



LIFE BEFORE 'Q'

Absurd Therapy ~ Life before 'Q' .

Stephen Bray

It is now more than fifteen years since I hinted that our knowledge of life and therapy could be augmented by incorporating the scientific method developed by quantum physicists in order to understand the nature of the very small. I struggled to write the early papers in a debate with Roger Adams, a consultant with the Children's Society in the United Kingdom. This was written up in the newsletter of the Association for Family Therapy of which we were both members. Roger is a seminal thinker, and in conversations both before and after this correspondence he did much to advance my thinking about the nature of systems and therapy. Moreover, he introduced me to Peter Checklands's concept of the Human Activity System, a system with the property of requiring human input to maintain or change itself and one that due to human self-reflexive consciousness is lacking in absolute predictability. What I had failed to appreciate just then was just how much could be achieved by adopting the metaphor of the new physics. Nevertheless, I believe the post-modern approach I developed subsequently 'Q' has its origins in this discussion.

At the time the first paper was written it was an intellectual stretch for me to create a debate both with a mentor whom I admired so much; and also because my ideas were in many ways only half formed, I was uncertain and felt that I needed to be concrete in my response. Now in 1999, I realise that this very uncertainty was and is strength when approaching the nature of life and its relationship to humans who live within it. I suspect that neither Roger nor I were completely reprogrammed to be devoid of the influence of an education steeped in positivism, yet we did our best.

Now that the application of metaphor from subatomic physics is at last finding its way into management thinking and through such programmes as 'Horizon' and 'Star Trek'

we are being educated into the fuller possibilities of human evolution I was pleased to find these papers again. I have taken the liberty of editing out references to the Association for Family Therapy, which too has come a long way since the mid 1980s. The theoretical content remains, as does Tony Farson's original comment on what he made of our struggle!

Stephen Bray, Dorset 1999.

Family Therapy Can Be Absurd

Roger Adams

THE ISSUE OF LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

In the 1982 Newsletter of the Association for Family Therapy Hugh Jenkins writes "those processes which operate at the immediate familial and societal levels are replicated at ever wider macro system levels". We choose and interpret facts by the defacto act of employment of a certain model of man. But our clinical practice now introduces us to a systems model that some of us take to be the equivalent of an atlas of the social world. This atlas does not refer back to lived experience, inter subjectivity and social relations we have lived: the point of departure for clinical practice and for our practitioner-tested operational model of man. Therapists are not content with accepting that the boundaries of this model are in the clinic.

It is sometimes said systems theory helps the practitioner appreciate that there are other and environmental restraints diminishing the relevance of his clinical interventions. It is common on the other hand for this modesty to give way to acceptance of the Hugh Jenkinss statement because as authors we become over ambitious and must be prescriptive. Increasingly good sense succumbs to systems theory and ambition is fulfilled. The literature on family therapy includes articles that prescribe for problems beyond the bounds of resolution within any therapy sessions. Systems theory is explicitly used to explain so-called social problems, defining what they are and why they occur. Systems theory, because it seems to successfully inform clinical practice persuades prestigious practitioners into societal prescription!

A.C. Robin Skynner in *One Flesh: Separate Persons* (1976) discusses family and other systems together in his first chapter - "a hierarchical organisation is inevitable if the individual, the family or society as a whole is to work at all". Others have 'advanced' much further, borne along by their confidence in their clinical practice and exciting theory.

The example of Watzlawick.

Watzlawick (1974) writes that he believes in defining psychiatric problems as an essentially social phenomenon. The disturbed, deviant and difficult behaviours of a person are maintained by the behaviour of a patient and others with whom he interacts, they are one aspect of a system reflecting some dysfunction in that system and best treated by some appropriate modification of that system.

Solving problems requires a substitution of behaviour patterns so as to "interrupt the vicious practice of feedback circles". I imagine most practitioners are familiar with his model. His prescription is to think small, focus on a system and make a limited approach.

