

BEYOND ARISTOTLE, BREUER AND FREUD: MORENO'S
CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONCEPT OF CATHARSIS

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Social scientists have traditionally been looked down upon by physical scientists and, to a considerable extent, are so today. The reasons are numerous, the major one being that according to the detractors social science continues to be an admixture of art with science, therefore not "pure" science.

To illustrate the fallacy in this type of thinking, allow me to share with you a small fable I have written à la Aesop or Jonathan Swift, with, of course, proper apologies to these illustrious poets. It is called "Barney, the Insightful Bumblebee."

Once there was a little bumblebee known as Barney who spent all his wake life flying and being lightwinged. One day he made friends with a mathematician. This mathematician really enjoyed his friendship with Barney but gradually Barney noticed that his friend was frequently more and more morose. So he decided to ask him what he, Barney, had done to upset him. "Well," the mathematician shook his head which was so full of wise thoughts, "well, yes, Barney, to tell the truth, there *is* something about you which upsets me deeply. I love you and value your friendship and do not want any harm whatsoever to befall you. But you see, I have made careful studies of all known mathematical laws and *there is simply no way of excusing your ability to fly. It is against all laws of aerodynamics.* The plain truth is, Barney, you just ought not to fly around like that! It is dangerous! Because there is no way of figuring out how you are able to fly, you ought not to be doing it. Your body and wingspread simply are not properly geared to it. I often have nightmares about it and wake up in a cold sweat when I realize that you and all your relatives and friends are literally taking your lives in your wings every time you take off. I can not tolerate the idea that one of my friends lives and flies in constant danger." And he shook his wise old head again in dismay. Barney was astounded, to say the least. Imagine! He and all his relatives and friends were endangering their lives by doing just that for which they had been created! He was deeply shocked. "Well,"

he told Mr. Mathematicus, "I will have to go and warn them and we will have to hold a family council. I know you are my good friend and want to save us all from a fate involving death." He tried to fly away—which was, after all, his normal mode of transportation—and found to his own dismay that, spread his wings as he would, he could not lift his large, bulky body off into the air as he had been doing almost since he was born. What suffering! What misery and anguish of mind, heart and body that poor Barney underwent! He saw no way out to save himself and his own kind. He began to lose weight and became so deeply depressed, even suicidal, that he had to undergo psychiatric treatment. But there are no psychiatrists anywhere trained to deal with so existential a problem. Try as he might, going on foot or on the shoulder of his very best friend Mr. Mathematicus, from one type of therapist to another, representatives of all the different schools—of which there exist quite a few—none and no one was able to cure poor Barney. Mr. Mathematicus now had real reason to be concerned about the welfare of his friend and besides, began to feel more and more guilty, responsible for the fading away of his friend. Periodically, he would sit down again and try to refigure the laws he was so familiar with; but, try as he would, he could not find a rational basis for encouraging Barney to undertake such a dangerous task. What a dilemma! He could not lie to his friend convincingly because he saw no way out. The mathematical truth was: Barney really *should* not be able to fly and therefore it was dangerous!

Out of the depth of their mutual despair, they decided to leave no stone unturned and, having made a long odyssey all around the globe, they take their strange case for consultation to a psychodramatic therapist. After all, they had nothing to lose and a great deal to gain.

In difference from all the other specialists previously consulted, the psychodramatist is not at all amazed. Barney's problem is one he has long been encountering, every day, in myriads of forms. He listens and watches very sympathetically and intensely as Barney re-enacts the entire story of his sad debacle from the moment he has gained insight into his "dangerous condition". "Barney," says the psychodramatist, "I want you to sit very still, here, right by me, for a few minutes and concentrate very, very deeply." The psychodramatist darkens the theater, turning down the lights until only a glimmer of blue is visible. "Concentrate upon your dream, my friend, give it everything you've got, and when you are warmed up to represent it in action, just start *doing* it. No more words or thoughts or puzzlements. Just be silent, sink into your innermost and then begin to act on the very wildest dream you have ever had or ever will have in your life."

