

# Archimedes' Lever

## Philosophy of Psychotherapy – the tool of «thought»

Dan Bloom

Psychotherapie-Wissenschaft 10 (1) 28–35 2020

www.psychotherapie-wissenschaft.info

CC BY-NC-ND

<https://doi.org/10.30820/1664-9583-2020-1-28>

**Abstract:** This is a reflection on philosophy and psychotherapy. It develops the notion that the two are so entwined that it is more appropriate to consider the philosophy of psychotherapy, the thinking that is intrinsic in it. The paper proposes that thinking is an engaged and embodied practice of understanding and psychotherapy is its embodied, clinical enactment. Philosophy and psychotherapy, in some sense, began as common human responses to the being-in-the-world, wonder, and disappointment. This idea is discussed from an historical perspective from pre-Socratic philosophy, empiricism, the Kantian, and phenomenology. A central focus is on thinking as implicit in the psychotherapy process.

**Key words:** philosophy, psychotherapy, theory, practice, wonder, science, disappointment, empiricism, Kant, Husserl

### Introduction

«Give me a place to stand on, and I can move the earth.»

*Archimedes (cit. in Heath, 1953, p. xix)*

«All science is philosophy, whether it knows and wills it or not. All science remains bound to that beginning of philosophy. [...] From it, it draws the strength of its essence, supposing that it still remains equal to this beginning.»

*Heidegger (1985, p. 14).*

Philosophy and psychotherapy have a natural affinity. A moment's historical reflection shows psychotherapy and psychology share common interest with philosophy in Socrates' examined life (*Apologia* of Plato, 38a). What psychotherapeutic modalities do not include philosophy in their theory building and practice? Simply consider contemporary psychotherapy. Whether the approach is psychoanalytic or cognitive behavioral, gestalt or existential-phenomenological, it seamlessly includes philosophy to ground and develop their work. Examples come readily to mind. There are philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Buber, Matthew Ratcliffe and Judith Butler who bring psychotherapy into their work and psychotherapists such as Karl Jaspers, Donna Orange, Eugene Gendlin and Gianni Francesetti<sup>1</sup> for whom philosophy is intrinsic to their work.

Skim through indexes at random in books and articles in many of our modalities and it is more than likely to see philosophers prominently named. Conferences such as the biennial «Psychology and the Other Conference» held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, do not differentiate the disciplines. The line that separates psychotherapy and philosophy then, is hardly a line at all yet the two are spoken of as if it exists. It is a split that is arbitrarily made. This paper begins with that self-evident fact and pushes it further to reflect on another dimension, a possible «philosophy of psychotherapy».

Not so long ago, the Gestalt therapy institutes in New York City held an inter-institute conference, «Gestalt Approaches to Psychopathology». We were discussing the dilemma of working outside the psychodynamic paradigm yet within the larger clinical world that understood psychotherapy in terms diagnostic categories and socio-behavioral norms, a perspective antithetical to the values of gestalt therapy (Bloom, 2003). I was assigned to a small group with other gestalt therapists. We were asked about the relation of theory to our work. One group member confidently said, «I never think.» She could have meant that she does not deliberate when she works as a therapist. There would have been nothing remarkable about such a comment. Given how she presented herself to us in that moment, however, she meant something more aggressive. It was extraordinary to hear a psychotherapist say *and* believe she «never thinks» since to think one does not think, of course, *is a thought*.<sup>2</sup> But beyond that, such a nihilistic thought wipes out the very possibility of the background knowledge of clinical training, experience, supervision, and understanding that actively are implicit in the clinical wisdom that sharpens our eye and guides our

1 I am a gestalt therapist and as such it is especially difficult for me to choose among my colleagues for example. Sylvia Crocker, Peter Philippon, Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb, Jean-Marie Robine, Michael Vincent Miller, Mónica Botelho Alvim, and Frank-M Staemmler come to mind.

2 There is a subgroup of colleagues who practice an «atheroretical» version of gestalt therapy (Naranjo, 2000).

clinical gestures in every clinical situation. Actually, such a thought proceeds from a misunderstanding of the nature of psychotherapy as a practice in which it and philosophy constitute one whole human thoughtful response to being in the world – one philosophy. I will consider this here. What follows will not be a survey of philosophy and psychotherapy so much as reflections on the thinking that is the philosophy we practice when we are psychotherapists.

