

GESTALT THERAPY

Frederick (Fritz) Perls

Autobiography: *In And Out The Garbage Pail.*

Gestalt Psychology compared to Gestalt Therapy

Holistic

In Gestalt therapy, we are working . . . here to promote the growth process and develop the human potential. We do not talk of instant joy, instant sensory awareness, instant cure. The growth process is a process that takes time. We can't just snap our fingers and say, "come on, let's be gay! Let's do this!" You can turn on if you want to with LSD, and jazz it up, but that has nothing to do with the sincere work of that approach to psychiatry which I call Gestalt therapy. In therapy, we have not only to get through the role-playing. We also have to fill in the holes in the personality to make the person whole and complete again. And again, as before, this can't be done by the turner-onners. In Gestalt therapy, we have a better way, but it is no magic short-cut. You don't have to be on a couch or in a Zendo for twenty or thirty years,

but you have to invest yourself, and it takes time to grow. (Perls, 1969, p 2)

"All life and all behavior are governed by the process which scientists call homeostasis, and which the layman calls adaptation." (Perls, 1973, p 4.) *self regulation*

For the individual to satisfy his needs, to close the gestalt [i.e, to make something complete and whole], to move on to other business, he must be able to sense what he needs, and he must know how to manipulate himself and his environment, for even the purely physiological needs can only be satisfied through the interaction of the organism and the environment. (Perls, 1973, p 8)

We include thinking to include a number of activities—dreaming, imagining, theorizing, anticipating—making maximum use of our capacity to manipulate *symbols*. For the sake of brevity, let us call all of this *fantasy* activity rather than thinking. Fantasy activity, in the broad sense in which I am using the term, is that activity of the human being which through the use of symbols tends to reproduce reality on a

diminished scale. As activity involving the use of symbols, it derives from reality, since symbols themselves are initially derived from reality.

Symbols begin as labels for objects and processes; they proliferate and grow into labels for labels and labels for labels for labels. They symbols may not even be approximated in reality but they start in reality. Perls, 1973, 11

Through his experience of himself on the three levels of fantasizing, play-acting, and doing, he will come to an understanding of himself.

Psychotherapy then becomes not an excavation of the past, in terms of repression, Oedipal conflicts, and primal scenes, but an experience in living in the present. In this living situation, the patient learns for himself how to integrate his thoughts, feelings, and actions not only while he is in the consulting room, but during the course of his everyday life. The neurotic obviously does not feel like a whole person. He feels as if his conflicts are unfinished business were tearing him to shreds. But with his recognition that he is, being human, a whole, comes the ability to regain that sense of wholeness which is his birthright. (Perls, 1973, p 15)

Gestalt Therapy is very much a phenomenological oriented form of psychotherapy.

"Life is as plain as the nose on your face when you are willing to stay with that which is presently clear, moving from one moment of actual experience to the next, discovering something new in each, something which moves forward, developing the theme of its own movement and culminating in illuminations which were inaccessible in the beginning." (Polster and Polster, 1973, p 46)

[Introjection] is a process of assimilating. . . .Concepts, facts, standards of behavior, morality, and the ethical, esthetic or political values—all these come to us originally from the outside world. There is nothing in our minds that does not come from the environment. . . .But if we simply accept them whole-hog and uncritically, on someone else's say-so, or because they are fashionable or safe or traditional or unfashionable or dangerous or revolutionary—they lie heavily on us. . . .I am not saying that this process of swallowing whole does not occasionally serve a useful purpose. . . .But if he deludes himself into thinking that he has really learned anything

from his cramming, he will be in for a bad shock." Perls, 1973, p 33)

Techniques

"The gestalt therapist repeatedly and frequently asks such questions as what are you aware of; what are you doing' what are you feeling' or what do you want."

Polster and Polster, 1974, p 207

The Issue of Past and Future

"The dimensions of past and future give recognition to that which once was and that which some day may be, thus forming psychological boundaries for present experiences and psychological context which provides the figural present a background upon which to exist. The paradox is that, while a concern with past and future is obviously central to psychological functioning, to behave as though one were indeed in the past or future, as many do, pollutes the living possibility of existence. Only in the present experience can the individual's sensory and motor systems function and it is from the perspective of these functions that present experience can be palpable and lively." Polster and Polster, 1974, p 8

Aboutism

A common problem people experience: They "talk *about* something without sacrificing the immediacy of experience. The trouble with aboutism is that it can become a poisonous addiction; one is likely to get stuck in it, like getting caught in a revolving door." Polster and Polster, 1974, p 9

The Objective of Gestalt Therapy

To increase awareness

"Gestalt therapy is an exploration rather than a direct attempt to change behavior." (Yontef and Jacobs, 2014, p 317)

Here are a few common Gestalt Therapy strategies

Experiments

Empty Chair Technique

Youtube.com: Fritz Perls A Session with College Students

Dreams

Self-Disclosure

Body Awareness

Group Therapy

The Hot Seat