoming conscious of each new relevancy as it arises.

## CONCLUSION

There seems to be something, not a dependable or rigid system to be referred back to, but a kind of responsive, intimate space or a way of being produced by these ways of attending. We might call it 'me', or we might not. Within this space, different 'somethings' arise. These somethings could also be called parts, but this seems unnecessarily mechanistic. 'Somethings' can be any transitory events that arise, within or outside the skin envelope.

In the West people are accustomed to think in units and nouns, and to attribute causality to individuals. 'There is a boy over there' is an acceptable sentence; it is optional information whether he is running, or sitting. But one would not easily accept the sentence 'There is a running over there,' adding only later that the running is a boy. (Gendlin, 1997a Chapter IV, d-2)

It is a conceptual stretch for people in the West, but the running over there may arise in our field of vision precisely as a running, it may not be relevant to us that it is a boy. If we were able to accept everything we experience within this loose kind of space, sometimes with close boundaries and sometimes widening to include many runnings and interactions, this would indeed be radical, we would not be unseated, or feel that all-pervasive lack, or *dukkha*, that drives people to search for 'self' in therapy or for 'loss of self' in spiritual practice.

While lack drives us to search for what is missing, the 'answer' – that is, how to live without a sense of lack - lies in finding a way of attending to/relating with what is already here.

In spiritual practice, this usually means setting up particular conditions, such as sitting meditation. In focusing it means paying a special kind of inner attention. Mindfulness may be a spiritual practice or a way to deal with anxiety on the therapeutic level.

You could say that the therapist's role is simply to be mindful with the client – in line with a long tradition from Freud's endorsement of 'evenly suspended attention' to the person centred approach today, which relies on the kind of presence discussed above to provide the right conditions for growth to occur (although it confuses them somewhat with the 'achievement' of particular qualities in the therapist). Conditions for 'the carrying forward moment' may be set up, although processes also carry forward without our intention, just as flashes of awakening can happen spontaneously without spiritual training or practice of any kind. It is important to make clear the distinction between the act which *facilitates* carrying forward, and the carrying forward itself, which is effortless.

Helpful conditions may also be set up following a 'no-self' strategy, as in early analytical Buddhism. The specific practice of dis-identification ('I am not these eyes, these thoughts...' etc), however far it is intended to go (in therapy it might be a case of dis-identifying with a self-image, in meditation it may go as far as your body and



'soul'), leads almost invariably to a kind of movement or change which 'just happens', often to a sense of presence – 'that which is left', and sometimes to a sense of participation in the movements of the world with no sense of separateness at all. In the case of 'inhibition' in the Alexander technique, disidentification with an action takes place at the same time as actually performing the action (Vineyard, 2007). This is maybe not so different from disidentifying with your thoughts while thinking, your eyes while seeing, or your feelings while feeling. Our being is always a doing of many processes at the same time.

As dis-identification with what we take to be ourselves in Buddhist practice leads to liberating insight, in therapy dis-identification with a problem may be empowering, in the sense that you are separate and bigger than the problem. Presence may be even more deeply empowering, in the sense that as you encompass and accept the problem, it changes, and finally with non-duality, there is nowhere for the 'problem' to hook on to, nowhere for it to be.

## CHAPTER FIVE – COMPARING GOALS –THERAPY AND BUDDHISM

**I have sometimes said that the common goal of Zen and psychoanalytic practice is *putting an end to the pursuit of happiness* [...] Awakening from a dream of isolation, we return in laughter and tears to the one real world we have been part of all along. (Magid, 2003 p.87)**

**Apart from all religious considerations, there is actually and literally more life in our total soul than we are at any time aware of. (James, 1902 p.661)**

Buddhism and therapy (in all their respective schools, to differing extents) share a certain ambiguity about goals, both about defining them and about having them at all, as evidenced by the Magid quote above. While some schools/techniques are aimed towards the direct relief of certain problems (e.g. CBT for panic attacks or OCD, some Buddhist practices towards the attainment of particular states of mental absorption), Zen and psychoanalysis provide striking examples, within their respective disciplines, of approaches which purposefully do *not* follow a path to a goal, making a home instead in uncertainty, ambiguity and an open-ended process of discovery. Zen and psychoanalysis work from the belief that making an activity goal-directed, limiting it to what fits inside a pre-defined concept, fatally undermines the integrity of the activity itself, the integrity in which the goal (say, happiness) actually lies.

The goal, however, sneaks in through the back door. It is clearly not the case that anyone is paying for therapy or sitting on a meditation cushion for hours on end with no trace of desire to improve their lives. However this 'hidden goal', which exists to different extents for different people, does not undermine either Zen Buddhism or the psychotherapeutic method in their belief that 'returning in laughter and tears to the one real world' with clear awareness is what is required – and this cannot, by definition, be done by getting entangled in more of the concepts

which created the problem, the 'dream of isolation,' in the first place.

The underlying goals of Buddhism and therapy, irrespective of the degree to which they are explicit, differ both in degree and in kind. While the goal of Mahayanan Buddhist practice is to ensure awakening and liberation from suffering for all, therapy has the more modest aim of restoring full functioning, relief from psychological pain, and attaining a state of well-being for the individual in everyday life. These goals could be conceptualised as endpoints of the same process taking place differently on the absolute and the relative level. But there is also a difference in kind – the Buddhist project is fundamentally an ethical and altruistic one, in goals as well as practice.

## **SECTION ONE – THE ETHICAL DIMENSION**

As discussed in Chapter Four, there is a tendency in contemporary western societies to ignore the ethical dimensions of both Buddhism and therapy. This tendency may lie behind the commonly proclaimed belief that Buddhism is a philosophy not a religion. This may be a consequence of the fact that more information is available about meditation practices, than the faith-based and devotional practices (e.g. prayer and chanting) which are very common in the cultures where Buddhism is traditionally practiced. Brazier argues that the secularisation of Buddhism is a harmful development, a kind of western colonisation driven by scientism that snaps Buddhism off from its religious roots (Brazier, 2014). The information available is selectively absorbed, according to western cultural values, and there is a general ignorance of the ethical precepts (*sila*) which underlie *all* Buddhist practices, including Zen meditation and mindfulness. Those practices which seem 'beyond' right and wrong actually have ethics soaked into them, thoroughly implicit.

There is also an attraction for westerners in what seems like an individual approach to ethics, as opposed to obedience to authorities or external rules imbued with authority. The 'obedience pattern' identified by Gendlin (Gendlin, 1984) is

understood by many to be inefficient. As Gendlin outlines, social obedience may lead people to submit their will to those who represent certain ideals, but it is not the ideals which determine the outcome, be it social change or stability. What leads to the outcome is rather the power relations within the hierarchical organisations themselves. When this power structure of authorities and followers concerns technical matters, it need not cause difficulty, but when it encroaches on ethical or spiritual domains, there is a clear conflict. Gendlin goes on to identify another type of obedience – following the steps of an inwardly arising process. Spiritual guides, and also psychotherapists, have the job of facilitating exactly this process. Taking these people to be external guides or authorities on the process leads to its being stifled at the outset. This point may be grasped simplistically, leading to a knee-jerk reaction against any forms of authority or codified ethics and rules, and a glorifying of the personal and individual.

Engler makes the related point that westerners engaging in Buddhist practice often do so in order to prop up or enhance their neurotic patterns, rather than from altruistic motivations or to let go of ego. The pursuit of 'enlightenment' can be used in the interests of ego maintenance in the following main ways: a quest for perfection and invulnerability, a fear of individuation, avoidance of responsibility and accountability, fear of intimacy and closeness, a substitute for grief and mourning, avoidance of feelings, passivity and dependence, self-punitive guilt, devaluing of reasoning and intellect, and escape from intrapsychic experience (Engler, 2003 p.49-50). In short, enlightenment can let us off the hook of messy human emotions and needs – or at least enable us to think we have bypassed the hook.

In his seminal work, 'Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism' (Trungpa, 1973), Trungpa elucidates how practices intended to destroy the illusion of a separate self can be used to shore up the ego, making the practitioner seem special. Epstein also lists traps that westerners fall into, e.g. glorifying a concept of emptiness understood in a variety of mistaken ways, all which tend to intensify feelings of isolation, rather than interconnectedness. (Epstein, 1989)

The first 'wave' of Buddhist teachers from eastern cultures were often frankly mystified by these neurotic problems. Burma's renowned Vipassana meditation master, Mahasi Sayadaw, after a visit to America in 1980 remarked on 'a new type of suffering – psychological suffering!' (Engler, 2003 p.45). 'Going into' psychological problems is explicitly discouraged in meditation practice. The Dalai Lama was also famously confused by the concept of self-esteem. In Zen such problems when they arise in meditation are known as 'makyo' – harmful illusions, on no account to be taken seriously. There are elements of culture clash here, and a lack of fundamental grounding among the western students.

Buddhist practitioners in western culture who are eager to be exceptions to the rule of suffering thus may be attracted to advanced practices aimed at the realisation of absolute reality, rather than their traditional, religious base – which lays the groundwork for healthy frames of mind, and the creation of life conditions which do not perpetuate suffering. This ignorance of context and basic psychological grounding may lead to a belief that 'seeing how things really are' is all that is required in order to achieve an ultimate goal which, once stripped of all ethical dimensions, could simply boil down to feeling good. Sharing this feeling with others would be merely a kind of desirable side-effect.

This kind of view misses the point of spiritual practice completely. Engler and Epstein both recommend that western practitioners use therapy to manage the relational problems that might have driven them to spiritual practice, or that have become become apparent during meditation. Trungpa also devised various forms of therapy. (Trungpa, 2005)

The practice of becoming a therapist could be seen in an analogous way, firstly as an examination of the neurotic self, in training, then learning to function without it in order to be helpful to others. As previously mentioned, Brazier points out that the maintenance of an altruistic state is the main gift of therapy, and it is a shame that it is only the therapist who practices this (Brazier, 1993). Maybe this state is

what the client is after, too, it just has not been conceptualised this way either by the client or by the therapy project itself.

But does therapy, even when conceptualised as an altruistic state, carry ethical dangers corresponding to those provoked by the misuse of spiritual practice? The psychotherapeutic project is also based on ethics, which tend to be overlooked in public perception of the endeavour. In fact, explicit, tight boundaries based on respect, commitment, transparency and non-personal involvement on the part of the therapist are the foundation that enables the whole therapeutic process to work, distinguishing it from a close, one-sided friendship, or indeed a parasitical relationship in which one person offloads on another. Ethics tend only to be noticed when they are breached. The ethics of both meditation and therapy are directed by guiding principles, lending them extra strength if they are actually followed, because they apply at every single moment, not just when approaching the possible breach of a rule.

In therapy, ethics provide a foundation, yet not a goal. People do not generally enter therapy in order to become better people, and a therapist would not be considered qualified to guide them if they did. Clients tend to aspire to be happier, well-functioning people. This is probably, as previously discussed, the main motivation for many spiritual seekers too. We all seek to avoid suffering. The specific goals of individuals entering therapy vary widely, though, which is not considered any kind of conceptual problem in the therapy world – the helping relationship or therapeutic process is believed to work for whatever problem an individual might bring. The western cultures in which therapy thrives best, however, do have 'the pursuit of happiness' built into them.

The ethical dangers here seem to revolve around the issue of whether what feels good, what makes you happy, is automatically right. It seems plausible that anything at all that feels good and makes someone happy might be pursued and encouraged by therapy, even if it is clearly detrimental to others, and there are no explicit safeguards against this possibility. Therapy seeks to facilitate individuals'

flourishing and values their authenticity over acting according to conditions of worth, or imposed social or conceptual forms. Is there a danger that 'it feels right' may come to be the sole criterion of the rightness of an action? As Gendlin points out, an emphasis on authenticity easily leads to moral relativism – after all, anything might be authentic to somebody (Gendlin 1986b p.265). Gendlin shifts the criterion for the 'rightness' of a decision to the use of a particular kind of process in its making. It could be argued that this process also conflates notions of naturalness and goodness, yet the point is that this process could not be used to justify just anything.

Gendlin examines how the process of making a 'right' decision in our lives might work, how to recognise and facilitate it. The process is basically the focusing process, described in the context of making sound decisions (Gendlin, 1984, Gendlin, 1986). The main point is not to simply obey a social, cultural or religious pattern or our own 'inner authoritarian' (Gendlin, 1984, p.194), which corresponds to the Freudian super-ego. Submitting blindly to the authority of any other, be it a destructive 'inner critic' or the highest spiritual authority, is potentially dangerous, as it cuts us off from the criteria of rightness, our own implicit knowledge. There is also the danger of 'inner limpness' (Gendlin, 1984, p.194) arising from the way that contemporary people may use the kind of detachment encouraged by spiritual practices developed in times/cultures in which people tended to have a strongly grounded 'ego', or presence in everyday life. Gendlin, similarly to Engler and Epstein, argues that in our times people may be lacking this foundation, and hence their use of spiritual practices or theories may destabilise rather than enlighten. This kind of use of detachment, he argues, keeps us small and undeveloped, less, rather than more engaged, and the kind of life energy we experience is a sure sign of this. A sense of 'limpness' is a sign of falling out of contact with available resources, bodily, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and interactionally. The focusing steps crucially keep us in touch both with the 'I' who listens and the 'what comes' (which could be called the spiritual, the beyond personal, beyond intentional) (Gendlin, 1984, p.196). Neither side should be let go of.

So it is the dialogue, zig-zagging or listening and responding motion between 'I' and 'what comes' that characterises a trustworthy process. Width and depth are no guarantees of a right result. Taking every single relevant factor into account when making a decision is no guarantee of the rightness of the outcome, neither is plunging to the very depths of the situation, or the amount of time spent on making a decision. What delineates 'the kind of decision-making process we respect' (Gendlin 1986b p.267) is the way it proceeds in steps, in a dialogue which does not consist of rearranging static ideas or points but generates *new* facts – not to be confused with bringing to light previously ignored or unseen ones.

So the aim is not to discover the truth of a situation and therefore what the right thing to do in it must be, but to generate 'more' from it. To do this, we need a kind of process that is responsive, that checks back with the facts and also changes them. If the situation is not changing as we go, we are just rearranging concepts.

It is the felt sense of the situation which guides us, and it does so through senses of carrying forward such as what 'moves, opens, releases' (Gendlin 1986b p.269). These steps, which often occur in effective therapy, keep us engaged with the responsive order, which includes and is more than the forms which we conventionally use for ethical navigation. But it still seems unclear why this should lead to the right outcome rather than, say, a more creative one, or one which is in perfect accord with a set of possibly twisted values. How does the sense of rightness that comes from the process of engaging with felt meanings differ from the conventional sense of feeling good about something? A key difference seems to be the active engagement of the relational dimension. This does not necessarily happen, but can happen in psychotherapy:

From its process-characteristics one can derive the ancient virtues. The process is a deeper honesty than the usual kind. One soon prefers the sincerity of living from that process. One senses one's care and need for other people. But the process functions more intricately than the abstractions in which these virtues have been conceptualized. The



human being lives with others, and body-life implies them. Isolation, withdrawal, missing the fullness of other humans feels bad, stifling, thin, dull, weak, and avoidant. Exploitative patterns can feel like that too; there is no company from the other person, only a stand-in for the patterns of one's autism. One may sense one's fear behind the macho poses. One also comes upon denials of oneself. Hiding feels false. One senses the cowering that avoids confronting the other. It is lonely. The other is cheated as well. (Gendlin 1986b p.271)

So it appears that our ethical guidance system is closely connected to a sense of authenticity, a deep sense of wellbeing and a living connection to others. It always feels 'better', fuller, to do the right thing – but not in a superficial way. Holding to the steps of a truly authentic responsive process is the only reliable way of distinguishing the superficial way from a trustworthy one.

When we do not use this responsive process, we may start to find advantages in our 'bad, stifling, thin, dull, weak, and avoidant' experiencing of the world. Exploitative patterns don't feel bad to those who have never used the process of checking in with their feelings. There is a certain kind of satisfaction and excitement to be gained from exploiting others, if we never 'look' in the direction of our whole feeling-experiencing process. For those who are in touch with their whole feeling-experience process as a matter of course, this may seem incomprehensible. A common mistake made by people in exploitative relationships is to persistently attempt to make the exploiter understand, holding to the belief that if only the other person understood, then they would not do the bad things. But intellectual understanding is powerless to effect change towards more ethical behaviours. Adding on the dimension of emotional understanding does not help either. The kind of responsive checking process itself, moving between thoughts and feelings and drawing on vast, implicit resources and inter-connections, is what makes insights and change possible. And it is entirely possible that someone chooses never to try this.

Ethics must involve both inclination and concepts. Neither can simply

impose itself on the other. A finer cognition feeds back from the body's implicit order in process steps. But a vital role is played by conceptual cognition (as the ethics of equality did in our excerpt). The body is not chaos with merely imposed form. Neither is it all-wise so that we would not need to think. Both are needed to see and change unconscious oppressive forms. That is one reason we cannot be sure that this process will overthrow every unconscious oppressive form, or arrangement of life. (Gendlin 1986b p.275)

Hence there are no guarantees, neither therapeutic nor spiritual practices are strategies that 'work' for everyone, always. They both rely on the kind of engagement the person has with each process. If someone does not engage their felt-meanings, their direct, full experience, then they will be able to use the knowledge gained from therapy or spiritual texts to completely different ends from those intended.

The lesson for therapists seems to be that therapy will effectively promote ethical behaviour to the extent that it introduces or further facilitates the responsive process in the client. Responsive here is understood as being in touch with the responsive, implicit order, not just our own personal responses. It is not, either, putting aside our will in order to follow a single, wise voice inside, the voice of God, or of conscience, although such mystical/religious experiences may seem to be treading on similar territory. The implicit order which comes forward when we listen contains so much more than any one voice of wisdom – more than can be said. It therefore works as a criteria for the rightness of a step in a whole situation, maybe in the form of a kind of inner voice arising, but usually not. There is not necessarily a sense of obeying, but rather a sense of rightness that makes the next step inevitable, or of simply following the steps as they appear. To fulfill the criteria of the process, the sense of rightness must arise along with a sense of changes in the situation – in contrast with the sense of rightness that happens when one thing fits another. We may behave in a way which accords with a moral code and that is the end of it. It may be the right thing to do or it

may be the wrong thing in this unique moment/situation. If we do not listen to the 'more' of the moment then we might get it right or wrong, but we are definitely not following the ethical process according to Gendlin.

If this responsive step-by-step process is not used, there is a danger that unethical behaviour will be encouraged in therapy. It may feel good to the client according to their curtailed form of experience, taking into account only what suits their narrow interests – listening to the less rather than the more. Safeguards cannot be conceptual alone, and feeling criteria cannot stand alone either, it is the quality of the interplay between them and the form of attention used that create the new right course of action.

As in Buddhist practice we may start by deciding to follow the precepts not to harm others, only to find that not harming others becomes instinctually obvious once we have realised that there is no essential difference between self and other, in therapy learning to stay in touch with the direct experiencing of relationships and felt meanings which are interactive by nature, entails the discovery that hurting others hurts us too.

Once the process is entered into, there is indeed a trust that the 'forward' direction, of 'fresh air' is necessarily a positive one, which might be seen as naive, a matter of blind faith and/or wishful thinking on the part of therapists/theorists. It may also seem somewhat facile to state that if it isn't working, that means you aren't doing it properly – but in this case I think the statement is not an avoidance of responsibility on the part of therapists (who cannot control the clients' process in any case) but is actually true. If you are merely following hedonic feelings and/or credible thoughts, you might call whatever you like growth, but, while there is no logical reason why it should always be the case, it is often and consistently the case that checking in with the whole felt process in steps complicates those initially simple good feelings and leads to new outcomes which do not move in the direction of harm.

Whether therapy leads to 'good' outcomes is also dependent on the will of the people involved – people must make the choice to be open to using the process that is shown or facilitated, and there is no inevitability about them

doing so, and no way of manipulating them into doing so (even if that were an ethical option!). Both therapy and meditative practices can offer tools, spaces, and support but no-one can take a decision for you. It is also the case that people sense that entering the process is different, new, destabilising to conventional certainties, and they may demand explicit guidance and rules to obey from the spiritual teacher or therapist. They may want to be obedient to an expert, because this is a role which feels familiar, safe and trustworthy. It may be that a step towards inner openness is taken which brings anxiety, fear of the unknown, uncomfortable feelings, and the person decides they do not want to be guided further along with the process. In meditation difficult feelings quickly arise when we sit with our own minds for the first time, and in therapy too feelings which have been studiously avoided, will be felt. Usually the responsive process lends a sense of relief and rightness that co-exists with the strong, uncomfortable experiences, but a person may always choose to retreat. It is simply not the case that the process always feels so good that people want to stay with it. Therapists often encounter clients who want to be told what to do by someone wiser, and therapists may withhold information they could share with the client in an attempt to prevent an obedience pattern developing. Unfortunately this in itself does not ensure the development of a responsive process, either.

Once someone's responsive process is fully engaged, however (and this can be the case quite naturally, without training or facilitation) it is not possible for spiritual or therapeutic practices to work in an anti-ethical fashion, even if a therapist, say, were to have manipulative intent. Therapists or spiritual teachers with unethical motives will swiftly be sensed, and that knowledge will be undeniable.

The goal of both therapy and spiritual practice for westerners, then, seems to be something like the realisation of a liberating truth, something which both feels and *is* right, which cannot be found in the external rules previously tried, so may become conceptualised as a 'truth within'. I argue that the way Buddhism and therapy function as concepts in western culture often does a disservice to the actual

practices themselves as well as to the people who come to them with a desire to 'live better'.

## **SECTION TWO – AN OVERVIEW OF THE THREE TURNINGS IN BUDDHISM AS THEY RELATE TO PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Despite these internal debates and public perceptions, however, it would be disingenuous not to conclude that Buddhism and therapy share one basic, common aim – the relief of suffering. The diagnosis of the cause of suffering goes on to direct the cure. It could be argued, as did William James, that all religions, in fact the general human impulse towards religion (which may well now be satisfied for many in therapy), have a common cause:

1. An uneasiness; and
2. Its solution.
  1. The uneasiness, reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand.
  2. The solution is a sense that we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers. (James, 1902 p.657)

In the Four Noble Truths, Buddha defined the causes of suffering in a similarly direct way:

- **The truth of dukkha** – the constant presence of suffering/stress/not-quite-rightness/disturbance/there always being something wrong
- **The truth of the origin of dukkha** – craving/passion, aversion/hatred and confusion/ignorance of the way things really are
- **The truth of the cessation of dukkha** – liberation from suffering/stress is possible
- **The truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha** – the practice of ethics, insight/wisdom and compassion

If we put these truths into the 'language' of person centred therapy we might get:

- **The truth of incongruence** – something about our experience is not fitting/not right
- **The origin of incongruence** – acting in order to gain love/approval, acting out of fear/trauma, or ignorance of the way things really are in our situation
- **The cessation of incongruence** – it is possible to live without that constant sense of not-rightness, without distorting our own experience in attempts to either gain love or escape fear
- **The path leading to the cessation of incongruence** – insight into our situation through therapy and the qualities of the therapeutic relationship.

We could go further and say that the problem is not incongruence as such but the very fact that experience is conceptually divided into two separate things that are supposed to match each other – hence 'the truth of duality', the possibility of its cessation and a path towards non-duality. This takes us beyond the remit of therapy, but it may well be implicit in the cessation of incongruence.

