

## **AUTHENTICITY AND RELATIONSHIP: CONFLICT OR SYNTHESIS?**

***Alan Robinson***

*This paper explores the possible conflict between two fundamental states of being.*

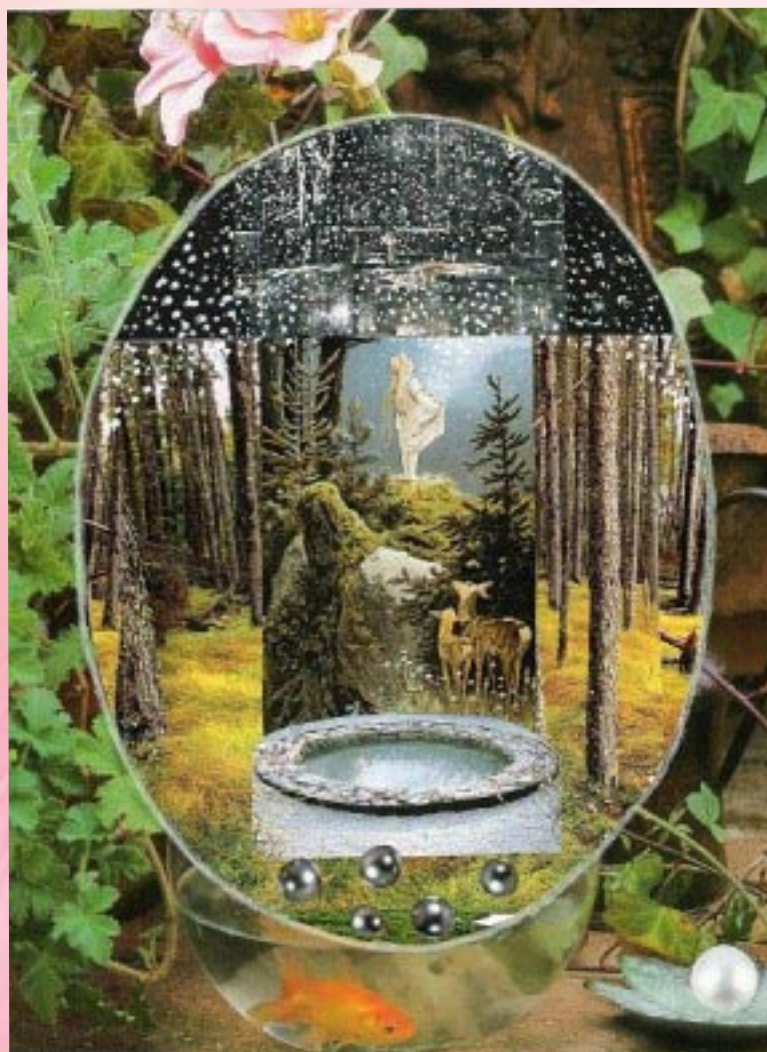
*On the one hand,  
our need for relationship  
and on the other,  
our drive for authenticity.<sup>3</sup>*

**Includes:**

***What Was Your Face Before Your  
Parents Gave You Theirs?***

***The Authentic Self – A Manifesto***

***“Hello darkness my old friend, I’ve come  
to talk with you again...”***



Shakti Genaine

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“We exist only in the sense that other people acknowledge our existence.

And if no one acknowledges our right to be who we are, then we invent ourselves and continue to invent ourselves ad nauseum, until we forget who we were.”

#### *The Function of Relationship*

“Relationship is inevitably painful, which is shown in our everyday existence. If in relationship there is no tension, it ceases to be relationship and merely becomes a comfortable sleep-state, an opiate - which most people want and prefer. Conflict is between this craving for comfort and the factual, between illusion and actuality. If you recognise the illusion then you can, by putting it aside, give your attention to the understanding of relationship. But if you seek security in relationship you are hindering its function,

which brings its own peculiar actions and misfortunes.

Surely, the function of relationship is to reveal the state of one’s whole being. Relationship is a process of self revelation, of self knowledge. This revelation is painful, demanding constant adjustment, pliability of thought-emotion. It is a painful struggle, with periods of enlightened peace.

But most of us avoid or put aside the tension in relationship, preferring the ease and comfort of satisfying dependency, an unchallenged security, a safe anchorage. Then family and other relationships become a refuge, the refuge of the thoughtless.

When insecurity creeps into dependency, as it inevitably does, then that particular relationship is cast aside and a new one taken on in the hope of finding lasting security, but there is no security in relationship and dependency only breeds fear. Without understanding the process of security and fear, relationship becomes a binding hindrance, a way of ignorance. Then all existence is struggle and pain, and there is no way out of it save in right thinking, which comes through self-knowledge.”

(Krishnamurti, 1995)

## Introduction

This paper explores the possible conflict between two fundamental states of being.

On the one hand, our need for relationship<sup>1</sup> and on the other, our drive<sup>2</sup> for authenticity.<sup>3</sup>

In particular:

How is our personal drive for authenticity hindered and/or supported by our need for relationship?

I will also look at the implications for the therapist in the therapeutic relationship.

In response, I intend to show that:

The authentic self can only be realised *in* relationship; that is, synthesis rather than conflict.

And that clients in search of their own authenticity, are best served by a therapist who is prepared to bring her own authenticity into the therapeutic relationship.

