

Life and Work of Graham Barnes (1936–2020)

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> Abstract • We provide an overview of the life and work of vGraham Barnes, who was strongly influenced by Gregory Bateson, and who collaborated with several other cyberneticians and constructivists, in particular, Gordon Pask and Heinz von Foerster. After having left the USA for Sweden, he commuted between Stockholm and Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Rijeka, where he taught his own integration of second-order cybernetics and psychotherapy.

Life

« 1 » Graham Barnes was born on 24 October 1936, in Creswell, North Carolina, USA. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Mid-Atlantic Christian University in 1959, his Master of Arts from Abilene Christian University in 1964, and his bachelor's degree in Sacred Theology from Harvard University in 1967. He also studied fields other than theology, including social psychology with Gordon Allport, sociology with Talcott Parsons and Robert Bellah, and political science and philosophy with John Rawls. After Harvard he went to Boston University, where he worked on his PhD and was a teaching assistant in social ethics (Barnes 2005).

« 2 » As a direct result of Martin Luther King's death in 1968, he set up a voluntary association called Fellowship for Racial and Economic Equality (1969–73) to work with segregated white institutions to overcome institutional and personal racism and economic inequality. The projects combined group process, group therapy and problem solving with educators and leaders from about 40 states in the USA and from other countries, including South Africa. Barnes surmounted his religious vocation and explored new ways of talking and of enriching the vocabularies of individuals, of families, and of groups, and to study psychosocial problems. He set aside religious, ethnic and national identities, and came to accept himself as a gay individual.

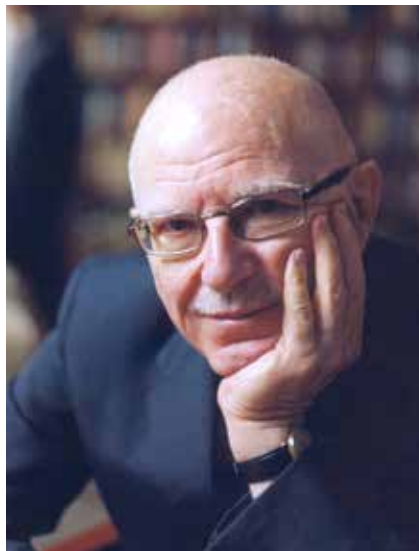
« 3 » In 1971, he received the psychotherapy certificate from the American Group Psychotherapy Association and in

1972 the certificate of competency as a clinical instructor and supervisor from the International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA). In transactional analysis (TA) circles, he became best known for his study of three TA schools (Barnes 1977), after the death of Eric Berne, who had founded TA (Berne 1961). He served on the ITAA Board of Trustees for most of the 1970s, including a term as Vice President. He also brought to the ITAA his projects on racial equality and used script theory in his work on white man's racism. From 1975 to 1990, he taught as a TA teacher and supervisor at different psychotherapy institutes in England, France, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany,

Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Yugoslavia, Norway, Sweden, Panama, Canada and the United States.

« 4 » Deeply committed to the profession of psychotherapy, and concerned about its politics, he founded the Southeast Institute in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a psychotherapy institute that was set to keep the social and the personal connected, describing social problems as personal problems and personal problems as social problems. Southeast was also the site of the first accredited graduate degree program in psychotherapy, an effort towards affirming the autonomy of psychotherapy as a profession. In 1977, he invited Gregory Bateson to the institute to present the inaugural Eric Berne lecture in social psychotherapy (Bateson 1997). After leaving theology, this became the second major turning point in his career (Barnes 1997). Influenced by Bateson, he decided to focus on the study of epistemology proposed by second-order cybernetics, constructivism and social constructionism to reframe his understanding of TA (Barnes 1995, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c) and psychotherapy (Barnes 1993, 1994) and to further enrich his efforts to reduce human cruelty and humiliation, and to alleviate suffering. While focusing, in particular, on Bateson's work, he established close collaboration with other seminal cybernetic and constructivist thinkers, including Heinz von Foerster, Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, Gordon Pask, Ranulph Glanville, Mary Catherine and Nora Bateson.

« 5 » If Bateson came from a background of atheism and saw the need for re-



Graham Barnes in the office of his apartment in Stockholm, 2006.

ligion as a corrective to a scientific attitude, Barnes came from a religious background and saw the need for science to correct the religious attitude. If Bateson saw the aesthetics of religion, Barnes saw the aesthetics of science. Both of them opened up possibilities (each in his own way) for a new kind of unity of science, religion and aesthetics.

