

## Chapter 8

### The cosmic circus

#### *Commentary*

The idea of the cosmos as being central to Man's existence, leads us into the first chapter of the next cluster of concepts. Martti Lindqvist explores Moreno's religious and philosophical background. He sees psychodrama as moving in two directions at the same time and argues for a reassessment of Morenian morality at a time of diminishing morality in the twentieth century.

Lindqvist and other authors suggest that Moreno's ideas on the nature of existence and the relationship between Man and God predate the work of the theologian Martin Buber and the later existentialists. There are many similarities between the philosophy of these two men and it is debatable which one influenced the other. It is now clearer that Moreno was one of the earliest of existential thinkers, even though Marineau sees contradictions in his advocating anonymity as well as fighting for recognition at the same time. The idea of a more direct experience of God in an I-Thou relationship, is perhaps more familiar to us now than when it was first expounded by Moreno.

#### Religion and the spirit

*Martti Lindqvist*

It is a sunny Sunday morning somewhere in the Finnish countryside. The group is sitting on mattresses in a big room which is full of light. The last day of the workshop has begun. As the group leader I gather some of the feelings and ideas from the participants. I say: 'You are in a circus. What do you see there? Look carefully what is of interest for you. When you have found something role-reverse with the thing you are looking at.'

The group creates several images from which I pick five for demonstration on the stage. In the centre of the stage lies a dying clown. He has decided to show his own death to the audience as his last performance. Further away there is a broken mirror on which an elephant has stepped. Very close to the clown is a beast, a very mysterious and frightening creature. And just on the edge of the stage lies a small child who has fallen from the merry-go-around. She feels very lonely and frightened.

The circus has no ordinary roof. The clear, blue sky covers the stage like a cosmic tent. The sky is eternal and unchangeable. It never lets you down.

The story starts to move when people, who are in the roles of the clown, the mirror, the beast, the child and the sky begin to interact spontaneously with each other. The story is very human and cosmic at the same time. It is greater than any explanation given to it. The mirror is the image of broken hopes and relationships. It symbolises the human soul that wants to be healed. Especially, it reflects the hurting feelings of the fallen and lonely child. The beast looks dangerous and starts to fight physically with the dying clown. When the struggle is over it shows that the beast and the clown are close friends, opposite sides of the same



being. For the clown, the beast is his guide and companion when he approaches the unknown at the moment of his death.

What happens to the small child who embodies both the heart and the deepest purpose of the circus? The sky looks at her and gives her trust and comfort. The sky cannot move to the child but is able to create the contact between the child and an adult spectator in the group. The child finds the hope which she had lost and is given the courage to climb back onto the merry-go-around. What at first glance was just horror, loneliness, destruction and madness has gone through a metamorphosis and turned into joy, togetherness and beauty. It shows the magic of the drama and the magic of the life (Lindqvist 1992).

What has this unusual story of a circus to do with the great themes of religion, spirit and drama which gave J.L. Moreno his deepest inspiration in his thinking and when he created the theory and method of psychodrama? The circus itself is an archetypal image of life. There are all the different feelings which a human being can experience. There is much sharing, excitement and magic present. People and other creatures on the stage have different roles which they develop to the full. The stage itself is a place with a touch of special magic. Everything is possible. The borderline between reality and surplus reality disappears.

The symbols are important. The name 'circus' refers to the circle-shaped stage ('arena') which is the focus of all that there is and happens in the circus. Therefore, it was not an accident that Moreno himself created a circular stage for psychodrama. The circle is the symbol of eternity, wholeness and life which returns to its origin. The same symbolism can be seen, for example, in the use of the wedding ring or funeral wreath. In the beginning the stage is empty but at the same time the atmosphere around it is in a state of pregnancy. It is as it was in the very beginning of the universe: 'The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters' (Genesis 1:2). In the circus, the first creative action takes place when the public form an emotional contact with the empty stage. Expectations rise in the warm-up process.

Life itself can be described as a cosmic stage. At birth we enter the stage and in the moment of death we leave it. Life means that we have the possibility to play our own stories on the stage of life and that our stories are seen, shared and received by others. Life is rich if the roles are manyfold and fully played. There are times when cathartic action takes place giving the opportunity for metamorphosis, a qualitative change in one's own core.

