

“The Struggle to Live and Let Live ...”: A Review

Jonathan Fay

PRIVATE PRACTICE, ONGA ONGA, HAWKE’S BAY, & AUCKLAND

Abstract

This review offers a critique of Farhad Dalal’s article in this issue, an article which is based on his keynote address to the 2013 NZAP Conference. In this review article, I offer an appreciation for Farhad’s contribution, but also propose an alternative understanding of ethical discrimination. I suggest that psychotherapy is the child of Romanticism, in which it is axiomatic that intelligent empathy is better than observational rationality, and that equity is better than equality. The suffering of the oppressed is indeed privileged. The social, political, and therapeutic consequences of this shift in emphasis are significant, particularly for indigenous aspirations and the development of bicultural partnerships.

Waitara

He arohaehae tēnei arotake o te tuhinga a Farhad Dalal kei roto nei i tēnei puka māheni: he tuhinga mai i tana kōrero matua ki te Hui o te 2013 a NZAP. E horaina atu ana he mihi nui mō tāna i homai, engari ka whakatū hoki i tahi mātauranga rerekē mō te aukatinga matatika. Ko tāku e ki ana, he hua o te Whaiāipohanga te kaiwhakaora hinengaro, inā rā e mōhiotia ana he pai ake te pūaroa mātatau i te tirohanga arotake, ā, he pai ake hoki te tūtika i te ritetahi. Koia rā he makaunga te mamae o te pēhitanga. Whakahirahira ana te hua o te nekehanga tirohanga hāpori, tōrangapū haumanu hoki, hāngai tika ki ngā whāinga tangata whenua me te whanaketanga o te mahitahi ahurea takirua.

Keywords: Dalal; review; critique; ethical discrimination; the Enlightenment; Romanticism; intelligent empathy; observational rationality; equity; biculturalism

In this article I speak first about Farhad and then directly to him.

About Farhad

There is something very exciting and very appealing about the breadth and depth of

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Farhad’s interests: psychoanalysis and its philosophical underpinnings; theories and therapies that pertain to groups and group members; diversity and cultural differences; politics and power; critical theory; post-colonial studies; the Enlightenment; Romanticism; the list goes on, such is the scope of his contribution. I also appreciate the clarity of Farhad’s thinking, which has assisted me understand more about how human beings are formed from the outside in rather than from the inside out: “us” precedes “me, which precedes “I” — both ontologically as ways of being and ontogenetically in terms of how children actually grow and develop. Our individual consciousness may be thought of as our particular corner or personal shareholding of the larger intersubjective consciousness that we generally refer to as culture. Culture is the public face of psyche and psyche the private face of culture. Most of our personal thoughts, feelings, and, in particular, our beliefs, are actually recycled versions of established ideas, emotional attitudes and beliefs of the multiple cultural groups to which we belong and the cultural traditions in which we participate. These thoughts, feelings and beliefs are all context dependent rather than context independent, that is, they take their meaning and purpose not from their content alone but from the existential and socially constructed conditions or “positionality” from which the speaker is speaking. As psychotherapy understands so well, much if not most of our positionality is unconscious, which means that it is potentially available to our minds but not immediately recognised or held in mind. It must be searched for in order to be found.

In 2002, Farhad published the excellent *Race, Colour and Processes of Racialisation*, a treatise in which he deftly navigated complex issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and culture that determine how individuals will be perceived by the wider society and often by themselves as well. This work established both the calibre of Farhad’s intellect and his high standards of scholarship. I recommend it highly. It is also worth mentioning that Farhad is a wonderfully articulate spokesperson for critical theory, a view that asserts that the deep structure and underlying purpose of many social practices is to hold power and preserve the distinction between the “haves” and the “must not haves” via “sedimented power relations”.

More recently, in his work on *Thought Paralysis* (Dalal, 2012), Farhad has turned his attention to the restrictive effects of political correctness. Political correctness insists on an uncritical cultural humility which impedes genuine engagement at the cultural interface. Cultural confidence and a willingness to stand behind our own cultural values can act as a useful counterbalance to cultural humility: we can be confident in ourselves and still be open to other persons and other ways of life that are culturally unfamiliar to us.