## Outline

The first section 'What Was Your Face Before Your Parents Gave You Theirs?' considers the question of how, when and why we lose touch with our authentic self in the first place. Starting from the model of human woundedness set out in *The Primal Wound* (Firman & Gila, 1997), but reframing it in an existential context, I put forward the view that fundamentally it is the very real threat of 'non-being', particularly within the family system (the so-called family trance) that causes the 'powerless' child, to *betray* her true self. Thus, through dependency, the need for relationship takes primacy over her drive to be authentic. Round 1 to our need for relationship.

In the following short section, 'The Authentic Self – A Manifesto', I define the authentic

self as a state of being and consider the relationship between truth and authenticity. The 'Manifesto' is very much a personal statement, of what 'being authentic' means to me.

Having looked at how we lose contact with our authentic self and how we might recognise its call, I consider how we can re-connect with our authentic self. Starting from the premise that the authentic self is not something we create, but rather is something we once were, I develop the theme that the first stage in our return to authenticity is essentially *away* from relationship. More, that the return to authenticity, means that we must chose to re-live and re-experience the existential pain we tried to avoid – to embrace and explore our primal woundedness. Round 2 to our drive for authenticity.

Whilst, the first stage towards authenticity is away from relationship the 'Crucible of Relationship' considers our need for relationship as the context in which we define who we are. The authentic self is now able to embrace relationship, not as an end in itself, through dependency or guilt, but as the only state of being that provides meaning in an existential context. This is the synthesis of drive and need in which the authentic self can begin to realise its purpose. Round 3 – no contest. Relationship is the context. Authenticity is the goal.

As a precursor to considering the implications of the foregoing for the therapeutic relationship, 'The Road to Authenticity' looks at the consequences for choosing to honour the truth of who we are. In particular, that we may have to leave and/or 're-negotiate' existing relationships. At the same time, our fidelity to our own truth, enables us to remain open to the possibility of new and different relationships – including the therapeutic relationship.

The consideration of the implications for the therapeutic relationship starts with the client's perspective. In 'Authenticity and the Client/Therapist Relationship', I have drawn on my personal experience to describe what I believe is the basis of an authentic therapeutic relationship from the client's point of view. 'The Good Enough Therapist', draws attention to the on-going need for the therapist to explore and develop her own authenticity.

## ***What Was Your Face Before Your Parents Gave You Theirs?***

*or: how we lose touch with our authentic self in the first place.*

### *Introduction*

In my opinion, ‘The Primal Wound’ (Firman & Gila 1997), is a ground-breaking book. It fully honours and builds on Assagioli’s pioneering work, updating it, and placing Psychosynthesis at the forefront of the current enquiry into the nature of consciousness and the experience of being. Firman and Gila, have marshalled an impressive range of evidence, and constructed a pervasive and (currently) all-encompassing model of human development that offers an invaluable framework for humanity in general and the Psychosynthesis model in particular.

At the heart of their carefully and scholarly constructed thesis, is a fundamental premise; *that the basis of meaning for human beings is found in relationship.*

“At the deepest level, human being is relational.” (p 32).

That is, relationship with our environment (the external reality), with other human beings, and with our selves (our inner reality, including the relationships with and between the Lower, Middle and Higher Unconscious, the I, the Self, the Higher Self etc.).

### *An Existential Approach to THE PRIMAL WOUND*

I am not a scientist, and whilst I found the discussion of ‘unifying centres’, ‘authentic personality’, ‘I-Self relationships’, ‘splitting’, ‘survival personalities’ etc., important for an intellectual understanding of what are after all fundamentally *constructs* to

support a *model* of human being, my own proclivities (no doubt born from my own survival personality !) impel me to reframe their constructs (their *model*) within a philosophical context (another *model*!)<sup>5</sup>

An existentialist interpretation of Firman & Gila’s book is that, if everyone ignored me — that is did not acknowledge me and therefore did not validate my existence — then I could draw one of two terrifying conclusions: [a] I did not exist, or [b] I was alone. Further, I will do anything necessary to avoid the unimaginable terror of non-existence/ cosmic aloneness, including denying my authentic self – what Firman & Gila refer to as ‘authentic personality’ (1997, p 164) and Winnicott (ibid.) refers to as ‘the true self’.

In a hostile or non-supportive environment/milieu, this would even include seemingly insane acts designed to provoke hostile reactions from the environment and the people in the environment, because, even a hostile reaction is validation that I exist. Even though the fruits of my provocative acts are likely to be painful for me (physically and psychically), in my battle for existence, pain caused by the actions and re-actions of others, is relationship of a kind, which at least provides me with some acknowledgement that I exist. This ‘secondary’ pain is in any case, preferable to the primal pain of non-existence/ cosmic aloneness, i.e. it is the lesser of two evils. I am in pain, therefore I exist, versus, I do not exist/I am alone.<sup>6</sup>

To put it another way:

“We exist only in the sense that other people acknowledge our existence. And if no one acknowledges our right to be who we are, then we invent ourselves and continue to invent ourselves ad nauseam, until we forget who we were.” (Robinson, Journal).

Placing this in the context of earliest individual development, we can picture a situation wherein the newly born being views herself as the centre of the universe. “I am.” But this is a flawed position since (unknowingly) the newly born baby is totally dependent on the environment and the people in the environment for physical and psychical survival. Therefore — “I am to the extent that my needs: my relationship to food, warmth, etc., are met.”