I have no outstanding quarrel with him here. On the other hand in his *Utopia Syndrome* (1973) his arguments on the limits of a responsible and humane psychotherapy is mixed with pronouncement on political intervention into social problems. Like Bowen and other systems theorists, he happily seeks to use systems theory to render intelligible distinct realities, which others might believe are determined by different laws and demand a separate conceptual discourse. The task of assessing the nature of the correspondence rules between the two is never seriously undertaken. Watzlawick believes he only has to shift to a different part of the macro system and he can make social and political prescriptions. He writes, "On the socio-economic and political levels the situation does not appear to be essentially different". Watzlawick argues that over-ambitious solutions create new problems. He then accuses the social welfare programmes of Austria, Sweden and Britain of creating new needs, thereby defeating their own purpose. (He is in private practice). While never explicitly admitting to the putting on of a social philosopher's mantle, he nevertheless quotes from Karl Popper's writings to lend support to his philosophical position, which is that of incrementalism and planned social engineering.

What has happened is that his treatment of contexts has become glued by systems theory onto a presumption that moral, political and social problems are the same order as clinical problems. Mere therapy is not enough for this family therapist. Thus Watzlawick all embracingly writes "we mean by this that the individual (or for that matter the group, or whole society)". This is a marvellously inclusive statement. It is derived from the integrative systems approach abetted by adding up therapy practice and systems theory. Family Therapy betrays Watzlawick almost innocently into a bland social conservatism. His prescriptions assume an additive model for social problems.

The causes of human misery may be broken down to small incremental parts. It never occurs to him that those who sit and wait for their turn as a suitable subject of his technical endeavours may believe his timing and solutions are mistaken.

Watzlawick moves from his clinician's concern with the techniques of therapeutic practice to programmes for social planning. He could not ask whether the problems of one element of society may not represent just and desirable conditions for others (when prescribing for social problems). He does not do so because he believes the family may be regarded as a system and any system is to be understood as comparable to a family. The authors assume a relationship but never define the relationship of the family to other systems, because this would entail an explicit definition of their own relationship as family therapists. As I have suggested they provide support for collusion between family therapy and family therapists and our present political system. Kearney (1983) rightly asserts Family Therapy cannot be political. I suggest it can be absurd.

A REPLY TO ROGER ADAMS

STEPHEN BRAY

Roger Adams (1995) suggests that Family Therapy can be absurd. In so doing he may be arguing that it is sometimes paradoxical - absurd and paradox sharing a word in the German language (Haley, 1963). He may be saying that as a vehicle for change it does not go far enough. He may be arguing that family therapists fix families, not society or the world at large. Indeed he may believe that global ills may only be cured by political struggle or revolution. It is hard to say.

I argue that family therapy is no more absurd than the notion of therapy, or, for that matter, life itself. I believe that family therapy represents a balanced clinical model based upon general systems theory, and that it is legitimately extending itself into wider areas. Further, general systems theory is itself one of the first western theoretical models that does not fall into the trap of western mechanistic reductionism. It seems to me insufficient to ridicule Watzlawick, who has contributed more than most to western notions of change, and by implication, to the family therapy with the same brush. To cite one author is not to prove a case as it fails to take into account philosophical opinions and beliefs of other family therapists, (for instance the humanistic family therapy of Kempler (1973). To shadow box with notions of family therapy as Roger Adams does is not helpful. He plays into the hands of those community workers who assert that all ills are political and may be reversed by the egalitarian distribution of an unlimited pool of wealth. Such a view is not universally shared.

Seigler and Osmond (1966), looking at that controversial phenomena known as schizophrenia discuss no less than six models of madness. The limitations of the term Family Therapy have been discussed elsewhere, in particular by Child (1985), Treacher (1985) and Kearney (1983), the latter suggesting there are limits to the usefulness of comparison between different types of system and a family. The charismatic Italian psychiatrist Selvini Palazzoli (1983,1985) when describing her work as a family therapist in both the private and public sector has taken pains to record cautionary tales about assuming experience in one context will be similar in another. In this respect she seems to provide support for the view expressed by Roger Adams that knowledge about families does not equal knowledge about other social systems. But is this true? As recently as February 1985 two members of the N.W: Family Therapy Trainers Group were able to join with the staff of a social services department area office and to provide training by modelling therapy with the office "family"; two team leaders who were peers (sisters) and subordinates (daughters) to the area manager and each having a number of "children".

This device worked well, and the trainers were able to proceed secure in the knowledge that the behaviour of their audience would be more or less predictable. Similarly, network therapy has developed out of family therapy rather than social work method where one might expect to locate it, given the broad base of social work education. Further, family therapy itself draws heavily from general systems theory, yet general systems theory was not designed as a means of studying families in particular, but rather in order to provide a working model for conceptualising phenomena which did not lend themselves to explanation by the mechanistic reductionism of classical science. To take information from one context and apply it in another would appear therefore to be a natural phenomenon and, I would argue a desirable one, provided that the innovator concerned is acting with integrity.

