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The Future

Abstract

Traditionally psychoanalysis has concerned itself with exploring the importance of the past by way of memory and the sense of the present by way of emotional states. Left out of this dialogue has been the sense of the future. Neuroscience has demonstrated that a distinct pattern of neural network activation occurs when the future is being contemplated. Thus the brain does not treat the future as a minor cognitive exercise but as an important function to which it devotes a specific network. Exploring an individual's sense of the future is often ignored in psychoanalysis although many psychological conditions, clearly demonstrate dynamic interactions between expectations, current states and interpretations of the past. An exploration of an individual's "sense of the future", its role in an individual's psychodynamics and how it can be used as a legitimate therapeutic tool is herein argued both from a neuro-cognitive and psychoanalytic perspective.

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The importance of the future

Part I. Prologue

The quest to better understand the human condition has generally been associated with understanding the historic past. From the psychological perspective, we have approached our efforts to understand man similarly. Great strides in understanding man were made when it became evident that man was the product of innate drives and his experience of the external world, but understanding the past of man is not sufficient to understand man.

The nature of the conflicts issuing from the mix of drives and externally and internally imposed constraints was explored primarily by means of looking into the way the individual interpreted their past. The problem of this technique was that memory is implicitly encoded at pre and post verbal stages of development and thus is not easily made verbally accessible. There were also limitations noted to be due to the difficulty of applying insight gained by way of exploration of the past in the absence of change of personal circumstances.

The model that man is a repository of experience that is recorded with accuracy is defunct. Man filters experience and his recollection of those experiences, is just as filtered. Both experience and recollection are subject to constant conscious and unconscious revisionism by the self, to create a coherent image of the self and the external world. In a sense recollection is a form of narrative creation that loosely is guided by past experience. Man is subject to both internal and external forces that are conscious and unconscious and it is those forces together with the content of the totality of memory that the personal narrative must render coherent. The Narrative structure must also render the world coherent rather than leaving it as a collection of existential facts that have no relationship to each other or to the person. Since the world is interpreted as having a past, present and future so too can it be assumed that the narrative imposed on past experience, present experiences and future expectations will follow similar rules of narrative construction.

Narrative structures require that something happen somewhere. In the case of personal narrative, the something and somewhere are both taken to be the narratively derived world. The same internal and external forces mold the world narrative whether it is creating a narrative of the past or is creating a narrative for the future. It is also understood that the individual holds

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their personal world narrative to be factual and what has been experienced as a part of that narrative to be real and unassailably true.

Early psychoanalytic theory was much concerned with the conflicts generated at the interface of the world and the constraints it imposed on human drives. However the world was defined as the immediate sensible world. It is clear however that "the world" is highly individual and yet we often assume that the world we are in is the universal world that all people inhabit.

We extend this notion further to assume that the material world is shared at all levels including that of significance and thus assume that all people will derive a similar narrative after similar experiences. Yet it is clear that experience is subject to individual narrative forces, thus there exist limitations as to what can be assumed to be the world of shared experience.

The human world is thus subject to narrative and is more created than discovered. Sometimes the created world fails to correspond to evidence of the experienced world and at that point a correction is in order or a state of delusion takes over.

Since the world is subject to narrative forces, the ability to share experience depends on the degree to which narratively created worlds are able to find and develop zones of narrative correspondence. Under these circumstances human worldviews do not have to be in total harmony but rather sufficiently in correspondence at key points to create binary system of mutual communication, creativity and attraction. The narrative process is carried out consciously and unconsciously assembling from bits and pieces of what may be regarded as a mix of past associations, present circumstances and future expectations. Thus, the past can be colored by present circumstances and future expectations while the obverse is also true, that is that the past and the present color the sense of the future.

The sense of the future may seem nebulous yet it is created out of a projection comprised of parts of mutated past, fantasy and desires some of which may have been satisfied while others frustrated. An analysis of the nature of the narrative form related to one's sense of the future may therefore provide a means for identifying and exploring character types and structure. An analysis of the sense of the future can also provide a means for obtaining insight, not by returning to the past, but by examining the prospective world that the individual inhabits.

When man is thought of as having a past, present and future he ceases to a single point or singularity but rather must be described as having a topography with extension around himself, a surface which metaphorically contains mountains, rivers and valleys that the human must navigate. Successful navigation is one which provides that

individual with relatively few conflicts and which can obtain relative correspondence with other individuals and which does not frustrate innate drives to the point that they render the individual dysfunctional.

Neuro-psychoanalytic implications

Most psychotherapeutic attempts at understanding psychological states depend on the assumption that states in which individuals find themselves are largely related to past events, which are stored in implicit and explicit memory. The past is looked at in great detail to the exclusion of the individual's sense of himself both in the present and in the forward-looking sense.

An individual's sense of the future as a contributor to an overall sense of distress is too often overlooked. It has been assumed that if unconscious conflicts can be rendered conscious and mastered, the future related distress will take care of itself, but it is commonly seen that prospective distress continues after conflicts and resistances have been resolved.

The Neural network associated with memory of the past has been demonstrated to be similar to the network activated in prospective thinking. Based on this and other neuro-cognitive observations another approach to individual distress might be to have a better understanding of the nature of an individual's relationship to their sense of the future.

The "sense of the future" bares resemblance to an individuals relationship to their past in that it can have conscious and unconscious features. Neuro-cognitively there is the impression that our relationship to our past by way of memory is fluid and subject to revision, and that we participate in the organization of our memories using conscious and unconscious mechanisms. The "sense of the future" similarly requires an organization of material, which is construed by individual as the content and form of the future. The distress of the future is thus related to active and unconscious mechanisms used in the course of future construction and the elements of past experience, which provide the basic elements that can be arranged and rearranged ad infinitum to create a feeling of future with significance.

Every individual has a "sense of the future", however it is rarely looked at psychotherapeutically. A possible useful tool in the form of a questionnaire is currently under development that attempts to obtain information on how the "sense of the future" is experienced and to what degree it is empowering or inhibitory.

In several ways attachment theory, in looking at the degree to which intellectualization and emotional control may be poorly integrated (hence producing faulty interaction mechanisms), may be able to use the "sense

of the future" as means of understanding the results of various attachment dysfunctions and help determine why such dysfunctions, when projected into a future, might continue to be sources of distress.

Classic theory of the future

The organization of the Future

What follows is a breaking down of elemental concepts that support the use of the exploration of attitudes towards the future as a legitimate therapeutic tool.

Most individuals have a sense of the future just as they have a sense of the past. Unlike the sense of the past, the sense of the future is often viewed as a series of wishes. Although individuals interpret the past as factual, it is in reality subject to much subjective interpretive editing. The sense of the future is similarly constructed out of familiar elements, which are similarly subject to significant editing and manipulation.

The difference between the past and the future is that to some degree the past is being escaped but the future lies in wait. Thus the anxiety, which potential future situations create, can be found in the nature of past events. As much of the past is encoded in non-verbal memory and thus of an unconscious nature, similarly the future may be edited by tendencies of a non-verbal unconscious type.

Individual attitudes towards the future can thus be considered as characteristics of the individual and can be considered as follows:

1. The future is fixed. It is neither cyclic or progressive or regressive, but rather random with no clear significance.
2. The future is cyclic. Events, regardless of what direction they take, will ultimately return to the prior status
3. The future is progressive. Improvement over time is assured
4. The future is regressive. No matter where things are, they will worsen with time.
5. The future follows a sinusoidal path, with overall gradual improvement but with periodic setbacks
6. The future follows a sinusoidal path. getting constantly worse.
7. The future follows a sinusoidal path, which gets better and worse randomly without reason.

What follows is a breaking down of elemental concepts that support the use of the exploration of attitudes towards the future as a legitimate therapeutic tool.

The elements of the sense of the future

- 1.0. The world is made up of elements. The past, the present and the future are made up of elements.

- 1.2. Inherently nothing makes "sense" or "has meaning" in the world. Inherently the past nor the present or the future comes prepackaged with a "sense" or "meaning".
- 1.3. Inherently elements do not in and of themselves have the capacity to confer "sense". The sense of the future is not related to the presence of elements in the future.
- 1.4. Elements can be organized in relation to each other and thus organized, participate in what is taken to be the world.
- 1.4. Even when elements are organized, that which is organized can't always make sense.
- 1.5. To organize any space, elements can be added or subtracted. The relationship of the elements may be factual or intellectual. Thus the future as the past can be organized in a selective fashion to suit needs.
- 1.6. Elements added can be real or imaginary. Thus the world contains more than verifiable facts. It can contain the visible and the invisible.
- 1.7. Elements can be organized in multiple different ways. There is no rule that forbids organizations to be
 - a) Coexistent
 - b) Sequential
 - c) Short lived
 - d) Durable
 - e) Recurrent
- 1.8. Because multiple organizations are possible at any given point in time (1.7) and because elements can be added and subtracted, be real or imaginary (1.6), multiple ways of making "sense" of the world exist, and coexist. Some coexisting "senses" may even be contradictory. The future can thus be seen as several possible worlds in which one participates.
- 1.9. To make sense of the "world", that is to make sense of the past, present and future is to "feel the world" as existing with attached meaning for one's self. The ability to "understand the meaning of the world and to be able to feel it" is like understanding the language that the "world" speaks.
- 2.0. Elements organized have meaning contingent on the individual's contextual reading of what is taken to be the world. Thus two individuals may seem to occupy the same space but not the same world, or two individuals may occupy different worlds but share a sense of occupying the same world.

Intuition

- 1.0. Intuition is non-verbal, non-linear thinking and includes emotions and feelings. It can be based on conditioning, experiences, memory and desires. It is a form of self-knowledge. It is experienced as the

real world by an observer and is referred to as our subjective experience.

- 1.1. Analytical thinking is rule based thinking and attempts to reduce the world to its constituent parts and elements. It is a form of abstraction. It is not experienced as real. It is associated with what we believe to be the objective world.
- 1.2. The world's elements are organized both intuitively and analytically/ intellectually by the individual observer.
- 1.3. Analytically based "knowing" assumes that elements can have significance outside of the organization in which they are found. The value of the significance is assumed to be universal even when it clearly is not.
- 1.4. The analytic bias assumes that the individual observer can be subtracted from the "sense" of the organization and that meaning will continue to be present. An analytic sense of the future can identify the elements, which constitute it but not relate it to a contextualized world held together by intuitive crystallization, which requires that the observer become a part of the crystallization.
- 1.5. The intuitive nature of the human experience is fundamental to the system by which one "senses" or "feels" oneself and the world as a whole and not as an assembly of parts or elements. The future, the present and the past become unified in such a way so that the observer comes to feel himself or herself in the world which does not have temporal boundaries.
- 1.6. The crystallization of elements around the intuitive rather than the analytic, introduces the individual's observer contribution to the sense of the world. The future thus is felt as real and can provide a "sense" of where one is going.
- 1.7. Elements that make up the world can also be analytically and intellectually organized, but in so doing the individual is excluded from the organization and the world is then rendered without true "sense" until at such point as the individual finds a way to introduce themselves into that world. The future under these circumstances appears as unreal because the individual observer has excluded themselves from the job of creating the "sense" of what the future may signify.
- 1.8. Intuitive crystallization corresponds to relatedness in "sensing" as when recognizing beauty, fear, love and other invisible qualities as a part of the world not imposed by an external factor outside of the world.
- 1.9. Intuitive crystallization resists engineering as it is not about calculation or analysis but rather is performed

in an unconscious manner and enters consciousness by non-verbal routes as in the emotions. It can be rendered verbal in the sense that emotions can be verbalized however this is an after the fact state and not a primary analytic state where the emotions are fully separated from the organization process.

- 2.0. Intuitive crystallization of relations between elements resists reduction to a point. It is not a fixed organization reducible to a singularity and therefore can change and have new elements introduced over time to it resulting in alternative conceptions of the past, present and future. These alternative crystallizations are manifest as intuitive subjectivity. The future has thus the potential to appear less fixed depending on the individual's capacity for intuitive subjectivity to experience this evolution. Analytic approaches to relationships between elements tend towards objective reductionism. What is held to be objectively true is seen as true independent of the individual. The individual can react to such a construction but not feel himself or herself in it, it is outside of themselves.
- 2.1. Access to intuition as an organizing force is constantly present in all observers but the mechanisms and bias of the intuitive, which includes non-verbal and emotional states can result in "senses" of the "world" which can interfere with observer goals and aspirations. Thus the sense of the future may seem very real and immutable to an individual that would be better off with a more flexible sense of possibilities.
- 2.2. An emotion is something we sense of ourselves. An intuition is our sense of ourselves in the world. In the intuitive, the "I and the object", are the world. The intuitive state requires no internal justification as it organizes the world invisibly.
- 2.3. The analytic state is non emotional. The "I" of the analytic state does not exist. Justification is performed in reference to elements and their assumed outcomes.
- 2.4. Intuition is fundamentally complex and of variable stability.
- 2.5. Intuitive crystallization of elements is performed at a preverbal, unconscious level and introduces a sense of variability into what is experienced as the world. Since our sense of the future is a part of our sense of the world it too is sensed as variable. A sense of a variability of the future can induce a sense of anxiety in the analytic individual afraid of change and instability.
- 2.5. Analytic crystallization can occur in contra distinction to intuitive crystallization. It is experienced

as an objectification of the world. As a result of the objectification the future is not an extension of the individual but is rather seen as that which exists outside and therefore manipulable by means of operations on external factors. It is less anxiety producing for individuals with reduced intuitive access but does not produce a sensation of the world as being real, as it exists outside of the observer's contributions.

- 2.6. Fear of intuition comes from fear of the subjective, and represents an analytic perspective. The analytic perspective assumes the possibility of objectivity.

Attachment theory and Future dispositions

Attachment theory provides a mechanism that harmonizes the neuro-cognitive discoveries involving neuro-plasticity and psychoanalytic theories of drive mechanisms. Clearly the earliest biologic drives function best when the external world being principally the child-maternal dyad is in synchronicity so as to produce the lowest possible chronic infantile stress state.

Several character types have been described using attachment theory and are principally:

- 1) Avoidant
- 2) Ambivalent
- 3) Disorganized
- 4) Normal

At present how the various attachment types function in terms of the future has not been systematically looked at. It is hoped that the questionnaire under development will shed some light on this. Based on some assumptions the following may be found, however it is only by verification and comparison with responses to the questionnaire and some knowledge of attachment type that any certainty will be able to be reached.

The avoidant when questioned about attitudes related to the future would be expected to be fantasy poor. Fantasy existing would be expected to be non-elaborated, constricted and restricted. Spontaneous fantasy would be relatively rare and when present lack improvisation. The

sense of being excluded from the future could be expected to support sense of abandonment. A tendency to intellectualization would tend to favor unemotional analysis of the future, generally in order to reduce emotional risk however the world would in general not seem to them to be a living breathing world, but rather a dry place.

The ambivalent when questioned could be expected to have a view in which the future is threatening and dangerous. Thus the emotional subjective sense of the future is elaborated and drives a sense of a need for surveillance of destructive forces. The chronic surveillance is driven by paranoid expectations and a sense of being marginalized. In viewing the future they see themselves as victims at all times and expect to be victimized into the future. The future thus needs to be analyzed unemotionally but the fear that it generates produces a violent emotional reaction that acts as fuel for the creation of negative narratives.

The disorganized when questioned about the future may have a highly elaborated sense of the future but it will essentially be incoherent, without a clear perspective or organizing principal. The ability to conceive the future would be expected to be limited and equally disorganized and thus activity would be very much dependent on current circumstance which would lead to a sense of the world around them not being experienced as quite real and certainly not dependable.

The normal, when questioned may well have a variable sense of the future and integrate both intellectualization and emotional significance into a sense of the world which is comfortable, certainly with the occasional danger but not threatening to the point where trust and love are not possible. Creativity may tend to dampen extreme interest in future intellectual analysis tending to favor experiential relationships. Thus motive will exist in a world that is alive and that is not denatured or analytically dead. As in any situation a spectrum of attitudes may function simultaneously thus even in the normal state some shifts to other modes of organization can occur under specific circumstantial conditions.