The concept of incongruence in person centred therapy is actually fairly close to the diagnosis of suffering in traditional psychoanalysis – it could be said to originate in a distorted form of experience. According to traditional psychoanalysis, the third truth would not apply – there can't be a total cessation of suffering, just a way of working within the unsatisfactory conditions of life so we are able to function, love and work, in a state of what Freud called 'ordinary unhappiness' rather than blocked neurosis.

Rogers held a similar view, but with a more optimistic feel to it. While Freud proposed that therapy could rid us of neurotic suffering, Rogers proposed that the suffering of incongruence could cease. In both cases we are left with the normal suffering of life (sickness, old age and death, as Buddhism lists them). However, while according to Freud we are left in a state of 'ordinary unhappiness,' according

to Rogers, as our incongruence gives way to a natural way of being, as we start to relate directly to the environment, life automatically takes on the characteristics of ease and flow (Rogers, 1980). According to Rogers, the fully functioning person displays a growing openness to experience and lack of defensiveness, an ability to be in the moment, an increasing trust in their own organism, a sense of freedom of choice, creativity, constructiveness and a full, rich life (Rogers, 1961 p.183). All these new qualities and experiences in life are based on freedom from compulsively structure-bound, character-driven behaviour. We do not have to be the way that a fixed concept of ourselves or of the situation demands, but can react directly to events as they arise.

In an analogous fashion to the development of therapy concepts – from the Freudian striving of a person driven largely by negative drives towards common unhappiness, to humanistic therapy in which a basically good human nature is twisted out of shape by our own incongruence, yet can be regained, the three main Buddhist schools develop from a Theraveda (first turning) view in which the best that can be done with life is to see through our illusions and escape from the cycle of rebirth, to the Mahayana (second turning) view, according to which everything has buddhanature and is basically good, while the Vajrayana undoes duality entirely to leave reality as it is – raw, unconstructed, vivid, luminous and clear. The third turning of the wheel enables us to hold this unconstructed level along with the constructions that make up our everyday lives without strain. This last turn of the wheel takes us out of the conceptual structure of therapy – but if reality is as it is, then, just as third-turning Vajrayana is not an alternative to but based on and infused with first-turning Hinayana, so therapy is a practice that will inevitably sometimes lead to an explicit insight into non-duality, and will always be bound up with it.

You could say that there have been three turnings of the therapy wheel too. Firstly, psychoanalysis listed the factors it saw as inevitably causing suffering, starting with the fact that we are composed of violently contradictory drives, the basic ones which need controlling by the higher ones, then proposed management and escape strategies, through therapy practices based on analysis and insight.

The second turning of the wheel consisted of humanistic therapies which defined the problem differently – as some blockage or twisting of the basic goodness of our nature, then pointed out the insufficiency of management strategies and proposed that the therapeutic relationship (compassion and ethics) is the major factor in healing.

The third turning of the wheel consists of intersubjective, dialogical, experiential, narrative and focusing approaches, looking beyond the model of the incongruence/congruence of the self to the basic non-duality of situations and self, both occurring as a multiplicity and intricacy of processes. Within this understanding, relationship factors and many other creative/insight strategies can all work to create a situation in which clients can carry their lives forward. This carrying forward was also a part of the previous 'turn', in Rogers' notion of full functioning.

A client may also use therapy in an analogous three ways:

In the 'first turning', a client may aim to attain better functioning, or relief from specific symptoms, e.g. panic attacks, without disturbing his or her life or self-concept too much, and may indeed 'escape' the particular form of samsara he or she has constructed. This may be done through a therapist teaching them techniques to manage their distress and improve their lives, or just by a therapist providing a confidential, non-judgmental space.

In the second turning, a client may aim at the healing of deep emotional wounds through their relationship with the therapist, or be interested in self development, in discovering 'who they really are', or who they have the potential to be, through new emotional and mental experiences in therapy.

Finally, a client may be open to a radical change in the way they live, to something unexpected, unpredictable, and new. This finding of radical new possibilities within distress, is a third turning of the wheel.



Of course the three turnings incorporate and interact with each other. They are implicit in each other. So a client coming for simple 'first turning' symptom relief, might find their reality spontaneously expanded, as in the third turning, because they suddenly grasp the new possibilities implicit in the analysis of their symptoms. Likewise, someone who is intellectually fascinated by the possibilities of the third turning may be unable to make use of it and experience therapy only on the first 'level'. In a sense all the turnings are taking place at the same time. Without the relationship level of the second turning, there is not likely to be any therapeutic movement at all. Relationship factors have been quite reliably shown to be the most significant factors in therapy effectiveness, cutting across therapeutic orientations and techniques. (Duncan et al., 2010)

## **SECTION THREE – GOALS IN HUMANISTIC THERAPY**

While in a sense Buddhism and psychoanalysis both aim for insight rather than happiness, the primary goal of the majority of clients turning up for therapy, and maybe also the majority of people from western cultures investigating Buddhism, is attaining a state of well-being, and, as investigated in Chapter Four, a sense of moving forward, not being stuck. This sense of movement and well-being contains some consistent aspects:

### **1. Congruence**

Rogers defines the essential problem which brings people to therapy as a lack of thinking/feeling/acting in sync with their actual experience. Hence ceasing to distort experience and attaining a congruent state of being will cut the problem at the root. Congruence is a state characterised by lack of anxiety, in which we interpret events accurately and respond accordingly. We are not pretending, either to ourselves through selective attention, or to others. This corresponds to 'Self as Sense of Matching', one of the categories of senses of self identified in Chapter Three. This is

a kind of 'being yourself' which means that there is no uncomfortable mismatch between what you do and say, think and do, feel and think or any of the other myriad possibilities for incongruence.

## **2. Balance**

Gestalt places emphasis on a dynamic balancing of various drives, parts, and needs, one of which is in the foreground at any given moment. '[...] the organism always works as a whole... [...] we are not a summation of parts, but a coordination – a very subtle coordination of all these different bits that go into the making of the organism [...] Health is an appropriate balance of the coordination of all of what we are' (Perls, 1969 p.5-6). Balance is seen as a sign of maturity and a goal to be attained in general in western culture (e.g. the 'work-life balance' springs to mind). This is somewhat linked to 'Self as Goal,' as identified in Chapter Three, not so much a hidden treasure, but an end product, an attainment, completed and perfect. In Gestalt, however, it is important to remember that an 'appropriate balance' means appropriate to varied and changing situations. For example, if we are attacked, our normal resting state of balance is not appropriate, so our sense of balance shifts. The state of mobilisation retreats appropriately into the background again when the threat has passed.

## **3. Growth**

Every individual, every plant, every animal has only one inborn goal – to actualise itself as it is... A rose is not intent to actualize itself as a kangaroo.  
(Perls, 1969 p.31)

Perls speaks of a sense that growth is neither endless nor abstract – a sense of growing into one's nature. The process of growing up is a 'transcendence from environmental support to self-support' (Perls, 1969 p.28). Of course Perls was not suggesting that we can live without the support of the environment. We might

substitute the word 'support' with 'approval'. We come to no longer rely upon the conditional approval of others. We learn to use our own resources through a series of crises, each which takes us to a point Perls calls 'the impasse', in which there is a peak of frustration. Frustration peaks when the outside world refuses to give us exactly what we want and we cannot manipulate it into doing so.

Hence, 'the aim of therapy is to make the patient *not* depend on others, but to make the patient discover from the very first moment that he can do many things, *much* more than he thinks he can do' (Perls, 1969 p.29). This may sound like a glorification of the autonomous self, but it is really more of a dismantling of a sense of a glorified *other*, who is supposed to supply the deprived self with what it needs. Of course, no-one else can give us our own life energy. Whichever end of the self/other divide we dismantle, once we start mobilising our resources, then the actualisation of our potential has a natural result. Once we no longer need to disperse our energy into strategic manipulations, we are able to be fully present and act. Rogers paints a similar picture of a free flowing life, once someone stops twisting their experience through a self-concept. Self in the sense of a concept or structure is an impediment to growth, but when we are free of it, we may feel something of the 'Self as Awareness' identified in Chapter Three. There is a heightened sense of being alive, that may or may not be identified with self.

#### **4. Flow**

According to Rogers, the fully functioning person is characterised by flow, according to Perls he or she has 'no character'. This is associated with 'Self as Ease' from Chapter Three. There is no need to try, nothing need be forced or designed.

The development of 'character' comes about, according to Gestalt theory, when a child is not allowed to be in the impasse, is manipulated away from its own frustration by caregivers, stops mobilising its own resources to meet its needs, and starts to manipulate others instead, so *they* will meet those needs. This is how the 'ego-boundary' tightens until we have no energy or power left. We could go further

and say that the child's living, as a process intertwined with other processes, is disrupted by the placing of some of that experience into a unit model, the fundamental units being between 'me/my energy' and 'the other/their energy'. Some elements in the process are split into separate concepts and manipulated, as if the multiplicity of other processes and connections making up the situation did not exist. For example, a child might repeatedly be told, 'you are angry so you have to calm down' in a range of different situations, including, say, a situation in which in fact the child is responding to the parent's 'hidden' state of anger. The child continues to feel a natural response, but it is distorted within the situation. The necessity to stop or alter certain processes each time they arise, creates a specific structure of activity. Character-bound experiencing is inefficient, because oriented in two directions at once – inwards towards maintaining the integrity of character, the habitual structure of reactions, and only in a secondary sense outwards towards the actual situation.

Character is defined as:

a rigid system. Your behaviour becomes petrified, predictable, and you lose your ability to cope freely with the world with all of your resources. You are predetermined just to cope with events in one way, namely, as your character prescribes it to be. So it seems a paradox when I say that the richest person, the most productive, creative person, is a person who has *no* character. (Perls, 1969 p.7)

This concept of 'character' functions similarly to Rogers' 'self-concept' (Rogers 1951) and Gendlin's 'structure-bound' experiencing (Gendlin, 1964). Healing, growth and simply more efficient functioning in the world are to be found in release from rigid patterns of character, structure or self-concept. Rogers' self-concept is largely composed of patterns of perception and reaction, maintained through force of habit in order to keep the approval and support of others.

The fully functioning person, the person with no character and the person whose

experiencing is no longer structure-bound represent end-goals within humanistic therapy, and an experience of flow seems a particularly important element. Csikszentmihalyi, in his extensive cross-cultural research on human happiness, distinguished a state of flow which comes about when we 'lose ourselves' in an experience, as a main characteristic (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This flow state often occurs when people are very skilled at an activity, e.g. sport, or music. Athletes refer to being 'in the zone', musicians feel that the music is playing itself through them, whether or not it is improvised – this is a common experience which artists of all kinds have while creating.

The state of flow prized in western culture crosses with meditative states prized in eastern culture, and is epitomised by the Taoist notion of wu wei (Lao Tsu, 1972; Loy, 1985). Wu wei translates as non-doing, or non-action, a paradoxical state that may be easier to grasp as *effortless* action. It appears, within the Taoist context, as the natural state of doing and being. There is no reason to understand action as effort. The Tao, or Way, is the phenomenon of total naturalness, which cannot be expressed conceptually – as in the opening words of the Tao Te Ching, 'the Tao which can be spoken is not the true Tao.' (Lao Tsu 1972)

The Abhidharma has the term 'asankarika citta' or 'unmotivated action' for such spontaneously arising action, free of attachment to results, or indeed personality, simply happening in accord with the needs of the situation in that moment (Engler, 2003, p.71). From a western philosophical angle, this idea also appears occasionally, e.g. early Sartre posits an initial state of total, positive action prior to the construction of the ego: 'Transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity.' (Sartre, 1957 p.98)

De Prycker, in her investigation of the intersection between flow experiences and wu wei, points to the internal tensions in both notions (De Prycker, 2011). While both experiences have the phenomenological feel of skilful absorption, with no 'extra' layer of self-consciousness and no goal-orientation, they each seem to require specifically oriented conditions, e.g. for a state of flow to be experienced,

there needs to be a subjective judgement made that our skills match the task in hand, a sense of challenge, clear goals, immediate feedback and a sense of control (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 p.71). In the state of flow however there is no place for judgements, action is effortless and intrinsically rewarding, and there is no sense of control, or rather no sense of separation from the task into the person controlling it and the task itself – it feels as if it flows by itself (this might also be experienced as being *totally* in control).

These tensions, on closer examination, seem to have been created by imposed divisions. There is a persistent western picture of the person as a rational control centre, carrying out clear intentions, and the duality habit of thought then forces us to create another side – 'the rest of us', which acts irrationally and unconsciously, out of control. As De Prycker writes:

While control generally refers to a self-conscious awareness of control, flow exemplifies a type of nonself-conscious, though personal, control. This type of control falls outside the scope of classical dual-process models in which rational, conscious processes are distinguished from nonconscious automatic processes. (De Prycker, 2011)

The flow experience during skilled action, or indeed in any other area of life (according to Taoism it is the natural way in which to do anything and everything), is neither nonconscious nor automatic. Yet we do not feel 'out of control'. Indeed, the flow experience is typically described as involving a sense of control – 'or, more precisely, as lacking a sense of worry about losing control that is typical in many situations of normal life.' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 p.59)

Our anxiety about losing control may be intensified by an intuition that we never had the kind of 'executive control' that we are 'supposed to have' in the first place. We may fear that if we lose control we will regress to an 'irrational' animal-like state. Once more it is the dividing practices themselves that create anxiety. Gendlin points out the vital importance of 'distinguishing the person from 'being in control':

Of course it is an error to split mind and body, but this is controversial. It is a more immediate error to define control as marking 'the mind' as against the body. This is a pitfall in which the person drops out and one defines 'the conscious mind' as control, reducing the whole person to 'the body' considered only as the mutually independent components... (Gendlin, 2000 p.109)

Gendlin stresses that everyone is familiar with things, words, ways of acting, which 'just come', outside the sphere of control, ranging from the everyday (it is rare that we have an experience of speaking in which words do not 'just come') to the artistic. We let things happen, but we do not conceptualise things as happening in this way. Hence we may think we have anxiety about losing control and not saying something in the way that we mean it, when in fact the anxiety is caused by trying to enforce control over words, which are more likely to say what we mean when we just let them come. Maybe in wu-wei, where control is not felt to be an issue, we have simply dropped the conceptualisation of control. This does not mean we become incapable of concentrating, learning skills and acquiring knowledge, which will work implicitly when the performance of a symphony 'just comes'. We can learn, as we can do anything else, without putting in *extra* effort. This is well expressed by a Buddhist master explaining his experience of enlightenment:

Having realised that I am one with and yet beyond the world, I found myself free from all desire and fear. I did not reason out that I should be free – I found myself free – unexpectedly, without the least effort. This freedom from desire and fear has remained with me since then. Another thing I noticed was that I do not need to make an effort. The deed follows the thought without delay and friction. I have also found that thoughts became self-fulfilling; things would fall into place smoothly and rightly. The main change was in the mind. It became motionless and silent, responding quickly but not perpetuating the response. Spontaneity became a way of life, the real became natural and the natural became real. And above all, infinite affection, love, dark and quiet,

radiating in all directions, embracing all, making all interesting and beautiful, significant and auspicious. (Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj in Engler, 2003 p.72)

## **SECTION FOUR – NO-SELF AS A GOAL IN WESTERN CULTURE**

To back-track a little, due to the default western conceptualisation of self as a 'top-down' controlling force – planning and deciding, imposing itself in typical dualistic fashion on the matter of the body, emotions, and all 'non-rational' realms from dreams to religious urges – it is little wonder that 'no-self' might become associated with escape from the over-bearing predominance of rational control. The lure of effortless action/no-self is very attractive to humans, and it forms a part of the lure of drugs and other addictions, which to a degree remove self-consciousness and the anxiety associated with it, and also erode the will. 'Primitive' or animal-like behaviour may emerge, e.g. indiscriminate fighting or sex.

Even here though, culture plays a vital role – drunken groups from different cultures will act according to different 'natural' instincts, e.g. some tending towards violence and others towards melancholy. But the desire to have the brakes taken off, the relief of no longer having to 'control oneself', is common. It may be the only sense of relaxation and wellbeing that someone has ever experienced. The subsequent lack of anxiety could also be identified as self esteem, as experienced by people who only feel they have the confidence to speak to potential partners after a drink or two.

The lure of no-self is expressed in religious behaviour of all kinds, not only participation in Eastern religions that explicitly espouse no-self. Trance states, shamanic journeys and initiation rites in many cultures all celebrate, and use to various ends, the loss of 'self'. In South America hallucinogenic plants are ritually used to produce such experiences, while in India meditation traditions and yoga aim at achieving the same state of feeling part of a universal consciousness, outside the boundaries of the individual self. Monotheistic religions emphasise the surrender of



the individual will to the will of God. During rituals, the reciting of prayers, singing hymns etc., the individual is subsumed in a collective practice. I do not mean to reduce the complex appeals of various religions to this one desire, but I do think that a kind of urge towards a transcendent loss or expansion of self is always to some extent present, and meaningful.

If we were to construct a continuum of experiences along the no-self axis, we might start from behaviour under the influence of drugs, with the associated pleasures of relaxation and regression, move through the 'creative highs' which come about through the exercise of skills, and finish with the transcendence of the religious no-self experience. Alternatively, we might place the transcendent experiences next to drugs and place skilled creative actions at the peak, depending on our value judgement.

So, if we identify a no-self or effortless action experience as an important element in healing – whether physical. e.g. using the Alexander technique to move the body without creating unnecessary tension (Vineyard, 2007), or mental/emotional (letting go of resistance/anxiety in therapy), which end result are we are hoping to produce? Relaxation, creativity or a spiritual experience? It would seem that the regressional aspects of no-self (and here we might also place Freud's confusion of no-self experiences with the 'oceanic feeling' of regression to the womb) are not what we are aiming for. While they carry a flavour of what is needed, they leave many processes which make up a human being unengaged.

## **SECTION FIVE – GOALS IN BUDDHISM**

The Buddhist attitude to goals is, to say the least, paradoxical. While the Hinayana (Lower vehicle, or Theraveda) had a clear goal of liberation of the self from suffering and rebirth through insight and practice, the Mahayana turning of the wheel boldly declared that there was no path and no goal. In fact any goal-directed effort whatsoever automatically precludes awareness of what is. At the same time it is

hard to deny that people sit down to meditate for a purpose, that this purpose and the desire for it exist, and that effort is required (and it is hard for us to imagine effort without goals).

## **1. COMPASSION AND LIBERATION FROM SUFFERING**

Buddhists strive for liberation from needless suffering for all sentient beings. This striving is actively compassionate, it includes a desire to invest determination and devotion. The self is to be 'seen through' rather than discovered, developed or perfected. Any sense of security that may be sought goes far beyond the self, in the recognition of its ultimate unreality, while on a relative level the person continues to function – more efficiently due to the lack of self-imposed stress.

## **2. ATTAINMENT OF REALISATION/AWAKENING/ENLIGHTENMENT**

Realisation of how things really are goes far beyond the therapeutic project of correcting how we may have personally misinterpreted or manipulated our experiences in the past. It is the same basic process of undoing misinterpretations, but on the absolute level. Once the ultimate misinterpretation, that we are separate selves, has been clarified, all the subsequent confusions clear up by themselves. We are left in an ordinary state of clear seeing, not placing our distortions on the world.

Inconceivably wondrous is the buddha nature. Exquisitely all-pervading is no buddha nature. It has nothing to do with cosmic consciousness or the divine self. Both buddha nature and no buddha nature exist in life and in death, as well as prior to life and death and after life and death. Before there ever was scattering and no scattering, movement and stillness, being and nonbeing, there has always been buddha nature and no buddha nature. 'It' is not metaphors, images or thoughts. Indeed it's not like anything. Don't be deluded. It is nothing other than what you do morning and night. (Dogen, in Tanahashi and Daido Looi, 2005 p.63)

If I am told... you have one more day to live, is that OK with me?

If I am in a severe accident, and my arms and legs have to be amputated, is this OK with me?

If I were never again to receive a kind of friendly encouraging word from anyone, is this OK with me?

If I make a complete fool of myself, in the worst possible circumstances, is this OK with me?

[...] For these things to be ok doesn't mean I'm happy about them... What *is* the enlightened state? When there is no longer any separation between myself and the circumstances of my life, whatever they may be, that is it.

(Joko Beck, in Magid, 2002, p.67-8)

A lack of separation between 'myself and my life', on the immediate level, is resonant with the experience of the end of therapy, in which there is no longer any need to use a special space in order to introspect, or a therapeutic relationship to explore the gap between 'myself and my life'. In the Buddhist sense however, there is not so much a oneness with your *own* life, it is that there *is* just life.

The goals of 'third turning' Buddhism however go beyond the sense of no separation, or maybe the accompanying experiences are just described in more detail. The perfections to be attained on awakening include 'utmost joy, purification, expanding light, flaming wisdom, invincibility, presence, far-reaching, unshakeable, [and] wisdom discernment.' (Hsuan-Tsang and Keenan, n.d.)

## **SECTION SIX – SKILFUL MEANS TO THE GOALS**

Like psychoanalysis, Zen practice is a structured, relational context for eliciting, tolerating, and working through one's patterns of organising affective experience. (Magid, 2003 p.109)

Buddha stated that he provided 84, 000 ways of liberation, so all sentient beings should be able to find something effective. As we are each subject to such precise causes and conditions, causing us to arise just the way we are, it is no surprise that the methods are many and varied. The concept of skilful means takes into account the different capacities of different people at different times. It would not be skilful to present the ultimate truth in the clearest possible way to someone who is unable to understand it.

Buddhist practices, while many and varied, all put emphasis on one of two main aspects – wisdom/insight, or concentration/peaceful abiding. In Zen, Magid points out, referring to the Rinzai and Soto schools respectively, there are also two main practice directions – 'top down', emphasising a sudden insight which then seeps downwards into everyday life; or 'bottom up', creating structures and practices in which we can sit with the discomforts created by our own resistances/sticking points/attachments and examine in forensic detail how they arise, play out and fade away, leading 'up' to insight.

## **1. VIPASSANA/INSIGHT/MINDFULNESS**

As outlined in Chapter Four, Buddhist practices began with the Abhidharma – a school of philosophical/psychological analysis forming part of the early Pali canon of the Buddha's teachings, and the theoretical basis of the Theravada tradition.

Theravada practices are divided into three main types, samadhi/shamatha, metta, and vipassana. Samadhi/shamatha, or concentration practices, aim at holding the mind steady and calm, producing a state of reliably abiding peacefulness. This occurs gradually, through a sequence of states of concentration, or absorption, known as the jhanas. Metta practices aim to cultivate compassion; Vipassana, or insight meditation, aims to develop wisdom. Vipassana meditation in the original Theravada tradition means careful observation, firstly of the breath, known as 'mindfulness of breathing', then of the movements within one's body, and finally all

the movements of one's own mind. This form of vipassana was turned into an independent movement of strictly disciplined 10-day retreats by Goenka, who stressed that the practice is a 'scientific' technique for examining the mind and should be unhooked from all religious doctrine. Goenka stressed that Buddha himself did not teach a religion but a practice. Vipassana as the practice of bare examination of the movements of the mind has also been popularised in the west as a part of the Theravada tradition, notably by Sharon Salzberg (1995), Joseph Goldstein (1976) and Jack Kornfield. (2000)

The 'mindfulness' movement in the west has unhooked itself from the religious context in order to present a practical method that is intended to be helpful to all. It was pioneered by Kabat Zinn, who defines mindfulness as 'the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally, to things as they are' (Williams et al., 2007 p.54). The idea of working with your mental habits in order to gain relief from suffering, which has always been the basis of cognitive behavioural therapy, has become a common factor in many therapy schools, such as Acceptance and Commitment therapy (ACT), Mindfulness-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) (Roemer and Orsillo, 2009; Williams et al., 2007). These developments have caused animated discussion in the Buddhist community over the possibility of 'Mac-mindfulness' taking hold (Lama Thaye, 2015). The danger is that a radical spiritual practice may be reduced to a one-size-fits-all form of stress relief with no ethical framework or wider context of intention. Worse, it may be used with dishonourable intention, e.g. in business, to increase productivity in workers to make a profit for others.

