Dariusz ŚLESZYŃSKI

The Capacity of Life to Renew Itself: Being Intuitive

Know the world of nature of which you are a part, and you will be yourself and know yourself without thought or effort. The things you see you are.

Aristotle

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot: poem „Little Gidding”

When we are in tune with the world, as it is lived, as it is a horizon of possibilities, we sense the other’s experience; through narrative agency, she or he is called forth to take a stand, to respond to, or to participate in the amazing capacity of life to renew itself in meaningful experience and existential understanding of action that reaches into her/his depth and of knowing it. To be intuitive appears as an important feature in human behavior, especially in developing relationships. What does it mean to be intuitive? Specifically, what is its role, or how can it be enlisted, in affecting the narrative or the story of ongoing relation to people, to situations, to events and to the world, our environment? How do we „use” our intuition or, better still, what can we do when we are intuitive? Will it assist the narrative agency, especially in our work in the therapeutic situation? Basically, or ontologically, being intuitive manifests itself in the apprehension of meaning, but also, of feeling. We will analyze the connection, in psychotherapeutic practice, between intuition of the other’s experience, or the narrative of experience and the communication made possible by the sharing of a „co-state-of-mind” (Heidegger, 1962) possible. In the immediate awareness, real time, we taste, get a sense of, feel directly the actual reality of being in touch with a possibility. The

* Sacred Heart University, New Haven, CT, USA.
meaning of the words, in the privileged setting of psychotherapy, that should elicit, as it is captured empirically, in a specific presence and through a distinctive awareness of it, the timely response to move toward action. We will describe in this paper (1) being intuitive and the capacity of life to renew itself, (2) the therapist's curiosity as incipient care toward becoming a discernful presence. Then follows (3) understanding of sympathy and rising empathy, hazards that stand in the way of being reverent in a caring presence, operating on the mode of sympathy of having "good feelings for" and being on the way toward empathy.

1. Intuition fulfilling wholeness in psychotherapy

Being in tune with the world is the beginning, the embarking on being capable of an intuitive experience of looking at who I was in the past, at who I am now, and at who I am meant to be in the future, as this unique human being. Here, in a different way, we experience time, first as recollection, then as perception of the present, and/or finally as imagination of future expectation. Of course, while all of this is happening, while we are captured by dynamic, affective tension, and struggling to hold to the center of gravity, along with being in the conflict of having time, or of not having enough time, of being scattered, and/or depressed; but we don't run away. We keep exploring the circumstances of this tension, through clearing the environment of our experience, (without the wasting effort of transference), or by a breakthrough, or by using imagination to reach the wisdom of giving voice to a spontaneous relationship to something beyond us.

Edmund Husserl (1990, 1982) says that when we set aside, or bracket pre-suppositions, beliefs and opinions, even in a hurry, then the things are as they show themselves. In therapeutic practice, "it is cleared space" where the patient experiences the therapist as seeing the patient without assumptions or preconceived worldviews or any of the therapist's own baggage. There is, however, a certain amount of bracketing involved, namely, the phenomenological "epoché" or "reduction," in fact reduction in the double sense of reducing the biases, prejudices and leading us back, up front, to the things themselves, that is, again as they, the things, speak of themselves, as they are immediately given and intuited by consciousness.

The presence of the therapist means a lot to the patient, especially in finding a way through the vagaries of lived experience, of what is encountered directly, and, then, intuitively, that this is as it really is. If the therapist's presence is such that being intuitive is not enough, then, it is not very helpful to the patient to enrich life, to rise to the point of authority, to the perception that makes life meaningful. It would seem, then, by working through or connecting to another and flourishing within their potentiality, when there is a loss, there is less and less possibility of learning to be prepared for revelations, and developments, however small, or large, when they come.

1.1. Curiosity as incipient care

The emergence of intuition is an important hallmark of counseling and psychotherapy because it makes incipient care possible. This connection of caring to the optimal path of thought, action, and artful presence is the home base of trust, the principle of movement, and, also, of concernful presence that opens up and allows entrance into the world of the other. Sudden discernment about someone or something is rooted in intuition; never the less there is no royal road to discernment.

We must travel the route of curious sensitivity as incipient care: the comfortable, lightsome presence, with flowing energy. As this relaxed and comfortable attitude increases, so does the possibility for apprehension of meaning. Curious sensitivity is light, buoyant, and sensory: there is a light touch, the sensing moment in the sound of the story, there is also incredible receptivity in the sound of the relief that is moving to the possibility of thought: "It was helpful." In a sense of welcoming the therapist says: "How was it helpful, effective for you?" The patient pauses for a moment and, then responds by noticing that the everyday mode of "worrying is not helpful, it is not really thinking." In other words, it is that presence and space of intimate, profoundly concentrated listening on the part of the therapist, who feels so deeply, generously, and spontaneously that is frequently described as being pregnant with meaning, that mediates the unfolding of being, the sense of hope, of giving way to the exploring of the possibility, or, the patient's expression, it is felt like a spiritual dimension pertinent to understanding of the whole dynamic of the human person. The presence of intense sensitivity, of availability to the patient has to do with being liberated in a subtle and gentle way, of being supported to open up experience and to walk with the other: a companion.

