

THERAPISTS OF THE WORLD, UNITE

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This article first appeared in "New Therapist," November/December 2001. Thanks to editor John Soderlund for permission to post it here.

I have always felt that since therapies of all sorts "promise" to help clients (of all sorts) to better navigate through the complex channels of life in our world, therapists must have and must communicate their views on the world. Some have insisted that doing so is introducing politics into therapy. But to the extent that one's worldview(s) is always relevant in figuring out what someone means by even the most mundane, innocuous comments, politics is always present in the practice of therapy.

The world was made no more political by the tragic events of September 11 and its aftermath. It just seems that way. But even it merely seeming so is enough, in my opinion, to further obligate the therapist to say where she or he stands on the world. But even more is required of the therapist in these times. For all therapists of all varieties would (or, at least should) be committed to a therapeutic view of the world. This paradigm or prism is surely consistent with other worldviews ranging from political right to political left. Yet to me, this does not mean that anything goes; our clients have a right to expect a critical degree of consistency between how their therapist relates to their anger and how their therapist relates to George Bush's anger. How would we treat the President if he had the good sense to ask for therapeutic support? Well, it seems to me that we might respond to it like we do all our clients' anger with understanding. We might begin by pointing out that all Americans are angry. That anger is a perfectly normal response to the horrific and criminal act that was perpetrated at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania on that frightening morning. But the "therapeutic view of the world" would not allow us to stop there. It is neither negating Mr. Bush's (nor America's) anger nor denying its justification to ask how come he is angry. And, to me, this is the methodological core (and the extraordinary value) of all forms of therapy. It is the essence (if you will) of the therapeutic view of the world (worldview). Whatever epistemological/ontological view one holds to on matters of mental life, methodologically therapists of all stripes properly insist that there is an important something going on beyond what meets the inner or outer eye. Different therapists use different descriptions to characterize it. But if everything emotional is merely what it seems, then what in the world is therapy? Much of what therapy (psychology) adopted from the natural sciences has been a terrible misfit, in my opinion. But the meta-methodological recognition that there is something going on other than what meets the inner and outer eye predates science by centuries but was corroborated by science to a spectacular degree. To be sure, the richness of human debate concerns what it is that is going on in the endless cases to be considered. But the recognition that there is something going on is a critical principle of humanism that even radical forms of postmodernism adhere to for fear of becoming pure, unadulterated nihilism.

And if the essential practical-critical therapeutic question is "What's going on?" then how do we justify the view that we cannot ask this question of Mr. Bush and his political

family? I personally suspect that if we were allowed to ask it (and he were allowed to answer it) we would hear a predictable amount of defensiveness and humiliation for participating in (not causing or being responsible for) but participating in (by commission and omission) the pre-September 11th policies and actions (or inaction) which determined (in the complex ways that historical process determines) the terrorist acts of September 11th.

Is this view unpatriotic? I think not. Patriotism (in this therapeutic context) would be analogous to the family member who prevents his loved ones from getting much needed help on the grounds that "we don't talk about these matters outside the family." Now that the "Godfather" has gone to therapy on HBO's wonderful show "The Sopranos" we are ready for George Bush and company. As every therapist worthy of the name has no doubt said, "It is not a sign of weakness to be in therapy; it is a sign of strength." Likewise for our country. And, it seems to me, therapists have an obligation to speak the therapeutic point of view loud and clear. This war we are likely heading towards is psychological through and through. We therapists can disagree on all sorts of questions. But if we do not agree on the relevance of therapy to life in all its complexity, we should, in my opinion, turn in our shingles.