Mindfulness in common parlance, also seems to have become mixed up with concentration meditation methods. In Buddhism, as previously noted, there are two distinct directions of meditation practice: shamatha consists of concentration practices, focusing attention on an object, closing our attention inwards, and developing a state of calm absorption; while vipassana opens out the attention to cover the whole field of awareness, noticing the thoughts that arise in it and the

whole process of their formation and dissipation. As Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as 'paying attention, in the present moment, on purpose' (Williams et al., 2007), the two meditation directions conflate into a new concept which seems to mean something akin to simply 'being present'. This presence includes intense awareness of external things, tastes, smells, etc., e.g. concentration on the taste of a raisin, which brings the mind to one point and fills it with a single sensation.

Traditionally, Vipassana practice would investigate the jumping around of the mind itself. This is the practice of wisdom and liberation through 'insight'. The two directions (calming/steadying and gaining insight) have been mixed together in the 'mindfulness' movement into a jumbled amalgamation aimed at delivering a general sense of wellbeing, and/or effectiveness. This certainly helps to relieve the relative suffering of as many sentient beings as possible (and as such, the Dalai Lama is in favour), but it is unlikely to remove suffering on an absolute level. To do this, according to the Theraveda tradition, it is sufficient to watch how our habits of mind produce suffering. Such insight is not immediately relaxing – it necessarily contains an element of disturbance.

Within the Mahayana tradition, vipassana, as insight/wisdom practice occurs mainly in the 'third turning' Vajrayana schools, as part of their most advanced practices of Dzogchen and Mahamudra respectively. Vipassana is here considered as one element of practice rather than sufficient in itself for awakening. As Epstein points out, 'Mindfulness is not a means of forgetting the ego; it is a method of using the ego to observe its own manifestations [...] The enlightened ego abides, but in a form which sustains the realization of impersonality' (Epstein, 2007, p.52). This is a manifestation of the state of non-duality typical for Mahayana practice, in which form is emptiness, and emptiness, form.

The practice of mindfulness is designed to train the practitioner to pay a specific kind of attention, to the arising and dissipation of their thoughts and feelings, and to observe in microscopic detail their creation of illusory structures and habits of attaching to them, avoiding them, or shoring them up with the illusion of an

essential unchanging reality which they simply do not possess. When we become skilled at paying attention in this way, we may no longer feel the compulsion to engage strongly with our experiences. Then, according to Mahayanan Buddhism, we will naturally experience the groundless, clear luminosity of absolute reality.

The common aims of both wisdom and compassion practices are to examine the resistances or stucknesses that hold us back from 'normal' functioning, be that defined as non-duality, buddhanature, or a natural state of flow. This can be done through analysis (the Abhidharma), through investigating the movements of the mind directly in vipassana meditation, or by steadying the mind in shamatha meditation. In his investigations of Buddhist psychology Trungpa stresses the 'sanity we are born with', the fact that we are fundamentally composed of qualities such as openness, intelligence and warmth. No original sin has been committed, we are not broken.

The attitude that results from the Buddhist orientation and practice is quite different from the 'mistake mentality.' One actually experiences mind as fundamentally pure, that is, healthy and positive, and 'problems' as temporary and superficial defilements. Such a viewpoint does not quite mean 'getting rid' of problems, but rather shifting one's focus. Problems are seen in a much broader context of health: one begins to let go of clinging to one's neuroses and to step beyond obsession and identification with them. The emphasis is no longer on the problems themselves but rather on the ground of experience through realizing the nature of mind itself. (Trungpa, 2005 p.10)

Similar points are made by Epstein (Epstein, 2001), who uses Winnicott's concept of 'going on being', i.e. a child's capacity to carry on living without being caught into reactive patterns in order to take care of the needs of their adult caretaker. For Epstein, the practices (both Buddhist and psychotherapeutic) of refusing to be caught in reactive patterns in later adult life, or to be led by a compulsive need for certainty or for 'intrinsic reality', provide the key to living a free, unimpeded, wise and compassionate life.

When the Buddha taught, he asserted both 'somebody' and 'nobody' were mistakes; that the true vision of who and what we are involves looking without resorting to the instinct of intrinsic reality. 'Somebody' was the equivalent of clinging to being, while 'nobody' was the same as clinging to nonbeing. In either case, the mind's need for certainty was shortchanging reality. (Epstein, 2001 p.6)

Once more, the point is made that reality may be experienced fully, as it is, without the structure of being anybody in particular, but also without the structure of being either a 'somebody' or a 'nobody', and that this is a desirable state.

## **2. REALISATION IN RELATIONSHIP**

If I think of a person as being interaction, then, of course it makes sense that in interacting with a new person they're going to be different. So my job then as a therapist is to be the kind of interaction that will make the person better. Even if the person says all the same words they've said to themselves alone in their room, it's different to say them to you. It's a different living process. And that's where the possibility of change exists. (Gendlin, 2005. Video 5)

In Buddhism, due to the importance of a spiritual teacher, and in therapy, relationship is a vital element in the practices. Relationships, like everything else, can be understood in two ways: the unit way, and the intersubjective (in therapy terms) or direct realisation way (in Buddhist terms), in which we can come to experience every 'thing' as made up of processes. The notions of separate people and relationships are all created by the imposition of boundaries, and every boundary simultaneously separates and connects (Flemons, 1991; Wilber, 1979). Hence, relationships cannot fail to produce learning and insight.



In therapy we pay a special kind of attention to what arises. In this sense, it is like the practice of mindfulness, but interactional, with another person to hold the space of the experiential field open and clear for us, free of judgements, and to notice with us what arises. The therapist is likely to be more skilled at this attentional process than the client, and also has the distinct advantage of not being personally emotionally invested in the contents. In therapy we may feel a sense of light dawning as our mental chatter and/or forceful emotional clinging give way to a sense that things are arising and passing within some kind of a space which remains. 'Space' here is of course a metaphor. In fact it refers to a particular form of activity, which may be continuously performed, in situations with the therapist, alone, or with others. It includes unconditional acceptance – the sense of not being personally invested – that allows previously unexamined, potentially threatening things to arise.

No situation can arise at all without interactive, intersubjective relationships, as nothing can happen without affecting other things, and I wonder if it is the case that the more elements of a situation are actively involved, the more likely it is that the whole situation may move forward. As Gendlin remarks, 'the more constraints the more creativity' – the more edges or points of contact there are between processes, the more changes there will be, in more places, and the more movement.

## **SECTION SEVEN – CONFLATIONS OF SPIRITUAL/THERAPEUTIC GOALS**

Within contemporary culture, the ideas of spirituality, therapy and self-development have become extremely intertwined, and sometimes diluted together into a faceless mass of feel-good techniques. This can lead to a reaction against 'mindfulness' as a contemporary trend.

The opposite tendency to mindfulness has been identified by Corballis (2012) as

'mind wandering', a human capacity linked to the brain's 'default network', which enables us to mentally wander between times and places, in and out of other minds. Corballis argues that our capacities for empathy and creativity are rooted in this free roaming of the mind, and sees it as a part of a natural movement of mental wandering outwards, then returning home to the present moment and the body.

In fact this activity of persistently wandering then coming home to the present, to the breath, is precisely the natural activity which is observed in vipassana meditation. The difference between mindfulness and normal life, then, is that in meditation we develop the art of observing our wandering attention, and the habit of 'coming back' to the present. This may reinforce an observing position, the kind of 'witness consciousness' referred to by Albahari from an Advaita Vedanta influenced position, as the self (Albahari, 2011). As discussed in Chapter Four, however, the intention of most mindfulness practices, particularly those from the Mahayana, is not to identify with the witness. Vipassana is a not-self strategy. Through experiencing our wanderings in a conscious way, we realise that we are not any of the things that arise, any of the places through which we mentally wander, neither are we the one we might posit as a watcher, in line with old dualistic habits.

Hence the goals of Buddhism and therapy may be usefully separated out. In therapy the witness position may be a very useful one from which to gain perspective, wisdom and stability, a stepping stone on which to stand in order not to become caught up in the wanderings of the mind. It can loosen compulsive patterns of all kinds. Within the framework of the goals of therapy, there is no need to 'see through' this position, it can simply be used whenever helpful.

## **SECTION EIGHT – NON-DUALITY**

In the moments when not 'caught up' in concepts or compulsions the whole being or 'fully functioning person' may experience a state of non-duality. This state has been described not only from the eastern religious 'side' but from the Western

philosophical tradition, e.g. Buber and Sartre:

For an action of the whole being does away with all partial actions and thus also with all sensations of action (which depend entirely on the limited nature of actions) – and hence it comes to resemble passivity.

This is the activity of the human being who has become whole: it has been called not-doing, for nothing particular, nothing partial is at work in man and thus nothing of him intrudes into the world. (Buber, 1923)

Being can not be *causa sui* in the manner of consciousness. Being is *itself*. This means that it is neither passivity nor activity. Both of these notions are human and designate human conduct or the instruments of human conduct. There is activity when a conscious being uses means with an end in view. And we call those objects passive on which our activity is exercised, in as much as they do not spontaneously aim at the end which we make them serve. In a word, man is active and the means which he employs are called passive. These concepts, put absolutely, lose all meaning. (Sartre, 1956/2001 p.60)

But if we once get away from what Nietzsche called 'the illusion of worlds-behind-the-scene', and if we no longer believe in the being-behind-the-appearance, then the appearance becomes full positivity; its essence is an 'appearing' which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it. For the being of an existent is exactly what it appears. The essence of an existent is no longer a property sunk in the cavity of this existent; it is the manifest law which presides over the succession of its appearances, it is the principle of the series. This new opposition, the 'finite and the infinite', or better, 'the infinite in the finite', replaces the dualism of being and appearance. (Sartre, 1956/2001,p.42)

Non-dualism is intimately linked to a no-self analysis. The self/other, or me/not me divide is the first, basic one between subject and object. If this 'goes' in the no-self analysis, then the remaining dualities slide away too. This leaves us with a Taoist

kind of natural action. In non-duality, conceptual distinctions are not made between subjects and objects, yet this does not mean that they do not exist in experience. We are not immersed in nothingness, blissful or otherwise. Non-duality means that there are neither, and also means that there are both.

Being in tune in this way with both relative and absolute levels of reality is the aim of Buddhist practice, and it might be relevant to therapy too. For therapy the goal is framed as a lack of incongruence, the state of feeling uncomfortably *out* of tune. For Buddhism the goal is an end in itself, of absolute value for all, rather than a matter of alleviating individual discomfort. Conceptions of how to arrive at the goal vary but all are concerned with the breaking up of resistance, divisions and artificial separations, largely through an experiential gaining of insight. Once gaps in resistance, or rigid 'characters' are opened up, the structures are no longer needed and drop away. We are left not without features, not without characteristics, but without compulsions.

There is such a sense of relief, at no longer having to hold up the whole edifice of being someone in particular, compelled to produce particular effects on the world, that joy naturally arises. Out of this joy and sense of relief, it is easy and natural to act in a way that benefits all, without making an essential distinction between self and others. Sartre argued that such a goal is impossible, that by being human we inevitably introduce dualism, but his new kind of dualism, 'the infinite in the finite' seems to capture perfectly the relationship between the absolute and the relative, the implicit intricacy and the unit model.

## **1. GENDLIN AND SARTRE**

A precise investigation of the working of the absolute and relative at the same time, without disrespecting either dimension, seems to me possible through Sartre's understanding of Being and Gendlin's conceptualisation of the implicit. It makes possible an explication of the state of things not as static units or logical conclusions

but as ever-active and specific processes and possibilities:

The possible appears to us as a property of beings. After glancing at the sky I state, 'It is possible that it may rain'. I do not understand the 'possible' here as meaning 'without contradiction with the present state of the sky'. This possibility belongs to the sky as a threat; it represents a surpassing on the part of these clouds, which I perceive, toward rain. The clouds carry this surpassing within themselves, which means not that the surpassing will be realized but only that the structure of being of the cloud is a transcendence toward rain. The possibility here is given as belonging to a particular being for which it is a power. (Sartre, 1956/2001 p.97-8)

Here Sartre is in full agreement with Gendlin, that potentials, or possibilities, are implicit in things as they are, not logical conclusions built onto them from external observation. They appear to us as properties, but are actually potentials. The range of possibilities/implicit intricacy is not defined or imposed by the observer but implicit in the phenomenon, in this case the complex set of processes that go to make up a cloud, which include our observing it. This is what happens in the human realm. But what of the absolute?

Being-in-itself can not 'be potentiality' or 'have potentialities'. In itself it is what it is - in the absolute plenitude of its identity. The cloud is not 'potential rain'; it is, in itself, a certain quantity of water vapor, which at a given temperature and under a given pressure is strictly what it is. The in-itself is actuality. But we can conceive clearly enough how the scientific attitude in its attempt to dehumanize the world has encountered possibilities as *potentialities* and has got rid of them by making of them the pure subjective results of our logical calculation and of our ignorance. The first scientific step is correct; the possible comes into the world through human reality. (Sartre, 1956/2001, p.158)

Sartre beautifully describes the Unit model and how it gets rid of being-in-itself for its own purposes. He attributes to science the desire to 'dehumanize the world' while asserting that, contrary to these intentions, possibilities are created precisely by this human, scientific step. Sartre and Gendlin part company over the nature of 'things in themselves'. The implicit intricacy, the stuff from which the unit model pieces are drawn, is made up of many potentials, in implicit relationships with each other. 'Being in itself', however, cannot have potentials implicit in it, these would be only human patternings of it. For Sartre humans *have* to be in the unit model, there is just no other way for them to be. For Gendlin, things in themselves, the implicit intricacy of things before they are made into units by human observation, are always already inextricably woven with humanness. Human life is a natural part of all life.

Being in itself, as 'what it is in the absolute plenitude of its identity' sounds like the absolute, or the Tao, as conceived of by Taoists. You cannot do anything with it, without making it into something else, a being-for-itself, a being on the relative level. The Tao, which can be spoken of, is not the Tao. Sartre sees being-in-itself as therefore unrealisable by human beings, who inevitably change it through not being it. 'A relative existence can only be passive, since the least activity would free it from the relative and would constitute it as absolute' (Sartre, 1957 p.66). 'Being in itself' is, however, always present, in a complex relationship to the relative 'being-for-itself' that we do every day. Early Sartre writes intriguingly of spontaneity, a basic state of total, positive action which precedes the ego, which accords neatly with Taoism.

Transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity [...] But perhaps the essential role of the ego is to mark from consciousness its very spontaneity [...] spontaneity renders impossible any distinction between action and passion, or any conception of an autonomy of the will. (Sartre, 1957p.100)

If the universe is a whole (Brahman, Tao, Vijñaptimātra, and so forth) and if, as

Hua Yen Buddhism develops in its image of Indra's Net, each particular is not isolated but contains and manifests that whole, then whenever 'I' act it is not 'I' but the whole universe that 'does' the action or rather is the action. If we accept that the universe is self-caused, then it acts freely whenever anything is done. Thus, from the nondualist perspective, complete determinism turns out to be equivalent to absolute freedom. (Loy, 1985 p.13)

For Buddhists and Taoists, it *is* possible to realise the absolute, along with the attendant undoing of the concept of autonomy of the will, and there are practices designed to this end, but on a day to day level the absolute and relative are as inextricably bound up together as they are in Sartre's picture. As we step into reflexive, conceptual, linguistic actions, we change the fundamental state of things (while of course we cannot really change it). The possibility of 'total engagement with the world' posited by Sartre might be construed as non-dual action, or the state of enlightenment defined as 'no separation between myself and the circumstances of my life' (Magid, 2002, p.67-8). 'Total engagement' is similarly underpinned by ethical commitment. This is possible because of the pre-reflective, contentless ego posited by early Sartre as primary (Sartre, 1966). Of course, as soon as we start to reflect, a separation occurs between subject and object, between 'myself and the circumstances of my life'. The first 'units' are constructed.

### **1a. EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY AND NON-DUALITY IN THERAPY**

In a section of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre proposes the practice of an 'existential psychoanalysis' (Sartre, 1956, p.557-75):

Existential psychoanalysis seeks to determine the original choice. This original choice operating in the face of the world and being a choice of position in the world is total like the complex; it is prior to logic like the complex. It is this which decides the attitude of the person when confronted with logic and principles; therefore there can be no possibility of questioning it in conformance to logic. It brings together in a prelogical synthesis the totality of

the existent, and as such it is the center of reference for an infinity of polyvalent meanings. (Sartre, 1956, p.570)

This proposed psychoanalysis is concerned with what makes a person who they are, in all their implicit complexity, or 'pre-logical synthesis'. It does not posit an unconscious, but neither does it assume that the person knows everything that (s)he is. The 'original choice' of basic attitude or orientation to the world is not one made in rational and conscious awareness, 'on purpose'. As more of the implicit is made explicit (to use Gendlin's terms), the choice of attitude may change.

The principle of this psychoanalysis is that man is a totality and not a collection. Consequently he expresses himself as a whole in even his most insignificant and his most superficial behavior: In other words there is not a taste, a mannerism, or an human act which is not revealing. The goal of psychoanalysis is to decipher the empirical behavior patterns of man; that is to bring out in the open the revelations which each one of them contains and to fix them conceptually. Its point of departure is experience... (Sartre, 1956, p.568)

In this psychoanalysis, with its striking similarities to Gestalt, it is of vital importance for the therapist to stay fluid, to take everything the client says as a specific, individual occurrence, and most importantly to make what is implicit in the client's behaviour explicit. The client can at any moment make the decision to change their attitude, as more of their implicit totality becomes explicit through contact with the therapist. The aim is to move from anxiety and alienation towards commitment and engagement with the world. The bringing forth of something new out of a situation of basic freedom, despite the determined nature of the facticity of things (we are not free to escape, but we are responsible) strikes a common note with Gendlin's picture, according to which it is the infinitely complex set of processes that make up our situation that make it exactly what it is, not our decision – yet we can *always* pause and allow a new aspect to come, then carry it forward in a way which is creative and new, not a manipulation of previous possibilities. In Buddhism too



there is a startling (to the unit model way of thinking) juxtaposition of absolute determinism (dependent co-origination) and absolute freedom.

Significant parallels may also be drawn between Gendlin's philosophy of the implicit and Mahayanan Buddhist philosophy. Purton shows how the Hua Yan philosophy, based on the Flower Ornament sutra (The Buddhist Text Translation Society, n.d.) throws light on the philosophy of the implicit, and vice versa (Purton, 2009). In Hua Yan philosophy the concept *li* refers to the absolute nature of things, which is emptiness in the Mahayana sense, that is, empty of permanent, individual essence. *Shi* on the other hand refers to things which we experience as separate entities. *Li* and *shi* interpenetrate and are interdependent. While *li* is in a sense more fundamental, being the mass out of which *shi* is made, it cannot exist without *shi*. In the words of the Heart Sutra, 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form.' (Hsuan-Tsang, n.d.)

A central image/concept in Hua Yan philosophy is that of Indra's net. The god Indra hangs an infinite net, with a jewel hung in each eye, each of which reflects all the others reflecting themselves – hence the process of inter-reflection is also infinite, even more complex than the original infinity of the net itself. A major skilful means, maybe *the* major skilful means in both therapy and Buddhism, is the appropriate direction of attention; and concentration practices, according to Hua Yan, enable us to look closely enough at one thing that it reveals the totality of all things, as images and inter-reflections within it.

Similarly, we might look at our feelings closely enough that they reveal the whole complexity of the situation from which they are made. They remain themselves, yet are not different from that whole complexity either, and that precise complexity would not exist without them. As Purton writes:

If we apply this way of looking at things to Focusing, then we start with an emotion such as anger, and through waiting, and giving sustained attention in its context, we come to sense that the emotion (the *shi*) is also a felt sense.

Then what we can say is not, 'Oh, it's not anger, it's *that*', rather, we can say 'Oh, the anger is *that*!' The anger doesn't disappear when the felt sense comes – they can both be there at the same time, not the same exactly, and not different exactly, but *interpenetrating*. (Purton, 2009 conference paper)

The difference in the enlightened experiencing pointed to by Hua Yan and the experience of a client hinted at above may be understood as a difference of degree rather than kind. The intricacy is implicit in every object, thought, feeling and experience, just as the absolute is present in the relative, and the relative in the absolute. The net is like the web of interactive processes that makes up the implicit intricacy, or the causes and conditions making dependent co-arising in early Buddhism, and the jewels are the moments in the intersections in which we can pause, or meditate, and gain clarity, insight.

The insight is that every jewel which seems to us to be a thing, a separate essence, is empty of substance, continuity and identity. However, the jewels within the jewels in Indra's net are *reflections*. The jewels initially placed by Indra in the net are emptiness as forms, and forms as emptiness, but they are different forms from the reflections. The endless reflections in the jewels *look* the same, but some were placed there and are relatively real, and some are pure optical illusion. The fact that forms are emptiness does not flatten out the distinctions between forms. The implicit processes making up the felt sense are as real as the simple anger feeling and they can be present at the same time on an equal basis, or may differ in degrees of relative 'reality'. For example, there may be an angry over-reaction to a situation that has been mis-interpreted, together with an anger which is entirely appropriate in the circumstances.

In absolute reality of course, there is no such distinction as real/unreal, because there is no duality. This is the reality to which Mahayana Buddhism points, using an image to show the endless interpenetrating nature of things that look real but are not. It is easy to get a taste of this experience in everyday life if we examine things we think, or feel, closely enough. We see that they are illusory, yet they do not

disappear. Each gives way to the next in a process of constant change. They are not so much 'illusory' as transient – the illusion we give up is that of a lasting substance.

## **2. NON-DUALITY – THE GOAL**

Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.  
(Ch'ing-yuan Wei-hsin, in Watts, 1957/1989 p.144)

The 'normality' referred to after a spiritual journey will have more in common with that of Rogers' fully functioning person than with those who 'normally' feel incongruent or stuck. It will also have much in common with someone living an 'unobstructed' life who does not feel incongruent in any way and hence does not start the therapy process. The search for an unimpeded way of living through therapy seems to be part of the human process in the secular, individualistic culture we presently live in, while in other cultures such stuckness does not seem to occur in the same form.

A common example of a glimpse into the world of non-duality in the midst of our 'normal life' occurs when we fall in love. The relative and absolute dimensions are felt keenly and simultaneously. On the one hand the beloved is unique, standing out sharply against the 'background' of the rest of the world. On the other hand, when we are together there is a strong sense of aliveness, along with the feeling that there is no separation, no difference between us. We feel the same, we finish each other's sentences, we understand each other completely as no-one else can, there is a sense of being 'carried along' by fate, of not-deciding, of 'things falling into place' and everything being 'right'.

This may well be an illusion, and is a temporary state, but it remains an easy way for us to grasp how we might function with a glimpse of non-duality, without intention or practice. We cannot will, create or control it on a mental level. When we fall in love, the rational level tends to be the first to get swept away. We cannot explain what has happened, or why it should be this person and not another, we cannot say precisely how everything has changed. We no longer know ourselves. We surprise ourselves constantly. We are released from who we were 'before'.