## A way to think about thinking

Human beings are always scratching an itch. Life irritates. We are uncomfortable with our fit in the world. Sometimes we reach toward this itching discomfort with a question and scratch it with an answer. We soothe and comfort ourselves with explanations and reasons. What was the experience that motivated the philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) to question his existence and then to answer, «Cogito ergo sum»/«I think, therefore I am»? Perhaps he was so uncomfortable with his fit with the world that he began an important series of questions that looked for and found a secure existential ground to stand upon (Descartes, 1641). Philosophy responds to the discomfort of not-knowing something essential by asking questions to get a satisfying answer. Correspondingly, psychotherapy responds to a different kind of discomfort – personal suffering. Philosophy and psychotherapy are two modes or *techniques* by which we seek to satisfy, soothe, comfort or heal. They are also entwining processes of meaning-making. They are gestures of making sense of life within a broad human context, or, «horizon» (Husserl, 1970a, p. 358). They are both activities of human engagement.

Among other things, in the sense in which I intend it, «thinking» is a technique to help us get from here to there and then from there to here within some world of sensation, meaning, and significance. I do not here mean abstracting or disembodied cogitating but thinking as an engaged process of understanding, although certainly there is a role for abstract thinking. As a mode practical enactment of understanding, thinking is an Archimedean lever with which we move as much of the world as we can depending on where we stand. To think is a way to engage the world with *technê* (skill), *episteme* (knowledge) and obtain *sophia* (wisdom). Philosophy and psychotherapy are modes of thinking with psychotherapy as a practice directed toward human suffering. Psychotherapy is a clinical *phronesis* – or concrete engagement of wisdom with human suffering.

In this way, whether we know it or not every one of us psychotherapists is a philosopher. Even further, psychotherapy has an epistemology, ontology, aesthetics, and a phenomenology (Bloom, 2019; Crocker, 2009). Whether we acknowledge it or not, all psychotherapies have a theory of human nature – a philosophical anthropology as well as a system of ethics, of values, of truth, and of the good (see, for example, Perls et al., 1951). In some sense, we even have in common with many philosophies and

religions an unacknowledged creation story and «myth of the Fall» with a drama involving grace, redemption, and salvation (Mulhall, 2005). In the case of psychotherapy we might have a developmental theory and notions of the etiology of dysfunction as a creation story, methods of treatment and symptom relief as our version of suffering and redemption. Whether our essential model is the bringing unconscious into consciousness, enabling the release of fixed gestalten, or changing maladaptive behavior and cognitive schemata, we have some sense of optimal functioning. Those are our version of a Promised Land at the end of successful treatment.

Our clinical approaches with implicit philosophy attempt to articulate such essential concerns as human values, personhood, intersubjectivity, sociality, responsibility, self, and ethics. We put these in clinical terms. Yet our terms are decipherable into ethical terms without much effort (Goodman & Severson, 2016). Whether we know it or not, we are all clinical philosophers.

To bring this full circle to address my colleague in that small group, «I never think» is not merely a mistake. It articulates a quasi- or incomplete clinical stance that encourages us to fail to notice that there is a world *within and surrounding* each clinical session. This is the philosophy of psychotherapy in our working and the community within which we work. By broadening our sense of the philosophy of psychotherapy, our thinking, we encourage the wisdom and practical engagement of our clinical practice. Further, we are wise to listen to those philosophers who sing in the background chorus of human wisdom – and to choose those voices of the chorus whose voice resonate most meaningfully to us (Orange, 2009). «I never think» is willful deafness.

We do ourselves credit to acknowledge outright that our work is in and of itself a powerful exercise of philosophy as psychotherapy. It is the thinking that engages psychotherapy in the world of persons and consequently assures that our work remains alive to the human situation.

«[We] can think in the sense that [... we] possess the possibility to do so. This possibility alone, however, is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking. *For we are capable of doing only what we are inclined to do*» (Heidegger, 1972, p. 3; *emphasis added*).

In what follows I will briefly reflect on the thinking<sup>3</sup> which psychotherapy is «inclined to do» do within a «humane attitude toward the world» (Husserl, 1970a).