Barney does exactly as he is told and, lo and behold, to the astonished eyes of Mr. Mathematicus, Barney spreads his wings, ever larger and larger, so wide as to make his bulgy body appear a lot less impressive, takes a few faltering first steps but, encouraged by the psychodramatist, lifts his heavier-than-air bulk up, up into the ocean of air and FLIES! The more he flies, the more his heart lifts up and the more that happens, the better and higher he flies. "Barney," says the psychodramatist while opening the door of the theater wide for him onto the great, beautiful world, "forget about all your past troubles, they can not be changed. Just live as you feel is best for you. And when wellmeaning friends warn you of your foolishness, remember this moment. Remember all your hopes and dreams of the wildest schemes; never let go of them and put them into action to the best of your ability."

And Barney flew off so fast, he even forgot to say goodbye to his good friend; off he went, into the azure blue sky.

That is how Barney was cured of his crippling insight for ever.

We are not apologists for the social sciences. On the contrary, there is overwhelming evidence to convince us that no one be truly called a scientist who does not, in fact, embody both science and art, whether he be physical or social scientist. Indeed, the history of the physical sciences is replete with human errors, blindness, mythology and intuition. To quote Einstein, who, as is usually comfortably repressed by physical science representatives, failed ninth grade mathematics, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." This same Einstein was so overwhelmed when he first heard Yehudi Menuhin play at age fourteen that he embraced him and said: "You have once more proved to me that there is a God."

In his book *The Sleepwalkers*, Arthur Koestler declares that if Galileo would have been truly "scientific," that is, basing his opinions on knowledge of astronomy available in his own lifetime the history of his own life as well as of science *could* have been very different. First, he might not have been condemned for his views and second, more importantly, he could have speeded up man's knowledge of the physical universe enormously, simply by thoroughly acquainting himself with the work of Johannes Kepler, a contemporary genius and visionary, and by acknowledging his contribution. Instead, due to his narcissism, he brought about his own disgrace at the hands of his inquisitors and impeded progress in the area of physical sciences. According to the same author, Galileo's real, immortal contribution to science rests on his work on dynamics and not on his sketchy knowledge of astronomy. Yet it was the latter which earned him his worldwide reputation. Indeed, it was his "ill-conceived crusade which had discredited the heliocentric sys-

tem and precipitated the divorce of science from faith." Incidentally, Kepler had apparently a wake-dream dealing with moon flight and moon landing described in his *Somnium*, published posthumously. It was the first science-fiction book ever produced and influenced later authors on interplanetary flight. The *Somnium* appeared in 1634, although he commenced working on it in 1609 and even sent in his fanciful description to Galileo, according to Lewis Mumford's report in *The Myth of the Machine*. Koestler reports that he worked on the *Somnium* until his death and adds: "All Kepler's work, and all his discoveries, were acts of catharsis; it was only fitting that the last one should end with a fantastic flourish."

In our own time we need but to look at the level of care given by the medical profession who specialize at that apex of the physical sciences—medicine of the body—to recognize the inadequacy of the coldly scientific approach.

All this by way of saying that the stamp of a good scientist is a synthesis between art and science, giving equal weight to both. They not only have common roots in religion but one can not long survive without the other. A most fortuitous instance of the happy marriage between the two is the little known fact of the birth of the phrase "count down," familiar to all who are part of the space age. This phrase, all assumptions despite, was not coined by anyone even remotely connected with astronautic engineering or mathematics. Instead, it was created by Fritz Lang, a famous German film producer-director. It occurred in 1929, while shooting the take-off to the moon for a movie called "Die Frau im Mond" or "Lady in the Moon." It was a science fiction story of the moontrip of two male astronauts and one very beautiful blonde lady astronaut—a new twist to the eternal triangle—and a film for which Willie Ley, the rockets expert, was technical adviser. Lang conceived the idea as the scene was built up to enormous tension, while the spaceship is preparing for take-off on the pad and the count one to ten is about to begin. Lang stops the actor portraying the counter of the final ten seconds, saying: "This counting is dull, predictable and anti-climactic. Let's do it backwards, let's *count down*, from ten to one!" This has since then become the standard term as well as accepted procedure in preparation for space travel. By the way, I was twelve years "young" when I saw the film and, believe me, it made the actual recent moonlandings appear like science fiction; it was a superb, pioneering creation of cinematographic art.

No other social scientist embodies, in our time, the requirements stated above as succinctly as does Moreno, whose pioneering ventures in both branches of the sciences as well as in religion have been wellsprings of in-

spiration. The eventual effects of his work upon mankind are far from being predictable. History and posterity will, I am certain, be better able to evaluate this than we, his contemporaries. It is a peculiarity of human nature to make respectful genuflections at the genius of the past and to belittle, deny, detract from, overlook and even ridicule the genius in our midst. If we here are truly to be considered as social scientists, let us be this consciously, systematically, objectively and intuitively.