I agree with Farhad’s perspective on a wide variety of issues, so I was disappointed to discover that I didn’t particularly care for “The Struggle to Live and Let Live ...”, didn’t find it very useful, and would rate it well below what I know of Farhad’s other work. Why? I don’t particularly object to Farhad’s liberal bashing. I think liberals can use an intellectual bash now and again. I agree with Farhad that indiscriminate tolerance is intellectually lazy and emotionally disengaged, what he aptly calls a “Live and leave well alone” position. In his paper, Farhad aims to demonstrate that ethics and politics imply and inform one another, and that both our ethical and our political ideals require us at times to be intolerant as well as tolerant. He therefore claims — rightly, in my opinion — the virtue

of ethical discrimination over the virtue of tolerance in certain instances.

I understand this discriminating ethical awareness to require an optimal synthesis or balance between reason and emotion and between cultural humility (respect for others) and cultural confidence (respect for self). When we are consciously attempting to practise “ethical discrimination”, we will strive to be attentive to the unconscious portion of our attitudes and beliefs, adopting a reflexive position, interrogating ourselves about why we feel as we do, in part so that we can enlarge ourselves, become more empathic to and connected with others as well as to ourselves, more able to role reverse, and less intimidated by difference. This invites us into a more relational and emotionally satisfying way of being.

To Farhad

Dear Farhad, Here is where I feel let down by “The Struggle to Live and Let Live ...”. You seem to me to be content to frame ethical discrimination as every postmodern person’s right to assert or defend their own cultural tastes and preferences, and in this far too narrow frame, to lose sight of the larger human task and purpose of ethical discrimination, which is not only to “be ourselves” as individuals but to contribute collectively to a more just and equitable world. I experience your intellectually reasoned objections to various forms of otherness as deficient in empathy, and your confident self-assertion of your own preferences as deficient in cultural humility. There is, for example, no ethical virtue in the decision to ignore Māori protocol on the Marae, to sit rather than to stand, to decline to sing waiata, etc. This is not “upholding” Pākehā values, it is merely the expression of a personal preference which, taken in context, represents a failure of empathy. In other words, the same problem which attaches to political correctness applies equally to political incorrectness; they are twins: parallel forms of intellectual laziness and emotional disengagement at the cultural interface. Your claim is that you differ from the imperialist inasmuch as you would be open to feedback about your prejudices, and I don’t doubt this is true — you are a humane and thoughtful man — but you also seem to be espousing a kind of comfortable and contented elitism, an entitlement to make provocative claims, to cause offense, and then to sit back and wait to be engaged in a process of reconciliation in which the other person is obliged to do most of the work.

I believe your description of the process of ethical discrimination also leaves unanswered key questions about the social ends to which ethical intolerance can or should be directed. You seem to be awarding the same moral and ethical status to the reactionary agenda of confronting the already marginalised and oppressed, thereby adding to their disadvantage, as to the more progressive agenda of confronting the powerful and the privileged or challenging the systems and structures that confer unequal power and privilege.

A socially responsible psychotherapy ought in my view to be concerned with everyone’s wellbeing, but in particular it ought to be concerned with the wellbeing of the least privileged and powerful members of our society. Imperialism comes in many shapes and sizes, and one of these is the “impartial” (read, imperial) position that everybody suffers and everybody’s suffering is equal. This is an individualistic and self-centred viewpoint

founded on ignorance and/or a wilful refusal to see and acknowledge just how unlevel the social playing field really is. The myth of the level playing field does not conform to social reality. I believe that as psychotherapists we should simply acknowledge the privileged status of the suffering of the oppressed and not confuse it with the fallacy of the superior virtue of the oppressed. Oppression produces suffering. While this suffering is not virtuous, it is in need of our attention and care. This is not because of some exotic “person of difference” characteristics inherent in the suffering person or persons, but is a straightforward consequence of the fact that their suffering, as compared to our suffering, is more extreme, more unnecessary, and more caused by us. Their suffering can be directly linked to our unfair, unearned privilege. The equation “prejudice + power = systemic oppression” is not just a strap line but is a daily reality for a great many people. This would include the systemic oppressions of racism, sexism, classism, and a host of other “...isms” that continue to bedevil us.