This challenge to our view of our relationship of ourselves to the external reality (the universe) is the origin of the primal wound. Each successive experience of not having our primary needs met, (i.e. non-validation of our existence) is a threat to our concept of ourselves as the centre of the universe (our self-belief). As our self-belief diminishes so the terror of non-existence approaches.

As babies, none of us are ever likely to receive sufficient validation for our existence. We all have, to some degree or another, to adapt to the external environment even though this is at odds with the given inner reality of I as the centre of the universe. As consciousness develops, so do we begin to develop coping strategies, behaviours and beliefs which through trial and error, help to make ‘painful’ reality more bearable<sup>1</sup>. Note that as previously suggested, coping strategies can be designed to provoke hostile reactions, that is increase the level of secondary pain, to stave off the primal pain of non-being.

At this development stage, and for a long time to come, the individual has little if any power to change things in the external world. Therefore the individual has little choice other than to adopt what ever behaviour is the most effective in minimising the pain of non-being. (Adapt or die.) As these behaviours are perfected and the level of primary pain decreases, this basically ‘negative feed-back loop’, serves to validate the developed behaviour and beliefs, leading the individual to accept that this is how she must be.

The learned behaviour — conditioned reflex actions to environmental stimuli — become the standard way for the individual to relate, and thus cope with, otherwise, painful reality — at the cost of relationship with her authentic self.

Often, these coping strategies are simply palliatives, that is addictions such as alcohol, sex, work, drugs, therapy, esotericism, religion, food, etc., which help to divert the conscious attention away from the source of pain.

In essence, but to varying degrees, the developing individual is never truly her authentic self. Our sense of self (who we are) is a product of our response to and flight from the threat of non-being. As a result, for many of us, our sense of self-worth and therefore self-belief, is built on sand (survival personality, false self etc.,) Every time we happen upon a situation or experience which cannot be dealt with by any of our previously learned coping behaviours or beliefs, we are lost — even if only dimly felt/ experienced — in danger of having to face the terror of non-being which our coping strategies were designed to mask. Thus new coping strategies and beliefs are fostered, with or without the help of friends, acquaintances, professional helpers etc.; new or amended coping strategies designed to bring us back into ‘right’ relationship with our perception of external and internal reality. The first casualty of these re-adjustment is often our inner reality, our relationship with our authentic self.

### *The Family Trance*

In Firman and Gila’s terms, the family is a holding environment and, for the newly born and growing child, the major source of validation (emphatic mirroring). If the family is dysfunctional, that is, if its behaviour is at odds with the growing child’s relationship needs, then it is the child, powerless to change the experienced external reality, who has to change and in the process deny/split off from their relationship with their

authentic self. Successive adaptations to the family environment, serve to further alienate the individual from their authentic self. Questioning the status quo, the experienced reality, is too painful since it puts the child back in touch with the pain of non-being as well as bringing retribution down on its head from the current external reality — the family trance is thus born and sustained through terror.

John Bradshaw (1997) makes the point that babies/children are innately curious and needy. Yet, they are also entirely dependent on the environment in general, and their ‘carers’ (a.k.a. parents) to provide for their needs. Thus, if the parents had to repress their natural curiosity as children – because it got them into trouble – then there is a tendency for them to inhibit the child’s curiosity too.

In my view this inhibition is experienced by the child as a prohibition against acting in a certain way. As a result, in order not to feel the pain – either physical, because the message was delivered with actual bodily harm or psychological (potential abandonment, non-being etc.), the child ‘learns’ to modify her behaviour in order to avoid the painful feelings and to get other needs met. Crucially, at this stage in her development, if her needs are not met, she draws the conclusion that there is something wrong with her or the way she behaves.

In general terms, behaviour which gets her needs met or lessens the pain of not having her needs met is preferable to the pain (both physical and psychological) of not having her needs met.<sup>2</sup>

But the true cost to the child is enormous: she denies her authentic self and the ‘survival personality’ (Firman & Gila et al) is born.

After many acts of self-betrayal, the need to avoid the additional pain engendered by the shame and the guilt of self-betrayal, serves to further reinforce the ‘survival

personality’. *Thus shame and guilt are added to non-being as experiences to be avoided at all costs.* Eventually the shame and guilt of self-betrayal becomes more painful than the original threat of non-being – she has after all abandoned her authentic self. In order to avoid this shame and guilt, she chooses (via suppression) to forget who she is and becomes what the environment wants her to be. This is the primal wound – the shame and guilt she would feel if she acknowledged that she had actually abandoned her authentic self.

I have written elsewhere (Robinson, October 1998) how the Family Trance by its very nature, inevitably impedes rather than assists progress along the road to the authentic self:

“I personally believe that the family environment, (and our parents in particular), has a significant impact on our progress along the road to self-realisation. Where the family environment is generally nurturing and supportive, we are more likely to grow up with an authentic sense of who we are and our possibilities. Where the family environment is hostile and non-supportive, then our chances are limited. As a consequence we may never be able to take any steps along the road to self-realisation, but remain trapped forever within the dysfunctional patterns of our family. Instead of expressing who we are we hide our true natures and become what the environment wants us to be. Thus instead of developing our ‘authentic’ personality (who we were born to be), we are forced to develop a ‘survival’ personality.”