One of Moreno's fundamental contributions to the knowledge of man's emotional life is the concept of mental catharsis based upon action. For the term and description of catharsis itself we must go back to Aristotle, who in his *De Poetica* describes the effect of tragedy upon the spectators in the theater of his day. Aristotle goes into great detail on the structure of comedy and tragedy. His frame of reference was, of course, drama in its *conserved* form, although he does state quite clearly, and I quote: "It—tragedy and comedy—certainly began in improvisations." However, he does not dwell any further upon its beginnings; he concentrates his attention on what happens in the audience as the play unfolds before it and defines tragedy as follows, and I quote again: "Imitation of an action, in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its 'catharsis' of such emotions." Catharsis, then, is a purging, an emptying, a cleansing. Many of us remember from our childhood an unpleasant medication, the purgative, which was popularly labelled a "cathartic."

Aristotle described the phenomenon from the point of view of the *spectator*. This is important and should be borne in mind, as it has a bearing upon the particular interpretation Moreno gave, as well as upon his unique contribution which has carried us beyond Aristotle and beyond Breuer and Freud, to whom we shall now turn our attention.

Breuer and Freud both first used hypnosis with patients. As we know they later parted ways and Freud then developed his technique of free association, dispensing with hypnosis altogether. It is not the purpose of this paper to dwell on the reasons for these developments; they are not germane to it. Rather, we must concentrate on our central theme, catharsis.

Breuer and Freud observed that when their patients under hypnosis described particularly painful scenes of their life, they often burst into tears, showed anger, even rage, or succumbed to the stress of those scenes in visible ways. Breuer called this phenomenon "catharsis" and attached the label "the cathartic method" to this use of hypnosis. However, because the patients *reported* the scenes, that is, verbally recalled them, they were still

observers in the sense in which Aristotle spoke, namely of "incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions." True, the drama was not written by a playwright and the fact that these were scenes in their own life made the feelings genuine and more explosive, but from the point of view of *method*, Breuer and Freud did not go beyond Aristotle. Like him, they did not move the person out of the seat of the observer. However, Aristotle does make a distinction between poetry and tragedy when he says of the latter (and again I quote): "In a dramatic, not in a narrative form." The *narrative* form, he implies, is a form of *poetry*. Aristotle did not deny that catharsis can be evoked in the listener of the narrative but he stressed the *quality of drama* as especially provocative. We may say, therefore, in Aristotelian terms, that Breuer and Freud's hypnotisands were, at least methodically speaking, at best poets or songsters, narrators of their own life. Lacking the actorial dimension, one may wonder whether Breuer's designation of the word catharsis or cathartic method obfuscates rather than clarifies the underlying processes.

Beyond the above quoted reference as to the early beginnings of tragedy in improvisation, Aristotle himself did not deal with the function of the actor in more detail or depth. His observations did not include the dimension of the actor's contribution to the process. Indeed, he never clearly envisioned the distinction between actor and spectator, nor does this arise in the thinking of Breuer or Freud. Their observations simply are not in this realm; the actor has no part in their system.

Therefore, whenever we use the terms "spectator catharsis," "actorial catharsis," "actor's catharsis" or "catharsis of action," it is always in the sense of Moreno. It is entirely due to his penetrating insight into the totality of the processes of drama, conserved or spontaneous, whether dealing with the function of the actor or that of the spectator, that we have gained this multidimensional vista.

If Moreno would have been satisfied with the *word*, he would not have been able to move beyond the spectator. It was his absorption in and involvement with the concepts of spontaneity and creativity, with the moment, the here-and-now, with the idea of immediate creation, that led to the new dimension of catharsis, the "catharsis of the actor in situ." His concern was not the past but the living present, the encounter, the moment as a dynamic, pulsating, arising category, not already experienced.

