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Title	Clearing the pathway to change: a new psychodynamic perspective
Statement	What can psychoanalysis bring to an interdisciplinary dialogue on behaviour change? A new direction in psychodynamic thinking shifts the focus from the dynamic unconscious to interpersonal processes, and the critical role played by epistemic trust in our ability both to learn about our social world and to change our behaviour. To promote behaviour change, on this account, we may first need to reopen an individual's ability to receive and accept social instruction.

What can psychoanalysis bring to – and learn from – an interdisciplinary dialogue on behaviour change? If Evie, Yusuf and Paola, the characters in the Dialogue, had invited a psychoanalyst to join them, where might their conversation have headed?

Many of you will probably be expecting us to talk about instincts and drives, particularly sex and aggression, and the ways that these might shape personality, mental disorder, unconscious motivations, neurotic fixations and resistance to change. These are the explanatory forces that have hitherto dominated psychoanalytic thinking. But how do we use this psychodynamic 'map' – as the participants in the Dialogue might call it – to

navigate behaviour change? Classical psychoanalytic models have tended to lay emphasis on helping the client to acquire insight into their unconscious motivations, but without explaining how this promotes change. This has left those trying to manage system-wide change puzzled about how insights into human motivation based on individual psychotherapy could possibly be of relevance to bringing about behaviour change other than through unconscious influence (e.g. Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders* (1957)).

The model we suggest in this chapter reflects a new and different direction in psychodynamic thinking, which is concerned with human communication and the interpersonal process by means of which we *learn to learn* about the world and the meaning of behaviour. The vicissitudes of this learning process, we suggest, can profoundly determine the degree to which we are likely to be willing to modify our behaviour on the basis of what is communicated to us (Fonagy, Luyten, & Allison, 2014).

Critically, our conceptualisation of behaviour change is essentially a relational one: before a person's priorities for action can change, we suggest, a *conversation* has to take place, a dialogue between a listener and a communicator (the agent of behaviour change). The success of this conversation depends on the qualities of the relationship between the two – particularly the capacity of the listener to be open to or listen to the communication that is designed to elicit behaviour change.

We are using the term 'conversation' here to refer to any interchange of information, ideas, etc. between people. In this sense conversation may be external (between people) or internal (inside someone's head); actual or just in fantasy; in spoken or written form; within a school, a business, a family, a country, including but in no way restricted to management or healthcare contexts.

Across all these possible settings, however, some common principles apply. In particular, we will argue in this paper that behaviour change is brought about by a particular form of *social instruction* – even when that instruction is from the self to the

self as part of an internal conversation. Behaviour only changes if the individual involved is able to accept that social instruction as relevant (to them) and valid. Under certain conditions, however, the channels for receiving and learning from social instruction become blocked, and the individual becomes closed to conversations that might direct a change in behaviour. To successfully promote behaviour change, we'll argue, we need first to identify the common factors that enable the reopening of an individual's ability to receive and accept social instruction (Fonagy & Allison, 2014; Fonagy & Luyten, in press).

To refer back to the questions covered in the Dialogue, we would suggest that what the psychoanalytic approach described here brings to the interdisciplinary approach is an understanding of the mechanism at work in linking change at the micro-level with wider meso- and macro-level change. This mechanism, we suggest, is the evolutionarily driven human capacity for epistemic trust, which is what opens the channel for communication and learning about the social world – cultural norms and expectations that govern behaviour on everything from how to use tools and technology to prevailing values and beliefs. We shall explain epistemic trust in more detail below; but in terms of the interdisciplinary approach that characterises this book, we suggest that the unique contribution of the psychoanalytic perspective we are offering lies in its conceptualisation of the significance of the individual's openness to social communication, and the insights it provides into how to stimulate and rekindle this openness to communication – necessary, in our view, if there is to be any possibility of sustained change.

Social instruction and epistemic trust

According to social anthropologists (socio-biologists) it's a mere 300,000 years since *homo sapiens*, having got up on its hind legs, had to face the challenge of passing on knowledge about how to create the tools that these freshly freed hands were capable of creating (Wilson, 1976). Tools, especially tools that can create tools, are opaque in

their purpose and require explication (hence language) to enable the learner to conserve this information for ensuing generations.

How can our children rapidly acquire the huge amount of cultural knowledge relevant to them, which has accrued over countless generations, while filtering out misleading, inaccurate or deceitful information (Gergely, 2013)? How is this kind of social instruction possible?

Based on the work of Sperber and Wilson (Sperber et al., 2010; Wilson & Sperber, 2012), we assume that openness to the reception of such social knowledge depends on *epistemic trust* – by which we mean trust that interpersonally transmitted knowledge has personal relevance and can be generalised beyond the immediate social context. If circumspection is the default position that protects the child from being misled, the young human needs to be able to identify the specific conditions under which their generalised 'epistemic vigilance' when listening to others should be suspended or inhibited.