“Survival personality is an attempt to form some sense of selfhood in

the face of the potential pit of non-existence” (The Primal Wound p164)

### *Authenticity versus Relationship – Round 1*

It seems to me that from our earliest experiences a conflict exists between our drive towards authenticity and our relationship with the environment, in particular other people in that environment. Chief amongst those relationships being our relationship with our ‘primary carers’ – our parents in most cases. In particular, our dependency on them to meet our needs for food, warmth and, relationship itself - against the threat of non-being, affords us little choice but to compromise and in my terms, to *betray* our true self; to turn our backs on who we are.

Round 1 to our need for relationship.

### ***The Authentic Self – A Manifesto***

*Or, how would I recognise the ‘authentic self’?*

The authentic self is a state of being.

A state where the expression of one’s being ‘in the world’ is entirely congruent with how one is at any given point in time or space.

Congruency is the key.

- I am what I believe in.
- I am true to what I believe in.
- I act and speak from what I believe in as I understand it.
- It is first and foremost my truth.
- The truth of who I am *without compromise.*

“Truth is a pathless land.”  
(Krishnamurti.)

Truth is relative and never absolute.

- No one ‘knows’ the truth.
- I can never know everything.

- What I believe in can only be what I currently know and think based on my life experiences to date.
- What I believe in has changed and will change as my life proceeds.
- I will never stop seeking, questioning and searching for the truth.

*This is part of who I am.*

- Essentially, I believe in me and my right to be myself.
- Sometimes this brings me into conflict with other people.
- I always strive to honour the needs of others but sometimes this is impossible unless I deny who I am.
- I will not deny who I am for anyone.

Oft times I will get it wrong.

“It doesn’t interest me if the story you are telling me is true. I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself; if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul; if you can be faithless and therefore trustworthy.” (Oriah Mountain Dreamer)

*But this too is part of who I am.*

My self-imposed task is to bear witness to my own truth and to yours.

This is who I am.

Authenticity and Self-Actualisation  
I wish here to draw a distinction between authenticity and self-actualisation as defined by Maslow. It should be clear from the foregoing that for me the need to be authentic is mostly about the need to be ‘true to my self, rather than for instance what Maslow’s termed ‘self-actualisation’ which he defined as:

“... ongoing actualisation of potentials, capacities, talents, as fulfilment of

a mission (or call, fate, destiny, or vocation), as a fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person's own intrinsic nature, as an increasing trend towards unity, integration, or synergy within the person." (quoted in *The Encyclopaedia of Reality*).

Firstly, note that I do not disagree with Maslow's definition of self-actualisation, merely, that I am not claiming that what I define as authenticity is anything as grand as that.<sup>7</sup> I also accept that the drive towards authenticity *may* have something to do with fulfilling my potential etc. It certainly has a lot to do with acquiring a "fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person's own intrinsic nature..." It is not that I deny the rest – what may be loosely described as the transpersonal elements – it is just that on the basis of my own experience I have no evidence yet that this transpersonal dimension is real.<sup>8</sup>

*"Hello darkness my old friend, I've come to talk with you again..."*<sup>9</sup>  
*Or re-connecting with the authentic self.*

The authentic self is not something we create – it is something we once were.

As I have tried to illustrate above, it is a state of being from which, for reasons of survival, we chose to lose contact with. Regaining what we lost – what, in a sense, we gave away – is not easy. Not only do we have to re-visit and experience again the pain of non-being and alienation, we also have to come face to face with the fact that we abandoned our self. We have to experience the primal wound – the shame and guilt we feel when we acknowledge that we actually abandoned our authentic self.

In particular, we have to re-examine our need for relationship.

### *Awareness and Choice*

For me being authentic is essentially about awareness and choice.

Being true to one's self is not about acting on every impulse and whim or re-acting to external simulation in a pre-conceived and pre-conditioned way.

Assagioli (1994) approached authenticity from a different starting point than I am proposing. Rather than see it as a state to regain he saw it like Maslow as a state to move into. He does however highlight the importance of choice:

"... I am not recommending that one *never* be aggressive or that one never fight; I mean that one has the freedom of *choice* about whether, and *to what extent*, to give direct expression to the impulse or motive, even if it be one of deeply felt anger or hurt... The point is that choices and decisions are possible. The act of will and intention then involves a decision to accept or not accept an impulse. Authenticity does not consist in giving in to a bad motive simply because it exists. (Assagioli, 1994. Authors italics.)

But choice follows awareness. And whence awareness?

I think we have to recognise that the struggle for authenticity is not something the majority of mankind are actively engaged in, nor are ever likely to be. However it is generally acknowledged that throughout history some people have chosen to explore this painful area. Some actively engage, others become drawn in. In the past perhaps, it was the path of the mystic and the ascetic. Since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, analysis and therapy has provided many a 'route-map for the soul' ; not least of which is Psychosynthesis, "a psychology with a soul"<sup>10</sup>. Often, to paraphrase Jung, it seems to be the task of the second half of life.