For this reason maybe Sufi mystics, such as Rumi, wrote of the Beloved in terms which make sense to lovers today, but primarily express a mystical union, or experience of the divine. Blackstone, a contemporary author, writes about the experience of non-duality in a way which is also reminiscent of unusual experiences we have when in love – e.g. the ability, when two people who are living in non-dual consciousness meet, to feel things within each other's bodies. (This also happens during focusing sessions with partners, even with partners we barely know and are not personally attached to). The radiant emptiness described by Tibetan Buddhist texts permeates physical presence and is felt everywhere and on every level. Falling in love is maybe the only glimpse many of us have, spontaneously, of this.

Activities in the brain during romantic love episodes and mystical experiences seem to be very similar, involving intense right brain activity (as is noted when we are engaged in non-verbal experience, emotional and/or vulnerable), and projections onto the beloved (Murphy, 1999). Murphy argues that this state is reminiscent of our lives as babies, experiencing shifting boundaries with care-givers and frequent emotional overwhelm, before our left hemisphere developed giving us the ability to use language and rationality, and gain some kind of understanding of what was going on.

This is an example of how easy it is to mix levels when trying to describe phenomena which do not have 'public language' to describe them. The emotional overwhelm experienced by babies is obviously not the kind of experience that spiritual practitioners who have realised non-duality are talking about. It is not the

case that someone who has never felt the need for therapy, someone who has finished therapy successfully, and a realised master, are in the same state. There is a far greater range of experience implicit in the state of the realised spiritual master. There are also different levels of unobstructedness. If we are unaware of the existence of further levels of realisation, then simply being unobstructed physically and emotionally may be enough for us to lead a totally fulfilled life. The last level is, literally, inconceivable. The fact that the furthest level of unobstructedness incorporates the rest does not take away its extra, absolute dimension.

The dimension of the absolute pointed to by Buddhism from the Mahayana onwards is by definition beyond words and concepts. In the words of the Heart Sutra mantra: 'gone, gone beyond, gone utterly beyond' (Hsuan-Tsang, n.d.). This awakening may not be talked about or expressed but it may be lived.

The saints, being freed from language through their holy wisdom and insight in this regard, realize the perfect awakening that reality is truly apart from language. (Hsuan-Tsang and Keenan, n.d.)

This is an entirely different way of existing from the desired end state of therapy – although it is possible to stumble into it there, and conditions of nonjudgmental, accepting openness may well facilitate such stumbling. It is also possible to stumble into awakening during everyday life, as Zen stories illustrate. It is both closer and more difficult to see than we think. The absolute realm interpenetrates the everyday world. It is not the same and not different. It is implicit. 'At all times and forever the reality nature of all things abides, it is unconditioned' (Hsuan-Tsang and Keenan, n.d.). Hence, it cannot be produced by the situation.

The goals of therapy and of Buddhist practice can clearly be conflated, but only on the initial level of relieving discomfort. Seeking for the relief of suffering through liberation from words and concepts is a very specific intention and practice, and its specific nature should not be confused with a vague intention to feel better, or the use of various therapeutic methods to help clients develop what needs developing,

let go what needs to be let go of, or unstick the points at which they habitually become stuck.

There are significant differences between having an experience it is hard to find words for, a temporary state of bliss and/or understanding, and the experience that the whole of reality is always entirely beyond words. A more lasting sense may arise in therapy that words and concepts which had previously held us captive are now held lightly, provisionally. This is a taste of true freedom and non-dual action. Pawle, in his conversations with Zen masters, quotes a Roshi (Pawle, 2009, p.48) as saying that after the Zen realisation of no-self, freedom arises – not 'freedom from' but 'freedom to'. Without the first and fundamental stuckness, to our own ego, we are free to act as fits the situation, all our energies and resources at our disposal. However the Samdhinirmocana Sutra states that:

the truth of ultimate meaning [...] transcends being characterised as either identical with or different from conditioned states of being and cannot be so understood. (Hsuan-Tsang and Keenan, n.d.)

Being entirely beyond conceptualisation, the absolute is neither different nor the same as conditioned states, such as those which arise in therapy or everyday life. Ultimate meaning is not to be understood in such terms as sameness or difference.

It seems clear that ultimate meaning cannot be made into a part of the therapy concept. The realms of the Buddhas are specific and the paths leading to them, infused by the teachings and experiences of masters, should not be watered down to the lowest common dominators they share with therapy. If 'ultimate meaning' could be easily realised in everyday life by all sentient beings without conscious direction of attention, then Buddha's 84,000 practices would not exist. They should be respected on their own terms, which clearly go far beyond therapy, off the continuum and into realms that would be considered in western psychological terms as insanity, realms in which time no longer has any meaning at all, and there is neither conceptualisation nor its lack.

## SECTION NINE – THE THREAD OF NORMAL HUMAN PROCESS

In conclusion, reality is as it is, whatever our ways of conceptualising it or working with it. Therapy and Buddhism may be seen as different patterns separated out of the multiplicity, concepts which function on the unit level, but by their very nature as practices involving human attention, must stay in contact with living processes that far exceed our concepts. As the two practices work with the same aspects of reality, human process and attention, they are bound to cross, both conceptually and experientially. The movements of their crossings make a kind of dynamic spiral, which shows different faces at different times as they in turn interaffect the very different processes of the people who practice them. Sometimes we find a new self arising and sometimes we lose the sense of being anyone in particular.

Relative and absolute do not constitute a fixed, either/or duality, and also appear as two sides of an ever-twisting process. It is the *structure*, or movement, of this process, as outlined by Gendlin, which seems the closest we can get to continuity, and thereby functions as a thread of something as near to an essential 'thing' as we are ever going to find. I investigate this further in Chapter Seven. The movement of the 'self to no-self and back again' process seems to constitute an identifiable flow, although it would make no sense at all if separated from the patterns of interaction it elucidates. Even if we are in a state of wu wei, acting naturally without any extra stress, desire, fear, anxiety or effort, there are still concepts, emotions and thoughts implicit in our actions.

Conversely, even if someone is seemingly entirely bound by a pattern of behaviour, say has OCD and is ritually checking 51 times that the door has been locked there is still, implicit in his being as he does so, the state of wu wei. The common factor is a kind of zig-zagging between states that may be performed on purpose, or may happen spontaneously when the situation calls for a different part of the implicit intricacy to come forward. If there is a fire in the building where the OCD sufferer is, he may well dash in to rescue someone, acting with ease, effectiveness and lack of fear, no longer, in that very particular moment, constrained by his compulsion. If we

are in an enlightened state and suddenly our country is invaded and we are expected to fight, we may no longer know what to do, and start to feel anxiety. Multiple action and being possibilities are implicit in our living processes, however trapped or however fully functioning we may consider ourselves to be.

Gendlin's philosophy, by keeping its eye on the total interconnection of patterns and 'more than patterns', keeps us from falling too far into illusions on either side, by identifying our 'selves' with either a rigid identity or a spiritual state of non-duality. *We are always both and more.* The practice of directing attention and pausing situations in order to contact this 'more', precisely without conceptualising what it should be, or what it should feel like in advance (as Rogers does with his fully functioning person, or Tibetan Buddhists do with the clear light experience), gives us, I think, the best chance of experiencing things as they really are, in as much of their complexity as is appropriate for us now. The process of making room for felt senses to arise, and directing our attention to them, is not as simple as defining an illusion and dropping it. This focusing practice cuts through any problems caused by dual thinking, by accepting both forms, and the implicit from which they arise, and by actively celebrating new forms which spring from purposeful interactions between the implicit, responsive order and the unit model.

Gendlin's celebration of naked saying, of carrying forward, of new forms in which absolute and relative thoroughly infuse each other for a while (before the form becomes static again, incorporated, and we need to think with the 'more' again) has a unique quality and something which, while it lacks the ethical commitment and intensity of revelation of the absolute that characterise Buddhism, goes into greater detail than the concepts held by either Buddhism or by psychotherapy schools in its explication of the normal human process.

Meditation, focusing and therapy are *all*, however, ways in which we may pause our everyday situation, and the habits of mind associated with it, to direct attention, without striving for a particular goal. This leads naturally both to improved skill in directing our attention, thereby calming the mind, and to the cultivation of a non-



judgmental attitude. This is likely to lead to our being more aware of what is really going on in our situations, and being free to react appropriately. Becoming more acquainted with our ability to direct and pause our own attention, aware of the feel of different kinds of consciousness (I mean this loosely, e.g. the feel of open awareness as opposed to clamping down on a thought, the feel of clearing a space in focusing, the feel of concentration on the breath), familiarises us with the 'more' of us, more than fits into concepts, including those of self and no-self. We let go of limited structures we previously felt bound to. We are perfectly entitled, if we like, to call this 'more of us' either a new sense of self, or of no-self.

## **1. THE 'MORE'**

William James also aimed to explicate the normal human process, tracing its workings through different religious practices and beliefs. He found a sense that people usually have of a 'higher part' or 'spiritual self,' which is different from the material self and social self that govern their everyday activities, i.e. it identifies with different things within the stream of consciousness which, for James, constitutes the whole self. The person:

becomes conscious that this higher part is conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck. The part of the content concerning which the question of truth most pertinently arises is that 'MORE of the same quality' with which our own higher self appears in the experience to come into harmonious working relation. (James, 1902 p.659)

The 'more' of a sensed quality is resonant with Gendlin's model. The 'more' sensed within the person is also in the universe outside, they are implicit in each other and in a sense made of the same 'stuff'. There are many different ways of finding the 'more'.

Each attitude being a syllable in human nature's total message, it takes the whole of us to spell the meaning out completely. So a 'god of battles' must be allowed to be the god for one kind of person, a god of peace and heaven and home, the god for another. We must frankly recognize the fact that we live in partial systems, and that parts are not interchangeable in the spiritual life. (James, 1902 p.628)

So while there are many ways, for each 'kind of person' there will be a different 'god'. Maybe for every person there will be a different self. For every person there will be a different felt 'more', more than anyone could be aware of (hence mostly remaining implicit) that begins with the 'warmth and intimacy' of their own thoughts (James, 1890 p.138), then extends outwards.

While there seems to be a continuum in 'spiritual' experiences, it is not accurate to assume that everyone wants perfect awakening or realisation – and it must be taken into account that full realisation in the Mahayan Buddhist sense is not, strictly speaking, at the end of a continuum at all – there is a radical discontinuity – a leap.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, while Buddhism and therapy are both ethically grounded systems created to relieve human suffering, their ultimate aims differ significantly. They have similar diagnoses of suffering – inauthentic ways of being, based on misunderstandings about the way life really is, which lead to a persistent sense of something not being right, that can develop into a wide spectrum of problems, that can be eased by untangling misunderstandings and dispelling illusions. These misunderstandings often centre on the existence of an autonomous, all-controlling self, and so therapeutic and Buddhist practices work, explicitly or implicitly, to undermine this. The experience of living without a rigid internal structure to adhere to is similar, whatever the method, having characteristics of flow, spontaneity and effortlessness that are in direct opposition to the anxiety produced by living

according to a compulsive need to fit a certain model.

The common ground of this experience leads me to posit that it is possible for anyone, irrespective of their beliefs or aims, to live in a way which undermines the habitual dualistic concepts that tend to structure life (as reinforced by culture, science and language as examined in Chapters One, Two and Three). The relationship between non-conceptual and conceptual being has been examined by Sartre and Gendlin. A continuum may be noted from states of relief and unobstructed flow (after therapy) to life utterly beyond language and concepts (after spiritual awakening), but it is not a continuum in the sense of a natural and inevitable progression. Realisation is a separate aim, exclusive to spiritual practice.

Gendlin's picture of an implicit intricacy of processes, from which concepts are made, concepts and intricacy being mutually dependent, is, I think, the most accurate in enabling us to pick out the thread of normal living – from compulsive attempts to make our lives and situations conform to a concept, or to stay with a concept that does not fit our living situation, through the stage of pausing to be aware of the 'more' from the intricacy, then carrying forward in a new way. In that carrying forward there is a moment of release from both the compulsion and the concept. Hence there is a kind of dynamic movement between being somebody, then, maybe briefly, nobody, then creating a new kind of somebody that works unimpeded until the next 'stuckness' or compulsion arises. This is I think a realistic way of looking at life even for advanced spiritual practitioners; although they may spend longer in the 'being nobody' process, the production of concepts is ceaseless, and as long as we are alive in complex inter-dependent situations, there will always be opportunities to get stuck.

This is not, however, to deny the possibility of being entirely at one with one's own experience, gone beyond concepts, attachments and aversions, resistances and anxieties. This state may be tasted in everyday life, and facilitated by therapy, but it cannot be maintained as a baseline state without zealous spiritual practice. This state is not to be expected, either by therapist or by client, from therapy.

## CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION

The thing which was waiting has sounded the alarm, it has pounced upon me, it is slipping into me, I am filled with it. – It's nothing: I am the Thing. Existence, liberated, released, surges over me. I exist.

I exist. It's sweet, so sweet, so slow. And light: you'd swear that it floats in the air all by itself. It moves. Little brushing movements everywhere which melt and disappear. Gently, gently. There is some frothy water in my mouth. I swallow it, it slides down my throat, it caresses me – and now it is starting up again into my mouth, I have a permanent little pool of whitish water in my mouth – unassuming – touching my tongue. And this pool is me too. And the tongue. And the throat is me. (Sartre and Baldick, 1938 p.143)

Personality is not so much 'what one is', as how one carries oneself forward in further living, further feeling and self-responding, and further interpersonal relating... Personality is not stuff inside, but the capacity to carry forward in words or acts what is experientially felt as focal and next (Gendlin, 1973 p.333)

They enter into the jungle of sixty-two false views  
Such as 'This exists' or 'This does not exist'.

Through the error of discrimination  
One sees all existent things  
As existing or nonexisting,  
Real or unreal,  
Produced or unproduced.

Lotus Sutra (Kubo and Yuyama, 2007)

## SECTION ONE – OVERVIEW, THE SELF SO FAR

The question around which the thesis is based is this: how does the concept of self work in practice, and does it help or hinder people – is there value in using 'finding the self', or 'losing the self', as guiding principles of therapy?

So far it seems clear that there is a wide range of possible ways of using both concepts of self, and of no-self. People identify with 'self' and/or 'no-self' concepts for a wide variety of reasons, but they do have a consistent tendency to conceptualise/sense themselves along 'self' or 'no-self' lines.

Hume delineates these two ways of experiencing. Some people perceive a kind of stable continuity and call it 'themselves', and others, such as Hume himself, do not. Strawson makes a similar point, that there are basically two different types of people, as far as sense of self is concerned. The first group, Endurantists, experience themselves as being continuous and lasting over time. An endurantist will 'intuitively figure the self as something that has long-term diachronic continuity' while an Impermanentist is a person for whom 'the Persistence Belief is not experientially natural'. Strawson describes an element of his Impermanentist structure of experience as follows: 'when I wake in a strange place and don't know where I am, I don't grope back to my last minutes of waking consciousness; I simply remember where I am, and facts about how I came to be there' (Strawson, 2009 p.225). The truth is not to be found in following an unbroken stream of consciousness.

This distinction has more to do with temperaments and personality differences than the actual ontological status of the self. It is not that there is one group who is mistaken. The idea that there are two distinct ways of structuring experience already rests on an assumption that there is no ontological reality to the concept of self. It is already defined as purely a matter of how we perceive ourselves, of who

we think we are. James' view of the self as a stream of consciousness characterised by a certain warmth and intimacy (James, W 1890 p.148) could be shared by those who are oriented towards sameness (feeling the very sameness of that warmth and intimacy) and those who do not feel themselves to be anything apart from a succession of various, temporary experiences, yet feel these experiences with a particular vividness that is not available when thinking about the experiences of others.

## 1. SELF-NEEDS

At the end of my investigation, I can see that the list of possibilities of 'who we think we are' fall into a few main groups, all of which seem to spring from a few main needs:

- **Need to be safe** – drawing/sensing boundaries around one's own experience offers protection, comforting familiarity and strength, in the face of threats, manipulations or traumas. Self works as a motivator to act or as an anxiety reducer when there is no immediate threat. It provides a sense of certainty and stability.
- **Need to be real** – 'being yourself' is a way in which to drop anxiety about fulfilling conditions of worth, to enjoy relationships with others and feel free to act without pretending.
- **Need for existential meaning** – we want to know how and why we have come to exist. Now that religious narratives have lost their force and science does not seem to explain existential questions, 'self' has become intimately connected to questions of meaning.

The list of possible constellations of meaning around self moves along a continuum from first to third person, then to no-self perspectives. Is self the thing we are *after*

or the thing we are?

## 2. BASIC USES OF SELF

To recap, here is a list of 'selves' that have emerged in the course of the thesis so far.

The basic uses are relatively uncontroversial, simply referring to the fact that we are individual people, with bodily boundaries and a tendency to invent psychological ones. They fit with our self-need for security.

- **Self as signifier** – referring back to the speaker of the words or the doer of a deed, a grammatical convention, showing that they are one and the same person.
- **Proto-self** – in Damasio's model. The set of co-ordinating physical processes in the organism that regulate it to keep it in a state of homeostasis, internally consistent and alive. Similar to Gallagher's prenoetic self, a co-ordination of processes which orient our behaviour in space.
- **Self as a boundary-drawing need** – the definition of me/not me is initially basic to our survival, then extends to mental definitions/concepts about ourselves, and to a definition of 'Self as Mine'. As James points out, the material self includes a person's clothes, possessions, home and family.

## 3. SELF AS PERCEIVING/PHENOMENOLOGICAL SUBJECT

This kind of self has/is a first-person perspective. It is embodied, present in the moment, and does not project itself into past or future. These uses are associated with security and the need to feel real. This may also be the only meaning or sense of presence we can always fall back on, as long as we are alive.

- **Minimal Self** – Zahavi's concept (Zahavi, 2005b). Self is the structure of the

first-person perspective, built into the way we experience, rather than the 'contents' of experience.

- **Core Self** – Damasio's concept (Damasio, 1999). This refers to the sense we have of being physically present, a subtle registering of the changes that happen when other events impact upon us ('the feeling of what happens'). In practice, it is hard to isolate. It also refers to a psychological level of functioning that can be lost in cases of brain damage, if someone loses the capacity to remember autobiographical details. There is no compelling reason why this kind of functioning should be linked to a phenomenological feel.
- **SESMET – or single mental thing** – Strawson's concept (Strawson, 2009). The single mental thing continues through our life, distinct from ourselves as whole beings, it arises along with the experiential field and, while distinct from it, may not ultimately be separable. It seems like a concept that has arisen in accordance with some kind of persistent intuition, verging on compulsion, that there must be *something* to us, some distinct 'me' which is continuous and separable, despite all evidence to the contrary.

#### 4. SELF AS CREATIVE/CREATED SUBJECT

This is, according to Thompson (2015 p.130), the kind of third-person perspective self which time travels into past and future and sees itself from outside.

- **Social Self** – One of James' main types of self (material, social, spiritual) that every person possesses (James, 1890 p.184), the social self – like Goffman's self as a performance on the social stage (Goffman, 1956), is concerned with acting to further its own interests among others. Here authenticity is not an issue, we play various parts, in order to keep the performance going and fulfil our needs.
- **Narrative Self** – a concept developed by White and Epston (1990) and



Dennett (1992). Strawson also distinguishes between narrative and non-narrative types of people. These categories overlap with the previously mentioned categories: Endurantists and Impermanentists (Strawson, 2009 p.14). While it might be expected that Endurantists are narrative types and Impermanentists are non-narrative, this is not necessarily the case.

Narrative types use a process or habit to make their thoughts, feelings and experiences into a story with a plot, sense and intention. We also, whichever type we are, live in a world which is made up of cultural, national, historical, religious and family narratives. We act according to the stories we hear and the stories we tell, the stories that interact to compose our understandings and behaviour. Narrative therapy understands people as interactions of various narratives, and works to make those stories explicit, for them to be witnessed, and to facilitate useful conversations.

- **Dialogical Self** – Hermans' concept (Hermans, 2001), drawing on Bakhtin's theory (Bakhtin, 1981). This self is created *only* in dialogue, whether internal (the taking of various 'self' positions') or with others, in dialogues in which the explicit taking of positions may bring a huge set of implicit information to bear on the situation in a creative way.
- **Autobiographical Self** – Damasio's concept (Damasio, 1999). It refers to acts of memory, projection into the future, interpretation and reflection that give us a sense of who we are involving our histories, languages, cultures, intentions, etc. In practice there is no real difference between the autobiographical self and the narrative self, but it is a thicker concept as it is more concerned with the mental processes involved, and it is less interactive, more of an individual matter.
- **Self as Inner Voice** – that speaks to us in verbal thoughts, with a certain 'warmth and intimacy' (James, 1892) that makes it particularly compelling.
- **Implicit Self** – Schore's concept (Schore, 2010). In a sense the other side of

the narrative self, the concept of the 'right brain implicit self' brings together often overlooked emotional and instinctual patterns of responding and makes of them a single entity.

These concepts of self build on the more minimal awareness of my being a functioning organism, distinct and particular, and add sense and meaning to life beyond simple survival. These selves fulfil the self-needs for feeling real and for meaning.

## **5. SELF AS OBJECT**

Treating self as an object could be seen as a salient aspect of problems with self-esteem and anxiety. In these cases, we take an external perspective on ourselves and compare ourselves/our behaviour with others as if we were all objects, on an equal footing, divorced from our individual contexts. These tendencies may crystallise in problems involved with the body, which, as a material thing, is an obviously comparable element of our lives. In anorexia, for example, the body is perceived as an object observed as if from the outside, then judged, punished, corrected, etc. Signals from the inside of the body, such as hunger, are ignored or over-ridden. This is the ultimate conclusion of what happens when an I-It relation (Buber, 1923) dominates experience, whether the 'It' be a self or an other. While an other-centred or relational stance seems to be more open, it can also become 'structure bound', or even abusive, if the other in the relationship concerned is working on an 'I-It' basis rather than respecting the other's humanity.

## **6. RELATIONAL OR INTERSUBJECTIVE SELF**

Self here is primarily composed of interactive patterns, from the start of our lives when interaction with our caregivers is a formative structuring of our experiencing (Chodorow, 1981). More than just stressing that we are always in relationships with others, intersubjective perspectives (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992) argue that there

is no separate entity that can enter into relations with other entities – we are made up, structured, temporarily constructed by such relationships, there is nothing of 'us' apart from them.

## 7. SELF AS AUTHENTICITY

- **Ease and wellbeing** – a sense of not having to pretend, or to strive, as we have what we need already. We do not have to twist our thoughts, feelings or behaviour to fit any schemes or expectations.
- **Self as Matching** – 'That's it!/that's me !' This is an intriguing sense of fitting into place with an unspecified 'something'. This is the picture generated by Rogers' concept of 'congruence' that was explored in Chapter Two. This picture is misleading – it is not that we are one thing that needs to match some essential template of itself. However, I think there is a sense in which the self as 'matching' experience evoked by a group of linguistic uses of self such as 'being myself at last' (listed in Appendix One) are less about one thing fitting another and more about the sense of responsiveness itself. When we come into contact with something that 'fits,' we feel that it responds to us somehow. It is not just an inanimate object. We respond in turn by identifying with it and identifying it with us. Is it simply '*I don't need to pretend?*'

These selves fulfill the need for authenticity.

## 8. SELF AS GOAL/ VALUES

- **Simple positive/negative values** – self-worth or self-control. Self often functions for us in linguistic expressions as an unspecified factor, unreflectively assumed to be either good or bad.
- **Goal/hidden treasure** – e.g. finding myself – here the self is the ultimate existential goal, whatever that may mean to us.

