

Review of: "Against Integration"

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Review: Manu Bazzano 'Against Integration'

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Reading Manu Bazzano is often an exhilarating experience. He likes to wield Nietzsche's hammer¹ that threatens to smash the reader's favourite, long-held tropes and assumptions. He is a provocateur who challenges therapists who trade in 'certainties and corrective answers' rather than 'the dialectical ambivalence inherent to existence.'²

In his article 'Against Integration,' he argues that contemporary psychotherapy privileges individualization – the individual's internal locus of evaluation that, in his view, does not exist. Nor does he believe that therapists can make a person 'whole' and 'integrated' in a world that is chaotic and ambiguous. Instead, our task requires us to embrace the inherent multiplicity of the human condition; that is, to differentiate the difference in ourselves and within the other, and our difference with the other.

I was surprised to learn that Bazzano is disillusioned with the person-centered approach (PCA) in which domain he has been, and still is, a prominent author and practitioner. The problem with PCA (and other therapies) is, according to Bazzano, the notion of 'integration' that combines 'woolly metaphysics' and a 'positivist reading of psychology.'³ This problem is also attributed to Kurt Goldstein's classic work *The Organism*.⁴

Goldstein's work as a neuropsychiatrist providing treatment to German soldiers, who suffered severe brain injuries during World War One, informed the bulk of *The Organism*. Bazzano disputes Goldstein's claim that catastrophic moments (a state of anxiety) are such that the 'the organism must proceed from catastrophe to catastrophe' since it would mean 'that there would be no learning in any real sense'⁵ Certainly, learning is significantly impaired for persons with brain injuries, recovery is slow and with no clear end-point. But, Goldstein stated that recovery is possible albeit with constraints; for example, they may perform tasks that require concrete, immediate and direct responses to familiar situations. But they may struggle to comprehend metaphors, puzzles and hypothetical situations.⁶ Nevertheless, new learning may occur, states Goldstein, whereby 'the organism itself aids in the attainment of a new milieu adequate to its altered condition'⁷

Bazzano argues that Goldstein and Rogers mistakenly regarded 'discontinuities as abnormal and pathological when even in fairly "normal" conditions discontinuities ... are the rule and not the exception.'⁸ While Goldstein certainly linked 'discontinuities' with pathology, he also argued that 'organismic self-regulation' entails a reciprocal relationship between the organism and the environment, and that it is a constant for both 'normal' living and for those persons living with disease, impairment or disability. Rogers took a different view. He never denied the existence of pathology, but contended

(unlike Goldstein) that the therapist's knowledge of psychopathology was not an essential element of effective psychotherapy.⁹

Bazzano prosecutes a strong case when he equates integration with adherence to the status quo: 'forces of repression ... always need a Self that can be assigned, they need determinate individuals on which to exercise their power.'¹⁰

Elsewhere, he argues against iatrocracy, and states the patient rather than the doctor should determine what is good health.¹¹ Goldstein would, I think, disagree. But, he recognized that this issue presented an ethical dilemma for him in his relationships with brain injured patients. Goldstein consciously encroached on the 'free decision of the patient ... [who] must choose between a greater lack of freedom and greater suffering'¹² Despite his stance concerning the human organism's capacity for self-actualization, he played a protective role to save cognitively impaired patients from self-harm while they were being taught to adapt to their immediate environment.

While Goldstein took a holistic viewpoint, it is likely that he was aware that he could not achieve integration as 'the process of making whole' (Bazzano).¹³ He understood that any advance in neuroscience is always incomplete, and that his patients' inherent capacity for self-actualization was contingent upon environmental factors, and that their striving for freedom was never extinguished nor entirely resolved: 'The driving force is given in the experience of imperfection.'¹⁴

Where I am fundamentally at odds with Bazzano is in regard to Goldstein's ontological premise of self-actualization being a simultaneous, reciprocal relationship between the organism and environment. Bazzano dismisses Goldstein's notion of self-actualization as the 'higher agency' that is the 'goal of the organism.'¹⁵ It is not, however, the goal. It is a constant process of becoming and, dare I say it, a way of being. It is akin to Rogers' concept of *actualization* which is a process and not a goal. It is also linked to the broader idea of the *formative tendency* of the universe evolving towards greater levels of integration. On this latter concept, I tend to be in agreement with Bazzano. But, where Bazzano may well be influenced by Nietzsche's doctrine of 'eternal recurrence'¹⁶ (the antithesis of the formative tendency), I am simply sceptical about whether there is a formative tendency in our universe. .

Footnotes

1. I was alerted to Nietzsche's hammer in Bazzano's book *Subversion and desire: Pathways to transindividuation* Routledge, 2023, p. 104.

2. Ibid, p. 187.

3. Bazzano, 'Against Integration', pp. 7,9.

4. K. Goldstein, *The Organism*, Zone Books, 1995.

5. Goldstein, *ibid*, p.388, quoted by Bazzano, 'Against Integration', *op cit.*, p.7.

6. Goldstein, *ibid*, pp. 43, 49, 231-232.

7. Ibid, p.51.

8. Bazzano, 'Against Integration', p.9.
9. R. Crisp, 'Rogers and Goldstein redux: The actualizing person responding to trauma and loss.' *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies*, 2018, 17 (1), 70-86.
10. Bazzano, 'Against Integration', op cit., p.9.
11. Bazzano, *Subversion and desire*, op cit., p.133.
12. Goldstein, op cit., p.341.
13. Bazzano, "Against integration", op cit., p. 3.
14. Goldstein, op cit., p.168.
15. Bazzano, Against Integration, op cit., p.9
16. F. Nietzsche, *The will to power*, 2107, Penguin.