Book Review

The Philosophy, Theory and Methods of J. L. Moreno: The Man Who Tried to Become God. By John Nolte. Routledge, 2014.

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John Nolte argues Moreno's contributions are best understood on the basis of his underlying philosophy and theory, and he sets out to present and articulate Moreno's philosophy and theory based not on the writing of others but on Moreno's own words. It is not unprecedented that an influential figure would neglect clear articulation of his theory.

Few would argue about whether Carl Rogers had a theory, but most would not know it was ever clearly detailed. Eight years before his death, Betty Meador (Meador & Rogers, 1979) stated his theory with his endorsement, "I have read the chapter with care, made some minor changes and additions, and believe it is a good and accurate presentation . . ." (p. 131). Rogers (1959) had considerable antipathy for theory development because theoretical propositions "are those which are furthest from the matrix of our experience and hence are most suspect" (p. 222). He hoped his own theories would not suffer the same fate as Freud's whose "gossamer threads" of theory became "woven chains" of dogma (Rogers, 1959, p. 191).

Moreno (1946) had similar concerns. "The book is the archetype of all cultural conserves—the cultural conserve par excellence" (p. 107). Moreno (1946) saw cultural conserves as "a challenge and threat to the sensitivity of man's creative patterns" (p. 108). He saw spontaneity-creativity as of ultimate value. "The meaning of . . . WHO SHALL SURVIVE? is the survival of creativity, of man's universe. *The survival of human existence itself is at stake*, not only of the fit; fit and unfit are in the same boat" (Moreno, 1953, p. 600).

Nolte reveals he is writing in response to three challenges: to clearly explicate Moreno's approach, to repay a debt, and to offer a tribute. Nolte states that this "book provides a more systematic presentation of Moreno's work and presents his philosophy and theory in a clearer and more understandable manner" (p. i). He is repaying the deep obligation he feels to Dr. J. L. and Zerka Moreno for "a new way of life and a new way of practicing my profession as a psychologist," by passing what he received on to others. "This book is an acknowledgement of that debt as well as a tribute . . ." (p. xi).

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Nolte answers the challenge identified by biographers of Moreno, alluded to by others, and required by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2009) for the funding of intervention grants. "The big challenge ahead, it seems to me is an epistemological one: to build and rebuild on Moreno's foundations in a coherent, systematic, and all-encompassing way" (Marineau, 1989, p. 153). "We leave the task of bringing together all of Moreno's insights in one coherent picture for some future time, probably by some future authors" (Hare & Hare, 1996, p. 27). No other author to date to this reviewer's knowledge has taken up this task though others have alluded to it (Reekie, 2013; Wallace, 2013) or begun to pursue it (Wieser, Fontaine, & Teszáry, n.d.).

In Part I, "The Religious Phase," Nolte begins where Moreno began. "The Man in the Green Coat," describes how Moreno was intrigued by the creativity and spontaneity of children, affected by existentialist thought, profoundly moved to theologically/philosophically identify with all (humankind/universe/God), and convinced that the encounter is the anecdote to the overvaluing of conserves.

In "Young Man of Many Parts," Nolte describes Moreno's helping various groups of troubled people, an outworking of his religious conviction, and the basis for his later scientific work. He recounts the social context in which Moreno's approach developed. Moreno identified with two Viennese café groups. His involvement with Café Herrenhof, which included intellectuals, poets, and writers, led to his establishing a journal of Austrian expressionist authors. Expressionistic ideas are implicit in his approach. His involvement with Café Museum, that included actors and actresses and a few writers, led to the "first psychodrama."

In "Role Reversal with God," Nolte describes the second powerful mystical event that led to Moreno's anonymous publication of "Words of the Father." Moreno experienced these words as "passing through him" (p. 37) and not his words. They express his ". . . philosophy of co-creativity and co-responsibility and . . . rudiments of all his later concepts: spontaneity, creativity, the conserve, encounter, and the moment" (p. 51). Moreno's mysticism and new conceptualization of God led to psychiatrists and theologians' rejection of his theories, philosophy, and psychodrama.

In Part II, "The Philosophy," Nolte begins by describing "Morenean Philosophy," Moreno's first love. Nolte recounts J. L. and Zerka's pleas that his ideas and concepts not be separated from his philosophy, describes it, notes its contribution to the scientific method, and contrasts it to the medical model.

In "The Canon of Creativity," Nolte outlines Moreno's core concepts of creativity and spontaneity, connects Kuhn's (1962) "paradigms" with conserves, and describes the evolution of the concepts of spontaneity and warming up. In "The Physics of Spontaneity-Creativity," he answers questions raised by Moreno's conceptions by proposing an intriguing novel solution and the predictable resistance.

In Part III, "The Morenean Methods," Nolte begins with "Group Psychotherapy" and describes the development of Moreno's conception of group psychotherapy, the field itself, and the third psychiatric revolution. In "Sociometry, A New Model for the Social Science," he describes Moreno's most often overlooked revision of the experimental method, insisting that knowing

"sociology" should not be separated from intervention, or "social work." Its demonstrated effectiveness at Hudson, though enthusiastically received, fell into disregard.

In "Sociometric Theory," Nolte spotlights Moreno's observations of the interconnectivity of humankind, the importance of personal preferences, the individual as an actor in situ in contrast to an organism-in-environment, the sociogram, the social atom, the cultural atom, sociometric networks, the sociogentic law, the sociodynamic effect, sociometric theory of leadership, and the role theory of personality.

In "Psychodrama and Sociodrama," Nolte elucidates the evolution of psychodrama itself, the method/instruments, the process/phases, its popularization, Zerka's invaluable contributions, psychodrama today, and the development and use of sociodrama.

In "Psychodramatic Theory" Nolte clarifies key aspects of Moreno's thought that underlie his method, conceptually addressing the subjective truth, the moment, and the situation, countering the "normotic" by increasing spontaneity, human beings as actors and interactors, acting out as a solution rather than resistance, act hunger as a source of anxiety, the tool of surplus reality, and the nuanced relationship of catharsis, integration, and abreaction.

In "Appraising J. L. Moreno," Nolte identifies the depth and intricacies of Moreno's disagreement with Freud, stemming from their different world views, and that the acceptance of Moreno's ideas and vision would require a paradigm shift for which humankind is not ready.

Assuming Nolte is right about Moreno having a philosophy and theory, it does not follow that all psychodrama practitioners should follow lockstep. Just as Rogers valued self-actualization and hence would abhor the identification of a practitioner as a "Rogerian" therapist, Moreno could not be happy at the insistence that everyone believe and preform as he did given his ultimate valuing of spontaneity and creativity. At the same time, whether one agrees with Nolte's understanding of Moreno's philosophy and theory—and I do not agree with everything—I believe there is great value in understanding Moreno as he understood himself and believe Nolte's effort is a great service to that end.

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