Watzlawick et. al. (1968)¹ have suggested that you cannot not communicate. If they are correct, the logical conclusion must be that given a body of knowledge in one context and a modicum of self-awareness, it is impossible not to apply that knowledge, either directly or by avoidance, in any context. The person of integrity simply acts deliberately and with what effect they can bring to bear.

This defence of Watzlawick (who is well able to defend himself) is perhaps less important than the need to foster transdisciplinary teamwork (Palazzoli, 1985) in both clinical and community settings. The concept is easy to understand, the reality hard to achieve. In the circumstances, perhaps it is excusable for Watzlawick to confuse

metaphor with reality and to use systems theory to glue moral, political and social issues into the same order as clinical problems. If we do not use what Roger calls an atlas of the social world and transfer our knowledge between contexts, we risk operating at the extremes of either Basho's eastern mysticism or Tennyson's western reductionism (Suzuki, 1960).

"When I look carefully

I see the (flower) blooming

By the hedge!" BASHO

"Flower in the crannied wall,

I pluck you out of the crannies;

Hold you here,

root and all in my hand,

Little flower -

but if I could understand

What you are, root and all,

and all in all,

I should know what

God and man is." TENNYSON

Having my roots in western society I prefer metaphor to mysticism. I like concrete examples to tighten up my practice. Erickson (1961) describes the case of Amelia L. who stopped to see her hypnotist following a visit to the dentist. She had a further five miles to drive but was in considerable pain. She demanded anaesthesia at will. The psychiatrist's task could not be simply to accede to her wishes. She was given instructions to have a posthypnotic anaesthesia only if she drove home carefully. Her anaesthesia was to be maintained only for a reasonable length of time, so far as body healing, tissue healing etc. were concerned. She could not keep anaesthesia for her own

amusement later. Further if a new or different sensation developed in her jaw, it would not be governed by the anaesthesia, and she would consult her dentist. The limitations placed upon the help were designed to protect her from herself. I quote this example not to assert that all clients should be hypnotised, but to draw attention to the ethical considerations of even the simplest intervention.

If we keep the boundaries of the model within the clinic we risk possibly dire consequences. A humanistic approach to therapy requires that we extend our knowledge to the wider context, in awareness of the tentative nature of all transferred hypotheses. It is difficult to be certain of anything when the atomic physicists write such things as:

"If we ask for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time we must say 'no'; if we ask whether the electron is at rest we must say 'no'; if we ask if it is in motion we must say 'no'."

OPPENHEIMER (1954)

To attempt to understand such phenomena physicists have developed the bootstrap hypothesis that not only denies the existence of the fundamental constituents of matter, but also accepts no fundamental entities whatsoever, no laws, equations or principles (Capra, 1975).

Capra (1982) suggests that a bootstrap model of society would be fruitful. This means gradually formulating a network of interlocking concepts and models and at the same time developing corresponding social organisation. Such theories and models and organisations will have to be trans-disciplinary, using whatever language becomes appropriate to describe different aspects of the multi-levelled, inter-related fabric of reality.

I have no argument with those who suggest that family therapy can be absurd, provided that they acknowledge that so is everything else.

ABSURDITY OF FAMILY THERAPY MAINTAINED

Roger Adams

I read Stephen Bray's (1985) response to my Newsletter' article (Adams, 1985) with interest. I wish to reply to his assertion that "to take information from one context and apply it to another would appear therefore, to be a natural phenomenon". Stephen thinks Family Therapy "is legitimately extending itself into wider areas". He observes Family Therapy "draws heavily from general systems theory" and that systems theory provides "a working model for conceptualising phenomena". Theory is always very important, not least because it legitimises the political power of experts - therapists for example.

My concern is to show the Family Therapy is not possessed of an unproblematic working model and that if it draws heavily upon General Systems Theory, this does not validate its application to wider arenas.

