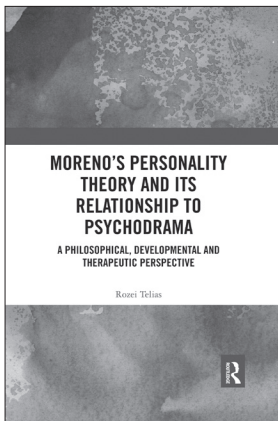


Book reviews



Moreno's Personality Theory and Its Relationship to Psychodrama: A Philosophical, Developmental and Therapeutic Perspective

By Rozel Telias

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Reviewed by David Oliphant

I am grateful to have been asked to review this book. I hesitated at first. Although I have been around Psychodrama circles for around twenty years or more, I have never qualified. But I feel some sort of connection with Moreno. I had a big experience of what I believed was God in my early twenties, and I lived in shame of my megalomania; until Moreno came along. It has fascinated me that when he had the experience that led him to write *The Words of the Father* he gave up on religion; when I had my experience I gave up on atheism and took up religion. He said that he had found God without religion and eventually I came to see that perhaps I had also. I began calling myself a secular religionist. I have Moreno to blame for this. So you see, he is quite special to me.

I am grateful also for Rozei's book. It has sharpened my own thinking, and since reading it a number of important ideas have fallen into place. It is a big book. If you are looking for a simple handbook on psychodrama methodology you would be better served elsewhere; but mind you this is not to say that there is not a wealth of insight and discussion about psychodrama methodology in this big book. There is. But Rozea is raising much more urgent issues for her, like the future of Psychodrama. It has become lost in therapy, she thinks, and worse still it has cut loose from being a method based on theoretical principles. "In other words, in this day and age, psychodrama is praxis without theory, and almost nobody bothers reading the works of Moreno anymore." (Telias, 2019, p.2)

In fact the situation is such, in her mind, that she thinks Psychodrama actually needs saving. "Converting all concepts into a theory that may be empirically studied is the basis which may serve as the anchor for saving psychodrama — theoretically and practically." (p. 24)

That is the main thrust of the book, to re-work the theory behind Psychodrama in a way that is true to both the full scope of his work and to

the man himself, so that the practice can be revitalised and reformed and given a proper theoretical basis. What Moreno left is a mess! You can't tell where the theory ends and practice begins. He uses the same concepts for all levels of his thought, from the Cosmos to personal therapy, from God to fragmenting role players. Little wonder the method has got cut off. But the situation can be saved, and when it is Psychodrama will be more readily welcomed and accepted in the world not only of therapy, but also the worlds of developmental studies and philosophy (if not theology even). But we must start with the theory, the big theory, and settle that; and from there we can stimulate, renew and refine the practice. That in a nutshell is her agenda.

Make no mistake, Rozei's vision is big and inclusive. She presents,

the hypothesis of the cosmodynamic man, who operates on many spheres: personal, interpersonal, familial and social, and is involved in the dialogue with God, which is spontaneity's universal principle in both the philosophical and developmental aspects. The hypothesis aims at understanding the human organism as a being creating his own identity as a role player. (p. 134)

I can only admire and be grateful for her taking on such a big and worthwhile challenge. It has re-awoken something similar in me, from reading her book. But we each will have to make up our own minds as to how successful we think she has been in realising her agenda. After both my first reading, and then my careful picking through and marking 'bits and pieces', I felt that it was all still a work in progress, however important. I wondered if she actually thinks that also, that it is a work in progress. On the very last page she writes,

Moreno made many contributions, yet they are to be examined according to the rapid changes occurring in the world in which we live, rather than as finished works. In the author's opinion, Moreno's work should be the foundation upon which the rest of the psychodrama method is further constructed. All Moreno's insights — philosophical, theological and scientific — are to be brought together and integrated into one, coherent image, as though from the viewpoint of Moreno himself. Thus, a full image of Moreno, and his work will be formed, serving as the basis for its continued development. That was the purpose of this book and, hopefully, it has been achieved. (p. 184)

So let me raise how I think what Rozei has done might be progressed further, if I am right in what I say. I think all my points interrelate, but I start with the less significant in my mind to the more.

I think more should be made of the importance Moreno places in the idea of 'responsibility'. If you have not been aware of this or have doubted it, have a look at one of his last publications, *The Religion of God Father*

(Moreno, 1972) in P. E. Johnson's (Johnson, 1972), *Healer of the Mind: A Psychiatric Search for Faith*. In fact, I would (humbly!) suggest this is essential reading for any serious student of Moreno. I think of Moreno's commitment to responsibility as the antidote he needed for his megalomania and the serious side of his claim to be God, something he believed we can and should all share in as we access the spontaneity and co-creativity of the Cosmos. All the more so now since the Second World War when most cultures around the world have accepted that every Tom, Dick and Harry has rights; while virtually no one says anything much about responsibilities.