## The thinking thought

«We come to know what it means to think when we ourselves try to think. If the attempt is to be successful, we must

3 Why do I say «thinking» and not «thought»? I choose the gerund to underscore the living process that underlies a process implicitly enacted in the practice of psychotherapy itself.

be ready to learn thinking [... M]an is called the being who can think, and rightly so. Being a rational animal, man must be capable of thinking if he really wants to [...]. Man can think in the sense that he possesses the possibility to do so. This possibility alone, however, is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking.»

*Heidegger (1972, p. 3)*

What is the thinking that psychotherapy thinks? Our field's diversity refuses a definitive answer. Clearly, on the one hand, psychotherapy is practiced as an empirical science. Some psychotherapy theories are also supported by hard science – neurobiology (Schore, 1994; Porges, 2011), physiology, biology, and so on. Some psychotherapeutic modalities are based on cognitive and behavioral science (Beck & Rush, 1979; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Human behavior is explicable in terms of bio-physical and behavioral science: what can be measured, analyzed, mathematized and observed from a third-person perspective. This has supported the quantitative research method of science that is more and more called for as psychotherapy is being asked to show the evidence base for treatment outcomes. On the other hand, there are humanist approaches that privilege subjective experiences, values, meaning-making and concepts of personhood-concerns that present in terms of introspection, that is, from a first-person perspective research here is qualitative and phenomenological (Brownell, 2019; Giorgi, 1985).

These two approaches, quantitative third-person and qualitative first-person, overlap. Each iteration of a psychotherapy modality is an expression of its own perspective, philosophy, or assumptions. Broadly speaking, a neurobiological approach, for example is a thoughtful gesture from a materialist premise. An existential or psychoanalytic treatment framework is supported by a phenomenal premise, that is, of a reliable first-person experience. That said, there are actually few who conceptualize their modalities at the extremes. The overlap is more commonly the case. Yet, as I suggest here, the thinking that is the psychotherapeutic gesture, no matter which form the gesture takes, is one that is organized by a central founding sense of humanness. The thinking that is psychotherapy shares a creation myth with philosophy.

### The Story of Thales – Updated

Thales of Miletus of Greece in the 5th century BC is popularly known as the first Western philosopher. Philosophy is said to have begun with wonder because Thales was looking up at the stars in wonder, didn't see a well – and fell into it. We can imagine him wondering at the moon and speculating, «What is that?» before he stumbled. He recovered from the fall and then looked up and studied the sky again, saw the moon and then concluded the sky was not the sacred heavens of the Hellenic gods.

Thales wasn't a philosopher prone to abstract speculation, but a mathematician and practical astronomer. His wondering led to predictions of an eclipse, for example. He was the first thinker to replace mythological narrative with philosophical rational systematic thought (Kirk et al., 1983, p. 99). Yet the fact that he made the move from a mythological explanation to a practical conception indicates he was a philosopher, who used reason to deduce principles of the natural world from what he observed. Thales was filled with wonder, curiosity, interest, fascination about the moon all of which motivated him to try to make rational sense of the natural world. In Plato's account, Socrates says,

«While he was studying the stars and looking upwards, he fell into a pit, and a neat, witty Thracian servant girl jeered at him, they say, because he was so eager to know the things in the sky that he could not see what was there before him at his very feet» (Plato, 2002, 174a).

We might imagine another version of this story that brings it closer to what is familiar to us psychotherapists – and provides a birth story for psychotherapy. What if Thales had been searching the sky for a sign of Zeus and his family of gods, but instead only saw small points of light randomly speckled against a dark background and a glowing globe, the moon. He sighed and muttered to himself. «Only this? No gods?» Then Thales fell into that hole. And then heard the mockery of that servant girl.

Shaken out of his interest in searching for Zeus in the sky by that hole and further yanked down to earth by the jeering servant, «What is that?» curiosity about the sky turned into something else.

«Only this? And not the gods?» And then, only then looking back at the moon, «Wow, I wonder *what* that is ...» Thales' initial reactions to that star filled yet godless Ionian night sky were disappointment and then wonder. Philosophy would then have begun with disappointment, as Professor Simon Critchley speculated (personal communication, April 2016), psychotherapy with wonder.