From the very beginning of human culture, drama has served as an important means of human encounter with 'the greater life'. Drama has united people, healed them and given them the possibility to participate in the common myths of human history. As a matter of fact most rituals, religious and secular, are means of describing, mastering and changing life in dramatic form. There is a wide variation of different forms of drama, but what unites most of them is the emphasis on the spirit, experience, interaction, spontaneity and creativity.

### **MORENO'S RELIGIOUS ROOTS**

It has been asked, whether Moreno's religious and metaphysical ideas are a necessary part of the theory and practice of psychodrama. Could one work with psychodrama successfully without taking notice of its religious roots? Different people have different answers. What remains clear is that we could not think of Moreno himself without his own history and his personal way of thinking which has profound religious overtones. Historically, religion gave Moreno in many ways his basic inspiration, the motivation for his practical work and the basic metaphors and concepts to describe the human drama in the universe.

In my opinion, it is possible to understand the relevance of religion to psychodrama at three different levels: (i) the metaphysical foundation of spontaneity/creativity theory; (ii) the moral commitment to work for people; and (iii) drama as a means to deal with religious/metaphysical issues. In what follows, all three aspects are briefly discussed.

It is widely known that Moreno had profound ideas about religion, God, spirit and cosmic processes. This is understandable partly because of his historical and religious background: his origin was Jewish. One of the famous stories from his childhood tells how when he was playing God with other children he tried to fly but in the attempt fell down and broke his right arm. Surely, there is some symbolism in this story given his cosmic ideas and his later self-interpretation as a man who was going to make a profound revolution in psychology and to transform the social institutions of human kind everywhere.

In his early adolescence Moreno also had deeply religious experiences. He tells about his vision when he was in his fourteenth year living in Chemnitz. He calls it 'his epiphany'.

I found myself in a little park standing in front of a statue of Jesus Christ illumined by the moon's faint light. It drew my gaze and I stood transfixed. In the intensity of this strange moment I tried with all my will to have that statue come alive, to speak to me.... Standing there in front of the statue, I knew that I had to make a decision, one which would determine the future course of my life. I believe that all men have to make such a decision in their youth. This was the moment of my decision.... I decided for the universe, not because my family was inferior to any other family, but because I wanted to live on behalf of the larger setting to which every member of my family belonged and to which I wanted them to return.... The small statue before me symbolized that Jesus had gone the way of the universe and had taken all the consequences which were involved.

(Marineau 1989:23)

Moreno, at least later, understood that this was the beginning of his calling for a special task in the world.

Standing before Christ in Chemnitz, I began to believe that I was an extraordinary person, that I was here on the planet to fulfil an extra-ordinary mission. This state of mind is usually called megalomania. That is a nasty name. It's really name calling.

(Marineau 1989:24)

The next step in his religious development took place in the early years of his time in Vienna when he established with friends 'The House of Encounter'. Some authors call that period of time Moreno's hassidic period (Fox 1987: xv; Williams 1989:10-11). Moreno wanted to establish 'a religion of encounter' based on love, voluntary giving and anonymity. The emphasis was on the community work with the simple and needy people who were displaced and without help. Moreno says:

My new religion was a religion of being, of self-perfection. It was a religion of helping and healing, for helping was more important than talking. It was a religion of silence. It was a religion of doing a thing for its own sake, unrewarded, unrecognized. It was a religion of anonymity.

(Fox 1987:205)

At that time Moreno also had religious debates with his friends. Marineau describes in his biography of Moreno how members often met to talk about subjects such as the return of Jesus Christ and everyone had his hypothesis. Moreno claimed that Jesus would come back nude, or jump from a tree, and tried out these

hypothesises himself. It is even possible that he might have thought of himself as Jesus at one period (Marineau 1989:27–8).

Although Moreno had a Sephardic Jewish background he read widely different religious authors and often identified with them strongly. Among the names to which he refers frequently are Jesus, St Paul, Socrates, Mohammed, Buddha, St Francis, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Swedenborg, Tolstoy, Dostoyevski and Schweitzer—all of them great prophets or religious teachers who put more emphasis on life than on intellectual/ theological expertise.

From the year 1910 onwards Moreno formulated his idea of God who is not only a distant creator but an active force in the universe, who is manifested everywhere where spontaneity and creativity are at work. Blatner's evaluation is that a review of the complete philosophical writing Moreno produced during these years shows that he deserves to be included among the early existentialists (Blatner 1988:18).