These are the main senses of self identified in the thesis, and they could all be used, in more or less skilful ways, in different contexts, to fulfil any one of the self-needs. People who are suffering may find themselves trapped in one definition, while people who have undergone particular mental training, e.g. meditation practices, may find it easy and useful to switch from one to the other.

## **SECTION TWO – SELF AS A THREAD OF LIVING**

'Self' is clearly not to be found actually or exclusively residing in any one of these definitions. Is there a thread of constancy leading through the uses of self and also the experiences of no-self or non-duality previously discussed?

Such a thread can be traced, in the actual *process* of arising and dissipation, of blocking and carrying forward, the making of explicit concepts and then releasing them, the thread of our living process itself. This thread does not depend on memory or the continuity of a single stream of consciousness. It may be the case that experiences arise and dissipate in milliseconds and are actually discontinuous. The thread however is experienced by both Endurantists and Impermanentists. As William James pointed out, there is a certain 'warmth and intimacy' about our own thoughts that makes them seem ours (James, 1890 p.205), and the thread may be associated with this rather than any contents. When we start to, in Buddhist terms, attach to this warmth and intimacy, we feel the 'pinch of individual destiny' (James, 1890, p.205) that James describes as inevitable:

The axis of reality runs solely through the egotistic places – they are strung upon it like so many beads. To describe the world with all the various feelings of the individual pinch of destiny, all the various spiritual attitudes, left out from the description – they being as describable as anything else – would be something like offering a printed bill of fare as the equivalent for a solid meal. (James, 1890 p.205)

In my terms, the thread of our living runs, indeed, through 'egotistic places' in which we interpret what is happening to us according to the 'pinch of individual destiny' that we are in the habit of creating. This generates both suffering, and some creative ways of getting out of the stuck 'egoistic places', whether through 'spiritual' practices, art, or facilitative human encounters.

This invisible thread of our living is 'something' we may regain contact with or hang onto in moments when the self-needs for security, authenticity or meaning arise, and while the thread itself is not a bearer of these things, when we are in touch with it there are opportunities for the situation to open out from the stuck 'egotistic places' – for living to resume in a more unconstricted way. The thread can, then, be understood in terms of carrying forward. It is not in itself a thing, although it may sometimes be conceptualised and experienced as one – and often is, as in 'losing/coming back to myself'. As the nature of things is to be 'things' and also not things, our moving through these two ways *is* our life, and it is probably best not to become attached to either way of conceptualising.

### **SECTION THREE – SELF AS FELT SENSE**

From the points of view of Gendlin's 'interaction first' principle, and Mahayana and Taoist philosophies, there are no such things as objects made of separate, consistent substances. There are only transient ones, arising as temporary constellations of causes and conditions.

Self may be the quintessential example of such a transient object – a temporary coming together of causes and conditions that seems very real and important, invested with 'the pinch of individual destiny'. It is the transient object which is the commonest, closest and most significant to us. Whether understood as a temporary constellation that naturally arises, or a specially 'made' object, it has much in common with the felt sense.

Firstly, what exactly do we mean by 'felt sense'? There has been a great deal of debate on this topic within the focusing community. Weiser Cornell, when teaching focusing, stopped using the concept of a felt sense at all, as she noticed that the issue of 'whether it's a felt sense or not' was obstructing the focusing process itself. In her workshops, Weiser Cornell told people to concentrate on whatever it was that they were feeling inside, 'We don't want the concept to get in the way of your experience. Just think of yourself as looking for 'something'. Anything can be something.' (Weiser Cornell, 1996 p.29)

Anything *can* be something, but most things are things. Gendlin's method is to clearly define what a felt sense is *not* – it is not anything that could be clearly distinguished and defined already as a thought, feeling or simple physical sensation. His method here works in the same way as the Abhidharma analysis of self. When we work our way through what self can't be, we are left with the realisation that it is not there at all, or at least, not there in the way that we defined a 'something there' to be. A felt sense is 'not there' in a similar way, not there as the thing we were searching for, when we tried to find one. But our experience, once we have discounted the set forms of experience (thought, feeling etc) is precisely this 'something'. There was not previously a word for precisely *this* something. 'Felt sense' can work well as a concept for it. Purton in 'The Myth of the Bodily Felt Sense', makes a convincing case that the felt sense does not necessarily have to be associated with the body, and the tight association of the concept with the physical body causes more confusion than it illuminates (Purton, 2014). However, wherever it is or is not located, this left over, not-fitting 'something' that we sense in our situations remains useful to point to, as an access/opening point to more of the situation, when we have a problem.

The confusion about what a felt sense is – so reminiscent of the confusion about what a self is – centres around whether it is an inner object or not. This confusion is not helped by the fact that the concept 'felt sense' is used in the focusing literature to refer to two distinct phenomena. These are analogous to the two predominant

ways of perceiving the self. Before outlining them, we need to examine the process of paying attention, which precedes our finding a felt sense of either kind.

At the start of the process of focusing, we either 'pause the situation' or, more traditionally, pause 'to look inside'. 'Looking inside' may be used as a conventional linguistic short cut for 'paying attention'. As we are constantly engaged with outer stimuli in our everyday lives, it can be calming and relaxing to simply concentrate on our breathing, on our 'insides'. When we are relaxed, more implicit information can come. When we are not forcing our attention narrowly down the channels that are known to us (e.g. trying at all costs to understand something rationally, or to feel something emotionally in a way that we can label), we may discover ways or mixtures of thinking/feeling/sensing that are quite new to us, and new solutions to our problems can come.

Directing attention to the 'place inside where we feel things' is an effective way of bypassing old habits of exclusively thinking, or relying on information from external sources. Unfortunately, as Purton points out, the inside/outside division can create its own biases, limitations and conceptual confusions from which we subsequently need to disentangle (Purton, 2014). While it is necessary to specifically pause and pay attention, it seems counterproductive to decide in advance the direction in which the attention should go. We need to direct attention in a global, diffuse way to the situation as a whole.

Given the confusion within focusing literature about what a felt sense might be, and the phases of development of Gendlin's concepts of the direct referent and felt sense, all of which continue to function, I find it helpful to distinguish two general directions, which can be generally characterised as an outward and an inward direction. Rather than pulling out comparative data to make a case for each, I stick to the felt-meanings of these directions which function for me. I consider them to be different felt aspects of the same, twisting life process.

The first, expanding outwards direction, I call 'all of that,' and for the second

concentrating inwards direction, I use the term, 'the direct referent', moving on from Gendlin's use of the term in the Process Model to indicate a special kind of datum object. The two directions are loosely analagous to the meditative directions, the diffuse all-encompassing outward direction of attention in vipassana and the settling of the mind of samadhi, in concentration on an 'object', such as the breath.

## **1. FIRST USE OF FELT SENSE – 'ALL OF THAT'**

The first use of 'felt sense' is a vague, fuzzy sense of 'all of that' – that is, the thick, implicit intricacy of a particular situation. Implicit processes are not just processes which have previously occurred, or connections to other relevant processes in the present, as described in the intersubjective picture. Implicit processes include aspects of processes which have become stopped or stuck, but continue to function *within* other processes, interaffecting, gathering and creating new implicit possibilities as they cross with other, and generating new processes along the way.

In cultures in which the mind is considered separate from and valued over the body, it may well be that many processes are not carried forward physically. They may be carried forward mentally but not in a bodily way (or 'rationally' but not 'emotionally'), leaving some of the action implied by the stopped process implicit. The mental part has already been 'done,' yet the physical action has not. This binary split exacerbates and maybe partially causes the phenomenon of tensions which have not been explicitly understood, or carried forward, being felt as physical anxiousness. There is no explicit mental, rational or emotional explanation for the anxiety (what might explain it is in the implicit aspect of 'all of that'). This sense of physical tension mixes with what is half-apprehended in the situation, and maybe our sensing something 'more', something unknown, in the situation evokes extra anxiety. Anxiety, whatever it may be, is always registered in terms of uncomfortable physiological arousal. Sometimes this is our only signal that there is a problem, or that something needs to be done, or wants to go forward. The physiological nature of anxiety may be one of the reasons why the felt sense has come to be so



intimately associated with the body. Gendlin states that 'the unconscious consists of the body's stopped processes, the muscular and visceral blockage.' (Gendlin 1964, p.24 online version)

Sometimes, a process that did not carry forward to a desired outcome changes beyond all recognition from the process that originally got stuck, yet in our thinking about the stuck aspect we constantly re-create it as if the circumstances in which it first became stuck were still relevant.

To give a classic example, you might suffer from the effects of inadequate parenting when you were small, and feel that your relationship with your mother is 'stuck' in adult life. While you might get on with her in the sense of usually being able to talk and relate with her easily, you might feel quite unable to touch her, or to broach certain emotional topics. It is certainly the case that you are no longer a helpless child and that many things have happened in your and your mother's life, and in your interactions, since the time when you did not get what you needed from her. But while you may live in a new way with your mother, there is a stuckness implicit in all the new processes which are taking place. This is aside from the way the stuckness has functioned implicitly within other processes, allowing you, e.g. to accept presents from her, but not to feel truly grateful, because your painful experiences function in your perception, rendering you unable to perceive the sincerity in her giving. I am arguing that along with all the effects of those initially blocked processes in your further living, a sense blockage is carried too, of something that cannot be fixed, shifted, moved, or opened up. You may become aware of these kinds of blockage by vague physical signs: 'there's something wrong with my relationship with my mother, because despite the fact that we're getting on well, I just can't bring myself to hug her'. The stopped process was long ago, the ease which could not happen. Now the situation presents as a global, diffuse sense of something wrong. The edge of it is where/when 'something in me' physically recoils. In the focusing process we would pay attention to 'this recoiling', drawing attention inwards, and as that felt sense unfurled, carrying forward, attention would move naturally outwards, making changes in that 'recoiling' in a vast array of

different life-situations.

Usually the sequence in focusing and in normal life process, is first inwards, then outwards. I suggest, though, that we can also intentionally pay attention to the very vague, diffuse quality of the felt sense and see where it wanders. We can wait for it to wander, rather than crystallise. It is possible that the very wandering includes micro-movements inwards, in order to check the felt sense and carry it forward to the next moment of its outward movement. I find however that it is possible to keep attention on the expansion of the felt sense of the whole situation as process, on what Gendlin referred to as the whole mode of experiencing, thick with interactivity and implicit dimensions (Gendlin, 1964) – rather than the aspect he later referred to as a special kind of 'feedback object' (Gendlin 1997 p.236).

## **2. SECOND USE OF FELT SENSE – DIRECT REFERENT**

In *A Theory of Personality Change* (1964) Gendlin introduced the concept of the direct referent as follows:

At any moment one wishes, one can refer directly to an inwardly felt datum. Experiencing, in the mode of being directly referred to in this way, I term the 'direct referent'. (Gendlin, 1964 p.7 online version)

The 'inwardly felt datum' is not a thing inside – although it sounds like one by virtue of being a noun – but a mode of experiencing.

Experiencing is understood as necessarily 'a *felt* process' (Gendlin, 1964). Referring directly to it might be grasped as a question of *not* experiencing primarily through concepts, adjusting our felt meanings to fit, or sealing our experiencing off at the borders of each discrete concept. When you are not pushing your experience through the unit model, the implicit may be freely sensed, and what is particularly relevant to the present situation forms its own edge which may be tangibly felt – as

a wanting to go forward, as an about-to-change. Attention to this mode of experiencing is 'direct reference' and the direct referent is simply the object which is produced as a function of that action, when we're thinking with concepts.

Later, in the Process Model, Gendlin writes about the direct referent as something that 'comes', which is sensed inside the body, responds to us, relates to us and answers our questions. It is both a kind of datum in itself and a checking point which lets us know we are on the right track. It is a 'perfect feedback object' (Gendlin, 1997 p.236). If we are on the right track then 'it' unfurls into a new situation when it carries forward. If we are not on the right track, then what we sense is just an idea, or a feeling, which can do no more than name itself and refer back to itself. What is real/right/responsive is what changes, what does not keep a substantial separate identity (or, rather, according to Buddhist analysis, the illusion of one).

The direct referent (Gendlin, 1997a; Gendlin, 1997b, p.90-100) works as an *access point* to the implicit intricacy, which could be defined as the whole situation, constituting each person, and the whole of life. When we 'dip into' this intricacy in order to know what is of primary relevance, what our point is, and carry our point forward, that point functions as a direct referent for us. It is what we get when we 'get it' and what we lose when we 'lose it'. Here it functions as a kind of special object that arises temporarily and uniquely in that particular moment and place, a conceptually separable sense of relevancy that we know when we touch it. We keep hold of our point as we dip in and out of the intricacy to let it be refreshed, changed, carried forward again. It changes but it remains the point. The direct referent is characterised by a sense of clarity, certainty - 'that's it'. When we keep in touch with a direct referent as we speak (a process Gendlin describes as 'zig-zagging') there is a sense of guidance, of knowing what fits and what doesn't, what the next move should be, without needing to move through the process of logical analysis. To illustrate this, Gendlin describes his experience of intentionally following and taking on other people's arguments when at university (Levin, 1997 p.346). The point that we are sticking to, or getting a sense of when we feel we have lost it, does

not need to be ours – there is nothing essentially 'true' about it. We do not need to believe it to know it from the inside out. It is not its 'truth' that is speaking to us. It is just the kind of thing that it is. It marks itself off as 'this'. We can follow the point, using the direct referent, to make an argument with which we heartily disagree.

However, is this 'sticking to the point' the same *action* as staying 'myself'? Is it like keeping our balance as we learn to ride a bike, making correcting movements in order to keep our centre of gravity? I will come back to this question later.

This 'following the point' action involves an internal checking, rather than looking around to widen the perspective, or view. The direct referent is not, however, a thing which has been lying inside our bodies all the time, waiting for us to go and look for it, or check with it.

A common example of a situation in which we may talk about a kind of internal checking to 'get something' inside is when we have a distinct sense of 'something we've forgotten'. Purton argues, however, that the sense of a forgotten word on the tip of our tongues, or of something we have forgotten to do, is not the sense of an absent thing itself but a sense of our ability to say it or recall it (Purton, 2013 p.16). This does not essentially change the problem of the 'having of an inner object' that it is intended to solve, though, as it makes in turn an inner object of the ability to say.

The 'something we've forgotten' may be understood as a sense of a process carrying forward in the best way it can, yielding for the moment little explicit information, but continuing to try. Purton now interprets the phrase 'on the tip of my tongue' as an expressed inability to say, in the sense of part of the *struggle* to say, functioning in a similar way to the poets' hand rotation cited by Gendlin (Purton, pers.comm). The poet knows that there is a line to come, it is implied by the previous lines, yet none of the lines that come seem right, the implied 'blank' remains. The poet's hand rotation 'says that', it says the whole demanding and implying of the next line of the poem, and all the changes it will make when it

comes. (Gendlin, 1991)

The 'direct referent' in this case may be the result of a choice to pay particular attention to the one aspect of the process that comes forward right now, separating it out from the waving hand, from the whole struggle to express something which is already here, yet has not explicitly formed yet.

## **SECTION FOUR - TWO KINDS OF FELT SENSE – TWO KINDS OF SELF?**

### **1. THE FIRST SENSE OF SELF – A VAGUE SENSE OF ALL THAT**

This sense could be understood as the whole situation I am in, or indeed as the whole situation I am. As such it is forever indefinable, ungraspable, covering the whole intersubjective field, or implicit intricacy, as widely as I can sense it at any given moment. It could be as close in as my own body when I am in a situation where I feel threatened, making me feel claustrophobic and panicky, or as far out as the universe if I am in an expansive state of meditation, or staring at the sea to a far horizon. This felt sense self is a crossing point of innumerable processes, which can never be fully explicated or contained by a form, it always contains more. I am the vague fuzzy edge of everything I am experiencing, wherever it is that I draw or sense the boundary line.

According to later Gendlin, the self is what is *around* the direct referent, the felt sense of our whole situations. Self is what pays attention to it, interacts with it, self is separate and characterised by vastness. It is simply so much bigger than whatever part of experience is relevant to us and moves forward at any one moment in our lives. 'The vast space [...] is made by a carrying forward with a new kind of medium. The object that falls out (the Direct Referent) is a new kind of object. That object and its space, form together. So the space is necessarily bigger than the object. The self corresponds to the space, not the object merely [...] That is why the self

seems so vast, and so clearly not merely the having-of-the-object. However large the Direct Referent formation change, the space is much larger.' (Gendlin, 1997, p.244)

The sense of self as infinitely vast, as more, has much in common, as a felt meaning, with no-self experiences of a spiritual kind. In an Advaita Vedanta framework, self could be defined in this way, although it would not be a 'new' creation but a basic prior reality, out of which all processes manifest.

## **2. THE SECOND KIND OF SELF – DIRECT REFERENT**

I posit that there is a sense of self which is practically inextricable from the direct referent as previously defined (p.236). It is a kind of 'perfect feedback object' (Gendlin, 1997 p.236), which cannot be intentionally created, but has to 'come'. This coming can be facilitated, though, as we pause the situation to clear a space in focusing. It is the feeling and having of the self, rather than the whole 'self-process' (Gendlin, 1964 p.26) of me-in-the-world, or the vast self-space referred to in the previous section. It is precisely what can be 'had' of us. This is a self in Strawson's sense – not the thick whole-creature meaning of self, but the thin version that can be conceptualised as a single mental thing, consistently, if briefly. The kind of self that seems to be meaningfully spoken about as a separate thing, the kind of self that functions as a felt meaning for many people.

The arising of a sense of self as direct referent may be desired and facilitated as a touchstone, to check whether I am being 'true to myself.' This is more than just behaving in accordance with my own definitions. It includes a responsive sense of rightness, coming from the implicit intricacy which is not contained by definitions or concepts. Hence the process of checking with it can be used to keep us in touch with the implicit 'more' of the situation, to keep us feeling real. We are checking whether we are what we really mean. The sense of rightness is often called 'being myself,' and I think this identification of felt process with self has a meaning to

people that carries an important cluster of implicit associations, and can be lifted out and freely used without negating the meaning of self as a vast space.

Self may also be defined not as the meaning but as the very process of checking. We're not doing this all the time, but maybe we are not 'being selves' all the time, either. Something of this kind of movement of self can be seen in the context of James' stream of consciousness:

If the stream as a whole is identified with the Self far more than any outward thing, a certain portion of the stream abstracted from the rest is so identified in an altogether peculiar degree, and is felt by all men as a sort of innermost centre within the circle, of sanctuary within the citadel [...] there is a spiritual something in him which seems to go out to meet these qualities and contents, whilst they seem to come in to be received by it. It is what welcomes or rejects. It presides over the perception of sensations, and by giving or withholding its assent it influences the movements they tend to arouse. It is the home of interest, – not the pleasant or the painful, not even pleasure or pain, as such, but that within us to which pleasure and pain, the pleasant and the painful, speak. (James, 1890 p.297)

The 'something in him' is something like what I call the direct referent self, 'what welcomes and rejects'. It is characterised by responsiveness. As both a centre of attachment and a felt sense, it feels like 'a something', it can be treated as one, interacted with. It can be held at a distance, brought close, welcomed, rejected, protected or treasured, and will react to all these actions. While self could be defined as the whole interaction process, there is a sense of meaning in assigning 'self' to this 'home of interest'. The investigation of language in Chapter Three shows a variety of examples of how this centre, more of a passive responder than an active agent, is associated with self in everyday expressions.

Strawson's personality types are highly relevant here. For those who feel they have a stable and continuous self, the direct referent will be experienced as the 'innermost centre within the circle'. For those who do not feel such a continuity, the referent will be transient, arising differently every time. Self can be understood as a constellation of implicit aspects of experiencing as they become newly relevant, being thrown up at different moments in time.

Whether sensed vaguely or specifically, in first or third person mode, by accident or on purpose, a felt sense is always a coming of relevancy. It is a sense of those aspects of a situation which are relevant right now. This does not fit the picture of important things being 'deep', hidden truths that we have to dig down to get at, hidden treasures of universal relevance. They are rather the ones lying right on the top of the pile, those next in the queue for articulation; these relevancies are on the edge, whether we call it the murky edge or the living edge. These newly arising relevancies we might call selves. Self in this sense is always a newness and a nowness, always what is particularly alive and wants to move, to know something, say something, do something.

### **3. CREATION OF THE SPECIAL OBJECT AS A FICTION**

Dennett treats the creation of fictional characters as an analogy for how we live our lives. An author makes characters by generating information about them which is relevant to the story. It is not the case that other details about the character are hiding in the author's head – they are simply indeterminate. If the story required it, other aspects would be generated. Were interested readers to ask the author, she could write a further episode in which those aspects come into play. 'In this way matters which are indeterminate at one time can become determined later by a creative step.' (Dennett, 1992 p.110)

I propose that this imagined exercise with Updike, getting him to write more novels on demand to answer our questions, is actually a familiar exercise. That



is the way we treat each other; that is the way we are. We cannot undo those parts of our pasts that are determinate, but our selves are constantly being made more determinate as we go along in response to the way the world impinges on us. (Dennett, 1992 p.110)

On the other hand, as more of us becomes determinate, more questions are asked of us, and each new question breaks the consistency of what was previously determined. We are constantly creating and created. There is a fruitful crossing point here with Bakhtin's polyphonic reading of Dostoevsky's novels. In these multi-voiced works, as in our own lives, characters and selves are 'unfinalisable' (Bakhtin, 1981). The determinations pointed out by Dennett are only relative, ultimately we cannot be fully understood – at what point would we stop? According to Bakhtin's model, the questions the world throws at us lead not to more determinacy but to ever more creative possibilities. This is because, as Gendlin says, 'where others see indeterminacy, we find intricacy' (Gendlin, 2004 p.128). This intricacy has a subtle and precise order of its own, alive with implicit processes. There is no such thing as finding a detail which is set – just exactly what it is on the surface and no more, inanimate. A movement in the implicit intricacy also changes the nature of the past.

For Bakhtin, threshold situations push us beyond all previously created and upheld determinacies. This 'carnival' situation is full of delight. The new crossings bring a huge multiplicity of implicit meanings, making them freshly available. It is not the contents themselves which make up the 'carnival', but the freshness of their discovery and their movements into the unknown. This is the thread. In life, what is implicit (indeterminate) may be carried forward by a creative step, whether facilitated by focusing, therapy or some other new dialogue in our lives. This gives us a lot of freedom. Anything about us which is not happening right now, is simply indeterminate, part of an intricate structure of possibilities. It is neither hiding inside us waiting to be done, nor waiting outside to be attained.

The self as 'special object' drops out here, and is replaced by Dennett's 'centre of narrative gravity' (Dennett, 1992). This is not an object but a balance point that

functions through its effects, providing a sense of how things hang together, of which way is up. The second sense of self also appears on a continuum, with degrees. It may be no more than a balance point, but it can also be developed further into a more elaborate special object.

In practice, that is, in our living, indeterminacy resolves itself for an instant into a determinacy that then responds to the next question life asks us by entering into a creative dialogue, a new indeterminacy, that throws up the next answer – the implicit becoming explicit and carrying forward again. This life-process continues, and just sometimes, when difficulties, complications or creative possibilities arise, we need to pause and let the direct relevancy form as something temporarily separate, like a felt sense.