To be intuitive can be cultivated as an ordinary used ability, that is, nurtured as the subject's ability to be open to and to see the meaningful structures in human experience and relationships in a way that knowledge of her/his being can be identified, articulated, and communicated easily, and truly in one's own words. This fine tuned sensitivity in both the small, and big, things that living is involved in is empirical and, as a matter of fact, is at the basis of all empirical thought.
This so remarkable human ability makes it possible for life to move to
different levels of experience such as the pathetic, rational, and the
enlightening or the illuminative.

Intuiting something, relating to something, expressing something
implies unexpected revelations from the patient leading the way into new
ground and modus vivendi. Differently phrased: these revelations
appearing as new ground, although it has existed for some time – but we
ever knew it existed – is uncovered, revealed in its significance and,
honored. This relationship to the unknown is not called „depth
psychology,“ but related to the sense-of-life or wisdom. There is a need,
by freeing, to develop and deepen, in our own sense-of-life, what makes
us human.

1. 2. Becoming discernful presence

The route to becoming a discernful presence is that of the spiritual
presence of buoyancy, lightness, resourcefulness, and openness. This
openness to the field of life and action as a liberating depth, as defying,
has scarcely been fathomed by research; it takes us beyond ourselves. It
is directed to the Cosmic, to the Transcendent, by way of inspiration; it
describes the way in which creative, evocative aspects of life become
larger than we are, almost deity-like, an uplifting sublime force
completely beyond our control. As noted, these descriptions point to the
very openness of the human self, or spirit; these are the workings of the
transcendent or of spirituality as we are influenced by one another to
respond from the depth of being in an enlightened unfolding.

The unfolding to various dimensions of openness paves its own way
to experiencing it as a dynamic experience of growing. In this experience
of growing, we are moving away from the empiric of the ego-self as the
center of gravity, toward the way of seeing our presence in the deepest
sense of our rootedness in a center, i.e., trusting to the ordinary, good
caring, felt sense of life.

This is the properly humane, world, where there is trusting, there is
caring, and this makes us gifted and that sense of life is not just a
conceptual formulation, though it is that also, but a concrete spiritual-
body experience: sometimes as joyful, sometimes as painful, and
sometimes, as disturbed, as in a sense of desperation. What we perceive
as the concrete experience is a sense of life; it is not a mere quality or
accidental feature of the person, but an essential constituent of spiritual
ex-sistence that touches us, and moves us, to fellow feelings as co-beings.
There is a wholesome sense of a unifying form that can lead to overcoming
the, sometimes frustratingly, holding of oneself at the, so believed,
center of reality.

We have been thinking that we are coming to the point of realization
that all possibilities are moving toward knowledgelessness, cleverness,
insightfulness, self-respect, „really sticking with it,“ and that these are
concrete acts of our living-in-the-world, and, yet, we now no longer
consider them fitting. On the one hand, they do belong to ordinary
experience, but on the other, they can bring us to a disturbing feeling of
derision.

By being moved toward this deeper sense of life, and, hence,
wholeness of being, we not only allow ourselves to be, but we also allow
God to be in our pains and in our joys. It is a humble, but useful,
position, spiritually speaking. It enables us to see others, and God, as a
real presence. They belong to the position that we can see a spiritual
person. Incidentally, it occurs in a way that we did not foresee or want.
There is, we find, a yearning in human beings, but it is a kind of mistake:
we want life to be steady, a constant flow of events, lively, spectacular,
in an egotistical way, but this is an error.

To understand should be found in a deeper sense of life, free, in a
free way. This attitude, in a certain way, upsets our choice, or will too,
letting the ego take over. We see the values of excellence as different: they
are invisible, of course, in their very special way, but they certainly exist.
We expect them to be spectacular. But, suddenly, through them, we see
the importance of gentleness, kindness, willingness to suffer along with
those who are hurting; to suffer them to suffer us: thus it is both other-
centered and compassionate.

Compared to the ego-mastering – micro management – of efficiency,
utility, defining, the values and dispositions of gentleness, kindness,
williness, for example, to be with other who suffers, seem to be useless,
ordinary: they promise nothing. We could say, however, in a very special
way, that in the experience of a deeper sense of life, our world itself is
different. The tone of the world changes in a mysterious way.