Moreno's religious concerns gained more philosophical overtones when he, together with other intellectuals established and published the famous periodical *Daimon* (later *Der Neue Daimon*) in Vienna during the years 1918–20. It was a journal mostly for existential literature and expressionistic arts. Its name was allegoric: the Greek word *daimon* meaning the ambiguous spirit which is creator, adviser and the source of inspiration. At that time Moreno also had contact with the famous philosopher and theologian Martin Buber (1878–1965) who had also a strong Jewish background. Buber's famous 'I-Thou' philosophy of encounter is in many ways very close to the ideas which Moreno had in his mind. According to Buber's view, God, the great Thou, enables human I-Thou relations between man and other beings. A true relationship with God, as experienced from the human side, must be an I-Thou relationship, in which God is truly met and addressed, not merely thought of and expressed. The opposite of an I-Thou relationship is the I-it relationship where other beings are reduced to mere objects of thought and action. It is typical of Moreno's life history that there was controversy between him and Buber, because Moreno thought (obviously without convincing evidence) that he had expressed the idea of the I-Thou relationship before Buber did (Marineau 1989:48–9).

The high point of Moreno's religious thinking was certainly the publication of *The Words of the Father* in 1920. It is a fascinating, subjective and very poetic book which is easily misunderstood. As Marineau says 'it was the logical conclusion of Moreno's childhood and adolescence, a long search for life's meaning and a truthful representation of the universe' (Marineau 1989:65). In a way, the book is Moreno's 'Song of the Songs' partly written in the poetic form. In the book he argues for a cosmic view where man takes responsibility of his own life and becomes the 'I-God'. Moreno says later:

At a moment of greatest human misery when the past seemed to be a delusion, the future a misfortune and the present a fugitive pastime I formulated in the 'Testament des Vaters' the most radical antithesis of our time by making my 'I', the 'I' and 'self of the weak human bastard the same and identical with the I and self of God, the Creator of the World. There was no need for proof that God exists and had created the world if the same I's whom he had created had taken part in the creation of themselves and in the creation of each other. If then God was weak and humble, unfree and doomed to die, he was triumphant just the same. As the I-Self-God it was he who had made himself unfree, in order to make a universe of billions of equally unfree beings possible outside of himself, but depending upon them. The idea of God became a revolutionary category, removed from the beginning of time into the present, into the self, into every I. It is the 'Thou'-God of the Christian Gospel who may need the proof of meeting but the 'I'-God of the Self was self evident. The new 'I' could not imagine being born without being his own creator. He could not imagine anyone being born without being their creator. Too, he could not imagine any future of the world ever to have emerged without

having been its creator. He could not imagine any future of the world to emerge without being personally responsible for its production.

(Moreno 1983:12)

The book *The Words of the Father* is the most controversial in Moreno's production. Some people consider it to be Moreno's main work, while others take it as a sign of his insanity and megalomania. Nobody can forget the impressive opening words of the poem: '*I am God, the Father. The Creator of the Universe. These are My words, the words of the Father.*' Marineau says: 'Following Swedenborg's example, Moreno, the doctor of medicine, was allowing his inner "voices" to speak, in an attempt to unite religion and science' (Marineau 1989:67).

Although Moreno referred often to the concept of God, he dissociated himself from traditional theological ideas. He wanted to find a new understanding of God as an active and all-covering creative principle in the universe.

When God created the world in six days he had stopped a day too early, He had given man a place to live but in order to make it safe for him he also chained him to that place. On the seventh day he should have created for man a second world, another one, free of the first world and in which he could purge himself from it, but a world which would not chain anyone because it was not real. It is here that the theatre of spontaneity continues God's creation of the world by opening for Man a new dimension of existence.

(Moreno 1983:7)

Moreno distinguishes between the 'God of the first status' and the 'God of the second status':

All the affirmations and denials of God, all His images, have revolved around this, the God of the second status, the God who had reached recognition in the affairs of the universe, so to speak. But there is another status of God, which even as a symbol has been neglected, that is the status of God before the Sabbath, from the moment of conception, during the process of creating and evolving the world and Himself.

(Moreno 1985:32)

It is typical of Moreno's thought that even here he wants to go back to 'the first universe', to the 'status nascendi' where everything is possible and where everything is in process—even God.