Methodologically, this made Moreno turn away from the frozen, given moments of creativity whose products he called "cultural conserves," away from the rehearsed form of the drama, away from the recalling of the past

however intensively recorded, perceived and experienced. His first step was to remove the actor's script. He tore off the mask of the actor and forced him to reveal himself, placing his own, private person on center stage. This "liberation of the actor from the script" took place first in the classic theater and led to the development of a new form of theater, the theater of pure spontaneity, spontaneity as an esthetic form, an art of the moment. When this art of the moment was established, the catharsis of the actor in situ became a visible reality. Now the actor was no longer the slave to another's creativity, he could be the master of his own. The peeling off of psychological layers of himself, of his own masks, made him helpless, vulnerable, weak, dependent. It simultaneously forced him to rely upon his spontaneity and creativity. All his earlier crutches were taken away; it was a most painful process. In place of them, Moreno asked him to trust his inter-actors, to throw himself not merely upon his own resources of spontaneity and creativity, but also upon those of his co-producers, the other actors in the evolving drama. Thus he was made to deal with the "counter-spontaneity" evoked in the interaction with his partners. It was an humbling experience. It involved not only the words, but the motions, the actor's total mnemonic-technical equipment. Whenever an actor began to freeze his better motions, lines, facial expressions, at the cost of his continuing creativity, Moreno subjected him to exercises of "deconservation," forcing him into new modes of contacting his spontaneity, to keep it in ready, liquid form. This was such a difficult task that it may have been largely responsible for the fact that the actors, disillusioned in their own spontaneability returned to the classic form of the conserved drama, in a majority of cases. Nevertheless, this was and remains today, one of the profoundest revolutions in the domain of theater. It has led far beyond Stanislavski, to the eventual development of Second City, the Premise, the Happening, the so-called Living Theater, Open Theater, Guerilla Theater, Theater of the Streets, etc. However, not a single one of these later offspring are as pure or essential a form of spontaneous-creative theater as was the Theater of Spontaneity. Each has given up part of or bastardized both spontaneity and creativity of the actors.

Besides leading the actor back to his own spontaneity-creativity, Moreno helped him to focus on the role. In liberating the actor from the script Moreno gave him the leeway to try a variety of versions of the same role. The role of the father, for instance, was no longer subject to a single interpretation; the actor could try out any number of versions to his soul's content. Thus, the tyrannic father, the gentle father, the strong but patient father, the weak, dependent father, the cold, critical distant father, the warm,

responsive, companionable father all fell into the realm of possibilities of action. His co-actors' repertoire too, was thereby enormously expanded as the above variations of roles required the complementary son role for their completion. Each individual actor now became the carrier of almost limitless possibilities. When, for instance, one of Moreno's actresses in the Theater of Spontaneity developed a "histrionic neurosis"—another of Moreno's diagnostic terms—that is, a neurotic condition due to her spontaneity being channelized only into roles of "pure, virginal womanhood" which caused her to behave like a wild virago in her private world as reported by her husband, Moreno hit upon the idea of "role-range expansion." Henceforth he had her take roles of women of the lower depths in the Theater of Spontaneity. Not only did she do them well, but the process enabled her to effect a more complete integration of both kinds of womanhood within herself. This then, was the conscious turning point of the Theater of Spontaneity as an art form into the Theater of Catharsis, the Theater of Therapeusis. Step number one, *the catharsis of the actor*, was assured and completed.

Moreno discovered early in his work with the children in the gardens of Vienna that even a role conserve can be catharsis-producing for the actor, provided the role dynamics parallel those of the actor, that they are "the right fit," do not crush his spontaneous-creative function and help him to expand and intensify this function.

A striking example of this type of actorial catharsis, though merely as an observation and happy accident, not as a central theme of her book, may be gleaned from Pearl Buck's autobiography *My Several Worlds*, from which I quote:

"That spring a little dramatic group among the foreigners gave a play for the English-speaking community. It was *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. I do not remember the other actors but only the little frail creature, whose name I have forgotten, but who played the part of Elizabeth Barrett. She was a missionary, I was told, a shy virginal woman, not young, not old, whom nobody knew. But she had great dark sad eyes and a small olive-skinned face and heavy dark hair, and a soft stealing footstep. Upon the stage she became Elizabeth herself, the beloved of a poet, and before our amazed eyes she gave a performance so passionate, so true, so utterly astounding in the perfection of its sensitive comprehension of a poetic love, that I have never forgotten it. And indeed when later I saw our own great Katharine Cornell play the same part in revival, I felt the little missionary had surpassed even her performance. Yet when the play was over that small

creature shrank away again, and when she was tried in another play was quite mediocre, I was told. Something in that play and in that one character fitted, I suppose, the emotional need of her own life at the moment."