I want to pick up the discussion of awareness by referring to Wilber's Spectrum of Consciousness (1979). In particular the transition phase between the 'ego' state and the 'transpersonal' which he calls the centaur stage<sup>11</sup>. According to Wilbur:

"... this is the stage where we start to take responsibility for our own development, rather than allowing ourselves to be moved on as if up an escalator... There is a conscious emergence of the *real self*, and a consequent increase in spontaneity and autonomy" (quoted in Rowan, 1993 – my italics)

So the individual begins to take personal responsibility for her own development. Note that implicit in this decision to take responsibility is the recognition (shock?) that hitherto they have not been the masters of their own destiny – as they perhaps fondly believed themselves to be. From this point on 'life' can never be the same. The doors of perception have been opened, albeit only a crack but the individual will never be the same again. Even if she then chooses to ignore 'the call' a degree of background pain will occasionally surface to play a certain havoc with her state of being.

For those who choose to explore the new world they have glimpsed; who seek to reconnect with that part of themselves they long ago lost contact with; who chose authenticity: the path is essentially one of separation from dependence on others, *that is ostensibly away from relationship*.<sup>3</sup>

There then begins a gradual descent as more and more of what the individual thought of as part of themselves is exposed as something they took on at a stage in their life when essentially they had to choose between survival and annihilation. Like the end product of the gradual stripping away of the layers of an onion, the individual is reduced

to nothing. To a primordial state of existential non-being where meaning comes not from our need to survive physically but from embracing the essential terror that fundamentally 'life' is meaningless; that survival beyond the present state is not guaranteed but is a cross on which the false self is crucified.

Note that a particular characteristic of this descent is that basically the individual has to do it *alone*.<sup>12</sup>

"At each stage of our journey so far, society had been on our side, and had said in effect, 'Yes, go on, you are doing well.' But now there is no such boost from society if we want to carry on. We have to do it from own intention and our own will. Society will in most cases put up obstacles instead of helping." (Rowan, 1993)

#### *Authenticity versus Relationship – Round 2*

Thus the experiences we hoped to avoid as newly born are presented to us again. No longer in a state of total dependency on other people, we now have the opportunity(!) to choose in favour of alienation, pain, anger, outrage, shame, guilt, and existential terror. The price of authenticity! Is it worth it?

Round 2 to our drive for authenticity.

#### *The Crucible of Relationship*

On the face of it, this return to authenticity, towards being true to my self, is a move away from relationship, e.g.

"I am what I believe in. I am true to what I believe in. I act and speak from what I believe in as I understand it. It is first and foremost my truth. The truth of who I am without compromise."

If only it were that simple!

The truth (as I see it) is that with the responsibility for being true to one's self also comes the responsibility for honouring others.

"My self-imposed task is to bear witness to my own truth *and to yours*."

It is not about turning one's back on society or other people. As Krishnamurti puts it:

"Relationship is a mirror in which I see myself as I am... Without relationship, there is no existence; to be is to be related..." (Krishnamurti, 1995.)

In his book 'The Ethics of Authenticity', Charles Taylor (1991) writes that the concept of authenticity is relatively new to modern culture, tracing it back to the eighteenth century. The contemporary definition of authenticity is based on the idea that "each of us has an original way of being human" [p 28].

"Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realising a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfilment or self-realisation in which it is usually couched." [p29]

One of his major themes is the connection between authenticity and - what he terms one of the malaises of modernity - individualism. He wants to know whether the trend towards individualism is congruent with being authentic.

He freely acknowledges that many people consider individualism to be one

of the major achievements of modern civilisation. We live he says:

"...in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors couldn't control.

In principle, people are no longer sacrificed to the demands of supposedly sacred orders that transcend them." [p 2]

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But he also bemoans the loss of these sacred orders. He writes that people used to see themselves as part of a larger cosmic order, such as the "great chain of Being." This gave meaning to their lives and significance to their activities. Individualism on the other hand:

"...is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society." [p 4]

He refers here to a loss of meaning and, I believe, to a loss of relationship.

He is concerned that on the personal level, the contemporary notion of authenticity:

"... fosters a view of relationships in which these ought to subserve personal fulfilment. The relationship is secondary to the self-realisation of the partners." [p 43]

And again:

"Authenticity seems once more to be defined here in a way that centres on the self, which distances us from our relations to others." [p 44]

It seems therefore, if being authentic is defined as ‘doing my own thing’, ‘following my bliss’, ‘being true to myself’, it can be interpreted as a move away from relationship.

Taylor however, is not prepared to give up and accept this version of authenticity. He says that the general feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical<sup>14</sup> character:

“We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our rich human languages of expression.” [p 33].

Here he means language in its broadest sense, to include not only speech but also art, gestures, love etc.

“We are expected to develop our own opinions, outlook, stances to things, to a considerable degree through solitary reflection. But this is not how things work with important issues, such as the definition of our identity. We define this always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognise in us. And even when we outgrow some of the latter – our parents, for instance – and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live.” [p 33]

Thus, echoing Firman and Gila (1997), we define ourselves in relationship with other people.

Yet there is more. There exists in us a subtle yet pervasive need to be received, to be seen, to have our unique humanness acknowledged by others. (Taylor uses the term ‘recognition’.)

When our identity was largely determined

by a social order which itself was taken for granted, ‘recognition’ was not an issue. However, in an age where most of the old certainties have been swept aside we can no longer take acknowledgement for granted. This creates an anxiety and a tension that did not exist before.