I also think a lot more needs to be said about robots. Rozei certainly deals with them, but not with the urgency that I think Moreno felt. There is something crucial to grasp here that is about both Moreno and our culture. We are far more entrapped in our technology, conserves and robots now than we were in Moreno's time. He was fully aware of the danger and what it meant ultimately for spontaneity and creativity, but I am not sure he had the science and the philosophy clear enough in his own mind. Like most thinkers of his period, he, at least at times, wanted his thought to be considered as science. The idea that science, as it had developed in our modern world, has boundaries was only just seriously appearing, and even though now we are more aware of it and even talk about scientism and other such delusions, the capture by science and technology of our world and its cultures is still just about complete. And despite quantum theory, the prevailing philosophical background we still all inhabit is the dualism of mind and body, matter and psyche that was bequeathed to us by Descartes and was capitalised on by modern science. It has become a yawning gulf that the bulk of people are unaware of; yet we all are having to adjust to the consequences. Robots abound, but this is just the beginning of what nanotechnology and artificial intelligence promise. The morning after I first wrote this the Guardian published a piece entitled: *Robots may soon be able to reproduce — will this change how we think about evolution?* (The Guardian, 2021) Our self conception has been divided now for a long time, and subjectivity and mind increasingly subsumed under body and matter. The reality and freedom of our inner being is at stake unless we can re-conceive ourselves in a way that asserts the unity of body and mind.

It is vital that we see, and I believe Moreno would now back me, that science cannot bridge this increasing gap between psyche and matter, mind and body. It is not within its bailey-wick. Science is a reflective process around matter of fact and means. It produces either a type of knowledge that resolves in being used in technology, or theoretical hypotheses that remain waiting connection with the empirical for validation. On the other hand, the Arts are reflective processes around feelings and values; ends rather than means. Moreno knew this well. If Kant and the Romantics are right, all forms of knowledge are dependent on imagination, but particularly

the Arts; so much so that more modern Romantics such as Owen Barfield believe that the aesthetic judgement, through a philosophy of the evolution of consciousness, can close the gap between subject and object, mind and matter, the one intermingling with the other in what Barfield called 'participation'. This requires a freely flowing imagination. I think this actually happens in good psychodrama, and I can hear Moreno saying 'See, I told you so'. But like the reasoning reflection of science, the aesthetic reflection of art is still a withdrawal into mind, a contemplation that since the Greeks is the basis of theory, *theoria*. It can stay in the mind, as it does for most philosophy in our tradition, or it can be projected out into practice as it does in the sciences and the arts. But the practice will be the creation of conserves and, now, robots. It will not be encounter and the experience of spontaneity and creativity.

This brings me to my main point. In the Cartesian dualism, theory comes before practice. Rozei writes entirely within this paradigm, despite knowing full well how important action was to Moreno. Get the theory right and proper action and practice will follow. Moreno on the other hand knows, I think intuitively that goes back to his earliest experiences playing God, that practice comes first. Look at Jesus and Socrates. Trust yourself to the encounter and reflect on your actions as you need, to change or enhance or diminish your presence and interaction. This is how it was in the beginning long before the Greeks. Practice came before theory, not theory before practice. This is why I think Moreno is so significant in the unfolding of western thought. Intuitively he closed the gap between subject and object, mind and body. When he acted his whole being, mind and body was involved as one, and the magic ingredient in this was the unpredictability of spontaneity and creativity, offspring of the productive imagination, 'the blind art in the depths of the soul' and at the heart of the Cosmos. But I don't think his thinking fully grasped his intuition and he kept falling back into the old paradigm of the Cartesian dualism.