In his later years Moreno was not writing so much about his religious ideas. He did not want to be a theologian or the founder of a new sect. But he incorporated a religious, transcendent dimension into all of his ideas and thoughts. He also had the opinion that secularisation and materialism were great dangers for humankind. Moreno says:

One of the greatest dilemmas of man in our time is that he has lost faith in a supreme being, and often in any superior value system as a guide for conduct. Is the universe ruled by change and spontaneity only? The psychodramatic answer to the claim that God is dead is that he can easily be restored to life.

Following the example of Christ we have given him and can give him a new life, but not in the form which our ancestors cherished. We have replaced the dead God by millions of people who can embody God in their own person. This may need further explanation. The outstanding event in

modern religion was the replacement, if not the abandonment, of the cosmic, elusive, Super-God by a simple man who called himself the Son of God—Jesus Christ. The outstanding thing about him was not scholarship or intellectual wizardry, but the fact of embodiment. There lived in his time many men intellectually superior to Christ, but they were flabby intellectuals, instead of making an effort to embody the truth as they felt it, they talked about it. In the psychodramatic world the fact of embodiment is central, axiomatic, and universal. Everyone can portray his version of God through his own actions and so communicate his own version to others.... It is no longer the master, the great priest, or the therapist who embodies God. The image of God can take form and embodiment through every man—the epileptic, the schizophrenic, the prostitute, the poor and rejected. They all can at any time step upon the stage, when the moment of inspiration comes, and give their version of the meaning which the universe has for them. God is always within and among us, as he is for children. Instead of coming down from the skies, he comes in by way of the stage door.

(Moreno 1975b: 21–2)

In this famous statement Moreno is already making a direct application of his concept of God into very practical psychodramatic work. God is not abstract and absent. He is on the stage in the role of everyman.

#### **METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATION OF THE SPONTANEITY/ CREATIVITY THEORY**

Moreno's spontaneity theory is closely connected with his idea of the 'first universe' whereby he means the matrix of 'all-identity' as the framework in which a small child experiences his existence. In the first universe a child sees everything as part of himself. At a psychological level, of course, the relationship between the child and the mother is decisive. For a child, there is no difference between him or her and his or her mother. In a similar way humankind has originally understood itself as an integral part of the cosmic process. This experience is mostly felt at the level of the collective unconscious without intellectual reflection or fixed roles (Leutz 1986:40–2, 71–4). For Moreno the first universe is a magic realm and man has the opportunity to keep contact with it through his whole life:

Why I chose the course of the theatre instead of founding a religious sect, joining a monastery or developing a system of theology (although they do not exclude each other), can be understood by taking a view of the setting from which my ideas sprang. I suffered from an *idæ fixe*, from what might have been called then an affectation, but of which might be said today, as the harvest is coming in, that it was by 'the grace of God'. The *idæ fixe* became my constant source of productivity; it proclaimed that there is a sort of primordial nature which is immortal and returns afresh with every generation, a first universe which contains all beings and in which all events are sacred. I liked that enchanting realm and did not plan to leave it, ever.

(Moreno 1983:3)

The warm-up process is in the last instance a manifestation of the 'cosmic hunger' to maintain an identity with the entire universe. Through that process we become reconnected with the creative sources of life and its unlimited opportunities. It is not only a hunger for self-realisation of an individual man. It aims at 'world realisation' (Moreno 1975a: 154).

This means that the distinction between 'reality' and 'illusion' becomes problematic. Everything is possible and nothing is pre-determined: 'millions of imagined worlds are equally possible and real, of equal

value to the world in which we live and for which metaphysics is constructed' (Moreno 1983:35). There are illusions of a real world which are of equal importance as 'the reality of an illusionary world'.

The roots of Morenian drama are deeply philosophical—even theological. The basis of Moreno's cosmology is the concept of a continuous cosmic drama, which God himself both directs and acts. This is the very beginning of all creativity and spontaneity which exists in the universe (Moreno 1953: xvi-xvii). The idea of creation is 'status nascendi' which is inherent in chaos.

The creative definition of 'Godplaying' is the maximum of involvement, the putting of everything unborn from the chaos into the first moment of being. This preoccupation with the status and locus nascendi of things became the guide of all my future work.

(Moreno 1953: xvii)

It is a state where no 'cultural conserves' (fixed products, structures, roles, definitions and theories) still exist. God creates, making opposite roles to himself. Thus, totally new things appear. God interacts with his own nature.