“... in the earlier age recognition never arose as a problem. Social recognition was built in to the socially derived identity from the very fact that it was based on social categories everyone took for granted. The thing about inwardly derived, personal, original identity is that it doesn’t enjoy this recognition a priori. It has to win it through exchange, and it can fail. What has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which this can fail.” [p 48]

So the crucible of relationship serves two purposes. Firstly it is the arena in which we forge our identity. Secondly it is the field in which, through ‘external’ validation (by the other) we experience our identity as acceptable – or unacceptable.

“On the intimate level, we can see how much an original identity needs and is vulnerable to the recognition given or withheld by significant others. It is not surprising that in the culture of authenticity, relationships are seen as the key loci of self-discovery and self-confirmation.” [p49]

This is the theme echoed by Krishnamurti (1995):

“Relationship is a process of self-revelation, of self-knowledge...”

### *Authenticity versus Relationship – Round 3*

No contest. Conflict has been replaced by synthesis.

#### *On the Road to Authenticity*

It takes a super-human effort of will and courage for an individual to remain a steadfast witness to her own truth. Potentially, the price to be paid is social and cultural ostracism<sup>15</sup>; loss of relationship with family, friends, work colleagues, employers, landlords, church, creed, race, religion and etc. That is the price she *can* pay. However, with awareness comes choice! No longer are her compromises motivated by her dependence on the ‘other’; on wanting to please them; on not wanting to upset them and etc.

Increasingly she is able to negotiate with her authentic self, on behalf of her authentic self; to mediate between her unfolding personal truth and her need for relationship, community, belonging.

Initially, this will, as often as not, entail a painful separation from relationships which no longer meet these needs. The moving away from these relationships will seem to those she is leaving behind, like a betrayal (and she will have to deal with the guilt of that) but in reality it is the final stage of the beginning of her journey into becoming authentic.

Relationships which no longer nurture or honour her authentic self have to go, or at the very least, have to be recognised as such and ‘contained’ accordingly. For instance it isn’t actually necessary for her to walk away from a long-term friend because she now realise that he has been ‘dumping’ on her emotionally these last ten years. It may be, that beneath his behaviour she can see a hurt and terrified child who is desperately seeking someone to take care of him and hoping it will be her. She can choose to remain in that relationship and continue to provide

support *but with awareness and, crucially, on her own terms*. Or she can choose to leave.

Although in prospect and in reality this move away from what are now experienced as ill-fitting and constraining relationships, is terrifying, it is also liberating. Freedom rarely comes without some degree of terror. Now however, for the first time, she is able to choose relationships, jobs, communities, beliefs etc., that reflect who she is in her authentic self. She begins to embody, be and live her truth. Its not a question of fitting in anymore, of selling her self short, to feel loved, wanted and valued. Now the source of validation comes from within, from the honoured authentic self and the truly lived life she has embarked upon.

I don’t think it is necessarily a lonely existence. The terror looms large it is true. Krishnamurti said that “Truth is a pathless land”. There are no maps, and rightly so, for another’s map is not her truth. However as she sets out to find her personal truth she will come into contact with other souls on a similar quest for authenticity. Each of them in some way will have a contribution to make to the ongoing discovery of her own truth.

One of these ‘fellow-travellers’ may well be a counsellor or therapist.

#### *Authenticity and the Client/Therapist Relationship*

I hope I have shown that the path to the authentic self is *within* relationship, rather than away from it.

I believe that, whether it is explicit or not to the client or her therapist, she, the client, enters into the relationship with the therapist, believing that the experience will be beneficial. That is, that she will, over time, learn more about her authentic self through the relationship with the therapist.

*Experiencing Authenticity in the Therapeutic Relationship*

“The issue is whether we as therapists can accept the reality of the psyche, the reality of the client’s experience. Whether or not a particular incident has objective truth is *utterly beside the point*. The client, in disclosing this information is telling us something about the woundedness of the psyche.” (Gael Rowan, 1999. My italics.)

The major turning point in my own therapy was the moment when for the first time I *felt* that another human being (my therapist) really understood what it was like to be me.

This experience was later unexpectedly repeated in a group-process context, when, faced with my pain in the form of my unmitigated anger expressed towards members of the group, one person responded in a manner that validated my experience of what it has been like to be me. A form of validation that did not infer any judgement or expectation of me, on the part of the other. In this particular context, a total acceptance of me and my rage which confirmed unequivocally that I had a *right* to be *rageful*.

What I have always *wanted* is simply to be accepted as I am without preconditions or expectations – I know that I am not perfect but I am still worthy of love all the same.

What I have always *needed* (ached for) has been a simple unequivocal acknowledgement of my inviolable right to be who I am – or bearing in mind the pernicious influence of the family trance, at least who I *think* I am. More, to *experience* that acknowledgement in a way that does not diminish either me or the other.<sup>16</sup> Hence insincerity or platitudes have no value at all.

To *experience* is the key. A mere intellectual understanding of “being seen or received or validated” is not enough. What counts is some act, which may or may not include a verbal response, which shows me that the other understands unequivocally.

Ironically, in my case, it was at the end of a long ‘rant’ about how I didn’t believe I was given due credit for my contributions in the therapy training, when my therapist *unexpectedly* agreed with me unequivocally. I was stunned and for the first time ever in my whole life, I *felt* that another human being totally accepted me for who I was – not what I could be or what they wanted me to be.

In hindsight I don’t think it mattered whether I was right or wrong. What mattered was that I was not told I was wrong. To put it more positively; against an *expectation* of being told I was wrong, I was actually confounded by being told I was right. At a deeper level, my outrage – the ‘rant’ within me – was totally accepted by the other and therefore validated. It was seen as the product of what had been done to me not who I was.