The spatiality of the world, for instance, I already experience in my
body. What follows is the ability of an existence to become engaged as
expressed: „I have a feeling that ...“ The values of a deep awareness of
the visible field of world relation is held together by „the structure of
invisible meaning.“ To describe the existentials of that „in-visible world“
with speech, begins to impregnate all things we see and witness
(Merleau-Ponty (1968) in the ordinary „I sense ...“ that emanates and
reverberates, from listening and responding to whatever is given, and,
now, both, the therapist and the subject become transparent, see-able, so
to speak: they are in tune. They are not to any further extent, for itself
and for the other but they are each present to the other side of the other,
simultaneously. It is a pregnant type of tonality or sonority, as an
expectant something special in a setting in which the world can be heard.
The Capacity of Life to Renew Itself: Being Intuitive

2. Understanding of sympathy and empathy

2.1. Hazards that stand in the way of being reverent in a caring presence

The expression may vanish before what is experienced can be cognized (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 401). This is why, without the mediating movement, or mediating the immediate experience, the patient's expression may pass unnoticed. Coming to a caring presence as mediating movement involves or entails hazards. These hazards, can be to go in the direction of (1) randomness of meaning, (2) of a "me too" standpoint, and/or (3) of having sympathetic "good feelings for" yet masking judgmental overtones. We will illustrate them here.

1) Randomness of meaning refers to an unorganized action, ataxia. Interest (inter esse, in Latin) is to be within, among, the things of the environment, and is connected with curiosity and increased possibilities. An aroused, but, low key, curiosity, moves one to an interest in all the possibilities within the current situation. As such it is not yet a matter of proper care, since discovering routes to what is going on for the other needs to be disciplined and remain the key motive to the incipient care of the other. Of itself, curiosity is a potential for the patient; it is made actual when I accept interest in the client.

2) "Me too" experience surfaces as an undisciplined presence that unloosens the identifying experience within me, in the I-in experience. As the conversation develops, I have this "movement" within myself that I want to add my experience. The first moment of this upsurge of curiosity is the route of the possibility of having something to say,
to add. In the movement toward initiating care, the patient's world is experienced as possible to be opened up toward knowing, toward creating, and toward distinctively human growing. Interestingly, in the sense-of-life, life is returned to the realm of mystery, self-inventiveness, re-creation, a sense of wonder about the self and others. Creation is restored to its original givenness.

3) Sympathy brings the other person's horizon of lived experience, through action, into our own context: thus, we are looking much too much at work with others from the affective, "me too", point of view, with such attributes as "me feeling," "me experiencing," "me suffering," profiling, really. All of this makes for difficulty in resiliency and in being incipient caring.

Naturally, the affective "me too" standpoint and attitude evolves from one's centeredness, because, from the point of view of the unreflective life, sympathy is seen as a relatively easy way to be with others; it is looked upon as a state of being in which all we have to do in health care is to "watch what we feel in relation to others." Suddenly, difficulty arises when we equate sympathy with all of care; it snuffs out the necessary lightness of presence and touch to the other person's world and the world around us. Much of bedside care is micro-management, but this technique cannot be applied to personally related care, emotional support.

Caveat: Sympathy can lead, as we mentioned before, to becoming judgmental: I often end up approving or disapproving. I am not aware of this because of the warm affectivity that is tied in sympathy. Approval and disapproval is the "coal mine" tendency; it is out of place, it is too heavy.

Sympathetic states of experience are powerful because they answer affective needs of connectedness, what we feel in relation to others. Hence sympathy has a powerful place in our ordinary experience; however it does blind us to the fact that one is already in a judgmental attitude. Interest in the form of mild curiosity is the way out; it is a transcending, and a light caring. Curiosity transcends approval and disapproval. I remain neutral, detached.

It is important to be aware that, in my private horizon, these sympathetic feelings may arise; the important thing is to transcend the movement to be judgmental. Along with judging, I may also be caught in being moralistic: this begins in the sympathetic pre-personal arousal.

2. Being on the way toward empathy

In the ordinary experience, sympathy focuses on having "good feelings for" another, and more so for the patient in particular: Having these sympathetic feelings may hide from us the judgmental factor involved. Everyday positive sympathy obeys the conservative value and principle of wanting to sustain the other, to hold her or him up. Therefore, in sympathy I am moved towards keeping the person at a certain level of being able to cope. I am being supportive in maintaining the other at a level of every day well being; Therefore, whether in psychotherapy or in pastoral care, sympathy may present the difficulties of being judgmental and even moralistic. This judgment has the hazard of simply communicating our own life stance or view of life to the other: the "I have gone through that too" attitude veils the egotistic stance. Why? Because what seems to be helpful for me may not be helpful for another; it may not even be helpful for me. This is not a liberalizing value; it's preeminent, or, preferably, conservative pole of experience can close the other off from the necessary explorative movement. In this way, sympathy can bring the other to a halt; can stop her or him from growing. Through this, my sympathetic support may stunt the unfolding of the other, if we rely on sympathy alone as, so as to make all of care, it may make both of us, for instance, be "stuck in sadness, with no way out," and, as a result we can make a lot of missteps or mistakes.