I accept the systems concept, the idea of a whole entity, which under a range of conditions maintains its identity and provides a way of viewing and interpreting the universe as a hierarchy of interconnected and interrelated wholes. I am furthermore convinced of the idea that real-world problem situations are preferably approached with the concept of the Human Activity System. We may learn about systems and systemic properties by observation and experiments with natural systems and we may aspire to design, modify, affect or improve what we perceive as human activity systems. i.e. sets of purposeful human activities. The human activity system is crucially different from the natural system. General Systems theory, (Stephen please recognise) to quote Boulding (1956) "does not seek, of course, to establish a single self-contained 'general theory' of practically everything:"

I do not know why Stephen brings into debate the "mechanistic reductionism of classical science" unless he is of the opinion my position is rejecting of systems theory.

General Systems Theory is concerned with work of a highly abstract nature on the general systems principles to be applied to any perceived wholes. Family therapy, on the other hand, brings systems ideas to bear upon social reality and upon specifics within that reality. It tackles issues that will be part of the concern of other disciplines. Family Therapists assume that problems can be formulated as the making of a choice between alternative means of achieving a known end. This belief, I acknowledge, is acceptable within a natural systems approach but within human systems the definition of objectives is still problematic. My position is to assert that it needs to be argued that human activity systems are fundamentally different from natural systems.

I acknowledge that within the Family Therapy Literature there dawns recognition, to quote Hollis (1972) that "there is no dispensing with a model of man, for it is buried in the roots of any theory". I refer to Whan (1983) and of course to Andy Treacher (1985) whose address to the plenary of the 1984 A.F.T. Conference itself was a reminder of Sue Walrond-Skinner's 1982 plenary address (Walrond-Skinner 1984).

Into this reply I introduce this debate along with argument, which remains a systemic, but is critical of the Family Therapy model, and its use of Systems Theory to propose solutions to 'problems' within its model of social reality. The comparison is with a humanistic approach that would take the following as its point of departure.

All human activity systems could be very different from how they are, whereas natural systems without any human intervention could not. The origin of that difference is the special characteristic that distinguishes human beings from other natural systems. The core of phenomena studied by the social scientist is the self-consciousness of human beings and the freedom of choice that that consciousness entails. The irreducible freedom of the human actor means that there can never be accounts of human activity systems similar to, and having the same logical status as, accounts of natural systems. At the level of the family the above debate would meet the following points:

The Social Worker faced with the problem of an abused child has to ask how are the family members responsible for their contexts and "how did they decide what to do in it?" A systemic hypothesis may helpfully remove the elements of individual blame and responsibility with circularity, but alternatively if the buck never stops, the individual is only comparable to the bubble on an incoming wave that accompanies it, but does not influence its course. Similarly family members are not incumbents of family systems, if they were, other members or any other system incumbent could fill such systems.

Stephen Bray must decide if he views the family as a social construction for a social order, or as something different, as a construction of systemic relationships. The second view implies that the individual is not a part of the family but is the raw material for it. It also assumes that the family's smooth running is essential for the continuing survival of its members, and of the social system of which it is a dependent part. From this perspective it is reasonable to assume that any breakdown in the family system is capable of terminating life in a way that is similar to what happens to life forms in a pond when it is without oxygen. Finally, it is always essential to include with a description of human activity systems, an account from the observer of the point of view from which his observations are made.

It is my assertion that family therapists are not seriously prepared to understand the importance of the "typologies of systems" debate. They must do this if they are to fully appreciate it is a mistaken positivist assumption to assert that Family Therapy has knowledge of a systemic social reality that is out there waiting to be discovered by clinicians. General Systems theory does not advance the argument that the methodology of Family therapy provides a reasonable mode of social reality and that it has solutions for problems in the reality at the disposal of the therapist. Theory, construction and reality construction go together!

Brodking (1980) has argued that the worldview of the Family Therapists' paradigm opposes the dichotomisation of lives into Public and Private spheres. He argues that the therapist is a social reality maintenance repair crew. Jordan (1981), and Reiger (1981) offer equivalent criticism.

In my view the image and model of social reality found in Family Therapy is fatally permeated by many mistaken assumptions.

The Department of Systems of the Faculty of Management, University of Lancaster had conducted action research into a Human Activity System approach into organisational problems. Professor Peter Checkland, Head of that Department, in his book "Systems Thinking, Systems Practice", (Checkland 1981 observes: "The dramatic not to say traumatic finding in our formative studies was that it was simply not possible to take any system as given" and writes "It was apparent that in study, there was no account of the System appropriate to the presentation on which everyone involved could agree; and disagreement extended not only to the choice of system but also how it should be described." After examining the research evidence that has accrued to his Department, and detailing the methodology that has been evolved, and repeatedly tested, he concludes "the experience of the Department has not supported the positivist account of the nature of Social Reality or the positivist assumptions of general systems thinking."

And furthermore, to conclude this response, Peter Checkland gives original attention in the final chapter of his book to a problem that is a concern Stephen does not appreciate. The experience of Systems Research, Checkland writes, has to be related to the context of the Social. He comments, "this is something the Systems Group as a whole has been markedly reluctant to do." How true this of Family Therapy! But Checkland can approach the problem successfully because he has established that a human activity system is essentially not describable in the same terms as a National System. Checkland

argues of human activity systems that they can be manifest only as perceptions by human actors who are free to attribute meaning to what they perceive. As such they are within the phenomenological tradition of Social Science. This refers to a belief that human beings in the social process are constantly creating the social world in interaction with others. They are negotiating their interpretation of reality; these multiple interpretations at the same time constituting reality itself.

There is no pre-given universe of objects but one that is produced by the active doing of subjects. The average therapist's assumption that it is possible to manipulate models of the assumed reality in order to discover a solution that is either optimum or at least good enough in a particular situation is therefore redundant within this frame.

The Human Systems alternative is different in numerous ways from the systems approach of Family Therapy; because its theory of intervention is phenomenological; the emphasis is not on any external reality but on peoples perception of reality; on their mental processes rather than on the objects of those processes. The paradigm is one of learning and because it is a process of learning the notion of an achieved solution is abandoned. The intervention is into the meanings which actors in a situation attribute to the reality they perceive. The assumption is of a situation in which various actors may perceive various aspects to be problematic rather than a solution to be secured.

I conclude my reply to Stephen Bray with the recommendation that he read Checkland. He will then understand why I cannot accept his assertion "that given a body of knowledge in one context, it is impossible not to apply that knowledge ... in another context."

MORE ABSURDITY

Stephen Bray

I am replying to Roger Adams' latest contribution to the absurd therapy debate (1985). Roger maintains that family therapy is absurd and he challenges my assertion that it is "legitimately extending itself into wider areas". He relies heavily on Peter Checkland (1981) to challenge my position, and borrows from Checkland the concept of the human activity system which argues that 'man' is the unique self conscious being and therefore human activity systems and natural systems are different because human activity systems could be different from how they are, whereas natural systems could not change without human intervention. Roger questions why I bring into debate the "mechanistic reductionism of classical science". I will attempt to clarify my position and to extend the debate.

Roger and I both hold that Family Therapy is absurd. I regard this as positive and am delighted that paradox, pun and absurdity form part of its body of techniques. However, I share Haley's caution about the use of procedures "which can cause harm in the hands of the ignorant and irresponsible who rush off to make people suffer" (1984). It is up to us to be neither ignorant nor irresponsible, in other words as I have suggested elsewhere, to act with integrity (1985).

I do not hold, as Roger suggests, the positivist assumption that Family Therapy has knowledge of a systemic social reality, "out there waiting to be discovered by clinicians". Neither do I hold that the answers are the property of academics such as Peter Checkland. My stance is broadly humanistic in so far as I am interested in the dynamic marriage of consciousness and the universal unknowable, the transcendental systems of Boulding (1956). Roger reframes Boulding by not quoting him in full. Let us use Boulding's full meaning as a point of reference - it is one which arouses frustration: General Systems Theory is not a "general theory of practically everything since we pay for generality by sacrificing content, and all we can say about everything is almost nothing" (Boulding op. cit).

It was exactly this recognition that has led to the formation of religious metaphors, the reductionism of magic and that most elegant of disciplines Zen. When I quote Capra (1982) and refer to a multi-levelled, inter-related fabric of reality, I am referring not simply to social reality although I include this. Nunn suggests that as family therapy is increasingly applied to physically ill populations there will be a need to include the biological components of the system to make sense of the family dynamics (1985). How right he is but perhaps there is much more to include.

Sue Walrond-Skinner (1984) claims that "family therapy began as the clinical expression of...(a) much wider movement" (which Capra calls the rising culture). She is concerned that it may not ultimately prevail over our medical and social bureaucracies. I do not share her pessimism, for as Buckminster Fuller has said: "The world is now too dangerous for anything less than Utopia" (Russell, 1982).