## **SECTION FIVE – SELF/NO-SELF AS THE PROCESS OF CARRYING FORWARD**

The dynamic interplay of the two kinds of felt sense/self I propose here – the 'direct referent' form emerging from the 'all of that' background and breaking up into a new intricate order, then another referent emerging – create a sense of the process 'between' them, or that they both participate in. This process is carrying forward, happening not randomly but according to relevancy – whatever is most relevant to the person at the time. This suggests another possibility for conceptualising self – as the process of carrying forward itself.

Carrying forward, like wu wei (investigated in Chapter Five), is a state of nonaction, in which the doing does itself. There is, you could say, an explicit lack of self-consciousness in these states, and we recognise them when they occur – maybe this could even be conceptualised as a felt sense of no-self. What happens in this moment of carrying forward?

Austin, by studying the brain states of experienced meditators, identified a state of

allocentric processing, as opposed to the egocentric processing mode we habitually use. In allocentric processing, the whole situation we are in is perceived and reacted to without any central preoccupation with ourselves (Austin, 2011 p.55). It is not spatially arranged around us as the pivot. The characteristics of these moments also seem to apply to the experience of the felt shift in focusing. During these tiny moments, there is no sense of being caught in the 'I-Me-Mine' loop of egocentric processing, there is no fear, there are no surges of emotional reaction, there is no rationalisation.

A felt shift is defined by Gendlin as necessarily involving small physiological changes in the direction of relaxation or relief, maybe a small sigh, or a change in breathing. This feeling may be caused by the sheer, sudden absence of the effort involved in egocentric processing, which has so much to interpret and defend, so much at stake. It takes everything with life or death seriousness. The new lightness may also be something to do with a lack of control. The shift is not something we have done on purpose. As we sense things being carried forward, we are carried along with them, not helplessly yet not in control either. We did pave the way for the shift to occur though, it is a change in the quality of our attention, which provides the gateway or impetus to the sense of motion and release.

By either directing or relaxing our attention, we are able to sense something that was stuck. 'What is split off, not felt, remains the same. When it is felt, it changes' (Gendlin, 1986 p.178). By allowing ourselves to sense the whole situation we give ourselves implicit permission to feel everything, we do not isolate or push away any single element, and then, in the felt shift we sense real changes in the *many* elements implicit in the situation. There is also a sense of trust, that life does not have to be exhaustively understood and controlled, that no ultimate destination can be planned. We do not know exactly where the movement has come from either, but for the moment it is good. Not in a moral sense, but there is a sense of rightness.

The carrying forward experience is entirely and exclusively present in the moment.

In that moment we are not rational, autonomous, controlling agents. In the movement of carrying forward there is much implicit, much presence, a sense of the more. There is a sense of expansion and a sense of relief. The fact that the felt shift can't be forced or planned puts it outside of the range of the 'self-strategy'. The pleasurable feeling of a felt shift, 'aaah', or 'that's it' or 'that's better'... often feels like going forward after being restrained (maybe by that very self-strategy), yet in another sense it feels like coming *back*, at last, it feels like being fully alive for a second. In the moments in which something is carried forward and a stuckness is released, do we feel more, or less, like ourselves? Do we feel 'like ourselves' at all in those moments?

This 'feeling fully alive' could be associated with, or called, 'being me'. But it does not need to (nor I think, does it matter if it does). On a simple level, say having a glass of water after being thirsty, a sense of relief is not identified with 'being me' (although it may be, in the sense that the physical discomfort was so bad that it was impossible to think about anything else – once that discomfort is gone, the other resumed processes may come flooding back and we might interpret this as 'being able to be myself' again). The difference between this simple physical relief and the carrying forward which takes place during the creative process has to do with the level of complexity, with the sheer number of processes involved. In both cases attention, which had previously been stuck going round and around the form of a problem, is released.

It seems to me that the examples Gendlin gives of experiences that 'come' and cannot be forced, like felt shifts, are telling. Sleep and orgasm are undoubtedly moments in which loss of self is experienced. Tears are also often experienced as a loss of the solidity of self, as a loss of self-control in a deep way (hence many people find them threatening). We cannot fight what is about to occur mentally, it just happens, which might be wonderful or might be humiliating. There are of course other examples of experiences that 'just come', which are less bodily – in speaking the words just come, and this is not experienced as threatening.

Whilst hot on the heels of a shift forward we may relate the movement 'back' to 'ourselves', in the actual moment of carrying forward there is no explicit self-consciousness, or perception of self as an object, with particular content. There may be a sense of energy, experienced as a relief from the effort of holding 'myself' together, or making myself coherent – a possibility of acting, or *being* in an effortless manner. Felt shifts do not have to occur as the end points of a focusing session, because carrying forward is both a naturally occurring process and one which happens when we are in touch with a direct referent in other ways – while thinking, while painting, while playing music – when there may be no bodily sense of the referent, indeed there may be no sense of the body at all. A felt shift is a split second in which we realise that life can go on 'without us', a sense of rightness that happens whenever we let it. As such it is both inspiring and immensely reassuring. (Gendlin, 1973)

## **SECTION SIX – EXTENDING/BREAKING THE BOUNDARY – THE OUTWARD DIRECTION**

Whichever way we direct our attention, in order to pause our situations for a while – be it the inner direction epitomised by looking inside a body-chamber in focusing (or samadhi concentration meditation), or the outer direction of the vague all-encompassing sense, (or mindfulness) – when a situation carries forward, bringing a shift or change, it is an experience of the extension of boundaries. This seems to be in the nature of carrying forward. This underlying outwards direction needs to be emphasised, particularly in disciplines such as therapy or meditation which carry cultural associations of looking inwards and isolating oneself from the wider context.

The underlying paradigm of focusing, in which the body functions as the place where all the information we need about our situations lies, can seem to reify the body, and to fit comfortably with the neuroscientific picture of our organisms as information-exchange centres. The physical emphasis in focusing loops back to a previous conceptualisation of self that relies on a sharp organism/world distinction.

However, as neuroscience moves outwards towards extended cognition, focusing also may be moving in an outward direction. The 'hidden wisdom of the body' that used to introduce the official online focusing base, was for a while replaced with, 'focusing shows how to pause the on-going situation and create a space for new possibilities for carrying forward' ([www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org)). The body as a source of wisdom has returned to the website, but in my reading, Gendlin's theory has developed and changed in emphasis to become more about the pause before the coming of something new, and less about hidden information within the body. The pause is just the point where articulation starts.

This 'outward turn' is propelled maybe most forcefully by the work of Purton, who refers to the 'myth of the bodily felt sense' in focusing practice and theory, which often leads us on a wild goose chase for a physical object inside, rather than enabling us to pause to allow the implicit in our situation to unfold, whether in a bodily sense or not (Purton, 2014). The articulation of something new, of the implicit in our situation, is wider than the body and also wider than the individual person. When looked at through an 'individual' lens, the practice of focusing can easily fall into line with old psychoanalytic pictures – the felt sense as a way of making the unconscious (something we hold inside us yet cannot see clearly and do not understand) conscious, or of making concrete symbols out of flux. 'You' and 'your body', your conscious and unconscious are separate, we have something like a set of Russian dolls – a body container with a felt sense container inside it and a meaning contained inside *that*.

There may be good reasons for the association of felt sensing with the body, which do not entail this picture of meaning-givers sitting inside containers. 'Sensing' something with the body is a common human experience, if we use sense to mean 'have a sensation'. 'Sensing something' captures well the vagueness of knowing/perceiving something we can't prove or explain – having a hunch, for example. This is not a physical occurrence happening inside, but we know we have a hunch *only* in a very concrete way. We can't be unsure if we have a hunch or not.

The sensation is the 'knowing that *something* is going on' that's left when no thoughts, feelings, or defined terms cover the experience.

Whether we categorise experiences in terms of bodily sensation or not is largely dependent on personal tendencies. 'Gut feelings' or 'shivers down the spine' are rare occurrences for some, and everyday sources of information for others. These 'gut feelings' occur in cases in which we know there is more to a situation than we can articulate, or have so far articulated. It is not a case of having 'something' inside, but a noticing of certain aspects of a situation that don't necessarily 'make sense' to us rationally. So we have no arguments to back us up but we nonetheless are convinced ('have a gut feeling') e.g. that we can't trust someone – maybe, were we able to say/know it explicitly, this is because of their patterns of eye contact, which we instinctively registered and responded to.

Sometimes there are physical elements to a gut feeling – the first signal that there is more to a situation, something relevant to us, but which we can't explicitly put our finger on (sic), may be a physical sensation ('shivers down the spine', 'butterflies in the tummy', etc). This may be connected with fluctuating anxiety levels when different thoughts/feelings/people/situations arise. The sense of things 'not being right' that comes along with persistent states of anxiety and/or depression is experienced with the whole organism, affecting the breathing and the whole nervous system. Breathing shallowly and constrictedly will reliably produce a feeling that things are not right, breathing deeply and expansively immediately feels different.

It is possible to pay attention to patterns of tension and experience 'more' of the situation, either through bodily awareness and relaxation or by paying attention to what else is going on at the same time as the physical sensations, i.e. their habitual associations. This does not mean that information about situations, as some kind of pure data, is held secretly 'inside the nervous system', but that attention to obvious sensations helps us identify triggers, the precise circumstances which tend to provoke fluctuations in our moods and physiological reactions, and paying attention

to the situation allows us to 'plug in' to the intricacy which we often avoided – maybe by paying too much, rather than too little attention to the body – but attention to the body as a passively receptive 'thing' rather than an inextricable part of our responsive living 'itself'. Hence, we may notice exactly when it is that we feel a certain stiffness in the shoulders, and then we might ask the shoulder stiffness what it might like to say or get a felt sense of it, which might carry forward.

In carrying forward, self, with its 'inner contents', ceases to be a problem. In fact it is characteristic of carrying forward that no problem is experienced at all. Suffering stops for a moment as we are directed forwards, emptied of contents while simultaneously sensing changes in many processes. How might we facilitate this carrying forward beyond the explicit teaching of the technique of focusing?

The most useful thing to do might be to maintain a practice which keeps us in the state of the first focusing step – clearing a space. This can be done in a variety of ways, from meditation to various spontaneous ways that people think up, maybe through exercise or other ways of relaxation. Giving a rule for the production of a particular state would create a conceptual category, bringing about the danger of interfering with experiencing, which would be particularly fatal in this area which is directly *about* experiencing.

Once we have cleared a space, then felt senses, the aspects of our situation that are most relevant to us right now, will keep coming to our attention and carrying forward – by themselves if there is no problem/blockedness/stuckness. This close succession of felt senses is like the constant succession of temporarily arising and dissipating selves in early Buddhist theory, and as observed in some cognitive science studies (Kurak, 2003).

If we have *not* cleared a space then we will be more likely to selectively attach to experiences that arise, and base a 'self' around them. The process of selection will be governed by habits and patterns of reaction set up in our lives, maybe laid down very early. In suggesting that we pay attention to this step – which in focusing is a



temporary step, meant to last just for the duration of the focusing session – I do not mean that we should be in a permanent state of clear space. We can, however, cultivate familiarity and flexibility in moving in and out of the state. For example, if someone blames us for something, we do not usually greet the comment, label it as someone else's opinion and set it aside – we are more inclined to react emotionally and use it as proof either of our unworthiness or our superiority to them. This habit is reinforced by culture and language, which impress upon us that self has a value, indeed *is* a value.

If value is sensed/defined in *just living*, however, in the process of different felt senses emerging and carrying forward, then we discover, experientially, that there is no hard and fast boundary between 'us' and 'situations' at all. This discovery, as previously discussed in Chapters Four and Five, in terms of Buddhist/Taoist practice, is a potential source of wisdom, freedom and joy. In psychotherapeutic terms we could speak of a sense of wellbeing, flow and meaning. It does not entail a sense of loss of agency, although it may entail a redefinition of the concept. Control is no longer seen as a force which we must impose on ourselves, or which must be imposed from the outside. It is more of a skilful interaction that works best when we drop anxiety and compulsive attachments to certain ways of experiencing and being, including clinging to logical formulations.

While it might seem that only philosophers or scientists need worry about the formulation of concepts or about disentangling themselves from concepts, in fact this is an activity that we all take part in, as concepts/language are inseparable elements of our living and, as Gendlin argues, our bodies. Our lives are certainly inseparable from our bodies, so it could not really be otherwise. We cannot do anything without activating particular thought-forms, which come along with all their implicit intricacy. We are not trapped by these concepts, or by language; indeed 'history and culture are insufficient to handle even an ordinary day' (Gendlin, 2004 p128). Neither are we condemned to a random meaningless excess of what does not fit into the ordered concepts.

Applying different categories does indeed bring forth different phenomena, but the direct experiencing of whatever we study always responds very precisely, always just so and not otherwise, and always with more than could follow from just our categories. Experiencing is a responsive order... (Gendlin, 2004 p.128)

If we think of our selves, for example, as buried treasure to be found at some time in the future, a prize that will make our struggles worthwhile, this will bring forth certain types of phenomena. We are likely to read some things we encounter as signs that we are on our way, or not. We are likely to think self-deprecating thoughts about ourselves on a daily basis, e.g. that we do not know who we really are or what we really want yet; we may feel despair if it seems to us that we are never going to get there. We may put a great deal of effort into various activities aimed at the goal of finding ourselves. Our thoughts and feelings in relation to this concept will structure our everyday life to a great extent.

At the same time, we are always living with *more* than this concept about ourselves, constantly disproving it, although we do not see it that way. This is because ordinary life always far exceeds concepts and this excess always works precisely and responsively, whether we think with it in a conscious way or not. Hence the state we are after, a full life, taking into account all of the 'more' that life has to offer, is actually our normal state. Whenever we are not performing the specific activity of creating concepts and manipulating them, according to the unit model – there we are, speaking, sleeping, living in a way which comes naturally. It is not a spontaneous mess, it has its own order. Just as in Mahayana philosophy, enlightenment – that is, total freedom from suffering – is ordinary mind, it is not different from what we do every day. Yet we spend time and energy setting up patterns of suffering, creating more concepts and attaching to them through the I-Me-Mine loop of desire and fear, some of the healthy, stress-free functioning that seems so unattainable actually goes on – unnoticed.

This is not to deny the point of specific practices or to argue that people who have

worked hard at spiritual practice and achieved results are living the same ordinary lives as entirely unreflective people. There is a difference in the quality of their experience, the wisdom and experience gained during their practice is implicit in it, and it may well be used to more skilful, compassionate ends. But we should not lose sight of the fact that absolute and relative levels are functioning at the same time, just as we switch between egocentric and allocentric processing, rarely registering the allocentric perspective: 'normally, this second, other-centred version will go on silently to join our first self-centred frame of spatial reference in a merger as complementary as yin and yang' (Austin, 2011 p.57). We tend to 'close in on ourselves' and move in the inward, egocentric direction, but this is a habit that can helpfully be examined and reversed.

The allocentric mode of spatial categorising is a relative level of functioning. It is a frame of spatial reference in which other people/things exist as independent entities with their own midlines, 'co-occupants of the scenery' and 'innocent of our presence' (Austin, 2011 p.56). There may ultimately be no independent entities, but it is an important part of psychological health to respect them on a relative level, where we take our place as an entity amongst entities, inextricably bound, but relatively speaking having our own interpersonal boundaries and a sense of how things are for other people. If we were only to use the egocentric processing mode, we would react to people as if they were parts of us, we would be wide open to merging and abusive relationships, guided only by our most basic drives, or primal circuits, to detect threat, then to merge in attachment for safety or flee out of fear. While these two modes of processing should work together 'like yin and yang' in everyday life, the brain naturally and spontaneously shifting or tilting from one network to another, the point of meditative practices is 'to empty the personal Self of its overconditioned egocentric preoccupations' (Austin, 2011 p.11). There is a consciously 'outward' direction.

This deactivation of the self-referential 'inward' perspective also happens naturally, according to Austin, 'when sudden stimulus captures attention' (Austin, 2011 p.118). This is reminiscent of the moments according to Tibetan Buddhism in which

the 'clear light' state, which appears to us at death, and represents absolute realisation of the luminous nature of everything, may arise during everyday life. It is said to arise in fainting and orgasm – but also during sneezing! (Dalai Lama 2005 p.166). Strawson makes a related point when he writes, 'most people have at some time, and however temporarily, experienced themselves as a kind of bare locus of consciousness – not just as detached, neutral, and unengaged but as void of personality, stripped of particularity of character [...] Such experience may be the result of nothing more unusual than exhaustion, solitude, shock, sex, abstract thought, boredom, or a hot bath.' (Strawson, 2009 p.182)

The sense of gears shifting, of the world suddenly becoming more 'objective' again, of things just existing in their own right, may come after a period of feeling overwhelmed, or may be just the result of 'tuning out'. We may have been so intensely involved in emotional storylines that we were not feeling constricted, but suddenly something happens that 'snaps us out of it' – some action is urgently required, or something happens like a sneeze, or tripping over, or the phone ringing, and there is a short, distinct sense of a shift in perspective, or in processing. When the immediate throes of grief have passed there is also often a sense of not so much of our returning to the world, but of the world itself returning.

Is it an important part of therapy to incorporate this shift outwards – seeing ourselves and our problems as a part of a world full of selves and problems, not as a rationalisation, but as an actual recognition of the way things are, bringing relief and more possibilities? This sounds incorrigibly upbeat but it does not have to be. Madison reminds us of the 'exhilarating pessimism' of seeing how things actually are – even when those things don't look good at all. Exhilarating pessimism is 'the expansive feeling of bodily resonance even when the content looks negative, even hopeless. The 'life energy' is released by acknowledging how things *really* are, without any spin that they are moving towards something sunnier.' (Madison, 2014 p.116)

In the cases Madison is talking about, in which we feel bodily release partly from

the sheer relief of dropping the pretence that things are otherwise, 'how things are' means accepting the facts on the relative level. This can be a way of carrying a process forward without involving the concept of the self. Were we to identify with the 'negative' content, for example imagine that we are personally deficient because we have cancer, we would not feel exhilarated. Gendlin also suggests, unconvincingly to Madison, that optimism is actually prior, fundamental. 'It wouldn't be so sad if it weren't so beautiful. The latter is wider and explains the first' (Madison, 2014 p.125). This seems to me to be more subtle than the victory of optimism over pessimism, as the beauty is to be found also in the sadness. Sadness is implicit in beauty and beauty implicit in sadness, the implicit is by its very nature wider, and beauty can be found implicit in many more, sometimes unexpected, places.

We can facilitate this widening focus in therapy in the only way we can really facilitate any kind of change at all. Gendlin writes, 'my job as a therapist is to be the kind of interaction that will make the person better. Even if the person says all the same words that they've said to themselves alone in their room, it's different to say them to *you*. It's a different living process. And that's where the possibility of change exists.' (Gendlin, 2005, Video 5)

This is a change in living, not a change 'in the self', although a certain cultural pressure to introduce 'self' into it is strong. Preston in 'The Relational Heart of Focusing Oriented Psychotherapy' indirectly quotes Gendlin as saying that 'our job as therapists is to be a new interaction from which a new Self emerges' (Preston, 2014 p.112). This is subtly and not so subtly different from the actual Gendlin quote supplied above. A new interaction makes a new living but the reified object of a 'new Self' does not need to intrude, and if it does, it brings a whole new set of superfluous expectations and associations along with it.

In the 'different living process', more becomes articulated. Gendlin's 'direction of fresh air' seems to entail more awareness, without necessarily making a distinction between inner and outer aspects of situations. This increase in awareness leads to

a decrease in pretending. There will be a decrease in self-deception, as Fingarette defines it – i.e. not as some mysterious inner sleight of hand but as the selective direction of our attention according to particular purposes (Fingarette, 1998). At any given time we are inundated with information and perceptions and we pay attention only to a certain amount. Whether we choose to hear criticism, collect evidence of our partners' infidelity or notice what is painfully obvious about our behaviour to disinterested observers, is a complicated personal matter, involving our personal histories, propensities and myriad other factors.

Self-deception of course happens on a fundamental level when we make the first discriminatory cut in favour of ourselves, showing an 'asymmetrical concern [...] a result of the bounded nature of the self, which is not just separate from the rest of the world, but also invested with a sense of specialness' (Dreyfus, 2011 p.137). 'Without such a sense of self, we would still experience emotions, but they would not be invested with the extremely compelling power they ordinarily have' continues Dreyfus. So our ordinary lives are dominated by the intense power of emotions, thoughts and perceptions of the world around us evoked by and organised around the desperate need to protect and preserve the self.

It seems that relief of suffering must entail loosening these tight inward-facing boundaries, hence a task of therapy becomes the widening of our outlook. It seems important that the therapist remain open, not habitually directing attention 'back inside' or towards interpretations of the self-object, but allowing perspectives to naturally widen as different aspects of the situation become articulated. The client then has the experience of articulating aspects of the situation that they had previously been directing attention away from, and this new articulation brings more possibilities and a sense of relief in the very expansion of viewpoint, whether we interpret this sense as carrying forward, seeing things as they are in absolute reality, shifting to allocentric processing, or as exhilarating pessimism.

## SECTION SEVEN – CONCLUSION

To return to the second of my initial questions, 'does the concept of self work to reduce, or to produce suffering?' – there are certainly persistent misconceptions about self which cause suffering. Self is talked about as if 'it' were a thing, from which we might be estranged, which we could lose or find, express or fail to express, as a measure which we try to match up to or a goal to be achieved, as a constant exertion of pressure.

After investigating/untangling these uses of self, however, not only are *things left as they are* (the goal of Wittgenstein's therapeutic approach to philosophy) – but also *there is more to them than we think there is, and we can do more with them than we think we can*.

There is no need to change the wording of expressions dealing with 'self-matters' or our understanding of them to render them more correct or fitting. There are many conceptual dangers to be aware of, but they cannot be eradicated from above or beyond the system. Rather, vigilance is called for when attachment and compulsion arise – whenever we feel that it *must* be one way and not another. 'Self-terms' and expressions usually serve us quite well, expressing both our confusion and our clarity, and it is also possible to make new meanings from them. We do this on a daily basis – we are not enslaved by any of the conceptualisations implied by our words.

It is also easy enough to dismantle the concept of self altogether, by analysis or by meditative experience and practice. Yet most people do usually start off with a sense of something to dismantle:

Whatever else is the case, the sense that there is such a thing as the self, and that it is not the same thing as the whole human being, is one of the fundamental structuring principles of our experience. (Strawson, 2009 p.31)

While the first-person perspective, in the proprioceptive sense, is undoubtedly the 'fundamental structuring principle of our experience', this is not the same as a sense of self that is different from the whole human being, or as Strawson puts it, a 'single, mental thing' (Strawson, 2009). The 'fundamental structuring principles of our experience' are precisely what goes unnoticed, and for good reason. As body processes maintain homeostasis, without needing any attention from us whatsoever, the first-person perspective structures our experience in an invaluable and transparent way. Within this structure, there is no compulsion or attachment, hence no problem, no need to talk about the self.

It seems to me that the concept of self as an entity within the whole human being is not a fundamental principle, but tends to be created/used when something comes prominently to our attention, and some kind of discomfort, attachment or compulsion arises in response. As we often notice physical processes only when our bodies malfunction, this arising of a problem and a self-concept might be an opportunity to widen awareness, as well as a discomfort.

This brings me to the third question, 'Is there value in using 'finding the self' or 'losing the self' as guiding principles of therapy?'. If we experience 'self' when in trouble, it seems to be an important question. Aiming to find or lose the self, as a 'thing', a holder of meaning, is potentially unhelpful, as there is ultimately nothing to find or lose. However, as investigated in Chapter Three, many different states and values may be pointed to by 'self' and these specific pointings may be useful as they arise in particular situations – rather than as examples of a general, universal, commonly understood principle or 'thing'. Talking about 'self' may also be a creative act, a fresh conceptualisation of a new experience. Hence there is no one rule as to whether self or no-self are helpful directions, it all depends on the particular, unique context.