Wonder and disappointment. Both are states of mind. They are affects with different vectors, different directions of focus, although not exclusively so. Wonder points toward its object with a sense of positive curiosity and interest. It motivates exploration. Typically, disappointment's vector tends inwards towards collapse. As such, it has a withdrawn quality. The object of disappointment is usually not approached or reached out to. In wonder, Thales is eager to understand the moon. In disappointment, he is drawn inward. Thales might reflect on his disappointment and consider its meaning. We could imagine his thinking, «What could I have expected? Gods? They weren't there ...» And soon he rejected the mythology and developed his own philosophy of the heavens – based on observation. His wonder led him to observe the moon moving in the sky and so on – which we assume he did as an astronomer. These reactions were modes of undertaking the world as presented and experienced: wonder led to observation; disappointment led to reflection, or

even introspection. These are two streams of thought: observation and introspection – concerns for the objective and subjective worlds. These are part of the thinking that is included in the philosophy of psychotherapy.

### A Brief History?

Plato wrote on ethics, politics, geometry, arithmetic, and astronomy. Aristotle reflected on poetry, politics, logics, mathematics, botany, physics, ethics, and metaphysics. The Aristotelean worldview was the template for much of the structure of Western thinking for centuries. The Scientific Revolution shook the settled world view of philosophy, as is famously known. Newton, Galileo, Copernicus as leaders of the Scientific Revolution refuted the Medieval Aristotelian assumptions about the world. They were philosophers who built on the philosophical work of Thales, Euclid, Archimedes, Pythagoras, and other geometers and mathematicians as well as natural philosophers who observed the world. Importantly, these were all concerns about the measurable, mathematizable, and predictable «external world» as well as principles they deduced from observable data not induced from prior beliefs. Their work led to the development of the empirical method – the reliance on quantifiable, measurable, and then predictable facts of the external material world.

Thales' wonder about the moon was taken to a revolutionary height. Cause and effect become a template to organize the world. A mechanistic universe guided by Newtonian laws of physics, became a template to organize the world. Copernicus' observation and calculations took the earth out of the center of the universe (The «Copernican Revolution») and Galileo set the stars and moon in motion. Now we can say to Thales, «Yes, of course it is the moon, Thales. It is a physical object with mass and velocity, and it orbits around the rotating and orbiting earth.»

But what about the world that included Thales' disappointment or his expectation that the sky would be populated by the Hellenic gods? What about the world that is only available to reflection? The world of mental phenomena? Of first-person experience? Could this world be looked at with the same powers of reason that the philosophers brought to the observable world? The structure of experience and of knowledge would become a central theme in philosophy and in the thinking is implicit in psychotherapy.

### It is the moon; it is only the moon: and «Ergo Sum»

René Descartes used the deductive method of the sciences to explore his own mind and the foundation of knowledge «independent of the senses» by observing his inner experience and systematically doubting what he observed. What could he know for sure? That is, what could be known without doubt? He could doubt his perception of matter since his senses could be easily deceived. But unlike

the existence of matter or his perception of the external world, he could not doubt his own doubting. «I am» is undoubtable. And hence the infamous Cartesian mind/body dualism is deduced through Descartes' introspection and understood within the scientific worldview of a «natural philosopher». <sup>4</sup> The external world is the realm of the natural scientist and now the mind can be subject to another kind of reflection. «There begins with Descartes a completely new manner of philosophizing which seeks its ultimate foundation in the subjective» (Husserl, 1970a, p. 81) and which continued «as a legitimate subject matter *within* the sciences, that is, in psychology».

### From mind to senses

The empiricists John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–1776) were interested in the nature of experience, knowledge, understanding and mind. What is the effect of the material, sensible world on what we know as the mind? Is what we know the consequence of the inscription by experience on a passive blank slate of the mind or is what we know the consequence of a bundle of sensations? In either case, I can be the object of introspection. I am a human subject who can be disappointed that the moon is not brightening Zeus's heaven. My subjectivity, my mind, are empirically and passively constituted. Rules of cause and effect and materiality – rationality – prevail. Mental states are caused.

What of Thales's disappointment now that we have an explanation that can account for his wonder? Feelings can be understood in terms of sensations, of sensible intelligence as a reaction. <sup>5</sup> All of these can be understood by and deduced from sense data through the infallible rules of reason. Is Thales' disappointment merely the effect of some cause?