Moreno goes so far that he even speaks of a divine theatre and gives his imagination the permission to visualise God as an actor.

Can God be an actor? How should the stage be constructed upon which God, the perfect being, acts? He who loves himself loves illusion still more. He who loves reality loves play still more, that is why children love playing. He who has created the world after himself, could it not be essential to his greatness that he loves to repeat creation like a playwright on a cosmic scale, not only to his own enjoyment which hardly requires any confirmation, but to the enjoyment of his creatures?

The repertory of the heavenly stage consists of the eternal repetition of one play, the creation of the universe. Numberless stages are necessary in order that this drama may be enacted. It is a stage with many levels, one higher than the other and one leading up to the other. On every level is a theatre and on the highest level there is the stage of the creator.

(Moreno 1983:95)

Moreno emphasises that the theatre of the creator does not produce any reduction of suffering: 'In reality, life and death, love and misery are underscored, multiplied in proportion and enormously increased. The repeatability of creation makes being immortal nonsensical' (Moreno 1983: 96). What is special in God's theatre is that in God all the spontaneity turns into creativity. All that he says turns immediately into actual reality.

At this point we meet the key concept which is perhaps the most misunderstood idea in Moreno's thinking. This is the concept of 'I-God' which he introduced in *The Words of the Father* in 1920. What is not usually seen, is the close interrelation between the concept of Man and the concept of God in Moreno's theory. As a matter of fact, dealing with the 'I-God' Moreno is speaking of Man's self-interpretation:

The modern apostles of Godlessness, when they cut off the strings which tied man to a divine system, a supramundane God, they cut in their enthusiastic haste a little too much, they also cut off Man's very self. By the same act by which they emancipated Man from God they also emancipated Man from himself. They said God is dead, but it was Man who has died. My thesis is therefore, that the center of the problem is neither God nor the denial of his existence, but the origin, reality and



expansion of the self. By self I mean anything which is left of you and me after the most radical reduction of 'us' is made by past and future retroductionists.

(Moreno 1983:8)

That means that the I-Self-God process has no relation to the idea of the Man-God and similar anthropomorphic concepts. The issue is not the godlikeness of a single individual, but the godlikeness of the total universe, its self-integration (Moreno 1983:11).

Williams sees correctly that for Moreno psychodrama is the practical means to make people 'I-Gods', 'part of the supreme power ruling the world by spontaneity and creativity' (Williams 1989:222). In this way transcendent becomes immanent—or, using a Christian metaphor, the divine incarnates into human existence. Moreno is not understood if one does not see that he was very serious in his belief that psychodrama provides a concrete tool to enter into the divine cosmic drama.

What has been said means that the core of Moreno's metaphysics is the intimate relationship between God and the spontaneity/creativity process. On the psychological level we can speak about human emotions, energies, imagery, vitality and freedom. However, for Moreno this is not only a psychic process but a real manifestation of the cosmic drama where human beings fully participate (Blatner 1988:14–15).

Moreno explains his new insight in this way:

When I found the proud house of man, on which he had worked for nearly ten thousand years, to give to it the solidity and splendour of western civilization burnt to ashes, the only residuum which I detected in the ashes portent with promise was the 'spontaneous-creative'. I saw its fire burning at the bottom of every dimension of nature, the cosmic, the spiritual, the cultural, the social, the psychological, the biological, and the sexual, forming in each sphere a nucleus from which a new urge of inspiration could arise. But instead of falling into an orgy of admiration before the new discovery, as thousands of other similarly affected men have in the past, considering the spontaneous-creative as an irrational gift of nature, as something mystic which some people have and others do not, around which a cult could be built, I was inclined to treat the matter with the same detachment as the scientist examines a new element... I thought of the prophets and saints of the past who appeared as the most shining examples of spontaneous creativity, and said to myself 'This is what you have to produce first and you yourself have to give flesh to it'. Thus it began to 'warm-up' to prophetic moods and heroic feelings, putting them into my thoughts, my emotions, gestures and actions, it was a sort of spontaneity research on the reality level.

(Moreno 1983:5)

In his theory of man as 'I-God' and spontaneity/creativity Moreno openly gives the therapeutic process a cosmological task.

A therapeutic method which does not concern itself with these enormous cosmic implications with man's very destiny, is incomplete and inadequate. Just as our forefathers encountered these changes by means of fables and myths, we have tried to encounter them in our time with new devices.