Therefore, the direction in therapy should be a persistent return to looking at the situation as closely as possible, in all its uniqueness, not being led by any kind of self or no-self concept to make assumptions, or to manipulate present reality into



anything other than *exactly* what it is. This is more demanding and concrete a task than it might sound – as we are habitually misled by the concepts we use to see our situations not quite fully or accurately enough. Concepts involving self also tend to point to the most meaningful areas of experience – about which we are not in the habit of talking in a detailed and specific way. It is easier to say we are 'not feeling ourselves' than to pay attention to how exactly it *is* that we feel. Hence, this phrase is used precisely when there are complex things going on which we are not easily able to express.

When we hit this kind of block in our expression of a situation and use a self conceptualisation to 'cover' it, the concept must be loosened for our lives to be able to carry forward smoothly. The concept becomes a part, or a crystallisation, of the problem. In this situation, through the practice of pausing and articulating the situation in ways, such as focusing, both vaguer and more precise than the manipulation of concepts, we may stop feeling a compulsive attachment to making things the way we've come to believe they have to be. Then suffering – in the sense of dukkha/persistent not-rightness/not fitting – ceases. Life can carry forward without obstruction for a while, whether we choose to call that finding or losing the self, or something else entirely, like flow, or being free.

There does not seem to me to be any sense in undermining the existence of self in an ideological way. There certainly appears to be a need for a 'sense of self', in most people, which is persistent. Whether it causes suffering or not depends on the quality of attachment to it. It should neither be glorified nor pushed into a corner and forced to defend itself. A minimal sense of things as happening to *me*, although non-duality experiences show it not to be inevitable, is certainly normal, and it tends to feel unshareable to people, although there is also a clear consensus as to what we are talking about.

Strawson describes a moment occurring in childhood – the moment in which we realise that no-one else feels the same sense of 'being me', that we are existentially alone. This moment is also a recurring theme in literature. This moment is

memorable and likely to appear in art, I think, precisely because it is a rare realisation rather than the first appearance of a sense which then continues. It also appears at a certain point in development, when we are already quite intellectually sophisticated, and it does not strike everyone as specifically or as hard – sensitive people seem more likely to suffer from a sense of existential isolation. This realisation is a kind of peak moment. It begs the question – how were we living and functioning before? It implies that it is normal for children to live *without* a sense of being locked into a private separate world, and if this is the case is there anything wrong with this approach to life, and does it necessarily have to stop?

In the Mahayan Buddhist view, self/the felt sense arises, carries forward from, and is made up of, a reality ultimately characterised by openness, groundlessness and luminosity (Trungpa, 2005). There are no private separate worlds, there is no isolation. This reality can be sensed through mindfulness practice, close observation of the creation and dissipation of different felt senses of self, the processes of clinging and aversion, the comings and goings of different relevancies, broken up and shot through with a sense of openness, groundlessness, as things we used to cling to as solid show themselves to be constantly shifting and disappearing, including our own impulses and feelings. This is not necessarily pleasant, indeed it is argued that

The apparent duality of 'self' and 'other' is a manufactured set of reference points that arises as a panic-response to the uncertainty, openness, and groundlessness of the 'basic ground' of primordial awareness. (Ray, 2001 p.308)

Vipassana meditation, thus, is designed to produce an experience of the construction of the set of self reference points as pure process. Yet the relevancies, as they form and dissipate, function as temporary objects – the coming together of causes and conditions in transient forms. I am inclined to agree with Strawson when he writes:

in saying that the self is a thing or object, then, I'm not saying it isn't a process, because I think it is a process. And in saying that it's a process, I'm not saying that it isn't an object, because I think it is an object, or rather, *at least as good a candidate for being an object as anything else*. In saying that it is a process that is an object I am, rather, doubting the metaphysics that says that a process requires an object or 'substance' distinct from itself in which to occur. (Strawson, 2009 p.12 italics mine)

Hence, following Strawson, the process of my life carries on without a substance to occur in. It is treated as a kind of object because we function, according to the unit model, on a relative basis, with 'kinds of objects' - even though they might well be ultimately empty. Without the metaphysics, the process of my life is just life.

But if being is in itself, this means that it does not refer to itself as/ selfconsciousness does. It is this self. It is itself so completely that the perpetual reflection which constitutes the self is dissolved in an identity. That is why being is at bottom beyond the *self*, and our first formula can be only an approximation due to the requirements of language. In fact being is opaque to itself precisely because it is filled with itself. This can be better expressed by saying that being is what it is. (Sartre, 1956 p.61)

Being is what it is, but as soon as we perform the first act of calling ourselves a self, we are not what we are, we've introduced another element, we have started Foucault's 'dividing practices', and made ourselves into an object.

In this case, can we ever fulfil our main 'self-need'? Self seems like the last place we have to look for meaning. Can we just be fully and exactly what we are, fit, match, belong? Is it possible for us to 'be ourselves'?

Being in its absolute plenitude, according to Sartre, is not something we can be, but our attempts to 'be it' are an important part of our humanity, and it does not seem as if we are *exiled* from being as from a separate realm. If being is in-itself, then it

seems that we are, at least pre-reflectively, also being in-ourselves. This is why explicitly stating the intention to 'be yourself' tends to sound 'off' to many people. It smells fake. We intuit that at the core, we are 'ourselves' already, although that too sounds unnecessary. We are alive, and that's enough conceptualisation for most of us, most of the time.

When problems arise in life, however, conceptualisations arise too.

Buddhist philosophy and the philosophy of the implicit are conceptualisations that present similar pictures of the world – a vast interplay of processes in an unseparated multiplicity. Within this interplay, self, in Buddhism, arises as a cluster of attachments, tied together by compulsions and fear, provoking the constant defining, grasping and defending of 'our own' described as inevitable by James, and indeed by contemporary culture. In terms of the philosophy of the implicit, we could say that the self is structure-bound experiencing, also maintained by compulsions and fear. It may well be the case that in absolute reality, there is no such thing as self at all, and those who have reached full realisation remind us that it is not inevitable to function as if fatally attached to a threatened object. But not everyone wants to take the Buddhist path. Release from structure-bound experiencing, or from some layers of it, is more accessible.

Concentrating on the similarities of the Buddhist path and the Philosophy of the Implicit is a bit like saying that all religions are 'the same'. The statement overlooks the fact that each philosophy and religion has a very distinct set of connections, interactions and implications (a different identity, form, or self), yet what we *mean* as we participate in different philosophies and religions may be very similar.

Gendlin urges us to phrase our thoughts so that people will ask, 'what do you *mean*?' This fresh articulation itself is the point.

When we look for freedom from suffering in religion or philosophy, we *mean* something about what it is to be alive and to intuit everything that has or will exist

in a finite body and mind, with no clear idea of what death is, or where we came from, and a sense that an explanation must lie somewhere, with an equal sense that no such thing could exist apart from what is.

Self does not have to be a cluster of attachments. It does not have to be stable, solid, ever-lasting or true. It can be a transient, creative conceptualisation that carries us forward, or it may be a felt sense of the life process itself. This life process, when not overly distorted through attachment or aversion to certain bits of it, moves in a dynamic spiral in which concepts, thoughts, feelings, subjects and objects are thrown up from time to time and then dissipate, break up into openness, groundlessness.

Self and no-self are two sides of a duality which are conceptually rather than actually distinct.

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## APPENDIX – USES OF 'SELF' IN EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

I have placed everyday expressions using 'self' into groups with certain family resemblances: 'Self as Sense of Ease/Matching', 'Self as Goal', 'Self-interactions', 'Self as Awareness', 'Self as Positive Value', and 'Self as Negative Value'. I describe the picture presented by each use, i.e. how it functions and within what context of assumptions, and then, under the heading, 'What does the picture do for us?', I place each use into one of three categories: 'Misleading', 'Superfluous' and 'Pointing to Something'.

Each category refers specifically to the use of the word 'self' in the expression, rather than the expression as a whole. Does it mislead us into taking on questionable assumptions, is it superfluous, in the sense that the same point could be made in different words, without 'self'? In a sense one could argue that all the 'self-uses' are linguistic short-cuts, because all the things expressed by the self-expressions *could* be said another way. But even if this is the case, they *are* commonly said this way, which has effects.

The word self may also point to some situation or constellation of factors, not exactly defined yet specific, that could not be said any other way. The 'pointing to something' category demarcates the area of Gendlin's direct referent – a phenomenon that, as I argue in Chapter Seven, is particularly associated with the self. The combination of vagueness and intimacy of the 'something' being gestured at is sometimes the whole point. This is precisely 'the self-point' – vague yet intimate.

### 1. SELF AS SENSE OF EASE, AND SELF AS MATCHING

**NOT FEELING MYSELF– 'I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm not ill or anything. I'm just not feeling myself today'**

**The Picture:** I'm in a bad mood, not able to articulate what the problem is, or act as 'normal', i.e. in a natural flow. The phrase may also indicate a state of general ill-health, as when you feel you are 'coming down with something' or recovering, and not quite firing on all cylinders. Well-being, and health, feeling all my capacities and powers to be available, are all clearly associated with 'feeling/being myself'.

There is a second element here, a lack of matching-up. I'm behaving/thinking/feeling in a way which produces a particular sense of unease, a kind of 'not fitting'. Usually this is a state in which lots of 'things' are implicitly felt, but I am not yet able to articulate them. If I were 'feeling myself' then all those dimly sensed things would become clear, and I would be able to choose whether to express them or not. 'Self' here functions as a clear, articulated flow of experience and action, imagined and desired in its absence.

To give a concrete example: the 'self' which has been lost by a woman after two decades of full-time caretaking might predominantly be, were the factors separated out, her health, her joy, her financial independence or her working life. But if the woman does not say 'I lost my health/etc' but 'I lost *myself*' – there is a big difference. There is likely to be a stronger emotional charge when she talks of not feeling herself anymore, it's more than the loss of a specific activity, or even the whole constellation involved with an activity. e.g. a community, sense of achievement, appreciation, etc. There is something about the way *all* these aspects of what has been lost seem to relate to 'her'. Something about this relation is ineradicable. When she says 'I just don't feel myself anymore', this fits better than saying 'I miss the job, my colleagues, the satisfaction'. The sense of experience matching up with a concept is missing, the feeling of fit, matching, or order, or things being as they should be. 'I don't feel myself anymore,' could often be expressed as 'things are *not* as they should be', or 'I feel out of context'. I don't fit seamlessly into my situation – something sticks out. In Buddhist terms it is the attachment to the experience that produces the exquisite twist of suffering that seems to cut the deepest. So 'things are not as they should be and this is somehow *my fault*' is a particularly bad feeling.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** The phrase, in its vagueness, yet with its strong charge, indicates the appearance of a felt sense. This sense could be a helpful gateway to knowledge/expression of what it is in the situation that needs attention, in order for the person to feel better.

While it is hard (perhaps because unnecessary!) to conceptualise 'feeling right', 'feeling wrong' is easier to put your finger on, and it is, maybe, more useful to do so. There is a sense of constriction, unease, or being prevented from living freely, that comes in degrees, maybe going as far as losing contact with what it even *is* that you 'really' think or feel. You are not actually sure what that might be, because you daren't pay attention. There is a sense that there *must* be a natural way of being, full of realness and ease, yet there's 'something in the way', and you are not able to get to it. The effects of this range from low level anxiety to frustration, chronic stress and despair. The use of 'self' here may, however, work to point attention unnecessarily at 'myself' as a separate individual in situations which could be more accurately defined as feeling out of context.

**BESIDE MYSELF** – 'When my son hadn't come back yet at 1am and he wasn't picking up his phone I was beside myself...'

**The Picture:** we are overtaken by the sheer strength of an emotional or anxious state, which cuts us off from normal functioning. 'Beside ourselves' with grief or worry we are unable to perform basic tasks, to remember to eat or sleep, or to communicate with others. 'Self' points towards normal functioning. Somehow we have become separated from that, we have become overwhelmed.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** We feel a stark and unusual sense of separation from our own state. We do not identify with our situation, it is something that has temporarily removed us from everything we take for granted and identify with. We are no longer on solid, known ground. 'Myself' would be that solid, known ground,

and I can see it, but I can't stand on it, it is beside me.

**BEING MYSELF** - 'When I'm with you, at last, I can be myself'. 'It's such a relief when I get home from work in the evening to just kick off my shoes and be myself...'

**The Picture:** we feel a sense of ease, freedom, relaxation after constraints, we can at last say what we really think, express how we really feel, without the need to pretend.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is both Misleading and Points to Something.** Looking at the use of the expression logically, it works from the assumption that we are usually alienated from ourselves. This is misleading as a description of the normal human state, and unhelpful, in judging our present state to be automatically not good enough. On the other hand, some people do feel something they might call 'alienated from themselves', as if they cannot behave naturally or be sure what they think or feel. This kind of 'incongruence' according to Rogers is often a consequence of our states, thoughts and feelings not being accepted or named by caregivers, so we end up twisting what we experience to fit the model that will win us love. This is a case of 'forgetting ourselves'. We get so in the habit of responding according to a conditional model that we have a sense of no longer knowing who we really 'are' – how we might initially respond and act in situations when 'allowed' to let our actions and responses come freely. It is also certainly true that people often pretend and play various social roles in everyday life, which can be exhausting. Hence the expression points to a specific experience of relaxation, mixed with a sense of relief, and returning to base, which I would say has a commonly agreed meaning.

**SELF CONFIDENCE** - 'Since I started the course, I've noticed my self-confidence growing.'

**The Picture:** we feel capable of doing whatever is required of us, we feel safe and secure, that we can deal with any situation that arises. We don't feel endangered or restricted by anything, we don't feel dependent on the judgements of others.

Whatever happens, we can handle it. This may be in one part of our lives, say work, or may extend to a general sense of confidence.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Superfluous.** The word 'self' tags on as an intensifier, pointing the confidence back to its owner. Why should the word 'self' be added on here? It seems as if an ideological point is being made. Is the confidence a person feels in 'herself' or in her abilities to act in a particular situation? There seems to be a self-bias at work in terms like this. At the same time it points to a kind of flavour of feeling able to act freely as you want to in a situation, where confidence maybe mixes with pride. This is something real, but to what extent is the language distorting it, telling us that confidence is a *thing* belonging to *me*, a possession to be proud of? Another possibility is that we feel confident 'with ourselves' as we might once have felt confident with someone else there to look after us. The primary case would be a caretaker giving us confidence, by their very presence, and later we become able to sense this confidence without another person supplying it. Hence someone with a secure family background might say 'I'm a self-confident person' and someone from an insecure background might say 'I'm not a self-confident person', and the statements may carry a flavour of pride or shame, due to the connotations of 'self' as prized object for which *I* am responsible. As we are not personally responsible for the family background we are born into, the pride or shame would not be appropriate here.

**SURE OF MYSELF** - 'It took me a few years to feel sure of myself as a mother'.

**The Picture:** We feel that we are not going to be 'caught out', that our decisions will be good, that we know enough to be able to trust our own feelings, thoughts and actions, not to second guess them. There's a lack of anxiety.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Superfluous.** What we are sure of here is not a 'self' but a capacity to act appropriately, effectively. Once more, 'self' points to a sense of comfort, confidence, an ability to act in the right way, a kind of trust. Sure of 'myself' in

changing circumstances, I can rely on my abilities and potentials rather than my features. I am a set of flexible potentials. Identifying with these potentials is an option, and may be a helpful one.

## 2. SELF AS GOAL

'Self' here is defined as a kind of precious resource, or hidden treasure, which has been obscured in some way and needs to be found, identified and understood – it is some kind of key to our future well-being. Self – finding it, knowing it, understanding it, listening to it, trusting it, expressing it, being it, being true to it, is seen as the destination of life. Life itself is understood as a mythical journey.

**TRUE TO MYSELF** - 'The most important thing, whatever you do, is always to stay true to yourself'.

**The Picture:** is very common in contemporary culture. A vow to 'be true to myself' recently replaced allegiance to God in the Scouts and Girl Guides movement in the UK. This development was treated as a cause for concern by some commentators, who remarked that it is meaningless and could be interpreted as doing just what we feel like, which would be quite the opposite of following God, as the universal, moral arbiter. If our moral compass is situated 'in ourselves' and doing the right thing is the same as doing the thing that feels right, we appear to live in an entirely relativist universe.

Commentators pointed out that children are usually perfectly 'true to themselves' in the sense of doing what feels right without necessarily having any concern for others or for the consequences of their actions. It would certainly also be possible for an adult to say, 'I know it's not right but I'm going to do it anyway – it's just the way I am', but I don't think it would be possible for an adult to say this entirely 'straight', without taking into account, somehow in tone of voice or intonation, the public implication that 'how I am' should be good. The statement would sound intentionally provocative.

Nonetheless, 'self' can be assumed to refer to opposing qualities by different people within the same culture. Those who wrote the vows took self to mean a necessarily good and moral centre, while the commentators took it to mean selfish desires and pleasure, possibly at the expense of moral values.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It throws up two completely opposing concepts of self and of being true or authentic. This leads me to think that the point can be made less ambiguously, as something like 'listening to my most important values'. Then there is the issue of the 'extra layer', my being real means me being in a particular relationship to something that is essentially 'me'. This implied 'real version' of each person, who we should match with, might prove useful when we have been suffering from 'incongruence' or being heavily motivated to pretend, but in everyday life for most people the 'extra layer' is at best an unnecessary confusion.

**VOYAGE OF SELF-DISCOVERY** - 'I went on a trip around the world and saw a lot of amazing things but really it was more of a voyage of self-discovery'

**The Picture:** a divisive picture, for some an attractive prospect, if we assume that, while it may be tough at times, the 'journey' will be worth it. For others this is the epitome of a meaningless and morally suspicious picture into which people are lured (maybe to divert them from more serious matters). 'Self' for this second group is taken to mean (and hence made to mean) concentration on an individual who separates themselves off from society and thereby abandons moral responsibility for others. 'Self' in this case is a luxury, something you have to be able to afford, once basic necessities have been secured. People would be unlikely to describe, say, becoming homeless as a voyage of self-discovery, although you could certainly learn about yourself from that experience.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** We are led to think that meaning is located somewhere specific, more to the point somewhere *else*. This brings associations with having to try hard,

to make uncomfortable journeys, to learn that we are different from the people we thought we were.

The metaphor is a powerful one so it has the potential to be helpful if it resonates with us. It links with an archetypal metaphor of the journey, the quest. This is a powerful set of associations, reinforced through human stories throughout history. There is a tendency to go back and interpret old myths in terms of the self. Whereas once the treasure was the Holy Grail, it is now the very self who is looking. What that self is understood to be composed of ranges widely. But the metaphor of 'self discovery' in my view unhelpfully makes a distant, external goal or prize of the potential that is under our noses.

**SELF HELP: The Picture** - this is a similarly divisive category, referring to an increasingly popular genre of media aimed at providing psychological tricks for people who want to improve their 'self-esteem', relationship skills or happiness levels in the privacy of their own homes.

#### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** The picture implies a mechanistic model of life, simplistic and inappropriate for dealing with phenomena such as happiness, confidence, relationships or grief, which are all complex, intricate, interpersonal processes (and can only be improved or healed through such relationships and processes). So the picture first posits that we are in need of help in some deep and essential way, help not with our situations but with our very 'selves', then it gives us instructions to follow, after which we can either succeed or fail. The 'unit view' here feeds beautifully into a materialistic, capitalist culture, where human potentialities can be operationalised, bought and sold. 'Self-esteem' is a prime example of such a pseudo-product. This model also treats us as individuals as responsible for complex situations involving many other factors.

**GETTING TO KNOW MY REAL SELF** —'I always thought I was a very competitive person, who wanted to be the best at any price. As I got older I discovered my real



self. Actually I didn't mind not always being first, I'd just been trying so hard all the time because I was trying to please my parents.' 'It wasn't until I met him that I got to know my real self, he gave me permission to do what I really wanted'.

**The Picture:** uncovering previously hidden capacities or aspects, a real self as opposed to a false one, which has been more or less deliberately pretending, in order to gain approval, or fit others' expectations in some way.

#### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** The use of 'self' here gives us a pointer to a state in which we are *not* pretending. This is useful for people who for various reasons have spent a lot of time in their lives pretending, but for those who have *not* been trapped in such patterns, it misleadingly suggests that I am not who I think I am, that there is some kind of mystery, or trick being played, and I have to get out of it and discover 'myself'. It presupposes, and therefore maybe partly causes, a kind of alienation. The phrases imply that our normal way of being is somehow unreal, and we should be searching for something else. It also makes the self sound like an external object that can be possessed, known, lost or found. This is alienating and simply not true. This phrase, like all those in the 'self as goal' section, tends to be used in particular social groups and situations. It is a kind of new psychological jargon used more by women than men, more by middle class than working class people, and by people who are therapy-literate. As such, it is already divisive.

**FINDING YOURSELF** – 'I spent my early twenties running around India trying to find myself'

**The Picture:** We think we have to be a certain way to be accepted. It doesn't feel right, but we eventually forget the way we were before we started. Then, one day, we uncover something, which feels new and yet familiar, a hidden truth.

#### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** Once more, we are told that we're lost and do not know where we are, in complete contradiction to normal everyday experience. This possibility also adds drama, a mysterious, mythological storyline to our lives, so it can be used

creatively.

**KNOWING MYSELF** – 'I had better avoid seeing him, knowing myself as I do, I might react badly', 'I made a mess of my relationships when I was young, now I know myself much better'

**The Picture:** refers to a sense of peace, acceptance, and possibly control. There are no more surprises, no being thrown around unexpectedly by strong forces from within. There's no sense of unease about 'hidden capacities/aspects' inside. There is a sense that anything I might think/feel/do will be comprehensible and acceptable.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It sets up the idea that it is not only possible, but normal to not be aware of your own thoughts/feelings/capacities, and at the same time introduces the idea that this lack of awareness is something 'wrong', that you *should* 'know yourself'.

### 3. SELF INTERACTIONS

**HIDING MY REAL SELF** - 'All through my childhood, I just sat quietly so as not to cause trouble. If I was too loud, or cheerful, I was punished. I had to hide my real self'. 'I have to hide my real self at work'.

**The Picture:** the first speaker has suffered from judgement and lack of acceptance in a formative relationship, and they learn not to say what they really think or feel or ask for what they really want, as they will be punished for it. This is a case of Rogers' 'incongruence', as in the case of 'Being Myself'. The second speaker is more pragmatically choosing what to express in a certain context, but frames it as inauthenticity.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** It assumes a complete split between who a person is 'inside'

and who they show to the outer world. It is doubtful that it is possible to have such control, but the picture points to a common situation, to potentials not used, or reactions or actions that are intentionally not expressed for some reason. Once more the 'self as object' is misleading. In fact, certain processes are not taking place, and this is very different from hiding an object, with certain fixed qualities and intentionally producing a different one. It could be said that we are always being 'our real selves' as we are in every different context – including ones of constraint in which we cannot do very much at all.

**TRUSTING MYSELF** - 'Since I made so many bad financial decisions, I just can't trust myself anymore'. 'Over the years as I've got older I've learned not to over-think things, I trust myself more and more'.

