

PSYKOSYNTES I FOKUS

Piero Ferrucci



Psykosyntes i Fokus (Psychosynthesis in Focus)

Stiftelsen PsykosyntesAkademin, Stockholm

Conversation with Piero Ferrucci

Piero Ferrucci (PF)

Ann Marie Lamb (AML)

(Text transcribed from the video recording, April 2019.)

<https://youtu.be/maaRXu8gk-4>

AML: Welcome Piero Ferrucci! Welcome to PsykosyntesAkademin in Stockholm.

PF: Thank you Ann Marie.

AML: We are so happy to have you with us here today. You are a Storyteller, so why don't you share with us the story of Psychosynthesis, where it came from, its source, and how it can play an important role in society today.

PF: That is always an embarrassing question, but I like embarrassing questions, so that's ok. Psychosynthesis is so wide. It is about the art of living and the art of living depends on each individual person. We stress uniqueness in Psychosynthesis. We are very, very different from each other. And that is what I stress also in my teaching. We have to be very wary of diagnosis and of categories. *"You belong to this type, you have this pathology, you are this or that way."* Those are just boxes and to put people in a box is dangerous, because then it's hard to get them out of the box again.

But in general, I would say that Psychosynthesis is about the art of living, of living well, of learning how to relate with others, of exploring your potentialities, of love and intelligence, and creativity and health and beauty. And therefore also work on what stops all of that. Which often are quite a few factors. And that work can take many forms. It can be in the form of Education if it starts early enough. But if it late, you can call it therapy, you can call it counselling. It takes many different names. In Italy we call it auto-formazione, self-formation or self-education.

Originally, Assagioli called it psychagogy, a word that Plato used in the Republic because Plato thought that you could learn... psychagogy means managing your soul. We don't come ready-made in this world and there are many things that we can learn. We are not born perfect, we have deficits, we have functions that are not fully developed and life itself presents to us in the form of difficulties, of choices, of enigmas, of mysteries, of uncertainties and we have to deal with that. And in dealing with that we can just curse it and rebel against it, or we can see it as a learning opportunity.

In Psychosynthesis we see life as a school and it is a very hard school. "It is a school of hard knocks" as somebody called it, because even in the greatest difficulties we can discover values and treasures.

There was a researcher several years ago that said that, in the moment of our births, it doesn't just take place by itself but it is the baby that makes a decision. "Now is the time". There was no follow-up on that research so I don't know whether that was a phantasy or if it was confirmed, but I like the thought that there is a human being in its very first stages who makes the decision to

come into this world. And it may be welcoming or maybe not welcoming at all, or something in between.

And then, little by little, our subjective senses that sometimes we have no choices. We have to follow what other people tell us. We are under constriction. We have to follow other people's will and that often is quite unpleasant. Of course we have to learn some form of discipline and it's hard to have our own discipline if we have not first learned to follow someone else's discipline. That is why there are schools. But the discovery of one's own will, of one's own autonomy and therefore of one's own freedom. That I am free to choose, first of all my own ideas, my own values, my direction in life, that is paramount. And if that will, that capacity to choose is inhibited, then we don't feel at ease.

We made a lot of progress outwardly. In the beginning of the last millennium, there was the "Magna Carta". That was a document that stated that "*habeas corpus*", you have your own body, you are free to move, as you want, to go wherever you want and nobody can put you in prison unless there are reasons that one has to demonstrate. There is no absolute power that can tell you that "*now I put you in prison*". That was a major step forward. And of course there were many more steps towards democracy, towards civil rights, towards your rights being guaranteed. Even when you have committed a crime, you can be defended towards deciding torture cannot be admitted. Those are all conquests of civilisation. So today you go in many countries in Europe and elsewhere, you go into an electoral booth and you make a mark on the political party that you decide and you are on your own and that is a decision, that is a choice. That is a conquest. Or you sign a contract, you sign and you agree your will to do that. Or you sign a piece of paper that we call a check and you give a lot of money to buy a house or something like that. Those are free choices. If you go in the booth and say "*yes I put a sign on, but somebody told me I should do it that way.*" People are going to call the police, because that is against the law. We are free; we are free people, at least in principle.

So we have a considerable degree of outward freedom, but we don't have that much inner freedom. Because whereas we don't have the state police or the king's soldiers all around us that threaten us, we have our inner phantoms and we have our fears and worst phantasies, so we may very well still be prisoners of all that stuff. And that is the battle for freedom now. And many people in our culture deny that there is a free will, but I believe it's not so. And I can it empirically in the work that I do for people to find the possibility to choose and to see that they can choose. They can choose their own attitude, not just what they do but what they think and where they emphasize their value. "*Will I emphasize the value of love and justice and freedom or will I put the accent on fear and hostility and selfish gain or whatever that may be*" that is a choice that we have. And if we don't have it, it will be part of our own Psychosynthesis process to regain it.

AML: So Piero, how would you describe the uniqueness of Psychosynthesis in the field of psychology?

PF: That's not so easy, because everybody is learning from everybody in the field of psychology. And saying it or not saying it, everybody is using a technique that other people have used and I think that's great. Assagioli himself saw Psychosynthesis, not only as a school of psychology of its own, but also as a way of bringing together all kinds of findings that psychology and pedagogy and the neurosciences can give us. And in this, I must say that he was a precursor. I have written an article on this subject and went to about a dozen findings of neuroscience and showing in this article that many of those things Assagioli had already said, although he had said it in a more empirical way and not such a systematic way.

I'll just make an example. If you are, let's say 50 or 60 and you are a doctor in this country or in any country really, you have been taught in the university that the brain does not change, it remains the same after maturation. It remains the same until you become old and then it degenerates but there is no way you can change the brain because it remains immutable throughout our lives.

