

Radical Changes in Psychotherapy – the present Swiss scene

Considering the issue of psychotherapy as an independent scientific profession

PETER SCHULTHESS & THEODOR ITTEN

Is psychotherapy a domain of theology, medicine, psychology, or rather an independent science? The opinions concerning this issue differ between the professional associations as well as within the associations. The authors explain the arguments and development that speak for an understanding of psychotherapy as an independent science. This perspective requires that any legislation gives the profession an appropriate and forward-looking perspective.

This quote from the well-known founder of Existential Analysis, Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) sets the tone of our short paper and shows his engaging support for the independence of psychotherapy to be seen necessarily as a science in its own right. He protested against the idea that says psychotherapy is a mere ancillary of theology. Psychotherapy has to be a “*scientia naturalier irreligiosa*”, he said, thus equipped as an independent science, with all the freedom of science granted to other university faculties. Already the founder of Psychoanalysis, the neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) strongly engaged himself for the so-called ‘lay-analysis’. He saw the emerging theory and practice of psychoanalysis not merely as a medical discipline, but as a new independent science. In order to develop successfully, this new science needs its own epistemological foundation drawn from a variety of other scientific disciplines. In Switzerland, there has never been an attempt to legislate that theology is thought to be a foundation study for psychotherapy. Nevertheless there was a law that allowed only medically trained persons to practice psychotherapy. In the Canton of Zurich, this legislation was lifted through a court decision only as recently as 1991.

Meanwhile psychology got it self established in the universities and began to see and understand psychotherapy (and preferably cognitive behaviour therapy) as applied psychology. Today, professors of psychology and professional representatives of the various

psychology associations argue this point vehemently with respect to their vested interests and they have been partly successful in forming statutory regulations in some of the Cantons.

However, in a variety of Cantons, there are Departments of Health and their commissions that have reached a different understanding of the profession of psychotherapy. In these, psychotherapy is seen and regulated as an independent profession. Overall in Switzerland, this professional attitude (in line with that of the EAP) is held as an axiomatic position by the Swiss Charta of Psychotherapy and since its inauguration in 1979 by the Swiss Psychotherapeutic Association (SPV).

The Swiss Charter for Psychotherapy

For three years, 1989-1991, representatives from various training institutes and psychotherapy modalities have united in a standing conference of the Swiss Training Institutes and professional associations. This conference provided the framework to negotiate, articulate and finally agree on a text that unites psychotherapy training and continuous education in the Swiss Charter for Psychotherapy (Charta). In this text, it was noted that the common understanding of psychotherapy is as an independent and inter- and/or trans-disciplinary science that draws from the whole body of knowledge and expertise across many sciences. The entrance to a professional training in this new science was consciously held wide open. Instead, this Charta statutorily regulated psychotherapy training. It also eased, and even ended, the annoying schisms, rivalries and acronyms between various schools of psychotherapy, which often bereft our profession of its worth and dignity.

This understanding of psychotherapy had wide international consequences. For example, the Austrian legislation on Psychotherapy has also adopted this position. Together with their Austrian colleagues, various Swiss representatives of the (then) Council of SPV worked on the wording of the text which became, and is to this day known to us as, the Strasbourg Declaration of Psychotherapy. This document became the foundation text for the European Association of Psychotherapy (EAP). Today, the EAP is the relevant partner in negotiations with the EU commission concerning professional and scientific issues of psychotherapy.

After the Charta was founded, it remained for a few years organisationally still a part of the SPV. In 1995 the step to independence was taken. The Charta now became an association for the psychotherapeutic training institutes, professional associations and

associations of modalities, in its own right. Presently it assembles under its roof a total of 34 institutional members. There are 23 training institutes as ordinary members, 5 institutes as extraordinary members, and 4 professional associations, of which the SPV with its 950 individual members is the largest. All in all, there are approximately 2,200 psychotherapists belonging to the individual institutional members of the Charta. Currently, the Charta is the largest psychotherapy association in Switzerland cultivating a pluralistic system of self-regulation.

There are also a large section of psychotherapists in the Swiss Psychological Association numbering about 2,000, some of which are also members via their institutions of the Charta. The Swiss Psychiatric and Psychotherapeutic Association (SGPP) unite about 1,800 medically trained and fully qualified psychotherapists. All in all there are round 2,500 specialists in psychiatry and psychotherapy, including the members of the Swiss Association of Child and Youth Psychiatrist (SGKJPP) numbering 440 specialists.

Some individual members are in a double membership with the Charta also, via their own training institute or Association. Unfortunately we have presently no figures in this regard. There are, of course, more psychiatrists working in mental hospitals who are not members of the SGGP, and there are many General Practitioners who consider some of their interventions not very psychotherapeutic. So the field is wide and full of diversity.

Under the lead of the Charta, the university training course of psychotherapeutic psychology was established, as a joint venture with the Austrian Donau-University Krems. Relevant knowledge, coming from a large range of various disciplines, is being taught for the foundation course of psychotherapy training. In various Cantons, this M.Sc. in Psychotherapeutic Psychology is accepted as equivalent to a basic degree in psychology as a foundation discipline besides a degree in medicine, to begin the normal five-year long professional training in psychotherapy. Most Cantons are united in this legal stance, that not merely a degree in psychology or medicine can legitimate the entrance in a psychotherapy-training course.

SPV and the Charta

In 2007, the SPV council put forward a motion at the AGM to change its statutes, in so far as to restrict membership to those psychotherapists who have a medical or psychological degree before their training to become psychotherapists. Up to now, the entrance to membership was

open to all those who have a licence to practice - which is Canton law in Switzerland - and might have had, in the past, a first training in one of the human- or social sciences.