Not surprisingly, I believe that this is also what the counsellor/therapist *must* do; put aside all judgements<sup>17</sup> and acknowledge/recognise (to use Taylor’s term) the client’s right to be who they are.

That is to *start* with total acceptance of the client.<sup>18</sup> Then as the therapy proceeds, to seek to *validate* the client’s experience of themselves – not the therapist’s experience of the client. To see the world through the client’s eyes. To share their subjective experience of reality. To seek to understand what it is like to be the client, in the client’s world, both in the moment and in the past. In this regard the client’s life history – what has happened to the client as the *client* understands it – is understood as the reason why the client has become who they are. This is not a pathological judgement but a recognition of how

things are for the client. The need then is to understand how the client's life experiences have contributed to the client's current experience of themselves; that is their subjective reality and the *pain* this has caused them, and is currently causing them. Only when the therapist, through immersion in the client's world, has some inkling of what in the past has contributed to their present experience, can the therapist adequately support the *client's efforts to heal themselves*.

### *The Good Enough Therapist*

"The good enough therapist, as Winnicott's good enough mother, will allow the other person in the relationship to experience this: "When I look I am seen, so I exist." (Firman & Gila, 1997 p 231)

Carl Rogers saw three key prerequisites for an authentic therapeutic relationship, as follows:

"(a) The therapist is congruent, that is, *authentic* or 'real' in her/his relationships with clients. In other words, the therapist is not just an anonymous 'expert', but is present as a person.

(b) The therapist experiences and communicates unconditional positive regard for the client. Put another way, the therapist has a warm, caring and non-judgemental attitude.

(c) The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's inner world, and manages to communicate this understanding to the client."

(Merry, 1990, p 9 – emboldened text in the original.)

Points (b) and (c) have been considered in the preceding section.

Point (a) bears further amplification. Merry (1990, p 10), further defines congruence as:

"... that state of being in which we are most freely and authentically ourselves, without the need to present a façade, to hide ourselves behind the mask or role of 'expert', for example. It is where our inner feelings are accurately reflected by our behaviour, *when we can be received and seen for who we really are.*" (My italics).

Note that the therapist brings to the encounter the exact same wish as the client – to be received and seen for who they really are. This does not mean that the therapist treats the therapeutic relationship as an opportunity for the gratification of her own needs. What it does mean is that the therapist strives to maintain an awareness of her own feelings and thoughts *in her relationship* with the client as it unfolds and develops.

Diana Whitmore (1995, p 24) expressed it thus:

"A psychosynthesis counsellor is encouraged to develop a full *presence* and to approach each client with a universal orientation and an enlarged perspective. What does this actually mean? It means that, given the importance of authenticity and the quality of the human relationship, the counsellor meets the client as a whole person; in other words having her own bodily, emotional and mental processes available." (Italics in original.)

The authentic therapist strives to be authentic in the therapeutic relationship.

That is to be true to her self and not to deny any of the thoughts and feelings which arise as a result of being present with the client. This includes apparently 'negative' feelings such as anger, irritation, boredom, fear etc.

At times these 'negative' feelings may be supportive of the client<sup>19</sup>. For example, a client is describing a scene from her childhood where she is being unjustly punished. Whilst the client describes this in a 'matter of fact' way, the therapist, may experience anger *against* the perpetrators. In such instances, the therapist may deem it appropriate to draw attention to this apparent incongruity. "I'm feeling some anger here. Yet I notice that you don't appear to feel any anger. Do you have any thoughts on why not....?" Thus facilitating an exploration of the client's apparent lack of emotion. In this example, it is clear that the anger the therapist feels is *on behalf of* her client.

But what of those occasions when these less acceptable feelings stem from the therapist's own wounding – the counter-transference<sup>20</sup>?

Here, by definition, the problem belongs to the therapist; and yet if not properly acknowledged as such, will have a negative affect on the therapeutic relationship. The authentic therapist needs to recognise and own these issues which are manifestations of her own shadow. To be authentic therefore the therapist must be aware of her shadow and how it manifests itself in projections, and particularly with the client/therapeutic relationship in mind, the counter-transference.

"Thus the major job for therapists here – far more important than any technique, theory, or intervention – is to recognise and deal with the aspects of themselves that are revealed in the counter-transference." (Firman & Gila, 1997, p246)

"Unless there is such an ongoing cultivation of authentic personality, the therapist will ever remain an ineffective mirror... One cannot form an empathic connection to the many levels of another unless one has established an empathic connection to those levels in oneself."

(Firman & Gila, 1997, p 247)

Such awareness can only arise if the therapist herself has explored, and continues to explore her own authenticity, in all probability, as a client in therapy herself.

To return finally to Firman & Gila (1997) and their unifying centres:

Only this development of authentic personality can provide the therapist with the empathic wherewithal necessary to function as a good enough unifying centre within psychosynthesis therapist. This development allows the therapist to connect empathically with the client no matter where the client needs to go, mirroring and facilitating the I-Self relationship over the widest possible range of experience. Where such an external unifying centre is provided, the client can develop an internal unifying centre that, though growing and changing over the years, can support the I-Self connection indefinitely. (p 229)"

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I posed the following question:

How is our personal drive for authenticity hindered and/or supported by our need for relationship?

