

Notes for a workshop at the Second Aotearoa Solution Focused Practice Conference – held in Christchurch on March 15 2017.

A conversation with Nick Drury – therapeutic?

Pre-conference Brief: In this workshop I will present for discussion my research over the past 12 months on dissolving problems “like sugar in water” (Wittgenstein, 2005, §421). My focus has been on dissolving the ‘self’ who attempts to leverage change in others, as most schools of therapy, including sfbt, usually does. With no ‘self’ there is only a reflexive responsiveness in our intersubjectivity; no planning and no attempt to change other. My foci this year was on differences between Pinel and Tuke, the originators of the psy-disciplines. I conclude that if we had followed Tuke instead of the medical model of Pinel, we may well be talking of ‘mental welfare’ instead of ‘mental health’; as the primary issue was seen by Tuke as a loss or regaining of self- and other-care. The other focus this year was the unknown early analyst Trigan Burrow who claimed if we dissolved our primary problem, the widespread neurosis that generates the sense of a separate self, then the secondary challenges like depression, psychosis, etc, would fall away. I am hoping that this will stimulate a useful conversation as to the nature of our *mahi*, and a deeper meaning to the term ‘solution-focus’.

Introduction: Everything I am going to talk about today is somewhere on my website – www.knownews.org.

Those of you on the international bulletin board for SFBT may well recognise my name as being associated with philosophical discussions on SFBT. After some of these discussions I have been told that I make people think; but actually I think a good philosopher is wanting to show something to people, and if he or she can do that well, there would be no need for people to think. So I suspect I might be a bad philosopher. I grew up on the philosopher Alan Watts, and he liked to call what he did as pointing out things, hopefully in an entertaining manner. Once people saw whatever it was the philosopher pointed out, they would say, “why of course, that was obvious all along”. Hence, for me, ‘kno news’. Ben Furman once described SFBTers as being ‘pickpockets in a nudist camp’ – our task if you like is to pick people’s pockets and sell them their own watch (solution). In theology this is known as ‘apophatic theology’; which is like the chipping away of stone in sculpture to reveal what was already there. So it is useful, if the philosopher is a good observer, or has a way of coaching people to be good observers, so they describe something, in some detail that might not have been noticed before, but was always there. Let me give you example from Aotearoa.

The Three Baskets of Knowledge. If you have taught a 2 year old to count, it can be useful to bring something from each of the three baskets of knowledge (that Tane brought back from the highest heaven), into play with each other. Often when parents teach children to count they just get them reciting the numbers, but that’s not counting. An easy way is to get a small pile of stones, and draw the child’s attention to one of them. Pick that one up, and move it to a new pile, and say ‘one’. Repeat the operation, saying ‘2’. Now first there is ‘perceptual knowledge’ – it is perceptual knowledge or *recognition* that’s in Tane’s first basket. Then there is the *performance*, moving the stone or the bead

on the abacus – and performance knowledge includes things like riding a bicycle and doing therapy. And in the third basket is *conceptual* or *representational* knowledge. The philosopher Wittgenstein, whom you hear a lot about in SFBT circles, claims that his greatest contribution was in the philosophy of mathematics; and his pupil Spencer Brown later published a little book (*Laws of Form*) which shows how the interplay of these three forms of knowledge are common to the genesis of all knowledge.

The repositioning of items from each of three baskets as ‘mastery’ develops, was of particular interest to me this year; when I turned my attention to the burgeoning literature on ‘expertise’ that Scott Miller and others have led us to. If time allows we may return to this later. Let me just say that in the model of skill acquisition developed by the Dreyfus brothers, we go from having conceptual knowledge, in the form of rules, lead us at first, as we acquire the perceptual-performance knowledge links; but once mastery is achieved we jettison the conceptual knowledge and “trust the force Luke”. Now previous cognitive scientists (called ‘cognitivists’) thought we internalised the rules, (sunk them to a deeper level), but the Wittgensteinian Dreyfus brothers showed they are dropped totally, and we are now instinctually reacting to patterns we recognise. When we come to a tough spot, more often than not, we slow down, pause, until we see a new pattern there to react to. We don’t usually consult the books (or maps, as ‘men’ show!). Professional development regulators please note. We may now express this new pattern we’ve noticed as conceptual knowledge; and perhaps become known as a discoverer. If you are interested, this is being explored by academics as ‘learning without representations’, or how to think without manipulating symbols. We experience this when we are “feeling” or “sensing something out”. (See my paper on Goethe’s ‘delicate empiricism’.) At such times our “attitude” towards something is being subtly changed or firmed up – I have a friend who has to go for a walk when she is making a decision until her decision “feels right”.

This is all part of a paradigm shift that is occurring in cognitive science to what is known as **4E cognition**. Dan Hutto, who will be key-noting the Australasian SFBT conference in July, once said that this new paradigm is no longer the barbarian at the gates of cognitive science, but now occupies its cafes and wine bars. Cognition has shifted from out of the head and into the body. The 4 E’s are:

Enactive: We have more nerves going to the senses than nerves coming from them, and we are using our senses like a blind-man with his cane, feeling out our relationship with our environment in order to stay in tune (at one) with it. In the old cognitivist paradigm the senses were bringing information to a ‘mind’ inside your head that was depicted as a CPU. Now no central CPU.

Extended: When we master a skill our attention flows around a circuit that includes the environment, such that we feel no gap between ourselves and the world. The tool becomes an extension of ourselves; the skill has become so much part of us we are no more aware of it than our own body. I feel *my* wheels on the road when driving.

Embedded: We are embedded in the world. We don’t stand apart from it as separated minds, as the Cartesians or cognitivists supposed. When a conversation takes on a life of its own, as good ones do, we are both carried along by it, sometimes even finishing each other’s sentences.

Embodied: Obviously, with this paradigm we have moved away from an emphasis on conceptual knowledge to perceptual-performance knowledge. As we have seen, after a skill is mastered its all perceptual-performance knowledge, and the conceptual knowledge ('training wheels') dropped – although we may describe new patterns we discover in conceptual knowledge (and thereby help scaffold others to new skills).

It is not difficult to see the excitement of this new paradigm, as it is offering to dissolve the separated mind Descartes had created, in favour of a description of ourselves as people living at one with the world. To dissolve problems (like sugar in water Wittgenstein once said), I'm sure warms the heart of any one attracted to SFBT. Indeed, we might ask, if a miracle (of miracles we might say) was to occur when we were asleep tonight and our ecological problems were dissolved what might we be doing on awaking.... (Well here is a clue to the type of thinking that might be going on.)

This new paradigm not only offers new hope ecologically, but also socially and/or politically. When Descartes gave us separated minds, we puzzled as to how we got to understand each other. The problem of other minds. Well, Wittgenstein showed us that we don't have an internal bio-computer decoding the symbolic meanings of each other's utterances to get your ideas inside my head; a 'telementation' theory of communication (favoured by cognitivists like Fodor – who fuels CBT). Instead we engage in joint attention-sharing activities that Wittgenstein called 'language games' – again perceptual-performance knowledge is primary. Not only that, but we are also excellent 'mind-readers' – we **do** have direct access to each other's minds. I can see straight away, without any interpretation, that you are upset. I get it right far more often than I get it wrong, and you can only fake it because you know what the genuine expression looks like. Now the cognitivist psychologists got into an argument with each other last century, as some thought you had to develop an intellectual theory about other people in order to understand them; that we were all amateur anthropologists deducing that from that frown I can see on your face you are worried about something. This was known as the Theory Theory of Mind (TToM). However when the mirror neurons were discovered late in the century, another group thought we were good at mimicking each other, and so argued for a Simulation Theory of Mind (SToM). But what Wittgenstein and Merleau-ponty had noticed is that we more often have immediate responses to others; there is no pause to interpret either intellectually or via simulating. I react with concern to your look of sadness, and in turn, you react to my concern with perhaps reassurance to me. An emotional dance if you like. We are born with this innate empathic responsivity, and Merleau-ponty calls it our **primary intersubjectivity**. When we are having to work it all out through ToM's, perhaps in the form of diagnoses and treatment plans, the therapy has lost its flow. Managers please take note. This dance of reciprocating responsivity is now being studied as 'second-person neuroscience' (e.g. the mirror neurons are busier when 'dancing' than mirroring).

Late in his career, Foucault turned his attention to the Greek Delphic Oracle's "know thyself", pointing out to us that this wasn't a conceptual knowledge of ourselves so much as a perceptual knowledge, a recognition of ourselves as relationally responsive beings, or what we are describing here as Merleau-ponty's primary intersubjectivity. Foucault claimed a significant "Cartesian moment" occurred about a thousand years ago (600 years before Descartes), when the Catholic Church introduced confession, requiring us to conceptually know (and confess) our breaches of various sins. This attempt to 'know' ourselves conceptually set us off on the path to cartesianism, which is where we have an alienated 'self' or 'mind' standing apart from the world and ourselves surveilling it and

ourselves. Pierre Bourdieu, another French thinker, considers cartesianism as 'misrecognition' rather than 'false consciousness', as it is not being foisted on us by the ruling class; we are just not recognising that we are primarily relationally responsive to each other. Further, a recognition of this responsivity leads to a recognition of our responsibilities to ourself and each other. So I sometimes ask children when I am seeing families, "tell me, what would you do if you were walking home from school by yourself and came upon a 2 year old who has fallen off her tricycle, and lying bleeding on the road?" Another phenomenologist, Levinas, shows that our first response to another is an ethical one, and thus calls his philosophy an 'ethics first' philosophy. You might be able to turn away from the 2 year old and tell yourself that her parents should be watching her better, or some such thing; but you cannot deny that you were "called". In Foucault's analysis there was a responsibility for the Greek and Roman senators to care for "the wife", "the boy", and "the citizens" one governed. In order to be able to do this, there has to be a degree of self-care (self-discipline), for unless one looked after oneself there was risk of not being able to carry out one's responsibilities to others. We see this ethic of responsibility in many (not all) women, who on finding they are pregnant have little trouble giving up smoking and drinking. In the January/February issue of the *Psychotherapy Networker*, Bill Doherty chronicles the shift he has seen in our field over the past 40 years from liberating 'selves' to facilitating 'connected/committed selves'. Our task is not to create a fortress ego from a shattered one, but to regain one's obligations, one's responsibilities to and for others. Yet despite this shift, there are still voices in the SFBT community claiming you will be happier if you don't care; but these same voices show by their actions they care a lot! By contrast Wittgenstein and others were fond of Father Zossima's "Each one of us is responsible for everyone and everything, and I more so than others".

In the 1960s researchers had established that if rats in individuated cages were given the choice between plain water, or water laced with heroin (or cocaine), they would choose the drug-laced water, and often develop fatal addictions. Some decades later Bruce Alexander constructed 'Rat Park' – an environment friendly to rats, with other rats, toys, and variety of food; naturally they were more sexually active too. Here the rats didn't go for the drugged water, and even those coming in with a habit, soon gave it up. Separating rats from their preferred environment was the problem, not the drugs. Are there human milieus where problems dissolve? A recent line of research on Indian farmers who go from a period of poverty to one of wealth at harvest time each year show a corresponding 14 points increase in IQ. 'Scarcity mentality' is not good for us. Thus, it's now being argued that guaranteed incomes helps dissolve 'stupidity'. If you have been following Bruce Wampold's work you will know that there is stronger empirical evidence supporting what he calls the 'contextual model' of psychotherapy than any particular Empirically Supported Treatment (EST) like cbt or sfbt. What's more he claims that dismantling studies to date, which is when a key component of a particular treatment is withheld, say the finger-waving in emdr, or 'behavioural activation' in cbt, treatment efficacy is not reduced. I know of no dismantling studies of sfbt to date, but there seems no reason to doubt the same will be found there too. Wampold's argument is that in psychotherapy, the medical model with specific ingredients doesn't apply; psychotherapy's success is in generating a therapeutic milieu. So a puzzle arises: if the problem dissolves without asking preferred future questions is it a solution-focused therapy?

We are seeing this shift to a more 'contextual model', or the emphasis on our relational responsivity/responsibility in Seikkula's work in Northern Finland in the treatment of

psychosis. As you may be aware they are achieving an 85% success rate (no meds, no symptoms, and in full-time work or study at 2 and 5 year follow-up), when the rest of the world is struggling with 15% for this problem. If a solution-focused therapy is one of dissolving problems, then this would fall into that category. In a recent ANZJFT article Seikkula says he is uneasy to name this approach a therapeutic method, and goes on to report he experiences difficulties teaching professional therapists his approach. This is because they struggle to drop their trained habits of imposing structure on the sessions, and just be with the client in dialogue. Some have taken the view that Seikkula's *Open Dialogue* works because both the client and the social network have become absorbed in isolating monologues; and just by getting dialogue flowing the "psychosis" dissolves. What's more, after 30 years of doing 'Open Dialogue' they are getting veterans of previous *Open Dialogue* meetings turning up in the social network of the new client; so they are gradually putting themselves out of business as the community learn not to panic and get dialogue flowing should madness break out somewhere. This relational responsivity/responsibility is recognised here in Aotearoa as *whakawhanaungatanga* – an invitation to recognise our connectiveness. Indeed, one of the papers I submitted to a journal early this year is on that. Recognising our primary intersubjectivity is a recognition that 'we' comes before 'I'. The error of Western culture, in its cartesianism, has been to place 'I' before 'we' – but many first nations people have a word for the primacy of our 'we-ness'; such as 'ubuntu' in Zulu, and 'shimcheong' in Korean. Following James K Baxter, I suggest we recognise Māori as our elder brother and learn from him.

Let me briefly mention 2 other subjects I wrote on during the last year. One was the first American psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow who was excommunicated from the American Psychoanalytic Association (which he founded and was a president) for engaging in 'clinical anthropology' – for he saw humanity's primary 'psy' problem also in what I've called here our cartesianism. Unlike Freud (etc) he said that mother doesn't become the "love object" we long reunification with when the breast is wanted and is not there; but rather we objectify ourselves, and maintain a primal sense of unity with mother. Like the Mahayana Buddhists, our unity with the world (mother) is primary, but by developing ideas about ourselves we lost touch (recognition) of this. Samsara (everyday mind) is nirvana (enlightened mind). For Burrow, this has become a species wide neurosis, and he was even measuring the EEG patterns in the 1930s and publishing in *Nature*, on the difference when we are at one and when we are divided against ourselves. Like Gregory Bateson, he saw that this has generated a culture of engineers trying to leverage change, and not a people living comfortably with nature and each other. Foucault had lots to say on this also, and the solutions especially towards the end of his career, which you will also find summaries of on my web site.

Finally I also went back and looked at the foundations of psychiatry around 1800 when Dr Pinel set up his clinic in Paris to treat madness, and the Quaker William Tuke set up *The Retreat* in York to care for mad Quakers. There is a world of difference in their approaches. Reading Pinel's case studies you might think you are reading chapters out of a book on strategic therapy. For example a tailor had become deluded that he was a disloyal and bad citizen who deserved the guillotine. Pinel set up a mock trial, and the tailor was declared a loyal citizen of France, and if he could return to his sewing over the next 6 months he could be released from the Salpêtrière Hospital. He came right, but just before discharge they told him of the ruse, and he relapsed. Although Pinel eschewed medicines – he was very much medical model. This was a time when the medical model (disease model) first appeared in Paris, a shift from the balance of the

humours model. Pinel's clinic was one of the first in Paris, the birthplace of the medical model, to inoculate. So he was very much looking to see how to leverage change in the madman. Certainly the patient, to say nothing of his assistants, were not Pinel's equals. By contrast the Quaker Tuke took the view that the "inner light" of the madman had gone out or was difficult to discern; but if you treated him with respect and care it would re-merge. We are all brethren here; no hierarchy. The worse case they had was a grazier, but when a sick cow at *The Retreat* became a concern the grazier offered some sensible advice, and the cow, and then the grazier got better. We would say his *mana* had been restored. Such was the success of Tuke (and Pinel to a slightly lesser extent), that asylum building took off across the Western world, but by 1850 it was apparent that few were getting better, and there appears to be little evidence that it has improved since. Unfortunately Pinel's medical engineering model dominated and still holds dominance in the 'psy' industry today. But had we followed Tuke, we may well be housing the 'psy' disciplines in the welfare whare, rather than the health one, for our primary intersubjectivity is our innate ability to care for each other and ourselves – and by placing this back central in our culture we might put ourselves out of business as our social and ecological difficulties dissolve.

Sorry that was so long-winded – lets get some questions going.

(An attendee at the conference made an audio recording of this – and no doubt it differs from these notes, which reflect what I intended to say.)