In “The Struggle to Live and Let Live ...” you make the claim to repudiate the imperialist intolerance that denigrates and attempts to annihilate other forms of life, and to advocate broadly for a “live and let live” approach to cultural and psychological differences, supporting and making room for inclusive, both/and forms of existence which assert that different ways of life have their own legitimacy. The trouble is, the political and economic system currently in force around the planet today is the prime example of this imperialist intolerance. What we now call the “status quo” threatens the safety and sustainability of the planet and the human species. Our economic systems are destructive of the natural environment, community life, civilised values, and the health and wellbeing of people and peoples; and our political systems do far too little to protect us from the adverse consequences of our economic systems. This politically and economically oppressive status quo endangers indigenous species worldwide, and, in Aotearoa New Zealand, it specifically endangers Māori culture and Māori people. New Zealand is currently subject to approximately 3,000 binding international economic agreements that virtually guarantee our country slave state status. The New Zealand Government is incapable of protecting or effectively caring for its own citizens, particularly those at the bottom of the economic ladder. As the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (2014) has noted: Aotearoa New Zealand has the fastest growing wealth disparity among the 34 nations that make up the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development.

Farhad, you presumably wish to teach us to become free and independent thinkers who are not in thrall to the group, and most particularly, not in thrall to the “sedimented power relations” of the group. You would have us resist the slavish devotion to cultural humility that you claim is in fashion today. In order to educate us about this, you challenge the unproblematic unity or “naturalness” of cultures, deconstructing them as conflictual, problematic and politicised entities — which of course they are — but, insofar as you are arguing against the integrity of culture itself, you are arguing against yourself, the person who in 2002 made such a convincing case for culture as the basic matrix out of which the individual psyche individuates. Of course we can and should challenge sedimented power relations, and to this end, we might feel that we need to deconstruct some aspect of our own or somebody else’s tradition or “tribalism”. We are quite capable of deconstructing

our or their collective identifications, but what then? Individualism without community results in a collection of increasingly disparate and desperate individuals. Nor are we rescued from alienation simply by calling ourselves human. A universal, species-wide identification is a good thing, but it is also too abstract in comparison with more local love and loyalty-based identifications. Cultural deconstruction does not serve indigenous aspirations for self-determination, nor does it recognise that the coherence and integrity of indigenous cultures are based at least as much on love and loyalty as on sedimented power relations. The vibrancy, diversity, coherence and integrity of contemporary Māori culture is a remarkable feat of resilience in the face of considerable odds, and is the final common pathway of its constituent members' identification with their individual experiences as indigenous persons and their collective identifications as an indigenous people (Mikaere, 2011).

I don't understand the purpose of trying to re-assert white privilege in Māori spaces or contesting well-intentioned Pākehā attempts to honour Māori protocol on the Marae. This, for me, is not a matter of political correctness but one of empathy and respect. Likewise, I find surprisingly ignorant the suggestion that biculturalism might merely replace one hegemony (Pākehā monoculturalism) with two hegemonies (the second hegemony would presumably be "Māori monoculturalism"). This is a sweeping simplification that ignores (1) the colonial history and experience of two peoples in one land; (2) the current social conditions in Aotearoa in which its indigenous people occupy the bottom rung of the social ladder; and (3) Te Tiriti o Waitangi itself, which is the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand and a unique blueprint for social accountability in this land (Orange, 1987). Our Government's refusal to share power notwithstanding, Te Tiriti envisions a bicultural partnership and a dual-control system of governance and guardianship that includes rather than excludes tangata whenua, whose aboriginal title and right to self-determination was never extinguished (Mikaere, 2011). Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi would mean implementing power-sharing and dual guardianship over natural and human resources — not two hegemonies, but a living relationship: a partnership (Jackson, 1989). In my opinion, honouring te Tiriti o Waitangi is our Nation's best hope of reclaiming democracy, enacting legislative limits to extractive economics, resisting transnational corporate domination, supporting local investment in more sustainable and egalitarian economic relationships, helping to create a more just, humane, sane and sustainable human society that is better for the environment, better for indigenous people and better for 99% of the rest of us.

Biculturalism is both the aspiration and the concrete proposal that our multi-ethnic society develop beyond its restricted colonial and monocultural paradigm by recovering its indigenous roots and acknowledging the contribution of its indigenous peoples. Any genuine multiculturalism in Aotearoa will necessarily have a bicultural foundation; that is its unique history. To suggest that Aotearoa should or even could embrace some sort of multicultural alternative to biculturalism, celebrating ethnic diversity and ethnic tolerance while simultaneously ignoring and denigrating indigenous needs and rights is misguided and fantasy-based. A truly multicultural society will not be erected on a foundation of colonisation. Any society that wishes to become genuinely multicultural will acknowledge its indigenous peoples' experience, make restitution for past injuries,

and support its indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination in the present. The alternative would be yet another example of neo-colonial violence.