The biologist Rupert Sheldrake has stated that the average I.Q. has risen by 18 points since 1940 as more humans; have taken the tests that define it. In Madison Wisconsin 150 people found it significantly easier to learn the Morse code than another made up of dots and dashes (Sheldrake, 1982). He produces a catalogue of similar examples that suggest evidence for transcendental systems. He proposes that not only laws of physical science but also by invisible organising fields regulate systems. If one member of a

species learns a new behaviour the organising field for the entire species is affected. A repetition of the new behaviour by a sufficient number of the species will influence the behaviour of that species in general. Peter Russell has compared the growth curves for industry, information processing and consciousness raising in the U.S.A. The indications are that early in the next century the dominant area of human activity will have shifted from information processing to consciousness raising (1982). One may argue at this juncture that Family Therapy does not set out to raise consciousness in individuals, but rather to produce change in patterns of family interaction. My suggestion is that such changes of patterns do not occur without changes in individual consciousness, indeed if this were not the case one could never expect any improvement in the index patient'.

Peter Checkland seems reluctant to give space to a discussion of transcendental systems in his book. He writes scathingly of university bookshops selling tarot cards and the like. Whilst he devotes whole sections to natural, designed, closed, open, hard soft and human activity systems, the potential of the transcendental system is written off in a paragraph. Further, his definition of the human activity system being the only system which relies upon the actor attributing meaning to what they see, breaks down when one studies the world of the very small, (hence my reference to Oppenheimer, and professor Chew's bootstrap hypothesis (Bray op. cit.) Quantum mechanics for example has been facing the problems of interpretation for the greater part of this century. Its scientific logic has become absurd and paradoxical and its conclusions transcendental.

In Roger's world "human activity systems can be manifest only as perceptions by human actors who are free to attribute meaning to what they perceive.....Human beings in the social process are constantly creating the social world in interaction with others. They are negotiating their interpretation of reality; these multiple interpretations constituting reality itself". According to both the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics and the Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics an event does not actualise until we observe it.

Schrodinger's cat is an illustration of this. A cat is sealed in a box with a device that at a random time will release a lethal gas. On opening the box the question is, is the cat alive or dead? A common sense view would assert that the cat's fate is sealed with the box. The Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics asserts that only when we open the box does the probability (wave function) representing the cat actualise and every other probability vanish; the cat is either dead or alive. The Many Worlds Interpretation would claim that when the box is opened the wave function splits into two branches of

reality, in one the cat is dead, and in the other it is alive neither consciousness being aware of the other. Such absurd notions of no-thing have come about since at the most microscopic levels entities which appear solid can behave like waves of energy and vice versa. Further these entities move through a process known as the quantum leap, or in what can best be describes here as an unpredictable autonomous instantaneous fashion.

In Roger's view of systems "the individual is only comparable to the bubble on an incoming wave that accompanies it, but does not influence its course". According to the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics the bubble might actualise the wave. Modern physics has arrived at a similar position to that proposed by Eastern sages for thousands of years and has pre-empted Check land by over fifty.

Professor Geoffrey Chew, in reference to a theory of particle physics, has said, "Our current struggle with (certain aspects of advanced physics) may be only a foretaste of a completely new form of human intellectual endeavour, one that will not only lie outside physics but will not even be describable as scientific" (Zukav, 1979).

For all Roger's espousal of the systems concept, his argument remains reductionist. He has relied upon one author to champion his cause, and sadly that author has let him down. He is right to suggest that family therapy "is not possessed of an unproblematic working model", but as I have said elsewhere (op. cit.) "This is so is everything else".

WHO'S GOING OVER THE TOP?

Tony Farson

As far as I am concerned, the fate of Schrodinger's cat has little to do with trying to use a family systems approach with families from downtown Liverpool. The current correspondence has obscured rather than illuminated the issues.

The danger as I see it is that family therapy may well go over the top by running before it can walk. We should not allow ourselves to believe that all wisdom resides in our theory or us. The movement we are part of is still young and to claim omniscience may be excusable. In an adult world, however, exchanges of ideas take place on a more equal basis with respect for the common experience of the participants whether they are clients or fellow members of the same Association.

If the infallibility of systems purity prevails then we are likely to disappear up our own epistemology.

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