CHAPTER 2

THE PERSONS IN RELATION PERSPECTIVE

Sources and Synthesis

Key words and themes: innate need for companionship, tenderness, interest-rapport, play, love and its vicissitudes, development of a social disposition, the taboo on tenderness, psychotherapy as reconciliation, internalisation, inner world, ideal object and central ego, rejecting object and anti-libidinal ego (internal saboteur), exciting object and libidinal ego, dissociation, passive tolerance of contradictions, true freedom.

INTRODUCTION

This second paper moves towards a synthesis of the contributions of three great 20th century Scots: the philosopher John Macmurray (1891–1976), the psychiatrist and relational psychotherapist Ian Suttie (1889–1935), and the psychoanalyst Ronald Fairbairn (1889–1965). Here I discuss the contributions of Suttie, indicate briefly the significance of Fairbairn’s contributions, and identify some key themes of the emerging synthesis. Reflecting on progress so far as if it were a football match, I would say that at this point we’re about two thirds of the way through the first half.

Ian Suttie created an interpersonal and socio-cultural psychology in the 1920s and 30s, one which has been unjustly neglected yet is widely influential. A longer version of this second paper was first published in The Legacy of Fairbairn and Sutherland: psychoanalytic approaches (Routledge, 2005), edited by Jill and David Scharff. The section of it omitted here is the summary of the ideas of John Macmurray, which are fully covered in the previous chapter. The third paper, which follows this one, is concerned with Ronald Fairbairn’s revolutionary account of the interpersonal nature of the basic inner situation, and takes further forward the task of articulating the synthesis.

Macmurray, Suttie, and Fairbairn all served in and were affected by World War I. They all drew deeply (and in different ways) on Scottish Christian traditions. They benefited from the Scottish educational tradition of training in philosophy, which enabled them to challenge Freud’s thinking with confidence and authority, without devaluing his contributions. Lest we might imagine that Ian Suttie is the odd man out, the one who has gate-crashed the party, we must note that it was on Suttie’s book, The Origins of Love and Hate (Suttie, 1935) that John Macmurray based some of his own thinking about persons in relation. Although Fairbairn makes no reference to Suttie in his published work, we know from his biographer, John D. (Jock) Sutherland, and from Fairbairn’s friend and analysand, Harry
Guntrip, that he was influenced by Suttie’s writing. Harry Guntrip records that Fairbairn said to him: ‘Suttie really had something important to say’ (Guntrip, 1971, p. 24). We learn from Fairbairn’s daughter, Ellinor Fairbairn Birtles, that he and Macmurray knew each other and may have collaborated, and we know that Harry Guntrip was deeply influenced by both of them and attempted to integrate their ideas in his own synthesis.

The last 20 years have seen renewed recognition of the contributions of Macmurray, Suttie and Fairbairn. Their works have been republished. There have been critical reassessments of Fairbairn and Macmurray, and ground-breaking biographies of Ronald Fairbairn by Jock Sutherland, and of John Macmurray by John Costello. Their perspectives are now influencing thinking and practice worldwide. John Bowlby described Ian Suttie’s book as:

a robust and lucid statement of a paradigm that now leads the way,

adding:

his ideas never died: they have smouldered on, at length to burst into flame … The Origins of Love and Hate stands out as a milestone. (Suttie, 1988, pp. xv, xvii)

THE CONTRIBUTION OF IAN SUTTIE

I am deeply indebted to Dorothy Heard for her painstaking excavations and lucid account of Ian Suttie’s life and ideas (Heard, 1988). Ian Dishart Suttie was born in Glasgow in 1889, the third child of a family doctor. He graduated in medicine in 1914 and worked as a psychiatrist in Govan before joining the Royal Army Medical Corps. He saw service in France and in what is now Iraq. After working at Gartnavel Hospital in Glasgow, and hospitals in Perth and Fife, he became a psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic in London in 1928, continuing to work there until his untimely death in 1935. His wife Jane was also a psychotherapist there. They shared an interest in the ideas of the Hungarian analyst Sandor Ferenczi whose work Jane translated. Ian Suttie was by all accounts a vigorous, kind, brilliant, and intellectually combative man who was deeply missed by his colleagues. In his obituary, J. R. Rees, Medical Director of the Tavistock Clinic, describes his boyish gusto, and his passionate advocacy of ideas. Dorothy Heard quotes Jock Sutherland as saying that

Ian Suttie could be assertive and confrontational in a way that was not always in his own best interests. (Heard, 1988)

I will offer a summary of Suttie’s ideas, followed by close-ups of a selection of his core themes. Essentially, Suttie was engaged in an impassioned – and (sadly) one-sided argument with Freud, challenging Freud’s instinct theory and replacing it with one based on the innate need for companionship and love. Suttie’s only book, The Origins of Love and Hate, was written in a great hurry. His themes criss-cross, but the author’s insight and passion carry the reader along. I have spent several