Epistemic trust is a special kind of attentiveness, a knowledge transfer highway that enables social learning in an ever-changing social and cultural context and allows individuals to open their minds to benefit from the accumulated knowledge of their social environment (Fonagy & Allison, 2014; Fonagy & Luyten, in press; Fonagy et al., 2014). Epistemic trust designates a communication as coming from a reliable trusted source, which gives the instruction the quality called *internality*: that is, it is experienced as personally relevant, is taken on board with a sense of ownership, and is understood as being in keeping with one's own intentions.

The key to an individual's acceptance of a piece of social knowledge as relevant to them is the authority that the communicator has with that individual. We can understand this as a sort of compromise position between two extremes. On the one hand, we could in principle use our inductive and deductive reasoning capabilities to differentiate accurate from inaccurate information: but in practice this is not always possible and, perhaps more importantly, involves considerable effort. On the other hand, it would not

be wise to be uncritically receptive to everything we are told, by anyone; being selective about which individuals we invest epistemic trust in enables us to relax the natural epistemic vigilance that protects us against misinformation (whether accidentally or intentionally) from an unreliable or untrustworthy source (Sperber et al., 2010).

Natural pedagogy and the role of ostensive cues

This account of social learning and epistemic trust leans heavily on Gergely and Csibra's theory of *natural pedagogy* (Csibra & Gergely, 2009). Gergely and Csibra argue that human communication evolved to enable us to deal with the fact that we are born into a world which is bristling with objects, customs, opinions and techniques for survival that are cognitively opaque, in other words, whose function, use or rationale is not immediately obvious. This is known as the *learnability problem*, and the theory of *natural pedagogy* maintains that, in order to solve it, we evolved instincts for teaching and learning.

Natural pedagogy is a uniquely human adaptation to enable culturally relevant knowledge to be transmitted from one person to another. Csibra and Gergely propose that the teacher/communicator uses special signals, known as *ostensive cues*, to alert the recipient that what is being conveyed is relevant to them, and should be understood as a generalisable piece of cultural knowledge. For example, they have shown that infants have a species-specific sensitivity to certain nonverbal ostensive cues (Csibra & Gergely, 2006; Csibra & Gergely, 2009, 2011), including eye contact, turn-taking contingent reactivity, and the use of a special vocal tone ('motherese'). By using ostensive cues, both in infancy and beyond, the communicator explicitly recognises the listener as an agent. Receiving this special attention prompts the listener to pay special attention in turn: *ostensive cues trigger epistemic trust*. They signal that it is safe and appropriate to relax epistemic vigilance.

In particular, the knowledge conveyed in this pedagogic state acquires what we earlier called *internality*. For example, when we learn to use an implement of our culture, such

as a ‘fork’, we forget who taught us: the knowledge is internalised, and becomes our possession, our inheritance, our tradition, our identity. Of course, other information conveyed to us may also be listened to and understood: but unless it is communicated against a background of epistemic trust, we will not internalise it, and the presence of the communicator (symbolic or real) is necessary to ensure that instructions are followed.

We believe this distinction is key to thinking about behaviour change. An individual who experiences epistemic trust in relation to the communicator is far more likely to take the knowledge being conveyed on board, own it and allow it to guide their future behaviour. In fact, we postulate that regardless of the content of a particular intervention, change is unlikely to occur in the absence of epistemic trust.

The distinction also invites an obvious question for anyone interested in behaviour change. If epistemic trust in relation to a communicator plays such an important role, then how can we (re)establish it? In order to answer this question, we first need to understand how epistemic trust is established in early development, and the circumstances under which the ‘epistemic superhighway’ of social knowledge transmission may sometimes become blocked. In particular, we need to take a closer look at the process via which a caregiver responds to the infant’s signals.

Epistemic trust and attachment

In normal human development, secure attachment to a caregiver and epistemic trust are established via some of the same interpersonal processes. Studies of attachment have shown that secure attachment is driven by the caregiver’s generally sensitive responsiveness to the infant’s expressive displays, which leads the infant to feel ‘agentive’ – that is, feeling that they are being treated as an individual whose reactions matter. The behaviours that communicate this general responsiveness to the infant also act as ostensive cues: they designate the attachment figure as a reliable informant and generate the epistemic trust that forms the necessary foundation for the child to

acquire further knowledge from their caregiver. Epistemic trust and attachment have common roots.

The capacity of an individual to form attachment relationships, based on their attachment history, is also an important indicator of their ability to change their own behaviour on the basis of instruction.

- On the one hand, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the quality of an individual's attachment history predicts the extent to which they trust the communication they receive from another person, and this explains the greater flexibility of individuals with secure attachment histories. Secure attachment is associated with greater trust, insecure attachment with chronic anxious expectations of rejection or the dismissal of the importance of attachment relationships.
- On the other hand, even in adulthood, insecure attachment remains associated with disadvantages in learning from experience (Ayoub et al., 2009; Fernald, Weber, Galasso, & Ratsifandrihamanana, 2011; Goodman, Quas, & Ogle, 2010; Rieder & Cicchetti, 1989). Particularly, adult attachment insecurity is likely to be associated with a greater likelihood of cognitive closure, a lower tolerance for ambiguity, and a more pronounced tendency to dogmatic thinking (Mikulincer, 1997). Individuals who are insecure in their attachment are also more likely to save intellectual effort and adopt stereotypes (Mikulincer, 1997). The same predisposition to knowledge inflexibility is revealed by insecure individuals' tendency to make judgments on the basis of early information and to pay insufficient heed to subsequent data even if it is incompatible with the configuration first created (Green-Hennessy & Reis, 1998; Mikulincer, 1997). Insecure individuals, who fear the loss of attachment figures, also anxiously hold on to their initial constructions. They are less likely to revise their knowledge in the face of information that challenges their assumptions (Green-Hennessy & Reis, 1998; Green & Campbell, 2000; Mikulincer, 1997; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999) as if they not only had less confidence in the robustness of their bond to their attachment figure, but also feared the loss of epistemic trust.