Perhaps you and I have different visions of what psychotherapy could be or ought to become. I regard Romanticism as an extension of the Enlightenment and psychotherapy as the child of Romanticism. I don't see Romanticism as ever having been opposed to the Enlightenment, although it did oppose the dictatorship of reason which Enlightenment ideals unwittingly let loose. The Enlightenment developed the ideal of human equality, principally by proposing a few key basic human rights for all, for example, liberty, equality, fraternity, or life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are rational social ideals that strive to achieve Kant's categorical ethical imperative of universality: if I adhere to them, this does not pit me against anyone else who is also following them. The Enlightened society, then, would be the result of everyone following compatible universal goals that successfully synthesise altruism and self-interest. Romanticism, by contrast, developed the idea of individual interiority, a pre-conscious, affective experience of being that provides the existential foundation of personhood, of which rational mind is but one aspect or element. The Romantic movement identified and positively valued the uniqueness of each person's individual existence. Romantics were champions of outward differences, but only insofar as these outward differences were signifiers of a unique interiority. This is exactly what psychotherapy asserts in positing a pre-conscious emotional or feeling-based self, a unique identity that is the existential foundation of rational mind. Romanticism held that this preconscious emotional self should not be allowed to be subsumed or subjugated by rational mind. Inwardness is something we all possess and therefore all share. Our differences are our uniqueness and we are all unique. In this regard, psychotherapy is firmly rooted in the Romantic tradition. This is not to say that psychotherapy is anti-Enlightenment, or anti-rational mind, but the psychotherapeutic conception of the human person is fundamentally that of a preconscious affective existential experience that cannot and should not be reduced to rational abstraction or subjugated to the dictatorship of reason.

There are indeed some important differences that distinguish Enlightenment and Romantic values; there is, however, no absolute dichotomy between them. Both value people “because” of their difference as well as “despite” their difference. The Enlightenment may value reason and prioritise basic individual human rights, but it also values individual differences, without which the idea of the individual doesn't make sense. Romanticism may value emotion and prioritise the fulfilment of individual human potential, but it also affirms universal human rights. Creating a dichotomy between Enlightenment equality and Romantic equity (positive discrimination, affirmative action, etc.) is, therefore, somewhat misleading, and sets up a false dichotomy between critical intelligence, associated with the Enlightenment valuing of the rational mind, and some sort of uncritical acceptance or rejection of the other based simply on their Otherness, which is a distorted version of the Romantic valuing of preconscious affective mind.

If Romanticism is not opposed to the Enlightenment but an extension of it, then it holds common cause with the Enlightenment in valuing all persons not because of but despite their differences, but extends this valuing to include differences that would

generally be considered unfavourable. For example, disability becomes understood as being differently abled, and so on. Valuing the disadvantaged, despite (not because) of their disadvantage is connected to the ideal of equity, an ideal that includes equality but goes beyond equal treatment to try to ensure more equal outcomes, striving for that somewhat hard to define equality in which we are all enabled to achieve our unique potential, as in the psychotherapeutic process itself. Positive discrimination in the service of equal outcome is consistent with a “therapeutic” society and is not anti-equality but pro-equity. This means recognising rather than ignoring the social impacts of differences, and attempting to restore dignity and opportunity to all those (and there are many) who enjoy neither dignity nor opportunity on the so-called “level playing field” of the status quo, yet whom are as deserving as anyone in the unique affective interiority that is their existential human essence. The expense of wheelchair access, the requirement to provide an interpreter, the priority of the indigenous version of Te Tiriti: these reflect the recognition of real and enduring inequity and not just differences per se. The ideal of equity actually includes the ideal of equality, but goes beyond it by adding to the requirement for equal treatment the more stringent and socially accountable requirement for more equal outcomes, or more precisely, less unequal outcomes. Equity motivates us to a higher standard than equality in the service of future equality. Despite our natural reluctance to share power, we may feel impelled to do so when we are able to see the value of reducing disparity, for equity is a condition in which everyone has opportunity to realize their potential and everyone benefits.