From the point of view of an Enlightenment philosopher grappling with the ethics of free will, necessity, human choice, and responsibility, the idea of a passive mind posed a challenge – if not a threat. From the point of view of a philosophy of psychotherapy in which most the same concerns are essential values, how these are addressed is critical. Psychotherapy needs a basis upon which it can take Thales' disappointment seriously.

### The person as subject – mind, soul, self

«Experience is without doubt the first product of that our understanding brings forth as it works on the raw material of the sensible sensations.»

*Kant (2009, p. 127)*

<sup>4</sup> Natural philosophy as a separate branch of knowledge began to stand apart from philosophy as a science in its own right until the scientific method (empirical research) developed in the 19th Century. Observation hypothesis, testing, verification.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715), a contemporary of Descartes, added sentience, sensation to rationality (Butler, 2005).

## Kant's Copernican Revolution

Emmanuel Kant (1742–1804) wrote in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* that «the remembrance of David Hume was the very things that first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy» (Kant, 2004, p. 10). Among other things<sup>6</sup> his project responds to skepticism and empiricism in terms of a theory of the understanding, which takes empiricism into account but does not assign knowledge a passive function. Knowledge is not a passive blank slate upon which experiences are simply inscribed. Rather, *Ehrfahrung*<sup>7</sup> is an active agent of knowing and world making in its own right. Kant refuted the skepticism of Hume and empiricism of Locke in what has been called a second Copernican revolution. Our understanding is not simply the result of our senses, but a function of our a priori knowledge, knowledge prior to experience. Our pre-experienced knowledge of cause and effect, space and time, for example, organize sensations into meaningful understanding rather being the passive consequence of what we observe. There is knowledge from experience of the sensible world and there is knowledge prior to experience that organizes, shapes, and synthesizes what is sensibly given. And reason itself? Reason gives us an important way to understand the world. Yet at the same time, sensation is another source of knowledge. There is an active subject and therefore a self to be seriously considered. Now that philosophy has a justifiable basis for an active understanding, a subject we can identify in its own right, such things as a human self as an active agent that is rationally justified.

Kant did not refute empiricism but provided a philosophy that justified the co-existence of empiricism with a human subject. This laid the foundation for Romanticism, a philosophical movement in which where Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) could write,

«I dispose of Nature in its entirety as its lord and master; my heart, roaming from object to object, mingles and identifies itself with those which soothe it, wraps itself up in charming fancies [...], what fresh colouring, what power of expression I give them!» (Rousseau, 1996, p. 675).

Thales' heirs may chart the phases of the earth's satellite as well as dig deeply into human passions stirred by that same moon. The philosophy of psychotherapy may research measurable human behavior as well as first person experience, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and personhood.

6 «... among other things» is a mighty understatement in a paper filled with understatements. Kant's philosophy is complex. That is another understatement.

7 «There seems little doubt that in many instances when he used this term, Kant thought he was using it in the empiricist sense [...] of Locke and Hume, As a result, *Erfahrung* has the same senses in his work that that «experience» had accumulated by this time in English» (Carr, 2014, p. 15).

## History as process; developmental theory

There is no indication of the cumulative succession of experience in either Locke or Hume. Kant lays the first brick in the foundation for this idea. Kant picks up Locke and Hume's empiricism's focus on sense impression as the starting place for experience, but Kant takes this radically further. For us to have knowledge from experience,

«these passively given sense impressions are «worked over» by spontaneous activity of the understanding [...], any temporally extended and cumulative sense of experience would involve the activity of the understanding» (Carr, 2014, p. 16).

This addition of activity is significant. It implies a temporality and historicity in the process of consciousness (ibid.).

## The grammar of the thinking of psychotherapy is set

Descartes's clear basis for the existence of a knowing subject or ego, Kant's establishment of understanding an active consciousness including sensible and intuitive knowledge, and then Georg W.H. Hegel's (1770–1831) philosophy of history as a dynamic struggle underscores history as a developmental process. This began to set the grammatical structure for the thinking that is the thinking of psychotherapy. Our clinical gestures are informed by what has been measured; our gestures are also shaped by an unquantifiable sense of what is. We think in terms of observable behavior; and we think in terms of first-person experiences. In terms of mind, in terms of matter, as Cartesians, or as holists: the clinical thinking that is the gyroscope of our psychotherapy world transcends categories.