What happens to the catharsis of the spectator when the catharsis of the actor is being unfolded? For a truly magnificent exposition of spectator catharsis I am indebted to St. Augustine, who, describing his early and, to him, most sinful youth in Carthage, states in his *Confessions*: "Stage-plays also draw me away, full of representations of my miseries and of fuel to my fire. Why does man like to be made sad when viewing doleful and tragical scenes, which yet he himself would by no means suffer? And yet he wishes, as a spectator, to experience from them a sense of grief, and in this very grief his pleasure consists. What is this but wretched insanity? For a man is more affected with these actions, the less free he is from such affections. Howsoever, when he suffers in his own person, it is the custom to style it 'misery'; but when he compassionates others, then it is styled 'mercy.' But what kind of mercy is it that arises from fictitious and scenic passions? The hearer is not expected to relieve, but merely invited to grieve; and the more he grieves, the more he applauds the actor of these fictions. And if the misfortunes of the characters (whether of olden times or merely imaginary) be so represented as not to touch the feelings of the spectator, he goes away disgusted and censorious; but if his feelings be touched, he sits it out attentively, and sheds tears of joy."

As St. Augustine so beautifully sums up: you don't *do* anything as a spectator, you just sit and watch it all happen.

It is quite a different experience, for an adult at least—children are easily captivated by dramatic magic if they have not yet established the break between fantasy and reality within themselves—to know the play to be "as if," a fiction, and the actors merely players, mask bearers, than to be shocked into an awareness that the actors in *this* theater are real people, without their masks, truly experiencing what they are now living, before one's very own eyes. *Their* suffering and joy is actual, here; *their* tears are what they are; *their* laughter is the genuine article.

Moreno distinguished three forms of catharsis: 1) the esthetic, that is, the experiencing of beauty; 2) that of the spectator, already dwelt upon and 3) actorial catharsis or catharsis of integration. It is the actorial catharsis, the catharsis of integration, which is his particularly momentous contribution. It was born when he turned the protagonist into the *actor of himself* rather than the narrator-spectator. The transposition of the actor from the level of "as if" and his transformation into the *primary source* of catharsis

itself, moves the spectator from the level of "as if" to the level of "is," from the recognition of "he is" to "I am." This shock of awareness of real other creates a parallel shock of real self-recognition in the spectator and astronomically intensifies it. But, Moreno was not content with leaving the spectator there, either, in his seat, merely being the receptacle of other people's spontaneity-creativity. He proceeded to propel the spectator, too, out of his seat, demanding him to turn into an actor, here, now, just as had the others before him. This was the completion of the catharsis of the actor, coming from the level of former spectator, and taking central stage in due course. Thus, the spectator represented not merely the watching, judging world as public opinion, but the larger all-inclusive world of total creativity and total involvement. The audience as actors and interactors could now complete the final round: that of therapeutic actors.

We know from psychodrama that the greatest depth of catharsis comes not merely from re-enactment of the past, however traumatic or instructive, but from embodying those dimensions, roles, scenes, and inter-actions which life has not, can not and probably never will, permit. It is in the realm of surplus reality that the catharsis of action, of both individual and group, is achieved in its purest form.

And who is there to predict with absolute certainty and foreknowledge, which of man's dreams and visions is capable of realization? Freud's concept of the dream was that it is a wish and wish fulfillment. Yet, Kepler's dream became a reality four hundred years later.

In Freud's work the encounter is an intellectual phenomenon. In Moreno's work encounter between I and Thou results in a direct, mutual catharsis. To quote Ramon Sarro in his Foreword to Ann Schutzenberger's book *Introduccion al Psicodrama* just published in Spain: "The essence of the act, its final meaning, is to provoke an encounter, not only a catharsis."

The work of Freud was based on atheism. There is no significant, fundamental relationship between atheism and catharsis. The atheistic position is without promise and hope.

Moreno's work is based on religion. This gives catharsis a religious anchorage.

In conclusion, this then, is the lesson we learn from Moreno: "Throw away that old script. Redo it, here, now. Act yourself as you never were, so that you may begin to be what you might have become. Make it happen. Be your own inspiration, your own playwright, your own actor, your own therapist and finally, your own creator."