« 6 » Many years (from 1975 on) of lecturing and leading seminars in Europe acclimatized Barnes to European life and culture. When he, a politically sensitive gay man, could no longer openly and freely pursue his civic and professional convictions in the political climate of the Reagan era, he accepted an invitation to move to Sweden – a passion of his ever since his graduate studies with Scandinavian students. In 1983, he moved to Stockholm, where he found better life conditions for his gay identity and became naturalized as a Swedish citizen in 1996. Professionally, he became very well known as a licensed psychotherapist by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare and as a mentor, consultant and coach for several Scandinavian organizations such as the Norwegian Sport Federation (1979–1983), Corporate Strategic Planning Team, Pharmacia AB, Uppsala (1981–1983), Hydro Aluminium A/S, Oslo (1984–1996), Swedbank, Stockholm (1995–2002), IRIS Development Centre (1991–2001), Danderyd Hospital (2000–2007), SAP (2004–2008), Mole Genetics AS (2006–2007), and Karolinska University Hospital (2007–2010).

« 7 » His range of interests in communication, epistemology, hermeneutics and relationships remained broad – from participant observer of groups as voluntary associations that worked to change public policy for the better, to psychosocial studies of racial attitudes and opinions (Barnes 1974), to studying the harmful results of theory-centered psychotherapy (Barnes 1994), to monitoring the electrical/cognitive activity of the brain during the dialogue of clinical hypnosis (Barnes & Dabić-Jeftić 1993). He explored the nexus between the personal and the social and the influences of specific ideas on shaping systems of varying degrees of complexity.

« 8 » As a teacher and supervisor of psychotherapists, he began regular trips to Belgrade, from 1979 to 1984, and from 1984 to 1997 he commuted frequently from

Stockholm to Zagreb, where we started our close collaboration that lasted until his death. As a guest lecturer at the Department of Psychiatry, University of Zagreb, he was co-founder and head of School of Psychotherapy Cybernetics (1990–1997) (Možina 1993a, 1993b). He taught his own integration of cybernetics with psychotherapy, which conceived of hypnosis as the communicative condition for psychotherapy. During the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995), he helped many Yugoslav psychotherapists (not only from Croatia, but also from Bosnia and Serbia), who were victims of war, to emigrate to other European countries, provided free therapy sessions, raised funds, and continued to work to resolve ethnic conflicts that arose during the Yugoslav crisis.



Graham Barnes at the Sigmund Freud University in Ljubljana on 28 September 2019. Photo by Dobrin Tav ar.

Impact of his work

« 9 » In 1994, at the height of the destruction, hate and intolerance, Barnes, in Zagreb, published the book *Justice, Love and Wisdom Linking Psychotherapy to Second-Order Cybernetics* (Barnes 1994), in which he collected the most important essays and lectures he had delivered in the School of Psychotherapy Cybernetics and elsewhere from 1985 till 1994. As is evident from the title of the book, its scope goes far beyond the field of psychotherapy:

“Norbert Wiener proposed that every scientist occasionally turn around and ask ‘Now that I have come to a result, what problems have I solved?’ During the period of the development and writing of these essays I have been trying to reflect on

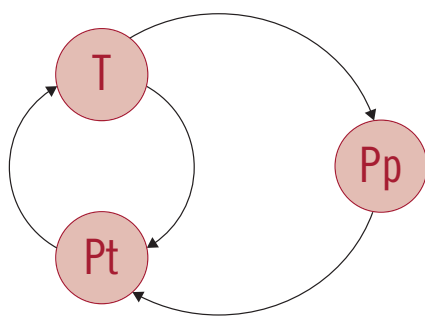


Figure 1 • The circularities among Theory (T), Psychopathology (Pp) and Psychotherapy (Pt) (Barnes 2002a: 13)

how we solve problems in psychotherapy and how psychotherapy solves problems in living. These essays are the result and that brings me to ask retrospectively Wiener's question about what problem was solved for me by linking psychotherapy to second-order cybernetics [...] The problems I have been working with, which constitute antitheses to the generative trilogy of justice, love and wisdom, are indifference or hate, injustice or unfairness and purposive or intentional thinking.” (Barnes 1994: 1)