A pro-equity perspective allows us to re-think and reformulate your case example of the progressive, secular, pro-choice daughter who is in conflict with her authoritarian, traditional, pro-family values father who opposes her choice of marriage partner. The daughter wishes to marry the man she loves. The father wishes to preserve the purity of his family group culture and control its future via the strategic alliance that is formed by his daughter’s marriage. Ethical dilemmas in this scenario include the daughter’s right to self-determination and/or self-realisation, and also whether this family and group culture requires a purism that prescribes partner restrictions in order to preserve its cultural integrity. To characterise the authoritarian, traditional father as embodying Romantic values is simply implausible, and far-fetched. It would be more accurate to say that the father represents neither the Enlightenment nor Romanticism, but a far older tradition still, which might in a European context be called Medieval. Being free to choose whom you marry could possibly be aligned to other Enlightenment liberties like freedom from torture or the right to a small share of the Earth’s unearned bounty. But our principled support for the daughter’s right to marry whomever she loves is more aligned to the Romantic values of her self-realisation or personal fulfilment than on her right to choose per se. Love matches are nourished by principles of equity rather than being rational or equality-based. It is worth noticing that the Romantic (or psychotherapeutic) impulse to ensure equity and preserve the integrity of the individual (daughter) in the face of superior power (father) actually offers a much stronger challenge to sedimented power relations than an enlightened (Enlightenment) rationality that tries to balance power between parent and child.

As regards the large, drunk tattooed man in the quiet train compartment, a pro-equity

perspective allows us to wonder about class and race in this case example. What colour do we suppose this man to be? Until quite recently in Aotearoa, a tattoo was a cultural marker associated with being either Māori or Pasifika, or a European sailor. How should we interpret the condition of being intimidated by this man? How do we feel about his disruptive behaviour — and, in comparison with, say, the equally loud and obnoxious, but smooth-talking, well-dressed businessman in the same compartment? Who would we be more likely to report to the authorities? Who would the authorities sooner arrest?

Conclusion

I have suggested that psychotherapy is the child of Romanticism, in which it is axiomatic that intelligent empathy is better than observational rationality, and equity is better than equality. Consistent with this, I am proposing that observation and interpretation are over-rated unless their meaning-making activities eventuate in ethical action, or, as Freud put it, an increase in our ability to love and to work. Some psychotherapies may purport to remain neutral and observational, but they are not. Observational neutrality is a myth, and therapist attempts to enact observational neutrality often result in nothing more than wise-owl posing. Reflexivity is a very fine thing and I value my individual and our collective capacity for reflection and self-reflection, but in psychotherapy as in life, disengagement is a disability. Psychotherapy has, and cannot not have, an emancipatory intent at the level of the individual client. The logic and praxis of psychotherapy insist on the integration of interpretation *and* action. When consciousness and the unconscious grow, they grow together and towards one another, enabling not only improved self-understanding and communicative ability to share this self-understanding but also improved capacity for ethical choice and ethical action. The reclamation of meaning and its interpretation must and always will share the therapy stage with the existential positionality of its actors and their ethical intentions, which are continuously being embodied and enacted, not just talked about. Farhad, I believe you and I mostly agree about this. I also see no good reason not to extend the emancipatory intent of psychotherapy to larger levels of social organisation, peoples as well as people, via considerations of equity and social accountability which will orient us to interpretations and action steps that enable and empower us to make ethical choices and take ethical action on the larger stage of our participation in community and public life. Here, in our communities of interest, professional circles, and the other important arenas of our life, we can seek and find what we seek and find in the therapy room itself, an optimal balance between reason and emotion and between cultural humility and cultural confidence. We do this in the service of alternatives to violence and the development of more peaceful, just, and effective means of caring for each other and caring for ourselves.

Farhad, doubtless I have you at least slightly confused with somebody else, and you have my invitation to return the favor, but I thought I'd shake off my thought paralysis and tell you straight up what I think and feel about “The Struggle to Live and Let Live ...”: an important and, I hope, not your last contribution to the ongoing dialogue of psychotherapy in Aotearoa.

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Jonathan Fay is a clinical psychologist with 35 years' experience practicing, teaching and supervising psychotherapy in the USA and Aotearoa New Zealand. Jonathan has always been active in the psychotherapy community in this country, serving on the Executive Council of the NZAP for 12 years and teaching on the psychotherapy training programme at Auckland University of Technology for 13 years (1991-2003), to which he is about to return as a senior lecturer, and co-ordinator of the postgraduate, post-qualifying psychotherapy training programmes in the Department of Psychotherapy & Counselling. He also practises in Auckland as a therapist, supervisor, and consultant. He is married to Margaret Poutu Morice and they enjoy the company of their three adult children: Rush (aged 30), Anna (28), and Zoe (22). Contact details: jonathan.fay@xtra.co.nz.