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Can Psychotherapy Help the World – Narcissism or Humbleness?

The answers to the question formulated in the title of this speech can be located on a continuum from narcissism to humbleness, from optimism to pessimism. They should also take account of the ways psychotherapy perceives an individual and the world and especially its complexity.

The obvious starting point of reflection upon whether psychotherapy can help the world is the definition of psychotherapy. The narrow definition, according to which psychotherapy is a method of healing through psychological techniques, limits its use and range, whereas considering psychotherapy as a method of personal development makes its range wider.

The answer to the question whether psychotherapists can help the world also depends on the therapeutic approach that they represent – it is easier to imagine that systemic therapists have better chances in that case since they perceive the world as a kind of a system they can try to shape. One can come across situations (unfortunately not in Poland) when systemic therapists work as counsellors who help with solving the crises of state institutions or big corporations. The identity of a therapist and, most importantly, the degree of their narcissism and sense of omnipotence, seem to be equally crucial in case of his/her judgments regarding his/her capabilities of helping the world.

Personally I am highly sceptical and even disapprove of the conviction, according to which a therapist has a right to tell what others should think, how should they live, what the world looks like and how it should look like. The subject of psychotherapy is not the external world, but the internal world. This is the one, on which the dialogue maintaining freedom and autonomy of a patient should focus.

Demanding meditations on whether we, therapists, can help the tormented world, push me toward pessimism, although I wish it was the other way.