The thinkers who hold this together cannot be explored or even all named with any sufficiency here. There are many hands on the lever, grasping it from many disciplines and through different times and knowledge bases (see for example Spiegelberg, 1972). Yet there is a common foundation in a common world.

## «It» thinks therefore someone is there

Franz Brentano (1838–1917) was an Austrian philosopher and psychologist. The field still had a single name: philosophy. Edmund Husserl, Sigmund Freud, Carl Stumpf, and Christian von Ehrenfels were some of the influential figures who studied with him. Phenomenological philosophy, psychoanalysis and Gestalt psychology, then, trace their roots to Brentano. He distinguished psychological phenomenon from physical by virtue of intentionality (Brentano, 2015). Consciousness always has an object – it is about something. Thinking is about something; it intends something.

Brentano took the concept of intentionality from the Scholastics of the Middle Ages. This is significant inso-

far as the theme of this argument is concerned since by reaching back to an Aristotelian concept, he actually rejuvenated a non-Galilean, *non-empirical* concept of mental phenomena. Mathematical analysis, while valid in some areas of natural science, to Brentano, was not appropriate to first-person experiences. He differentiated between what he referred to as genetic psychology and descriptive psychology. Genetic psychology studies psychological phenomena from a third-person perspective, which are observable, and therefore amenable to empirical research. Descriptive psychology studies psychological phenomena from a first person perspective, which by definition cannot be observed (Huemer, 2019). To Brentano, both psychologies are of equal value, to Brentano.

Edmund Husserl was the leader of the phenomenological movement in philosophy. He continued Brentano's exploration of intentionality and developed it much further into the structure of consciousness and all mental phenomena. His method was intended to address the pure or ideal structures of consciousness and not the psychology of particular persons. He was mindful of this when he addressed the differences between phenomenological philosophy and phenomenological psychology and the difficulty of bringing the two together. He wrote that he

«could give merely the outline, the presentation of a pure internal psychology as a fundamental science for the socio-cultural sciences – but also for a natural psychological research; also, the purely subjective consideration of inter-subjectivity» (Husserl, 1977, p. 179).

### Others would have to take it further

They have been brought together. Husserl's phenomenological method<sup>8</sup> has been incorporated into various psychotherapeutic approaches. (Spinelli, 2005; Crocker, 2009; Bloom, 2019; McConville, 1978) as well as psychology (Spiegelberg, 1972) and the social sciences (Gurwitsch, 1974).

In terms of our work, they are brought together as we listen to all the various versions of Thales's «Only this?» that constitute so many of the human laments of our patients – if we listen for the deeper level of their lament disguised by surface concerns. After all, isn't our ability to discriminate these levels part of the gestures of our work? If whether we know it or not we are all philosophers, then to the extent we engage in this manner in our work, we are all clinical phenomenologists (Bloom, 2019). The deep grammar of the thinking of psychotherapy is the thinking of the thoughts of human beings made available to us by Husserl.<sup>9</sup> This is true whether we approach

these thoughts from within a first-person perspective or within a third-person perspective by collecting data from observed behavior. The thinking that is the philosophy of psychotherapy is thought in a human world. The words «I never think» echo among the always murmuring thoughts of the surrounding human world.

### The human world

In «The Vienna Lecture» 1935, Husserl (1970b, pp. 294f.) wrote there are

«problems which arise from the naïveté through which objectivist science takes what it calls the objective world for the universe of all that is, without noticing that no objective science can do justice to the [very] subjectivity which accomplishes science.»

He continues to point out that unless psychologists include themselves in the subject they approach, in their subject matter, their findings overlook the human, social, and historical premises that can only be found by attention to the community in which it, their work, is being practiced.

He reflected on the history of science and the triumph of universal truths discovered first in Greece and further perfected over time by reason and observation. Then step by step he noted how the personal world of actual living, the world of personal meaning, was overtaken by mathematization, measurement, and then by technology.

The crisis of the European sciences occurred when science became scientism. That is, when science no longer understood its connection to the world of life. It related to the world as something to be measured and counted. People could be objectified. Technology could swallow up nature. We became uprooted from what he referred to as the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld).

Briefly, the *Lebenswelt* is the world of our meaningful living that is the basis for our various ways of understanding and forms of approaching it and one another. It is the peopled world of relationships, families, society and culture into which we are born and participate throughout our lives. The lifeworld also situates us in the history and extended universe of past social interactions and social references, of possibilities and potentialities. The lifeworld is what we take for granted in our ordinary unreflected living yet is what gives color and meaning to the outlines of the world.