**The Picture:** often refers to intuition, i.e. to information which does not come through one modality only. It evokes the way in which we may trust data which comes to us, and cannot be immediately labelled – e.g. as a rational argument or an emotional reaction. 'Myself' here mixes up a reliable sense of knowing what to do, with a 'self' – posited here as some kind of reason or cause of this. It can also simply refer to our ability to make good decisions.

#### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Superfluous.** It is not some other person that we trust, but our capacities to make decisions. It does point to a vague something, however, the concept 'myself' here brings together all the various different ways in which we gather relevant data to make decisions.

**ACCEPTING MYSELF** – 'Now I accept myself as I am, I don't need to diet anymore'.

**The Picture:** here we have two beings posited, the acceptor and the acceptee. 'I' unconditionally accepts the actions and existence of the named 'myself', who acts/thinks/feels. 'Myself' here, quite often, especially when used by women, refers to the body.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** First it splits us into accepter and 'acceptee', then unconditional acceptance seems to heal the split, and present a kind of oneness - the lack of a former obstacle. This healing of previously felt conflicts 'in ourselves' through acceptance is something is a well-trodden path in therapy. Strictly speaking, 'myself' is not accurate in its positing of an object, when the acceptance felt, e.g. through the therapy situation tends to flow towards many processes and aspects of our whole situations. But it very often heals precisely conflicts which caused us to separate ourselves off as 'unacceptable', so there is sense in saying that it is 'myself' which is now accepted.

**LISTENING TO MYSELF** – 'I feel like I should go, I think its going to be a good concert, but if I really listen to myself, it's clear that I don't really want to go out'.

**The Picture:** 'myself' refers to intuition, or to listening to the whole situation. Or it may imply another split, between the I who listens and the 'myself' who knows the truth. Sometimes associated with the picture of an 'inner voice,' telling you a truth you are not quite ready to act on yet.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** It points us to a practice of pausing and listening to the whole situation as we experience it. 'Myself' in this case could be replaced with 'the whole situation as we experience it', but listening to 'myself' rather than 'the situation', adds a quality of intimacy. Taken literally, there are the usual implications of unnecessary division—in this case, that I am listening to some essential core of knowledge, which is separate from my experience.

**UNDERSTANDING MYSELF/NOT UNDERSTANDING MYSELF** – 'I understand myself very well, I know why I take drugs, it all makes sense, but that doesn't help'. 'I just keep getting into the same bad relationships over and over again. I just don't understand myself'.

**The Picture:** a separation once more of one part of the dynamic system, into an observing I and a 'myself', which is prioritised as the object worth understanding.

Less attention is paid to 'I'—the part in this picture which is trying to understand, it is not actually visible in the picture, its existence is implied.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It is an inaccurate and disempowering way of putting things – it implies that we are separate from our patterns of behaviour, or the thoughts/feelings that arise in us. We are, though, both the ones who are doing the unreasonable things, and the ones who are trying to understand, and this 'trying to understand' understands its activity perfectly.

**LOSING MYSELF** - 'I just lost myself in the music...' 'When I was working in the City I was successful and I made lots of money, but I lost myself.'

**The Picture:** has two distinct meanings – it refers to either the loss of 'self-consciousness' through absorption in an activity, in which case it has a positive flavour, or the sense of having lost meaning in life, feeling unengaged with your own behaviour, that you have lost power and agency.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

'Losing myself' as in losing focus on our own internal dialogues, and becoming totally involved in an experience or activity, **points to something** – implying that in times when we are happily and effectively doing something, concentration on ourselves 'as subject' is a superfluous encumbrance. Maybe we could 'lose ourselves' permanently...?

'Losing myself' in the sense of losing meaning **is superfluous**. It is unclear how 'losing myself' in this context is more accurate than 'not acting in accordance with my values'.

**SELF-HATRED** - 'I hate myself for not having stopped her'. 'Part of my depression is this underlying feeling of self-hatred. I just can't stand myself'.

**The Picture:** I feel uncomfortable and judgemental about something I have done/thought/said/felt and turn the full force of this judgement on 'myself' as the person who is responsible, who decided, or allowed it to happen. I then allow this

judgement to expand into something essential about me as a person. We may not be clear where the judgement has come from or what it is we have done wrong, as in the case of the depressed person. Self-hatred 'out of nowhere' may well be to do with internalised judgements from others. Thinking that we are the ones who hate ourselves may in a sense be safer.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It seems to identify the whole of our person with certain acts/thoughts/feelings that we have. While the actual situation is always more complex (we don't in actual fact hate every aspect of ourselves), we choose to say 'I hate myself for leaving' rather than 'I hate the fact that I left'. This carries greater emotional force and points to the way the feeling of 'self-hatred' seems to spread out from the original act/thought/feeling to taint everything about us. So rationally speaking it is misleading, while practically speaking it refers to a feeling which is commonly understood. The common understanding also seems unhelpful, in making suffering worse. Frankfurt's analysis is more fruitful (Frankfurt, 1971) – we simply have a second order will to do something other than what we are doing – and there are emotional consequences.

**SELF-SABOTAGE** - 'I manage to sabotage myself in starting my new project by constantly inviting people to help who turn out to be incompetent'.

**The Picture:** 'self' in this case means an authentic person with good will, under attack by other 'parts' of the self, or other forces within it, which do not want 'the self', here assumed to be the positive drive of the person, to succeed.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Superfluous.** It could actually be stated as 'I keep acting so that I fail in what I've decided to do'. It is also misleading in the sense that in situations in which we have a conflict of interest, say security vs growth, it personalises the conflict, coming down on the side of those interests that we name 'self', while the other side, the desire to sabotage growth, is identified with the 'I', and acts. The acts are owned, but simultaneously shown to be against the 'real interests'. This may perpetuate the initial confusion the person is experiencing, or facilitate a creative

act of separating out interests, that clarifies the situation.

**SELF HARM** – 'I self-harmed for a year, mainly cutting, then through an eating disorder.'

**The Picture:** the identification ('I') is with the person who acts, but the person, as 'self', is also the passive victim. There is a sense evoked in which by intentionally harming my body, or causing myself pain, I am harming my whole being.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It produces a sharp, simple, binary conflict. In fact, I am the one who is acting, I am acting to cause myself pain. There must be a sense in which this action is also 'for myself' – i.e. in my interests. I am doing something for a reason.

**SELF-PITY** - 'I can't stand his self-pitying whining anymore. I wish he would just get on with it'. 'Ever since she left I've just been staying in every night feeling sorry for myself.'

**The Picture:** By pointlessly homing your attention in on 'your self', on certain 'negative' aspects of your experience, you undermine your dignity.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** It points to a commonly recognisable phenomenon, when we lose perspective and start to feel 'sucked into' unpleasant thoughts/feelings, feeling compulsively attached to them. Although we know we would feel better if we looked at the situation with a wider perspective, we have a conflict of interest. Identifying 'self' with both the one who is feeling pity and the one who is being pitied is a disempowering combination. There seems to be no way out, and 'self' here is cast as a uniquely negative, painful thing. Looking more in terms of a conflict of interest would bring out the reasons we have for remaining in a state of self-pity, what we want to accomplish by it. Of course it can also be used to morally judge perfectly normal sadness.

**DOING SOMETHING AGAINST MYSELF** - 'I know I have to send my child to school,

but I'm doing it against myself, really'.

**The Picture:** I'm acting 'against my better judgement', making a compromise . Once more, the values (or thoughts or feelings) which are referred to as 'self' are considered to be the most important, the most authentic. Yet for some reason the person has decided to act against this.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It locates our values, our 'better judgement' inside and identifies them with passive core of 'self,' while the one who is acting according to other interests, making a compromise, is the active 'I'. At the same time, the positive attention seems directed to the 'self'. This type of dramatisation of the conflict might not be helpful, setting one kind of thing, 'what I am doing' against another kind of thing, 'what I really want to do,' when the situation is more complex and contains more possibilities. Once again the concept of a second order will is useful here. I want something but I don't want to want it. Nonetheless I act according to my first order desire. The discomfort I then feel need not be conceptualised as being 'for' or 'against' 'myself'.

**CONTRADICTION MYSELF** – 'so, I contradict myself! I contain multitudes' (Whitman, 1855 p.85).

**The Picture:** I am a dynamic system with room for arguments, disagreement and creativity. This might be seen by others as a kind of dishonesty.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** There is an inaccurate binary split created here between 'I' and 'myself' but the two parties seem to be on an equal footing, so the metaphor is open and constructive. The 'appearing dishonest' angle points to our need for people to be consistent with themselves. This is, as pointed out in Chapter One on cultural contexts, a culturally specific demand that causes unnecessary pressure.

**SELF-DECEPTION** – 'I don't know how I could have deceived myself for so long, it's obvious now that he was betraying me'.



**The Picture:** this is maybe the most complicated use of 'self'. It suggests the dynamic system turning on itself, yet presumably in its own overall interest. It seems to presume that there are competing interests within the wider system, or community of 'self', within which the word 'self' is still the touchstone of authenticity, in this case betrayed by other interests. Not completely successfully though – otherwise the phenomenon would not be noticed.

Fingarette encapsulates the issue well in 'Self-deception needs no explaining', (Fingarette, 1998) in which we argues that, 'self-deception is as ordinary and familiar a kind of mental activity as one can imagine...' (Fingarette, 1998 p. 289). In our everyday mental activity, we take into account many factors and conditions, without explicitly focusing our attention on more than a few of them. Simple consideration of the act of writing, or driving, or just about anything, should make this clear. It is 'intelligently adaptive' for us to focus our attention on what is relevant to us in our activities, no more no less. We can take into account a huge amount of data without being attentive to it, find it hard to recall things which were outside the span of our attention at a given time and focus with particular intensity upon the piece of our field of attention that is important to us.

Given this picture of normal functioning (rather than the misconception that we are rational, all-aware and all-controlling agents, shining our attention-spotlight consciously and intentionally on all relevant details) it comes as no surprise that we direct our attention away from potential traumas, shameful events/feelings, or anything potentially disruptive to our lives. If this is in our interests (usually fear-based interests), then we can choose not to notice a lot of data without performing any special mental trick, and without losing our sincerity when we report what we feel or think. This is where Rogers' 'incongruence' may be sensed, when someone has built a self concept by selectively directing attention away from shame or fear-provoking areas, yet these shameful or fearful situations in their lives are still present. This does not make the person who has spent their life intentionally avoiding them into a liar, or someone who is holding 'repressed' material in a sealed container.

Fingarette expands the example of our suspension of disbelief while at the theatre or seeing a film, to remind us how powerful and visceral our reactions can be to situations we are perfectly aware are not actually happening. We simply choose where to direct our attention, what to 'believe'.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It introduces the possibility that we might be able to entirely control our awareness to suit our own purposes, and that this might entail making certain parts of our experience disappear altogether. Once more, 'self' is designated the victim, and the perpetrator is un-named. This seems, in the light of Fingarette's analysis, to be a totally unnecessary drama.

**LYING TO MYSELF** – 'now I'm divorced I can see that I was just lying to myself all those years...'

**The Picture:** this expression is on a continuum with 'self-deception'. Lying is not a not-noticing, like self-deception, but a deliberate, intentional act. Can we deliberately act to erase our own experience while living it? The word 'myself' in this expression once more does not refer to the whole system but to one part of it –the authentic aspect. 'Myself' here is, following the typical pattern for self-expressions, the victim rather than the perpetrator. There is a sense in which 'myself' always knew, but other forces/interests were more powerful. 'Lying' implies conscious exercise of a will to deceive. Therefore the picture is a more forceful one than that of self-deception, but not essentially different.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** Once more, there seems to be a preference for the passive self who was lied to, rather than the invisible 'I' who did the lying for its own reasons, and a certain dangerous delusion is set up, that there may be a source of bad will within us which actively works against us.

**SELF DESTRUCTIVE** – 'I'm not surprised he took an overdose, he always had a self-

destructive streak'.

**The Picture:** The whole person is a dynamic system, containing conflicting tendencies. 'Self' is identified with the essential core and the positive tendencies/potentials. At the same time there is a part, or person, person who acts to destroy, and they appear to be more powerful.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** It points quite neatly to a certain kind of behaviour, in which there seems to be a compulsive, and usually to some extent pleasurable, desire to take risks which go against the instinct for 'self-preservation' or survival. It can be less usefully extended to cover, and personalise/defuse, various acts of rebellion, which may be primarily be against external conditions and/or other people. When it seems impossible to have an effect on others, aggression may be turned on ourselves.

**SELF-CRITICAL** – 'I can't forgive myself for what I did'. 'I find it really difficult to finish a piece of work, I'm so self-critical', 'The best thing you can do as a young artist is be self-critical'.

**The Picture:** This can be a positive or negative judgement, emphasising the split between things done/thought/felt by someone and a different 'part' of them which observes and judges.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** It creates a metaphor of separation of one part which may be hostile to the rest. There may be a cultural movement over time in the West to value being 'self-critical' more negatively, with the development of the concept of the 'inner critic', from whom we should free ourselves, etc.

**SELF CONTROL** – 'I'd love to do that diet, but I just don't have the self-control'.

**The Picture:** here 'self' seems to refer to the whole of the dynamic self system, containing the assumption that there are some parts which could lead 'the whole' astray, hence need controlling by the rest.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Superfluous.** The situation it refers to could be explained differently, e.g. 'I often do things that I don't think I should be doing'. This is the prime example of 'second order' will functioning (Frankfurt, 1971) – the will to not want to have the will to have the ice-cream. But the 'self-control' picture posits that our desires are essentially in need of controlling, and not to be trusted, in a sense reminiscent of the Christian tradition and Freudian theory. There is a conflict between what we want to do and what we think would be the best thing to do, but this could be conceptualised as two different desires, not necessarily in a relationship of force. The language here seems to intensify the conflict inherent in the situation and takes the further step of identifying those desires with our very being. This is misleading and ups the emotional pressure.

**SELF-PROTECTION** - 'I'm feeling fragile at the moment so I know I need to protect myself'.

**The Picture:** 'Self' may function here to encompass the most vulnerable parts of a person, that need to be hidden from view, or it may function as 'my own interests as opposed to those of others', e.g. protecting yourself in the workplace or in a personal relationship.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** It places value on all of our own experience, paying care and attention to it. The fact that I can separate out my strengths to take care of my weaker sides is a creative metaphor which could be helpful. Where we draw the boundary of 'self' is of course a fluid matter. Here, 'self' can be defined as 'what I need to protect'.

**SELF-CARE** – 'I'm chronically exhausted, I need to spend some more time on self-care'

**The Picture:** a relatively recently coined phrase, referring to self once more as a separate entity with different interests from those of others, but this time placing a morally positive connotation on serving one's own interests, looking after 'oneself.'

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** The expression is not yet rooted in everyday speech and so it seems to function as a kind of psychological jargon to cover the need to relax and do things we enjoy, that we can already say perfectly clearly. It privileges the 'self' as something which requires extra special care, taking it out of the realm of everyday life.

## **4. SELF AS AWARENESS**

**SELF-AWARENESS** – 'I developed more self-awareness, and now I don't react so strongly to that situation anymore'.

**The Picture:** an 'extra layer' of consciousness reminding us that 'it is *me* who is doing/thinking/feeling'. I am observing my actions/thoughts/feelings as units, yet without the judgemental attitude necessarily involved in 'self-consciousness'. Self awareness is seen as a form of intelligence, an ability to consider your actions, feelings etc with a certain element of distance which enables you to act from an informed position, not under compulsion from thoughts, feelings or habits. Self-awareness seems to point to the seeing/being of self as a dynamic process or unfolding livingness rather than an object. It is something which is used in practice, e.g. to catch yourself in old habits.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Superfluous.** It points to a certain sense of being 'in sync' as we live, without being caught up in conflicts (as described by many of the afore-mentioned expressions). 'Awareness' sees these conflicts without taking sides. 'Self' is not strictly necessary here but serves to add a sense of intimacy and prioritise the direction of attention.

**SELF-CONSCIOUS** – 'I hate having to speak in front of groups of people, I always feel so self-conscious'.

**The Picture:** an awareness that it is 'me' performing an action trips us up. Often used when 'performing' in front of others. The fear is that others will see me as an object and judge not just what I am doing now but *me*. This extra awareness of me as an object amongst others, up for judgement, is an impediment both to well being and to the task in hand. These moments may also be part of a meditation practice, or arise during moments of disorientation during an activity, e.g. sometimes when I am going down the stairs quite fast and 'automatically' the thought arises 'what am I doing?' Then some kind of conscious attempt to measure the next distance to the stair occurs – and this is obviously not the appropriate way to go down the stairs. I am far more likely to trip. The same process may happen when considering the self – the question 'who am I?' causes disorientation in what we are actually doing (living - 'being ourselves').

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** As the opposite of 'losing yourself' in an activity through absorption, it points helpfully to the way that directing attention to ourselves and turning ourselves into objects can produce a superfluous encumbrance to our natural actions.

## 5. SELF AS POSITIVE VALUE

**SELF-ESTEEM** – 'I need to improve my self-esteem, I always feel like people are looking at me and think I'm stupid'.

**The Picture:** Self-esteem can be the ultimate prize, like self-confidence but more so. While self-confidence refers to abilities, self-esteem is pride just because of who I am. It refers to the sense of ease, well-being and authenticity of 'being myself', but goes further, leading to a sense of pride and confidence, that I am a *thing* of which I can be proud.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something, and is misleading.** This is a catch-all phrase for many of my clients. It clearly does something important. It reinforces the picture that there is

something we need to acquire in order to be able to live 'normally', or well. It is often used by people who feel deficient in some way, and are task oriented. It is one of the highest valued 'goods'. Of course self as a thing to be acquired is one of the most common misleading 'self -assumptions'.

**SELF-WORTH** - 'I keep being exploited at work, I need to improve my sense of self-worth so people don't treat me like that anymore'.

**The Picture:** In this 'game' it is as if the whole person were literally assigned a value, marked on their foreheads, to indicate how the person is to be treated (if they are worth a lot, be careful and treat them well, if they aren't worth much then don't bother).

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something and is misleading.** A close relative of 'self-esteem', it is commonly used in situations when people consider how they are treated by others. It places us firmly within the market economy. Of course we do not really come in units with value, but persistently playing this game has led to it functioning in people's experience.

**FAITH IN MYSELF** – 'To be a top sportsman you really need faith in yourself'. 'Even in really hard times, when I was failing at everything, I never lost faith in myself'.

**The Picture:** 'self' here is posited as my highest potential, or deepest value, or a mixture of the two.

**What does the picture do for us?** This puts 'ourselves' on a pedestal that was previously reserved for God!

**NOT DOING MYSELF JUSTICE** – 'I've decided to leave my office job, I'm just not doing myself justice there'.

**The Picture:** Here self means my highest potential, which we can to some extent choose to fulfil or not.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Superfluous.** It simply points to capabilities, abilities, that are not being used

yet.

**SELF-RESPECT** – 'When I left my abusive partner, I got my self-respect back.'

**The Picture:** this is a popular contemporary 'game', used in situations that refer to keeping/losing dignity. In it we refer to being able to 'answer to yourself,' separating out your own judging capacity then resonating with it. To have self-respect you should act according to your values – self here is intimately connected to the basic worth you assign yourself.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** It points out that we are ultimately answerable to our own values, and although these are socially constructed and the judgement of others is integral to our understanding of what behaviour is to be respected or not, it is being able to look 'ourselves in the eye' without shame, that is the most important yardstick.

**SELF-CONTAINED** – 'She's so self-contained, I'm never sure what she really thinks'.

**The Picture:** 'Self' here refers to the dynamic system again, with emphasis on a lack of neediness, a lack of compulsion to share thoughts or feelings.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It implies that 'self' is something that can be held back, and maybe even implies that it needs to be held back.

**SELF-SACRIFICE** – 'she was so self-sacrificing all her life, she never enjoyed herself, she was always clearing up after other people'.

**The Picture:** this has connotations of nobility, but increasingly is used judgementally. Self stands for the important and valuable capacities and abilities of the person. In this case some other 'part' of the self has chosen to sacrifice the rest – sacrifice is an intentional act. This 'part' or decision is implicitly acknowledged and criticised in the expression 'self-sacrificing'.



### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something and is misleading.** This is another 'second-order will' situation, in which rather than one part of us obliterating another, we simply want two things. Depending on context it makes a strong moral judgement. The emphasis on the passive, unquestioned 'what we really are', betrayed by the rest of us, is a simplistic picture, and a disempowering one.

**SELF-EFFACING** – 'he was so self-effacing it took me all evening to find out how successful he really is in his career'.

**The Picture:** This expression describes someone who acts as if they were not as important/worthy of attention as others. At the same time it implies that the person has a self as valuable as everyone else's, and has chosen to efface it.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It points to something.** It points to a specific type of behaviour, making yourself seem less important, which is generally recognised, and separates out the 'self' aspect as uncomfortable for the speaker – they are not happy with the implication that their features or achievements reflect back on them as people.

## **6. SELF AS NEGATIVE VALUE**

**SELFISH** – 'Don't be selfish - share your sweets with your sister!' 'He's so selfish, he always puts the programmes on that *he* wants to watch'

**The Picture:** here self refers to the difference between you and other people, and the concentration on your 'self-interest' in opposition and contrast to that of others.

### **What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** A clear moral distinction is made. This does not seem misleading in any way, it is a clear way of expressing a judgement that concentrating on some narrowly defined needs of your own at the expense of the entire situation, or the needs of others is ethically wrong.

**SELF-CENTRED** – 'I don't like him, he's only nice to you if you do what he wants. He's just really self-centred'.

**The Picture:** This is not an expression you would be likely to use about yourself. Someone serves their own interests, necessarily to the detriment of others (assuming a scarcity model).

**What does the picture do for us?**

**Points to Something.** Whereas the central position of 'self' in our worlds is fairly uncontested in our everyday understandings, in this expression it works differently, as one of a group of 'moral' expressions pointing out the necessity to consider others and the greater good.

**SELF-ABSORBED** – 'She's so self-absorbed, she just sits there texting all day, she never thinks to get up and give us a hand with anything'

**The Picture:** This has a morally negative, asocial connotation. Self is pictured as some kind of substance which can exert a pull on you, you might disappear inside it, stop caring for others, and become unable to act in the 'outside world'.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** It emphasises that it is possible to shut ourselves off from others and concentrate exclusively on our own interests, thoughts and feelings, turning our attention inwards so that many of our capacities/abilities disappear – become absorbed.

**SELF-SATISFIED** – 'I'm not going to vote for that guy, I can't stand how self-satisfied he looks when he gives a speech'.

**The Picture:** our selves are things which we possess and can be proud of. This picture once again emphasises the option to remain within a small circle of immediate interests, with less emphasis on the feeling of being sucked in, and more on a sense of happily choosing not to develop beyond a certain point, not to look too far outside or consider alternative points of view. There is a negative judgement

attached to this, a self-satisfied person is conceited and annoying.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It Points to Something.** With the negative judgement it brings, it undermines the picture of a person who treats themselves as if they were a shiny, perfect self. It implicitly points to the impossibility as well as the undesirability of sealing 'yourself' off and being satisfied with it.

**SELF-INDULGENCE** – 'I'd love another ice-cream, but it would just be self-indulgence.'

**The Picture:** I really want to just enjoy myself, to do exactly what I want to do for the sheer pleasure of it, with no other justification, and hang the consequences. Here 'self' makes a whole system, as one element must be indulging another.

**What does the picture do for us?**

**It is Misleading.** It carries moral connotations, in the past considered negative, now moving in the direction of a positive judgement. Once more the self that wants to be indulged is the passive object of the operation. We identify with the 'self' in naming it with 'our name' and do not mention the one choosing to indulge by name.