The problem is, and this is where I think Rozei perhaps comes unstuck, that we can talk and theorise about action without actually doing it. For instance, Fichte in his major work begins with the assertion, 'In the beginning was the Act'. But as one commentator remarked 'this 'act' turns out to be an act of *consciousness*, and its objective the theoretical and egocentric one of complete self-consciousness' (Macmurray 1957, p.11) It is still all in the mind. It is theorising about action from within the Cartesian paradigm. But not only Rozei does this; a good deal of *The Philosophy of Action*, which includes some significant thinkers, is still largely in this paradigm. But there is at least one philosopher, who in his own way is as unrecognised in the mainstream as Moreno, who could see that to fully close the gap we have to learn to *think* from the point of view of action. Because when we act and not just behave our whole being is involved, body, mind and all. This is when

we are fully ourselves, not split between mind and body. This philosopher is the Scot John Macmurray. His magnum opus was the Gifford lectures entitled *The Form of the Personal* (Macmurray, 1957), published in two volumes, *The Self as Agent* (Macmurray, 1957), and *Persons in Relation* (Macmurray, 1961). Macmurray thought deeply about the human condition from a new philosophic paradigm that breaks free from Descartes, a paradigm that puts action before reflection, practise before theory, without negating the validity of withdrawal and contemplation in its own place. I think also that it is clear Moreno had gone into this very significant paradigm shift also at least in his practice. And his thinking was also coming around to it. At least by 1947 when he published *The Future of Man* (Moreno, 2013) he believed the locus of the Self was in spontaneity.

My thesis is, the locus of the self is spontaneity. Spontaneity itself is (1) deviation from the “laws” of nature and (2) the matrix of creativity. When spontaneity is at a zero the self is at a zero. As spontaneity declines the self shrinks. When spontaneity grows the self expands. (p. 19)

The links between Moreno and Macmurray are striking. Rozei lists Moreno’s therapeutic principles on page 21 of her book:

1. *Encounter means a discourse of ‘I’ and ‘thou’.* Macmurray believed we have to think of ‘I-You’ as the basic unit of our being, not the isolated ‘I’. This is dealt with in detail in *Persons in Relation*. Interestingly, Macmurray and Martin Buber met once in a long conversation. When they emerged, Buber said that he and Macmurray agreed on most things, but ‘Macmurray is the metaphysician, I am the poet’.
2. *Action.* This is dealt with fully in *The Self as Agent*. *All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action.* This was the original experience before we began to withdraw into our minds to contemplate map things mathematically. This was a natural development and good in itself, but it took over and cut us off from our original interaction with and participation in the world and each other. We need to encounter each other and re-personalise the world.
3. *Transition from Individual to Group Therapy.* For Macmurray: *all meaningful action is for the sake of friendship.* We are meant for personal community. It is where in our interactions we learn and have the opportunity to become more open, self revealing and wise. Personal community is not only therapeutic, it enables personal growth and self transcendence.

If I am right, little wonder it is so hard, as Rozei asserts, to find in Moreno where theory ends and practice begins; but only if you want to put theory first. Put practice first and theory will always have to come out of it and go back to it, whether you are playing God or sorting out a social and cultural atom. The refinement of this theory then can only be brought about by

thinking from the point of view of action, and that is something we have to learn to do.

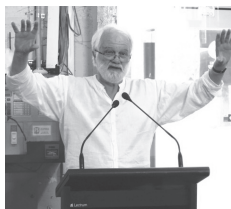
So there is the rub. If we want to take further what Rozei has achieved, I believe we have to 'cross the rubicon' and think through the implications for psychodramatic theory of thinking from the point of view of action. Moreno began with God and the Cosmos, went first to axiodrama, then to sociodrama and finally to psychodrama. Going to the theatre of therapy Moreno said saved psychodrama at the time. I think now the time has come to go back the other way, saving psychodrama again by going back to the Cosmos through understanding what we do from the point of view of practice that involves reflection that returns to practice. I think this may have some chance of realising Rozei's vision. Being able to put forward a group process in which we clearly understand and work with a unified concept of the self (or rather the *person* as both Macmurray and, at times, Moreno suggested) is of truly important cultural significance; training and growing people to live spontaneously and creatively with the robots.

It may not be as hard as you may be thinking. I suspect many of us are already doing it intuitively if not formally. Take the central idea in Macmurray's philosophy of reflection-in-action, an idea and process that is now talked about by other theorists. Rather than withdrawing into mind completely from action to think about what we are doing, we learn to reflect while we are acting, to adjust our intentions and motives in accordance with the reality before us. It requires a whole new trusting of the flow of our consciousness. It is the getting of wisdom, a form of knowledge the world so desperately needs. In more traditional terminology, when I reflect I am mind, when I act I am spirit. I am not just behaving, I am acting. I have definite motive and intention. To access mind while I am acting I have to trust what my psyche gives me in the flow. The more I trust what is given to me the more spontaneous and creative I become. I tap into my body and my inner depths. To get to this happy state, I no doubt needed therapy along the way to sort myself out and tame the 'baggage'. To be free spirit in the world is to engage other presences and spirits in different levels of encounter. It is to be Cosmodynamic, and to know I am. And I am is the ancient Hebrew name for God. That is where Moreno began.

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