2. 3. Being on the way toward sympathy

Empathy gives a genuine access into the other's field of experience, says Edith Stein (1964); it allows us to participate in emotional life in the others' context. We can see their experiences within the framework of their own idea of the self, thus we see, and affirm whatever is in their context; we help others to say "yes" to whatever is happening for them, from their perspective rather than ours. That is to say in our care of others and counseling we free ourselves from our own context in order to participate in the unfolding of the world of others. Empathy functions, using Steinian expressions, as an aid to understand "the condition of possible knowledge." This possible knowledge, as we understand it, is an awareness that is out there for patients for their life stream, that is enough to build a life on; in the self-conscious awareness of what is, we can discover the possibility for building a life. At times, what is, as it has been, is detectable, we hate it, it causes anger or depression; etc. The liberating character of empathy is reality; we learn to live with what is: skills, talents, weaknesses, our real strength. It is the power of the world to call us out, and to move, in the direction of conscious orientation toward the issue at hand. Our relatedness to the world – whatever is – is the occasion for being called forth.

When empathy occurs, we feel ourselves "in" the situation; what we feel naturally spells trust. There are inexhaustible possibilities of recognition of the other's otherness in relation, particularly in relation to the world. Their spatio-temporal world is the ground of meaningfulness.
Concluding thoughts and reflection

As we have seen, sympathy and empathy only exist in the relationship between the I-in-experience and the other's field of experience. In sympathy, the I-in-experience prefocally is brought to the other as though we are having the same experience. In moving toward empathy the I situates in the other's experience, that is, it is taking the other's perspective, the one specific to the individual and, probably, to her or his culture. However, there has to be an I in order to be in relationship with, or for, others and, hence, real sympathy or empathy. Tying directly to connect empathically with the other is not a helpful way; we loose track of the I as it returns back. That is to say, there has to be something left "back there," solidly anchored in the "I," to attach the sense of relating that, in the first place, made it possible. Researchers such as Edmund Husserl (1989), Edith Stein (1964) relate empathy to an enduring, and even an enhanced sense of the deepening of the self alongside a vivid experience of the other.

How does one really move toward the ideal of deepening the self? If one begins to sense a moving toward more a individualized sense-of-self, then, to live at this level means to deepen one's sense of the human, to deepen one's sense of life; there would be no splitting it up into atoms, no repetition of the same things without continuity, but a moving to deepen, to back up one's sense of wholeness. How can we show it up more profoundly, how we really see that this in fact happens in real situation, in one's own life to be lived? These questions can only be raised from the perspective of the more fundamental choice, to what one is turning to, what more or other one desires, to whom one listens, before whom one can stand up without a mask and not loose face. Gaining knowledge of possibilities comes from the situation we are in, and is structured by a temporal framework, a way of unfolding past, present, and future, which is the same as being grounded in oneself. In this mundane way of being present to our everyday life, we begin to will this deepening of our sense of life, in our sense of being is a project. There are dimensions of our experience that can be terrifying or tragic; we want to turn away from some situations, and we cannot. We have to go back, probably, to Greek history, where the self, the ideal of deepening the self, always has the element of tragedy enter in it, into any notion of the deepening of one's life.

There is no escape from seeing a sense of life, as this living entity that we call human life in the world, as the tragic pervading the human condition, often, because of the manner in which we conceive ourselves. By not being in touch with the depths of our own being, especially as an ongoing dialectic of a sense of the limitations of identity and the mode...
of finiteness, with possibilities of creative relation in the world, including relation with the divine, results in one’s own life being scattered, being-frightened.

Taking a step in understanding the necessary conflict, the anxiety evoking situation forces us to drop our barriers or to let go of presuming, of accepting what comes, through catharsis, turning „disaster” into a breakthrough experience, a kind of rupturing with the past. This rupturing with the past and shaping one’s own destiny reveals the world and a relation which was already living one. How? Often with a thrill, to the more sublime force like God that flows and goes beyond the traditional therapeutic relationship.

It is clearly a momentous life decision, magnus opus, to allow life, in our being given over to the world and relation, to happen. Now, as a horizon to the world of the person expands, he can feel it, see it, act it, and experience a sense of wholeness larger than the self, and the wholeness of life is brought back to her/him, within this realization of being-a-whole again.

Interestingly, the deeper „I” emerges as a reality being part of another, but neither is the same as the other. As we follow these developments of meaning in human stories, choices become spiritual gifts.

References