In sum, we propose that *the epistemic connection provided to us by evolution in order for us to learn from experience appears to be partially closed to those whose attachment to their caregiver is insecure*.

Implications for the behaviour change process

In the absence of epistemic trust, the capacity for change is limited. Conversely, significant behavioural change can be facilitated by establishing epistemic trust with the listener in order to open the individual to social communication. How can we help this to happen? In brief, we need to ensure that the listener receives the key ostensive cues that facilitate epistemic trust and open the listener's mind to internalising (coming to own) the instruction as relevant to them and governing their behaviour.

This, of course, invites a question: how are the ostensive cues that mothers use in communicating with their infants relevant to adult behaviour change? Remember, the essence of an ostensive cue is to make the listener feel their own agency is respected. To open the mind of a listener, to help them internalise the communication, they have to feel that the communicator has attended to their understanding of the situation. Exactly the same principle applies in the case of adults.

For example, John Hattie is Professor of Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Over 15 years of research he synthesised over 800 meta-analyses relating to the influences on achievement in school-aged students (Hattie, 2013). No small dataset this: 60,155 studies, about 245 million students, 159,570 effect sizes, influence of some program, policy, or innovation on academic achievement in school (early childhood, elementary, high, and tertiary). Was there a set of predictors of good teaching outcomes? What makes a teacher effective? The findings were clear: it is the teacher's ability to see learning through the eyes of their students (and consequently students seeing teaching as the key to their ongoing learning) that made for effective behaviour change. The key ingredients were: the child's awareness of the learning intentions (the

objective of the lesson); knowing when a student is successful; and having sufficient understanding of the student's understanding.

To generalise to adults and other behaviour change contexts, our relational model of behaviour change, informed by psychodynamic attachment theory, suggests that:

- the communicator needs to be able to see the request for change through the eyes of the listener
- listeners need to see new the information as key to their ongoing learning about their culture

This is what establishes epistemic trust and ensures robust behaviour change.

The greatest effects on social learning occur when communicators become learners in the context of their own teaching: they are constantly aware of how they might be experienced, and on the look-out for possible changes that might improve their effectiveness, and for when a relationship is established that enables listeners to learn to teach themselves. The attributes that seem most likely to support behaviour change – self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-assessment, self-teaching – are also the developmental outcomes associated with greater resilience. When learners become their own 'teachers', behaviour change becomes sustainable.

So what can we do to trigger the epistemic openness that enables an individual to take in (internalise) social communication? We believe that the listener's experience of agentiveness through contingent responding (ostensive cueing) is the key. *The listener has to feel listened to before they can listen.* We take the view that the experience of feeling that I as listener am accurately seen – along with all the expectations, beliefs and emotional experiences that I bring to the conversation concerning change – is the critical element that enhances our ability to learn. The experience of our subjectivity being understood – of another human being having our mind in mind – is important because it establishes epistemic trust and opens us up to learning. Only then does what we learn have the potential to change our perception of our social world and our consequent behaviour.

One of the major themes of the Dialogue is how might we use models in a way that makes them both more productive and more theoretically rigorous. The psychoanalytic approach described here, based as it is on clinical experience, research findings and theoretical considerations encompassing attachment, mentalising and natural pedagogy, seeks to introduce to the interdisciplinary table a new approach to what makes the communication of social knowledge (i.e. a modification in behaviour) meaningful at the level of individual subjectivity..

Suggested further reading	
Ref 1	Bateman, A. W., & Fonagy, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of mentalizing in mental health practice*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing.
About	A comprehensive introduction to mentalizing theory and its clinical applications.
Ref 2	Fonagy, P., & Allison, E. (2014). The role of mentalizing and epistemic trust in the therapeutic relationship. *Psychotherapy, 51*(3), 372-380.
About	This sets out more fully the theory of epistemic trust in the context of therapeutic change.
Ref 3	Gergely, G. (2013). Ostensive communication and cultural learning: The natural pedagogy hypothesis. In J. Metcalfe & H. S. Terrace (Eds.), *Agency and Joint Attention* (pp. 139-151). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
About	This is a valuable outline of the Theory of Natural Pedagogy, which underpins our thinking on epistemic trust.
Ref 4	Wilson, D. & Sperber, D. (2012). *Meaning and relevance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
About	This provides a full account of the latest thinking on communication and the transmission of knowledge and beliefs.

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