The pressure to make this statutory change did not come from the SPV's own membership with up to 600 psychologists, but from the two psychology associations with the civil servants who were negotiating a new tariff for psychotherapy (a raise of 6 €) in the social security and incapacity insurance. The motion got passed with the consequence that the SPV was now in contravention to the binding regulations in the Charta and the EAP. The members of the council and the voting members at the AGM had not given this fact due consideration.

Furthermore the SPV thus risked no longer adhering to its own declaration, to be the professional association for all the legally licenced psychotherapists. There are, as explained above, practicing psychotherapists who do not have a first degree in either medicine or psychology, yet are fully licensed by a Canton.

With the benefit of doubt, it was an attempt to come closer to a common political position with the psychological associations, which however did not pay off: it was more an appeasement tactic than a successful one. Therefore a fresh motion to lift this restriction in the statutes was tabled at the AGM in March 2008. By a clear majority, this new amendment was carried through. Now, besides medical and psychological degrees, one can have a (B.A.) degree in the social or human sciences and a Master's degree (M.A. or M.Sc.) in a supplementary university course with relevant foundation knowledge in psychotherapy.

Having lost this vote, the president of SPV resigned. His political strategy, which could not now be substantiated, had been supported by the members of the council for a whole year. This was that psychotherapy training was to be reduced to a primary degree in medicine and/or psychology in the vain hope that only then would psychotherapeutic services be paid by the basic health insurance, It was, in hindsight, politically flawed. Currently there is no national legislation on psychotherapy. Until this is the case, and only if the drafted law pass through parliament in 2010 onwards, present Cantonal legislation is the law of the land, including the law to practice one's profession within the whole of Switzerland.

Thus the majority of the members present at the 2008 AGM have decided to uphold the aims and professional interests of the Charta and the EAP and are dedicated to a responsible and open access to the training of psychotherapists and in psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy as a Science

The development of psychotherapy as an independent science is making further progress. There are a number of universities in many different countries that offer psychotherapy training as a B.A., M.A. or M.Sc. and there are some Ph.D. courses as well. In Vienna, the private Sigmund Freud University offers a full-time course in psychotherapy science. On a wider European level, a network from different university representatives was founded (EPU), aiming to place psychotherapy as an independent 'science' in the universities. In Germany, a new association was founded with the aim, to make psychotherapy training and studies independent in the universities, keeping the entrance open for other social sciences and work in cooperation with private training institutes, which provide theoretical and practical training. In the UK, several different universities now accredit many of the independent psychotherapy trainings at Master's degree level.

In most psychotherapy research done at university level (in Psychology Departments), randomised controlled trials are the 'gold standard' for evaluating treatment. These are often unsuitable for most clinical research. Nevertheless, in practice, if we, as clinicians, do serious social scientific research, we can no longer just fall back on our individual experiences, observations and opinions in the clinic and from case histories. Therefore the Charta has designed and implemented, after years of running research and scientific seminars five times a year, a nation-wide practise study of outpatient treatment in Switzerland. This form of longitudinal research, running for seven years, started in March 2007, and the Charta is conducting it together with the Department of Applied Psychology in Zurich and the University of Cologne. One of the most prestigious psychotherapy researchers in Germany, Professor Volker Tschuschke, is chairing this unique research, in which practitioners of all the major modalities in psychotherapy participate.

Other schools of psychotherapy, like the Jungians, have recently successfully conducted their own long-term outcome and process research. All this is vital to substantiate our claim to be an independent academic and scientific profession. In fall of this year, the SPV will hold an extraordinary AGM, where, among other issues, it plans to form a working group, together with expert members of the Charta, to focus on developing psychotherapy training as an independent science at a Master's degree level. The vision is that one day students can study psychotherapy directly at a university and/or an institute of higher education, where all the different modalities are represented and housed. Maybe the Charta

will eventually create a Swiss National Institute of Psychotherapy. Future psychotherapists should no longer have to fully finance their own education: no other health profession still has to do this today.

Psychotherapy requires the “right” type of regulation

Presently, the 26 Swiss Cantons regulate our profession. They generally focus on the adequate primary degree of education, training standards of professional learning, and the system of licensing practitioners. The other main point is to make sure who and what is necessary to be regulated in order to protect members of the public.

Swiss psychotherapy legislation, on a national federation level, has to take these developments into account. After parliamentary regulations for non-medical psychotherapy to be included as a healing profession, the law regulating medical professions (MedG) has not yet materialised, and any new attempt to regulate psychotherapy in a future law regulating psychology professions (PsyG), can only be successful if psychotherapy is not merely and exclusively understood as an applied psychology profession. Not one professional interest group or trade union has the “right” answers. We psychotherapists see our work partially as being that of a healing profession; partially as being part of a scientific profession; partially as being a set of skills – a craft. Psychologists, who are not (per se) practitioners of healing, but are more like academics with some skills, just cannot know what is good and right for us. They possibly should not even be consulted.

In due course, the need for a national occupational standard for the different psychotherapies and psychotherapists will form the core of a national law. The success of unifying all the various schools and modalities in one association, like the Charta in Switzerland, guarantees the standards of training and ethics, and makes sure, that a friendly and collegial atmosphere between the different schools prevails. Now it is time to make sure that, in this transition period, at the level of basic education, the different positions regarding the required first university degree can also merge into a common interest in the service of a modern psychotherapy training and education. Our profession develops like the natural sciences once developed: from the natural historians in the 1850s, via training in technical institutes, and finally becoming a university-based profession in its own right.

Authors:

Peter Schulthess: President of the Swiss Charta of Psychotherapy and member of the EAP.

Theodor Itten: President (interim) of the Swiss Psychotherapy Association. He represents this NAO in the EAP.

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