(Moreno 1975b: 20)

This also means that even strict psychodramatic concepts and methods have cosmic implications. For instance, the warm-up phase of psychodramatic production is not a technical 'foreplay' of the dramatic act

but a process where the group is reconnected to the 'first universe' and to the cosmic process of becoming 'I-Gods'.

### RELIGION AS MOTIVATION FOR THERAPEUTIC AND SOCIAL WORK

From Moreno's life history it has become clear that he had a firm belief in his special calling. For him, the whole purpose of psychodramatic work was human liberation, democratic society, world peace and cosmic transfiguration. He found this vision during a long process where he identified himself with great prophets and religious leaders. He has been blamed and stigmatised for that, but on the other hand it was also the most powerful sign of his moral greatness. Therefore, it was not an accident that he gave so much of his time for work with outcasts, refugees, prisoners, prostitutes, young children and delinquent adolescents. He had a moral vision and he had a concrete mission.

Moreno could not understand why he was accused of being egocentric and megalomaniac. He wrote referring to the criticism concerning his book *The Words of the Father*:

It is amusing to think retroactively that my proclamation of the I was considered as the most outstanding manifestation of megalomania from my side. Actually, when the I-God is universalized, as it is in my book, the whole God concept becomes one of humbleness, weakness, and inferiority, a micromania rather than a megalomania. God has never been so lowly described and so universal in his dependence as he is in my book. It was a significant transformation from the cosmic God of the Hebrews, the He-God, to the living God of Christ, the Thou-God. But it was an even more challenging transformation from the Thou-God to the I-God, which puts all responsibility upon me and us, the I and the group. Another aspect of the micromania of the book is its anonymity, which blatantly proclaimed that it is not the I of a lonely, singular person, but the I of everyone. The embodiment of the I was practised by me in life itself, long before it took psychodramatic form.

(Moreno 1975b: 21-2)

The natural consequence of this was that Moreno did not respect an intellectual enterprise for its own sake. His interest in knowledge was emancipatory. Until his death Moreno expressed his admiration for great persons in history who committed themselves totally to the human predicament. He wanted to become one among them.

Men like Josiah, Jesus, Mohammed and Francis of Assisi had a sense of the drama and knew a form of mental catharsis incomparably deeper than that of the Greeks, one which comes from the realization of great roles through their own flesh and blood, singly and in groups, from the daily meeting of bold emergencies. Their stage was the community proper, every situation which they entered challenged their therapeutic genius. They knew of spontaneity, immediate solution, of the warming up process and of acting in roles, first hand and not from books. Jesus, like a chief therapeutic actor, had his auxiliary egos in his apostles and his psychodramatic director in God himself who prompted him what to do.

(Moreno 1985:8)

No wonder that Moreno admired the Swedish mystic Swedenborg, who had an excellent scientific background but saw his proper calling in making the mysteries of God known to people.

Moreno seems also to have been aware of the pathological side of this kind of self-understanding but he did not make any excuses for that: 'I was an experimenter and experimenters like Jesus, Buddha, St. Francis often look inadequate even pathological, but they are trying to live a life of truth and prefer an imperfect existence to a perfect theory' (Marineau 1989: 120).

Even much later, when Moreno was already in the United States and had accomplished his major life work, he referred to religious figures as examples to follow. In the mid-1950s Moreno wrote on Kierkegaard:

For Kierkegaard existential involvement of the subjective actor was axiomatic; it validated itself—it did not require further proof. Underlying his credo was the problem of validation. Religious behaviour in order to be valid and meaningful has to involve the entire subjectivity of the religious actor. It has to fill and vitalize the religious ritual with it. This is a special case of spontaneity familiar to psychodramatists; a new response to an old situation, the requirement to re-experience a repeated situation with the same intensity as if it had happened for the first time, the revitalizing of religious conserves as a ritual or a prayer.

(Moreno 1975a: 209)

What is special in Moreno's moral insight is that he also wanted to incorporate his basic moral ideas to the scientific concepts and practical methods of his psychodramatic theory. For him, sociometric movement was a source of democracy and social justice. According to him sociometry is a process of the people, by the people, and for the people. Also the introduction of the method of role reversal was a major revolution in a moral sense. Through role reversal Moreno concretised the famous golden rule principle according to which one has to put oneself into the position of others in order to understand what are their rights and their view of life.

Moreno gives also three basic ethical rules for sociodramatic and psychodramatic work: (i) Give truth and receive truth. (ii) Give love to the group and it will return love to you. (iii) Give spontaneity and spontaneity will return (Moreno 1953:114).

### **DRAMA AS A MEANS TO DEAL WITH RELIGIOUS/ METAPHYSICAL ISSUES**

Using drama in dealing with 'spiritual' issues was by no means a secondary concern for Moreno. Actually, he started his dramatic work with 'axio-drama' from which he later developed psychodrama and sociodrama. For instance, his three major works from the years 1918–19 were papers written in axiodramatic form: 'The godhead as author', 'The godhead as orator or preacher' and 'The godhead as comedian or actor', which were published in *Daimon* and *Der Neue Daimon*. Axiodrama is a dramatic exercise where issues of ethics, cosmic relationships or values are dealt with using action methods. In Moreno's words it 'deals with the activation of religious, ethical and cultural values in spontaneous-dramatic form' (Moreno 1953: xxvi).

In axiodramatic work Moreno also had great role models. For instance, Socrates himself was, in Moreno's opinion, a good axiodramatist using the famous 'maieutics' method, including role reversal when speaking with people in the agora of Athens. 'I was interested in the ethical more than in the intellectual Socrates, in the "changer" more than in the thinker' (Moreno 1953: xxii-xxiii).

Psychodrama and sociodrama give the opportunity to visualise and concretise all possible metaphors, images, symbols and creatures on the stage and promote interaction between them. The roles taken can be,

for example, religious, philosophical, mythical or aesthetic. The purpose of the work can be the clarification of the concepts, to try to understand the different levels of their meanings or to promote cathartic processes in the realm of religion and world view.

### PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS SOCIODRAMA

For six years I have run an ongoing group for theological students dealing with moral and religious issues using sociodrama/axiodrama. In this context I give just one example of our work.

The last Sunday of the Church year is approaching. Its religious theme is 'The Last Judgement'. The sociodrama group has gathered for a three-hour session. The general theme of the winter term in the group has been the problem of evil. As a warm-up the director tells the group the story of a preacher who based his sermon on the topic of the last judgement. The preacher said that the Church had lost its credibility and failed in its missionary task because the priests no longer spoke about hell. The preacher told the congregation that each person who has not personally repented and converted in the proper Christian way will go to hell after his or her death.

The participants are asked to imagine that they have just been listening to that sermon. They are divided into two groups to discuss their feelings and thoughts concerning the sermon. Most of the students are very critical about the sermon. They say that the preacher put himself above the congregation. In their opinion, it represented an old-fashioned way of interpreting Christian teachings which leads to the situation where more and more people withdraw from the church. They say that the Christian faith is not something that is based on people's own choices and decisions.

One student takes an opposite view (partly in order to provoke heated discussion). He says that it is good when somebody still has the courage to preach in pure form what is said clearly in the Bible. The Bible says that after death there are just two choices—either heaven or hell. One participant insists that belief in hell is a sign of bad exegetical knowledge.

After the warm-up the group makes a sociodramatic study on different concepts of God, heaven and hell. The ideas are taken from the viewpoints presented in the discussion during the warm-up. A sociometric triangle is made in the room the corners of which show the three main attitudes among the students towards the issue concerning hell. The first corner symbolises the idea that hell means an eternal separation from God. The second corner represents the opinion that hell means eternal damnation by God. The third corner shows the place where the issue of the hell has no relevance in life and faith. Of the nine students three take places very close to the first corner. For them, hell means separation from God. Two students show through the choice of their places that the whole issue is almost irrelevant to them. Three students stay in the middle of the triangle. One student (the one who had defended the preacher during the warm-up) steps outside the triangle. He says that his concept of the world as a creative and frightening chaos cannot be demonstrated by a point within the triangle. Nobody takes the stand that hell means eternal damnation.

The students describe one by one what their positions mean to them. 'Hell means for me a life without Christ.' There is eternal separation and suffering without hope.' 'I cannot decide. Earlier I thought that hell means separation but now this issue is irrelevant for me.'

Maarit says: 'I stay in the middle because in my thinking I find the issue irrelevant but my fear moves me towards eternal damnation.'