Husserl referred to the approach we adopt to one another in terms of a shared common world, in terms of the personalistic attitude (Moran, 2012, p. 322). The deep grammar of thinking that is the philosophy of psychotherapy is the language spoken in this personalistic attitude. No matter the style of our approach to

8 The phenomenological method cannot be described simply or in a way that would satisfy different ways it has been incorporated.

9 While Husserl stands out as the winning candidate to be considered, there is another who needs passing mention and, probably has already appeared between the ideas already written. Husserl's most famous student was Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's analytic of facticity might be a companion thread here. Certainly, Heidegger's

direct influence on psychotherapy is obvious – perhaps more obvious than that of Husserl. Karl Jaspers, Ludwig Binswanger, Medard Boss, Thomas Szasz, Eugene Gendlin, Robert Stolorow and others were directly influenced by Heidegger.

our suffering person, our stance as clinician, we stand amid the thoughts of the personalistic attitude of the *Lebenswelt*.

### And yet, «I never think» continues

«I never think,» she said. And I remembered this well enough to use her words to lead off this discussion and use this now to bring these reflections to a close. Consider further: she said this in a context and in a context of thinking thoughts. That is, she knew what and to whom she was speaking; and her idea emerged from a meaningful background. The affective tone of our small group shifted after she spoke. I leaned away from her; others leaned in. Some heard me gasp. Those moments were grammatical moments. They were spoken to me and to us, all of us in that group, held together in a common interest in the theme of our work we were exploring together. Her words remain with me and are in my thoughts. As is she, to some extent.

«I never think.» A therapist who doesn't think is as inconceivable as a cloud without air, or a song without sound, or a dance without movement. The thinking that is the philosophy of psychotherapy is the gravity that gives weight to our clinical movements. Consider how we hear the words of our patients when we use our thinking-ear, which is open to the hushed tones and able to discriminate and find the windows of significance. Or how the history told to us becomes the clinically-effective narrative. All without any active calculation on our part. This is the thinking. This is clinical wisdom.

We achieve this wisdom over time – and over a process of thought in the sense I've meant it here. In a process of activity and expression enacted within the human understandings handed down to us through the centuries. Our clinical training teaches us how to listen to what hums in the background.

And more. The thinking «that we are inclined to do,» the philosophy of psychotherapy, is the embodied, felt, and sensed thinking of humans who wonder and are disappointed, are sad and happy, feel love and grief, are depressed and anxious. The philosophy of psychotherapy is not constructed with calculations, equations, data, or the hard, empirical facts of things. It is the enacted thinking that springs forth out of the human situation as an activity – as a gesture of help, as clinical wisdom. The philosophy of psychotherapy is that but much more. It is a philosophy that can envelop those valuable gifts of the triumphs of science and fold them into the accumulating wisdom of what we know to be what it is like to be human beings alive with one another in this world – and is enacted in the clinical gestures of each moment of a therapy session. As Vittorio Gallese said in an interview, «neurons are not epistemic agents» (Gallese, 2011, p. 37). That is, a brain doesn't know. A person does. The philosophy that is psychotherapy is not constructed by the lintels and walls of logic, but by the forms without form of human experience.