In response, it seems that far from removing us from the need for relationship, our drive for authenticity is only meaningful *in* relationship.

Secondly, the major implication for the therapist in the therapeutic relationship, is that unless the therapist is in touch with her own authenticity, she will not be able to truly meet the other in the therapeutic relationship.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> “At the deepest level, human being is relational.” (Firman & Gila, 1997 p32)

<sup>2</sup> I have purposely used the word ‘drive’ in this context based on Assagioli (1994): “In considering motivations, then, one is helped by distinguishing between two classes which we may designate respectively as drives and urges, and reasons. Drives and urges can be conscious or unconscious and can be generically regarded as spontaneous tendencies which “move” us or tend to do so....” [p 144] (Italics in the original.)

<sup>3</sup> In this paper I use the terms ‘authenticity’ and the ‘authentic self’ in the same sense as Firman & Gila (1997, p227) use the phrase ‘authentic personality’ to mean “the expression of one’s, true I-amness through time.”

<sup>4</sup> Zen quotation.

<sup>5</sup> That is not to say that I any way reject their ‘scientific’ formulation. As I hope to demonstrate, I am in total sympathy with their ideas. However, for me to be able to make sense of their concepts (that is assimilate and absorb them; make them mine), and look at their implications for my and others ongoing relationship to the environment, each other and our inner selves, I need to integrate them into my own inner model of the human condition.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this secondary pain, in all its manifestations, serves to cover/deaden the primary pain/terror of non-being. In time, any or all of the multifarious aspects of this secondary level of pain can become unbearable in themselves and lead the individual to seek further strategies for avoiding the secondary pain. And so on ad-infinitum - ad nauseum.

<sup>7</sup> Although I suspect in fact, that being authentic (true to one’s self) is a pre-requisite of self-realisation – see also my discussion of Wilber’s centaur below.

<sup>8</sup> I would not in my terms be authentic if I claimed otherwise!

<sup>9</sup> Paul Simon – “Sound of Silence” (1964)

<sup>10</sup> Jean Hardy, 1996

<sup>11</sup> Sounds like ‘centre’-stage – where the I/Self split begins to be healed.

<sup>12</sup> Not withstanding the support provided by a therapist or a member of the clergy and etc.

<sup>13</sup> A Canadian, Charles Taylor is Professor of Philosophy and Political Science at McGill University. Laying judgement to one side, he like many people, cannot escape his culture, and his upbringing (conditioning.) Therefore when he uses phrases such as “where people have a right to choose for themselves” and “people are no longer sacrificed” and etc., he is of course referring to a very privileged group of people – mostly white, mostly western, mostly educated, mostly financially secure. This does not invalidate his point of view in general terms only in the more specific applications to which he sometimes refers.

<sup>14</sup> A view that supports the value of counselling and therapy with its emphasis on the dialogical relationship between the participants.

<sup>15</sup> At worst persecution and death!

<sup>16</sup> “My self-imposed task is to bear witness to my own truth and to yours.”

<sup>17</sup> Transference/projection under another name.

<sup>18</sup> Surely the true basis for empathy?

<sup>19</sup> Projective-identification.

<sup>20</sup> “...defined as the conscious and unconscious responses of the therapist to the patient.” (Firman & Gila, 1997, p 240)

“Feelings that the psychoanalyst unconsciously directs to the analysand, stemming from his or her own emotional vulnerabilities and unresolved conflicts.” (Davison & Neale, 1998)

Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> “...coping strategies, behaviours and beliefs..” – often embodied or actualised as sub-personalities.

“Subpersonalities..... are learned responses to our legitimate needs: survival needs, needs for love and acceptance, needs for self-actualisation and transcendence.”  
(Molly Young Brown, p94)

“Subpersonalities... develop as a means of meeting some basic need.” (Whitmore, 1995, p79)

The particularly ‘unacceptable’ subpersonalities, that represent, for instance, the need to rage or to destroy and etc., are pushed into the ‘shadow’.

I disagree with Firman & Gila here. They see the splitting into subpersonalities as preceding the split between authentic personality and survival personality.

“Since the primal split is created by a wound in the I-Self relationship, it constitutes a split at the most fundamental level of personality organisation. Here one’s deepest sense of self-in-representation — one’s sense of being is fragmented. We have looked at this fragmentation as a split between the higher and lower unconscious, but there are two other significant splittings to

consider. The first of these is the splitting into subpersonalities, the second is the split between authentic personality and survival personality.” (Firman & Gila, 1997, p151)

In my opinion, the ‘needs’ which the subpersonalities embody are ‘fragments’ of the authentic self. Therefore the authentic self is ‘a priori’; preceding the development of the subpersonalities, which in turn constellate the survival personality. Surely it could not be any other way since the authentic self is who we were before we began to:

“... hide our true natures and became what the environment need(ed) us to be...” (Firman & Gila, 1997. P164.

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<sup>2</sup> Yet, some children refuse to adapt in such a ‘compliant’ way. I would suggest that ‘difficult’ children for instance, are children who have in some part of themselves at least refused to give up on getting their needs met.

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<sup>3</sup> Of course after independence can come a recognition of our ‘inter-dependence’ and our active choice for relationship. However, this seems to me to take us into the realms of the transpersonal, and outside the scope of this paper.



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