

PSYCHOTHERAPEI: On The Nature of Psychological Problems

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By way of introduction, one may crudely paraphrase Krishnamurti by saying that human beings have available to them two instruments. One is the instrument of knowing, resulting in the attitude of concentration, of focusing - all these being the ways of exclusion, discrimination, omission. This instrument Krishnamurti also called the scientific mind. The other is the instrument of attention, observation, seeing, listening - and Krishnamurti called this the religious mind.

While the instrument of knowing could still be called an instrument, the other, the attention, could no longer be called an instrument because attention is no longer a thing, for attention is open and without boundary in the truest sense of that word. Of the two instruments, we are steeped in the first one, while the other is a rare and occasional occurrence.

Suffice it to say for now, and we will go into greater detail later on, that that instrument of knowing and psychological problems may be one and the same thing. Of course, one must qualify that knowing by saying that knowing per se is not a problem. However the knowing that we become attached to by identifying with; the knowing that gains a substantiality that it evidently lacks and consequently turns itself, then, from an assumption that it is into a thing that it is not, yet so convincingly appears to be; in short, the conditioned knowing also known as psychological knowing is the knowing we are referring to as "psychological problems".

If psychological knowing is synonymous with psychological problems, one can then ask what is synonymous with the absence of the problems, and is that even possible?

To me this question is more of a tease, its function being a perturbation opening the doors of exploration of the problem itself rather than begging an answer, a supposed solution to the problem.

This question is a koan-like structure; it's function being to shock us into an insight rather than into a verbal answer. It is like a riddle of a sphinx: if answered incorrectly - and for a sphinx any answer would be an incorrect answer - one was turned into stone, one was fossilized.

Only when the question is not answered, only when new knowings are not added to the already existent knowings - the problems themselves - is there exploration of the problem. For maybe in the very exposing, in the very uncovering of the problem, without manipulating it in any way, even without wanting the problem to perish, to be dissolved; in that may be the true solution of the problem. The solution of a problem then may lie in the problem itself.

But the history of man is full of innumerable ways of looking for solutions outside the problems, psychotherapy being only latest addition to the tiresome list of these ways.

As we know it today, psychotherapy, no matter what type it be, is a method, a conglomerate of a variety of ways of how to solve psychological problems, though one must admit that within the spectrum of psychotherapies there are cruder methods of solving psychological problems stemming out of the conscious arsenal of knowing and there are subtler ones, these being more oblique stemming from the vague hints of the personal and collective unconscious, our more concealed and shrouded knowing.

Nobody has been that naive not to notice that all those methods somehow did not work. But because we did not see the true reason why it did not work, we did not see that it even could not work, and so were everlastingly inventing newer and newer methods of solving psychological problems, hoping to stumble eventually into a method that will work.

To dispel the confusion, one must understand what actually are the problems and what are the solutions, and whether the solutions are solutions at all or merely problems only disguised as solutions. What is the psychological problem, what is its structure and what is its nature - these questions form the central topic of this presentation. It is important to emphasize that it's not particular problems like sorrow, pleasure, fear, anger or various beliefs that will be explored. The subject of this exploration is the problem per se. Yet in order to enter the realm of the problem per se one has to

have some, if even a superficial, understanding of the mind itself. Since the words mind, consciousness with unconsciousness as its extension, the psyche and so forth are all synonymous, I will use the most familiar, namely the word consciousness.

What is consciousness if not its content? Psychological problems are often said to be contained within the consciousness. This consideration creates an unnecessary dualism with its imminent intrinsic problematic that is not to be ignored.

Consciousness and its content are one and the same thing. Even at a glance it is clear that the particular psychological problems like hatred, anguish, fear, pleasure and so forth, are a matter of psychological thinking. Even the very etymology of the word consciousness points at the knowing, thinking from the latin root word, "scire" meaning "to cut," "to know."

Then to understand the nature of thought, the life preoccupation of Krishnamurti, may well be the key for understanding the nature of the psychological problem and consciousness itself.

As we already alluded to, the psychological thought is the conditioned thought, infested by the various identities and therefore radically different from the neutral, unconditioned thought. Clear, neutral thought, a thought per se is not a problem at all.

The categorical imperative of thought, its most essential quality, is its liminality. One may say easily that there is no thought that is wholesome, all-encompassing. Thought is essentially limited. The sense of liminality pertains as well to memory, knowledge, experience, all these being ramifications of thought. Can one then suspect that the most basic, most primary problematic of the psychological life stems from that very liminality of thought?

One can observe for oneself that the liminality of the thought is an isolation that is felt as loneliness, anguish, sorrow, depression. That same liminality of thought being projective produces a feeling of misperception, illusion and ultimately confusion. And that that same liminality of thought being divisive forming inner and outer, this and that, me and you, us and them produces a feeling of strife and conflict.

The simultaneity of the intricate problematic of these problems of isolation, projection and division is felt as distress, perturbation, discontent, all of which are yearning for a release, all looking for a solution.