Now, about 20 years ago, the tide changed radically. Now many people are talking about the plasticity of the brain, how the brain-circuits can change and how we can create different circuits in our brain, voluntarily. Assagioli himself was talking about the plasticity of the unconscious. There is a big dimension of the unconscious, which we can train and teach at will. Even such simple things as learning how to drive, that goes into the plastic or mouldable unconscious and then we know it. But the unconscious can be used also to learn much higher and more beautiful things than just learning how to drive. We can use it to learn how to be kind or how to enjoy beauty or how to be compassionate or how to affirm ourselves and so on. So that is an example.

But I would not be telling the truth if I said that only Psychosynthesis has been talking about this, because many other people have. What is peculiar about Psychosynthesis perhaps is that it tries to put together the insights of contemporary psychology (and there is a lot in contemporary psychology, Assagioli died in 1974 and since then many more discoveries have been made, many of which confirm some of this original insight) and Psychosynthesis tries to combine that with some forms of ageless wisdom that has been around for centuries.

That has more to do with, what we call the vertical dimension, the spiritual dimension or maybe it is better to use a more technical word like transpersonal, which goes beyond the realms of the individual and has more to do with the mystery, the mystery of life and the meaning of life, with beauty and with awe and with the sacred and with ecstasy and with illumination.

You can function very well in that realm but you may not be very good in functioning in everyday life. Or you may be good in functioning in everyday-life but you may not be inspired and at some point you may get depressed and you may get bored and you may feel that you are closed in and you may feel the need for more inspiration and that's where the transpersonal comes in and that's why there has to be more than one dimension in our work. Sometimes in contemporary psychology, people go too much into protocol and diagnosis and step 1, step 2, step 3 kind of thinking and rigid diagnosis and it does not work like that. What heals people is the meeting between two people, the I-thou relationship and the miracle of two people meeting. It's magic and that magic cannot easily be described in words or restricted in protocols.

AML: So, tell us a bit more Piero. With the challenges that the world is changing today, what could be the most unique contribution that Psychosynthesis could make to the different systems, the different fields – it could be psychology, political, social, educational – and what is the potential of Psychosynthesis in the world today and for the future?

PF: Yes, well I think we are living in dangerous times, which at the same time have a lot of beauty and potential, but there is a lot of unrest going on and maybe because I am getting older, I am realising that values should not be taken for granted.

Values like freedom or justice or compassion or care for other human beings are not necessarily given. They are not there for sure. They are not a guarantee. We have to discover them again and again or we may lose them, we may lose sight of them and therefore fall into being barbarians. Evolution is possible but *involution* is also possible. I believe that ultimately we will evolve but it is also possible for a few centuries to *involve* and to become much worse than we have been, to unlearn things.

So I see one of the functions of Psychosynthesis is to preserve and to remind us that we have values and values are inside us. There is even a recent neuroscience study, actually several studies, that show that words like no or like danger or like poverty, illness, death, illicit all kinds of negative reactions in the brain. So I apologise if I give that to your brain now, but it was to explain.

I am not saying that we should not use those words, but use them with care. On the contrary, affirming some basic value within has enormous effects in the brains, which can be seen in real time and in our whole physiology.

If I am asked to think of the values that are personally most important for me, and I think about them and I affirm them, I am going to change, instantly. And, as I said that a few moments ago, I saw that you were breathing already in a different way. So, this has very short-range and of course very long-range effects that values are there, values like beauty.

Beauty is a very strange value because one can say that there is no value that is as affirmed as beauty now in our culture. You know that in America people spend more on cosmetics than on education. But that may be a limited way of defining beauty. When I talk about beauty, I talk about the awe in front of nature, I talk about the beauty in art and I talk about the inner beauty of people. And that is not taught in schools for instance and yet children would be very open to that. And that has enormous effects. Even hospitals could spend much less money. For instance, if you have a window and you could see trees from your hospital room, you would need less analgesic, medicines and you recover much sooner and you complain less with the nurse. And you will go home sooner and the hospital will spend less money on you and you'll feel better. And that is all because there is a tree that you can see from your window instead of just bricks, which may also be beautiful but may be a little harder to appreciate.

And children, this has all been demonstrated, they will learn better and quicker and their academic performance will be higher if they can see trees and green from the windows of their classroom. That is just one example, I could mention a lot.

I'll just mention one other. People who have cultural activities, who go to concerts and movies and to theatres, live longer and they go less to psychotherapy and they are healthier and they have greater satisfaction in life. Why? Because they are more open to beauty, that can be taught. And that is another value, Beauty and of course also, maybe even the most important one, which is Kindness. It used to... this is a big revolution in science, because up to a few decades ago most scientists and our culture thought that we are all selfish and at war with each other, that we try to prevail on each other, that we are not inherently kind and altruistic. But, the opposite has been found!

There is a care circuit in the brain through which I naturally care for people. If I see somebody in need, the care circuit will be activated and I will probably, possibly take care of that person. We are built that way. Children are naturally kind and friendly to each other, most of the time. Of course, we are also aggressive, of course we are also selfish and cruel, but not only that. We are born to be kind and to care for each other and to support each other. And in fact, that is exactly why we survived. We are very resilient as a species. We survived for such a long time and we did so, not because we were at war with each other, we did so because we were supporting each other.

AML: Thank you – thank you Piero for being here with us today and for sharing all your knowledge and wisdom with us. From the bottom of my heart, thank you very much.

PF: Thank you and I am grateful to you - and as Blake once said, "*gratitude is heaven itself*".

...