

## J. L. MORENO'S IDEA OF PSYCHOSIS

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Moreno wrote most of his material about the psychoses in monographs and short articles in the 1930's. His writings indicate that in the process of writing and illustrating his ideas with clinical examples he developed the concepts of the social and cultural atom. This paper outlines several of his ideas about psychosis.

A systemic view of personality.

Moreno has a systemic basis to his theory of personality and of psychopathology. In the monograph Mental Catharsis and the Psychodrama he examines what spontaneity is and what catharsis is in psychodrama. He comments that catharsis occurs within the group as a result of the protagonist dramatising a situation which has relevance to the group. The catharsis is also within the protagonist who experiences his actual life becoming his stage.

Moreno illustrates this idea with a systemic concept of equilibrium. He says that private tragedies and traumas in life are caused by various disequilibrating experiences. He implies that the person is a system in equilibrium and can be thrown into disequilibrium. He says that the traumas which a person experiences "may be caused by the relationship of the body to the mind or by that of the mind to the body, and result in an inadequacy of performance in the moment. They may also be caused by an individual's thoughts and actions towards others and by their thoughts and actions towards him. Again they may be caused by a design of living which is too complicated for the amount of spontaneity the individual is able to summon. Practically speaking, there is no sphere of the universe imaginable whether physical, mental, social or cultural, from which there may not emerge, at one time or another, some cause of disequilibrium in a person's life. It is almost a miracle that an individual can achieve and maintain any degree of balance." (p. 19)

Moreno says that psychodrama is a powerful force which can assist man to attain and increase his equilibrium through the effect of mental catharsis. How does this mental catharsis occur?

Personality is a structure of roles

Moreno goes on to describe this equilibrium as an equilibrium of roles and says that most of our roles remain at a "dream" stage. They are never attempted. They remain fragmentary, inconclusive, loose ends. These

roles are formed into clusters and form the cultural atom of the individual. "Every individual has a range of roles in which he sees himself and faces a range of counter roles in which he sees others around him. The pattern of role relations around an individual as their focus is called his cultural atom." (p. 31)

Moreno said that in the course of studying cultural atoms, he had encountered two groups of people. In one group were people who found the demands made upon them by the roles and role relationships of a group in which they live, is greater than their resources or their interest. They would prefer to have the number of roles in which they function reduced. The other group desires to develop and realise many more roles than the pattern of the society in which they live can afford them.

The psychodrama stage offers the person the opportunity to explore and expand their roles and to realise the situations and relationships which they seek. For most people this process is a healthy one. What is observed in the case of psychosis?

#### Characteristics of psychosis

Moreno says that some mental patients exhibit a strong trend towards simplification of their life designs and a reduction of the number of roles they are called upon to play. A reduction of their roles on the stage may produce a catharsis because there is an increase in coherence in the action on the stage.

It is characteristic that psychotic people have private elements in the roles they play and they are less able to appropriately carry out social roles. Moreno allowed the enactment of these private roles and the playing out of the inner drama of the person.

Other mental patients reduce the social roles and have a "frantic desire to make room for numerous other role aspirations which are impossible of expression within the bounds of normal existence." (p. 23) The roles may be hallucinatory roles so that the psychodramatic stage was the only possible vehicle for their expression.

#### Fragmentation of the self in psychosis

In his monograph Psychodramatic Shock Therapy first published in 1939, Moreno describes his method of putting the psychotic patient back into the state of psychosis. He says "the technique of embodiment, soliloquy and immediate analysis of each act as soon as it is portrayed enables us to reconstruct the psychotic situation." (p. 3) From this Moreno formulates an idea of how self structures develop. He says "The social atom is that

peculiar pattern of interpersonal relations which develops from the time of human birth. It first contains mother and child. As time goes on it adds from the persons who come into the child's orbit such persons as are unpleasant or pleasant to him and vice versa those to whom he is unpleasant or pleasant. Persons who do not have any impression remain outside the social atom as mere acquaintances. The social atom is a compound of the tele relationships of an individual." (p. 4)

Moreno goes on to say that in his social atom the individual also has a relation to himself. "As an infant grows he does not only experience other people but also experiences himself. Gradually, he develops a picture of himself. This picture of himself may differ considerably from the picture others have of him, but it becomes considerably significant for him as life goes on. Finally it appears as if he had, besides his real ego, an outside ego which he gradually extrojects. Between the ego and his extrojection a peculiar feeling relationship develops which may be called "autotele." (p.4)

In cases of psychosis the individual's core self is fragmented. Moreno postulates that "In cases of complex personalities a patient may shape for himself more than one extrojection. A most fascinating illustration of this is the case of hallucinatory psychosis in which a break-up and distortion of the tele-relation takes place, a breaking up of the auto-tele. And with all this a chaotic condition within the social atom of the patient develops. Out of old tele particles and perhaps some new spontaneously created ones emerging during such an unprecedented psychological upheaval through which the patient passes, numerous embryonic extrojections are produced. Various roles crop up. Parallel to the breaking up of the auto-tele, all the tele between the patient and individuals and objects is breaking up: his social atom is in a state of revolution." (p.5)

The process of psychodrama aims at formation of clusters of roles around new experiences of the self. Moreno used a technique called Psychodramatic Shock Therapy which was used to throw the patient back into the psychosis. Moreno says "The break-up of the patient's social atom, his new experiences of his own self, the break-up of the auto-tele and its replacements, the replacement of the individuals and objects in the social atom by new constellations, came back into the bodily and mental experience of the patient. . . . The tele formations existing during the psychotic attack have to be brought back into the common reality. As long as unintegrated elements persist in some manner near the individual proper, or scattered within his social atom outside his spontaneous controls, similar occurrences may again upset his balance." (p. 5)

## Principles of psychodramatic treatment of the psychoses

In the monograph *Psychodramatic Treatment of the Psychoses*, Moreno elucidates further on several of his principles. The first is that the stage provides a place where the subjective reality of the patient is enacted and that the treatment is as far as possible in the hands of the patient.

A further principle is that it is the "imaginary reality" which is enacted with psychotic patients. Enacting the imaginary roles places a restraint upon them and provides an auxiliary world for the patient.

Moreno outlines the use of the cultural atom as a structure of roles and discusses how roles develop. He sees this structure as the structure out of which all action of the person takes place. The person is therefore seeking a response which is recognisable to them within their own world.

Moreno in his work provided for what has been articulated in self psychology as a basic need of the person. Self psychology postulates that the baby from birth seeks relatedness and has needs for (a) merging with an idealised object who through empathic attunement provides soothing and comforting, and (b) a mirroring self object who will recognize the greatness. Moreno provided these auxiliary roles as a person and trained his staff as auxiliary egos to respond to the needs of his patients.

Summary: This paper draws together ideas from Moreno's writings about psychosis.

### Bibliography:

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