### References

- Beck, A.T. & Rush, A.J. (Eds.). (1979). *Cognitive therapy of depression*. 13th print. New York: Guilford Press.
- Bloom, D. (2003). «Tiger! Tiger! Burning Bright»-Aesthetic Values as Clinical Values in Gestalt Therapy. *Creative License: The Art of Gestalt Therapy*, 63.
- Bloom, D. (2019). *Gestalt Therapy and Phenomenology: The Intersection of Parallel Lines*. In P. Brownell (Ed.), *Handbook for Theory, Research, and Practice in Gestalt Therapy* (pp. 183–202). 2nd print. Newcastle upon Tyne/UK: Cambridge Scholars Publ.
- Brentano, F. (2015). *Psychology from an empirical standpoint*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Brownell, P. (Ed.). (2019). *Handbook for Theory, Research, and Practice in Gestalt Therapy*. 2nd ed. Newcastle upon Tyne/UK: Cambridge Scholars Publ.
- Butler, J. (2005). Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malbranche. In T. Carman & M.B.N. Hansen (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (pp. 181–206). Cambridge/UK: UP.
- Carr, D. (2014). *Experience and history: Phenomenological perspectives on the historical world*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Crocker, S.F. (2009). Phenomenology in Husserl and Gestalt Therapy. *British Gestalt Journal*, 18(1), 18–28.
- Descartes, R. (1641). *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 2 (pp. 1–62). Cambridge: UP.
- Gallagher, S. & Zahavi, D. (2008). *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*. London: Routledge.
- Gallese, V. (2011). Neuroscience and Phenomenology. *Phenomenology and Mind*, 1(1), 28–39.
- Giorgi, A. (1985). *Phenomenological and Psychological Research*. Pittsburgh/PA: Duquesne UP.
- Goodman, D. & Severson, E.R. (Eds.). (2016). *The ethical turn: Otherness and subjectivity in contemporary psychoanalysis*. London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Gurwitsch, A. (1974). *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences*. Evanston/IL: Northwestern UP.
- Heath T.L. (Ed.). (1953). *The Works of Archimedes with the Method of Archimedes*. New York: Dover Publ. Inc.
- Heidegger, M. (1972). *What is called thinking?* [trans. by J.G. Gray]. New York, London: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1985). *History of the concept of time: Prolegomena*. Bloomington/IN: UP.
- Huemer, W. (2019). Franz Brentano. In E.N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019). Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/brentano>].
- Husserl, E. (1970a). *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston/IL: Northwestern UP.
- Husserl, E. (1970b). *The Vienna Lecture*. In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (pp. 269–300). Evanston/IL: Northwestern UP.
- Husserl, E. (1977). *Phenomenological Psychology: Lectures, Summer Semester, 1925* [trans. by J. Scanlon]. The Hague: Marinus Nijhoff.
- Kant, I. (2004). *Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to come forward as science: With selections from the Critique of pure reason* [rev. ed.; trans. by G.C. Hatfield]. Cambridge/UK, New York: UP.
- Kant, I. (2009). *Critique of pure reason* [trans. by P. Guyer & A.W. Wood]. 15th print. Cambridge/UK: UP.
- Kirk, G.S., Raven, J.E. & Schofield, M. (1983). *The pre-socratic philosophers: A critical history with a selection of texts*. 2nd ed. Cambridge/UK: UP.
- McConville, M. (1978). *The phenomenological approach to perception. Existential-Phenomenological Alternatives for Psychology*, 94–118.
- Moran, D. (2012). *Husserl's crisis of the european sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction*. Cambridge/UK, New York: Cambridge UP.

- Mulhall, S. (2005). *Philosophical myths of the fall*. Princeton/NJ: UP.
- Naranjo, C. (2000). *Gestalt therapy: The attitude & practice of an atheoretical experientialism*. Carmarthen: Crown House Publ.
- Orange, D. (2009). *Thinking for Clinicians: Philosophical Resources for Contemporary Psychoanalysis and the Humanistic Psychotherapies*. Routledge.
- Perls, F., Hefferline, R. & Goodman, P. (1951). *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. Great Britain: Souvenir Press.
- Plato (2002). *Plato: In twelve volumes, vol. 4: Cratylus. Parmenides. Greater Hippias. Lesser Hippias* [reprinted; trans. by H.N. Fowler]. Cambridge/MA: Harvard UP.
- Porges, S. W. (2011). *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation* New York: W. W. Norton.
- Rousseau, J.-J. (1996). *Confessions*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Ed. Limited.
- Schore, A.N. (1994). *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development*. Hillsdale/NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Spiegelberg, H. (1972). *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry*. Evanston/IL: Northwest UP.
- Spinelli, E. (2005). *The interpreted world: An introduction to phenomenological psychology*. Newcastle upon Tyne/UK: Sage.

### The Author

*Dan Bloom*, JD, LCSW, is psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer in New York City. He teaches at the NYIGT and is guest and adjunct faculty at gestalt institutes worldwide and frequent conference presenter. He is past president and Fellow of NYIGT and past president of AAGT.

### Contact

Dan Bloom  
35 west 9th st apt 6a  
New York/NY, 10011  
E-Mail: dan.bloom@me.com  
Website: www.danbloomnyc.com