This supposed release, the resolving of the problems created by the liminality of the thought, is to be done by another aspect of the thought, namely an ability of thought known as association process. One may call this association process, this aspect of thought that produces out of itself opposites, complements, samenesses, differentness etc., the dialectical nature of thought.

This associative, dialectical aspect of the thought process one may call a secondary process for it is a reaction to the very discontent of the primary process based on the liminality of the thought. The primary problematic of the thought based directly on the consequences of the liminality of the thought speaks to the very nature of the psychological problems. The secondary problematic of the thought with its ability of association, its dialectical bringing of opposites or complementing ideas speaks to the solutions of the problems.

But can one see at this point of the discourse that the problems as well as the solutions both being psychological thoughts are both burdened by the same, inherent problematics of the liminality of thought. Can we see then that we do not have problems and solutions, but instead problems and problems only disguised as solutions. Krishnamurti's statement that "thought cannot solve any human problems for thought itself is the problem" amplifies the position that mind, psyche, consciousness with all its unconscious contents can only make problems but can't possibly solve them.

What will end the problems if the thought with all its solutions can not? The ending of the problems can only happen in the adequate response to the problems, the only adequate response to the problems being in the attention to the problem.

Solutions being thoughts themselves can't solve the psychological problems, psychological problems also being the thought. Attention, itself a cessation of thought, not only does not burden the existent problem as the solution does but it also allows the existing problem to see itself and see itself through and so dissolve itself.

At this point of our lives we are still looking at the problem distracted with the ideas of various solutions. At this point of our lives it is even unimaginable just to look at the problems without even an inkling of how to solve them.

It is timely to bring up the paradoxical implication of the word psychotherapy. The word psychotherapy is not less of a paradox than is our understanding or not understanding of the nature of the psychological problems. The paradox exists in the paradoxical meaning and consequent implication of the word. On one hand the etymology of the word psychotherapy coming from the Greek word "therapei" meaning attention obviously points in the right direction, the only direction capable of truly solving psychological problems. The modern usage of the word psychotherapy definitely and unmistakably points towards methods of solving problems ending up not solving them but rather perpetuating them.

One also wonders to what extent ancient Greeks had been aware of attention as a problem solver when they were so deeply steeped in knowledge and thought, venerating thought as the ultimate and the only instrument of man.

Modern psychotherapy is not operating from attention, is not psychotherapei meaning attention to the psyche. Modern psychotherapy is completely blind to these issues for it pursues so confidently the path of solutions never even suspecting that solutions carry a similar problematic as do the problems themselves.

In talking about the nature of human problems we talked about the nature of human suffering and what will possibly end it.

At the end of this brief and utterly incomplete discourse I want to add that even the ending of the psychological problems does not mean complete ending of human suffering.

In order to understand this complex and enigmatic statement one has to understand not only the nature and structure of our psychological problems but also one must understand the nature and structure of the phenomenal world, of our basic world view. Even the phenomenal world, the world of things, though we may not see this at all, is still an offshoot of the most basic geometry of our mind. It is important at least to suspect that such notions as time, space, the inner and the outer, things as this vs. that, me and you, us and them are ultimately inventions, nonetheless useful but ultimately illusionary.

The very interaction between these things essentially invented by this most basic thinking of ours is the birth of the chronological and more subtle, psychological time.

What I am getting at is: there must be at least some sense of suspicion that all these are pseudo-problems. All these distinctions not only in the strictly psychological but even in the phenomenal world ultimately have no significant relevance. The relative significance is in the pragmatic matters only.

All this brings us to the point of seeing that reality is somehow a pseudo-phenomenon, seeing that may stop us or at least, slow us in the frantic running after so-called "outward" things and turning them into the "inward" things in order to fill up the supposed inner emptiness.

As a conclusion I may say: any thing, be it strictly psychological or be it phenomenal, being significantly a matter of our consciousness, meaning a matter of the spectrum of our knowing, inevitably and imminently carries in itself that, already mentioned, sense of isolation, projection and division and consequently a sense of suffering.

That does not mean that suffering is absolutely integral to the phenomenon of man.

The ending of suffering can happen if there is insight into all this activity of the mind. The point is not to do away with the phenomenal world but to achieve some transparency of the phenomenal world so that in everything one sees at once a thing itself and far more importantly no-thing at all. For if we see things as things only in that there is a sense of isolation, division and so forth. For only if there is essential no-thingness amongst relative thingness will there be no isolation, no illusion, no strife and, in short, no suffering.

I will end the presentation with Vasko Popa's poem, "Proud Error", which is deeply relevant to all this that we have said and says it much better with far fewer words:

PROUD ERROR

Once upon a time there was an error
So ridiculous so minute
No one could have paid attention to it
It couldn't stand
To see or hear itself
It made up all sorts of nonsense
Just to prove
That it really didn't exist
It imagined a space
To fit all its proofs in
And time to guard its proofs
And the world to witness them