Orienting Comments

The course will look closely at the ways that theoretical assumptions shape clinical practice and will consider how various developments in the evolving relational tradition open new possibilities for clinical understanding and intervention. At the same time, it will look at ways in which relational thinkers have at times unwittingly incorporated more of the older “one-person” models they are ostensibly critiquing than is commonly appreciated, and will consider how this has affected relational practice. In examining these issues, we will explore the concept of the “default position,” introduced in my book, Relational Theory and the Practice of Psychotherapy (RTPP). The default position is a set of clinical attitudes and practices that have long governed the practice of psychoanalytically oriented clinical work. Often, even when an analyst or therapist departs from these traditional assumptions and practices (regarding, for example, issues of neutrality, anonymity, self-disclosure, interpretation, etc), there is an implicit assumption that the departures need to be “justified” in a way that failing to depart does not. An alternative approach to the question looks at the tradeoffs we are confronted with both in hewing to the default position and in departing from it, with neither as the “correct” way to practice or as an automatic default.

"Default position” assumptions place constraints on the creative applications in clinical practice of the theoretical innovations in relational theorizing. A second constraint derives from narrowing one’s vision to attend almost exclusively to psychoanalytic ideas and clinical models, ignoring important developments in other theoretical traditions. The relational perspective potentially opens a variety of valuable points of intersection with ideas and methods of therapists from outside the psychoanalytic tradition. We will consider ways in which psychoanalytic work can be broadened and deepened by incorporating elements from family systems thinking, experiential approaches, and recent new developments in the constructivist and affect-centered branches of cognitive-behavioral therapy (which depart very considerably from the versions of cognitive-behavioral therapy with which most psychoanalytic therapists are familiar and which have led them to view cognitive-behavioral approaches as rather thoroughly uncongenial to the spirit of their work).

The course will proceed through a combination of (1) readings directed to theoretical and clinical issues; (2) presentation and discussion of cases; and (3) close examination of videotaped clinical interactions to consider, on a moment by moment basis, the choice points that present multiple options for response or intervention (including the response or intervention of silently listening) and the implications and tradeoffs that each option introduces.
In the spirit of “co-construction” that is so central to the relational perspective, the class and instructor together will shape the balance of these three modes in any given year. Consequently, the syllabus offered here is a general outline or structure of themes and readings rather than a week-by-week pre-set schedule determined in advance by the instructor. Please do not be frightened by the number of readings listed. This too we will consider together and prioritize/cut/triage together.

For many of the units, we will read one or several chapters from Relational Theory and the Practice of Psychotherapy along with a number of papers by other writers that either parallel the ideas in RTPP or represent a different point of view. In many of the units, I will suggest also chapters in my book Therapeutic Communication that parallel from a different vantage point the points made in RTPP. Those will always be treated as “suggested” or “supplementary” because I don’t want to ask you to buy more than one book of mine. But I include them because they may be of interest to those of you who want to further explore that particular topic and because they offer additional perspectives or go into greater depth on some particular aspect of the issue. Where we choose as a group to go more deeply into the realm of integrating psychoanalytic work and perspectives with those of other orientations, I may also suggest other writings of mine that bear very directly on the theme of integration.

**Unit One: A close examination of the distinction between one-person and two-person perspectives and their implication for therapeutic practice**

RTPP, chapters 1-3


Orthopsychiatry. 59, 331-345.

**Unit Two: Archaeological and Cyclical-Contextual Models and their Implications for Therapy**

RTPP Chapters 4 and 6 TC Chapter 2


**Unit Three: Dissociation, Self-States, and Variability in Behavior and Experience: Implications for Therapeutic Technique**

RTPP, Chapter 7 TC Chapter 7


**Unit Four: The Centrality of Anxiety and the Clinical Power of Exposure**

RTPP Chapter 9 TC Chapter 3


“panther” paper?

**Unit Five: Acceptance, Interpretation, and “Making Room” for Experiences**

RTPP Chapter 8    TC Chapters 5, 6, 8, 9, 10


We will also read some material on the new developments in cognitive-behavioral therapy that stress **acceptance** of the person’s feelings and attention to **affect**. in contrast to the older, rationalistic forms of cognitive therapy that try to show the person his feelings are “irrational.” These will probably include the work of Marsha Linehan on dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and of Steven Hayes on acceptance and commitment therapy.

**Unit Six: Enactments, New Relational Experience, and Implicit Relational Knowing**

RTPP Chapter 10


Unit Seven: Self-disclosure: A “Special” Problem or Part of the General Issue of Tradeoffs?

RTPP Chapter 11  TC Chapter 11


Unit Eight: Initiating Action in the World and the Issue of Working Through

RTPP Chapter 12  TC Chapter 12


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A number of by now “classic” books in the relational literature are also an important resource for considering the issues discussed in this course. I have not assigned any parts of these as readings because it is difficult to excerpt them for copyright reasons. Most of the readings are available on PEP, to which you all have access. Among the books most pertinent to the themes addressed in this course are the following:


