

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE “HELPER” AND “THE HELPED”

(This is the first try to get some insight into this relationship. If it becomes clear that it is worthwhile, I can try to make a more extended version.)

1. The problem

It seems clear to me that very often there is something wrong in the relationship between a helper and (a) helped. Both are unfree, what is done is often frustrated by the relationship. This is, I suppose, true for all the relations in this atmosphere, between doctors and patients, social workers and clients, nurses and patients, ministers and priest and members of the parish. So it seems worthwhile to have a look what is wrong and how maybe things could be changed.

2. The traditional relationship

Originally the relation between a person in a helping profession and the person who was helped was very clearly structured, even in two senses.

- (a) Society was clearly horizontally divided in different classes. The “boundaries” between the classes were in the same time “walls”, which made it impossible that mimesis, desires, rivalry would come across.
- (b) Society was too very clearly vertically divided, in that sense, that every profession had its own identity, customs, manner of clothing, places where they lived, and so on. Again, there were “boundaries” between the professions, which were in the same time “walls” which made it (more or less) impossible that mimesis, desires, rivalry would come across.

When the helper and the helped came from different classes, both were protected in two manners. This was mostly the case. When they came from the same class, which was by far the minority of the cases, they were in any case in one manner defended. Both were free, both kept their human dignity, although the one helped and the other was helped. The relationship could be very personal, and in the same time very free.

To put this in a diagram:

3. The decay of the traditional relationship

Happily the traditional relationship did not yet totally disappear, but mostly it did. Both, the horizontal and the vertical division are disappearing. It happens in the whole of culture, and so it happens here. That means, that the boundaries between the helper and the helped don't function any longer. The consequence is, that both become unfree. The helpers become very consciously helpers, that helped engage too in this power game. One of the possibilities of the helped is of course to show that the helper is not worth anything, by preventing to be helped. The efficiency, the credibility and very soon the identity of the helper, and so of the helped, is destroyed. This process is going on around us. In fact the external mediation of olden times is replaced by internal mediation, ending up again and again, in metaphysical desire, in the desire to have the being of the other, so frustrating every functional relationship.

Of course this can be worked out much broader. A factor which can be important for the helping professions is too, that many of the helpers nowadays are coming from lower class origin, being in the internal mimesis with middle class people, of whom they are the helper, so making difficult things still more difficult.

Again in a diagram:

In the end, there only remains the power fight, the rivals coming nearer and nearer to each other, in finally sadomasochistic relationships, in which the position changes and changes, the helper only having the better chances, when the suffering for/or the helped is subjectively so big, that he has to remain in the masochistic situation. In how far real help is then still possible is a big question. How much helping work, especially of psychiatrists and social workers, is in this manner frustrated?

4. Are there other possibilities?

If nothing could be said further about this relationship, it would in fact mean the end of the old professions. Then the power game will go on and deepen, and in the end nobody at all

can be helped any longer. I have the impression; many social workers have already this impression, being useless for everybody, including themselves. And only social workers?

I suppose, there are two possibilities:

- (a) The horizontal structural lines are probably hopelessly passé, and maybe rightly so. Out of several reasons it is of no use whatever even to try to renew them. But maybe, we have a chance with the vertical ones.

That means that maybe it is possible to renew the professional identity of the “helper”. How could this be done?

The big condition is, that the “helper” has a relationship with an external mediator, a mediator, who (or which) influences him, with whom (which) he is in the mimesis, but on whom (which) he has no influence. As I put it in my public lecture, that is the condition to have free relations, relations in freedom. The external mediator can be culture as such, the honour of the profession (very difficult for new professions ..) a code, a personal relationship with a teacher, humanity, God.

As soon as we live in such an external mediation, we do our work out of duty. It is in that case impossible, to call yourself a helper any longer. You are a doctor, a social worker or whatever, but never, never a helper. And so the other never is the helped. He has the right that the other is doing his duty. So both are free and absolutely necessary condition that something is achieved in the relationship is established.

To put it again in a diagram:

I hesitate if I make the other
as big as the professional man/
woman, or smaller, he is
smaller, insofar as he is
dependent but the other is as
dependent! Both need from each
other every possibility each
has to achieve together as good
as possible the work they are
engaged in. The freedom, out of
the external mediation, of the
professional man/woman, is by
the mimesis transmitted to the other.

(b) The second possibility is in fact a special case of the first. It is again the possibility to have an external mediator, being in the mimesis with Christ, with Jesus.

In that case we do not need the structural boundary, because being in the mimesis with Jesus means not to desire. Because we need structure and structural boundaries, differences, to prevent the destruction of relationships by desire, we don't need them when the desiring, of power, success, whatever, is over.

When I make again a diagram:

The professional man/woman, being in the mimesis of Christ, is in the diagram a point, not a line. He is not desiring, not building up. The relationship with the other begins, he/she being humble, in the free, biblical sense, the other still being proud (in his fears, in his expectations how to get along with this professional and so on). The professional man/woman, being free in his/her humbleness, humble in his/her freedom, gives the other the possibility to be in the mimesis with him/her. This is internal mediation, but a good, not a dangerous one, because there is no desire and so no power fight. The work can be done together in a free relationship, not spoiled by rivalry or whatever.