«10» The result of linking psychotherapy to second-order cybernetics was the new concept, research project and clinical application of what Barnes called “psychotherapy of psychotherapy” or “second-order psychotherapy,” which is “turning psychotherapy on itself to bite its own tail” (Barnes 1994: 130). He raised questions about what psychotherapy theories do to psychotherapists, by shaping their observations and descriptions of their experiences. Barnes experienced a breakthrough when he, as a teacher in different countries, became aware that the roles (in the sense of diagnosis) that his students attributed to clients' behavior were constructed by the students and were not in accordance with his assessment. He asked himself:

“How was I seeing patients from within the world of theory? In seeing this way of speaking, what was I not seeing? [...] From that point I began to look at theory as invention rather than as discovery.” (Barnes 1994: 133)

«11» After the war and break-up of Yugoslavia, Barnes acted as an advisor to the pro-democracy think tank, Foundation

2020, which helped political, civic and business leaders to promote democracy in Croatia. The foundation also created idealized designs and experimental scenarios for the country's future. He was one of the founders of the School for Cybernetics and Systemic Therapy in Rijeka, Croatia, and guest lecturer at the Sigmund Freud University in Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he held annual lectures and workshops for more than 10 years, up until 2019.

«12» During the 1990s Barnes continued his research on second-order psychotherapy, Pask's Conversation Theory (Barnes 1993, 2001; Pask 1975a, 1975b, 1987, 1992, 1993) and the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty (1979, 1989, 1999) and linked them to his PhD thesis in the School of Social Science and Planning at the Faculty of the Constructed Environment, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia (Barnes 2002a). His findings are relevant, not only for psychotherapy, but for all “talking cures” in the broader sense (for example, psychological and medical counseling, clinical social work, etc.). From the second-order perspective, all theories are constructed and all knowing is created through participation in communication. However, these human constructions also shape us; the influence is circular, not one-sided.

«13» In his PhD thesis, he showed how theory-centered psychotherapy, which neglects epistemological and hermeneutical aspects, creates psychopathology (he used, as examples, schizophrenia, homosexuality and alcoholism) and then psychopathology determines the psychotherapy, guiding, often unconsciously, the selection of concepts, topics and ideas in the discourse between the psychotherapist and the client (Figure 1):

“The received view, which I am arguing against, is that psychopathology determines the psychotherapy, guiding, often unconsciously, the selection of concepts, topics and ideas in the discourse between the psychotherapist and the patient ...”

«14» For Barnes the psychopathology is not a given but, rather,

“is derived within the context of psychotherapy, through the application of the theory. The relationship between psychopathology and the theory of psychotherapy is circular, in strict contrast to

the linear dependence of the received view. Thus, theory (T) creates psychotherapy (Pt) just as psychotherapy makes theory; psychotherapy-theory (Pt-T) brings forth psychopathology (Pp) just as psychopathology gives rise to psychotherapy-theory (Pt-T).” (Barnes 2002a: 13)

«15» Theory is about “making patterns” and thus amounts to simplification, which is why any theoretical psychopathology “cannot fully account for the full variety of human activities.” This causes psychopathologists to widen the range of application of their theory, i.e., adding complexity, which, in turn, makes the theory less attractive, as its original purpose is to simplify.

«16» In 2008, Barnes offered an alternative to theory-centered psychotherapy, which he called “dialogotherapy,” which is linked to second-order cybernetics, “the science that studies dialogical practices, which puts it within the hermeneutic circle of interpretation and understanding” (Barnes 2008: 25). In this way, psychotherapy makes its hermeneutics explicit, defines itself as conversation and finds itself in the language of each patient, rather than in the privileged vocabulary of a grand and universal psychotherapy theory.

«17» As a master in the practice of hypnosis, he included hypnotherapy, especially in the way it was developed by Milton Erickson and Robert Lindner (Barnes 2002b), as the condition or climate for dialogotherapy:

“The dialogue of hypnosis creates the context for studying dialogue and investigating unconscious processes. Through this dialogue of hypnosis, dialogotherapists and their patients together bring forth the unconscious they talk about, an unconscious that becomes both a process and their potentially most valuable therapeutic resource.” (ibid)

«18» As a teacher, Barnes taught his students the same way he practiced psychotherapy. He was very careful about the content and even more about the relationships. For him, teaching was a dialogue and dialogue was relationship. He never imposed his concepts, but rather nurtured and responded to the uniqueness of each individual student or client.

«19» Graham Barnes passed away on 9 August 2020.

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