The director decides that the group should move to work on Maarit's response because it reflects a high ambiguity between thoughts and feelings which might be true also for other members of the group. Maarit reverses roles with her fear and goes to the place of eternal damnation. Maarit says: 'The atmosphere here is depressing and condemning. When I was there I would not guess what this would be like...'

The director asks Maarit to build hell. She takes three students to be the fire in hell and three others to laugh at her suffering. Maarit says: 'I miss my feelings. I just have the idea that I have done something wrong.' The director asks Maarit to concentrate and find out what is going on inside her. Maarit (making a spontaneous role reversal) goes suddenly away from hell and says: 'I have done something to cause me (Maarit) to be in hell.' In role reversal Eero takes Maarit's place in hell and Maarit becomes the person who is responsible for Maarit's being in hell.

MAARIT: (in role reversal) There is not such a thing as evil or hell. Don't be afraid. We have a loving God.

DIRECTOR: You have preached the loving God and Maarit has believed in what you said. Now she is in hell. What do you think about it?

MAARIT: (still in role reversal) I don't believe it. It is not possible.

EERO: (in Maarit's role in hell) I trusted you. You said that there is no hell. I cannot get rid of this.

MAARIT: (in role reversal) I have nothing to say. I am guilty. I have let her down.

The Director asks Maarit to build heaven. Maarit makes a circle using five students to demonstrate it. They show togetherness and warmth. She goes to the circle but says that she is still aware of the reality of hell.

Maarit goes back to hell. The director asks whether she knows about heaven while being in hell.

MAARIT: Yes, I am aware of it like the rich man in the Bible saw Lazarus in heaven. I would have liked to go to heaven if it would have been possible.

DIRECTOR: Why was it not possible?

MAARIT: I could not do anything. It's God's business.

Jussi is taken into the role of God.

MAARIT: (addressing God from hell) I want to know whether You are a marionette or not.

MAARIT: (in God's role) I am not a puppet. I am the ruler of the universe, I represent justice but unfortunately everything went wrong.

DIRECTOR: How did it happen?

MAARIT: (as God) This was not my purpose. I did not want to have this kind of segregation.

DIRECTOR: What do you mean?

MAARIT: (as God) It has happened in people's heads.

The director asks Maarit to build the human head according to her own understanding of it. She makes the head in the form of a circle and puts six students there representing (i) fear and aggression; (ii) other feelings; (iii) humour; (iv) intellect; (v) empathy; and (vi) human weakness. The director asks Maarit what issues the head is thinking at this moment. Maarit says: 'It wonders whether a man has the right to condemn another man.'

The director asks different parts of the head to have a dialogue with one another.

FEAR/AGGRESSION: There is no need to condemn others. In that way yourself will not be condemned.

HUMOUR: All are condemning each other.

HUMAN WEAKNESS: We all are limited beings.

OTHER FEELINGS: How on earth could one condemn others?

INTELLECT: It is like a car theft. It is natural that criminals are condemned.

OTHER FEELINGS: But hell is quite a different thing!

FEAR/AGGRESSION: It is just natural that one protects oneself.

Maarit follows the discussion in God's role and says that it is quite understandable.

The director asks God to say something to the human head.

GOD: It is interesting to watch the head which I myself have created. It is a small but also a very confused thing.

DIRECTOR: But you have made it.

GOD: Yes, but strange things are happening there. It would, of course, be easier if it was not so confused.

Different parts of the head start asking God questions.

FEAR/AGGRESSION: Have you created me, too?

GOD: Yes.

FEAR/AGGRESSION: Where has Sin come from?

GOD: It's a good question.

HUMOUR: Oh, God...!

The director asks students to find where Sin is. Tiina role-reverses with Sin. Tiina takes a place opposite to God.

SIN If God would not be there, I would not be here. (to God) I think that I have been born from something which belongs to you.

The director role-reverses Sin with God.

GOD: (played by Tiina who speaks to Sin) I have not created you. You have been born inside the human mind.

Tiina is reversed back to Sin. She says that her duty is to create chaos, to turn everything which is good into bad. The director asks Tiina, as Sin, to bring about chaos.

SIN: The evil is in me, not elsewhere. I am deceiving all the time. I pretend to be good. I can wear the mask of empathy. I can understand people's lives so well that they do not need to bear their responsibility. I am mothering them. I take the mask of different feelings. They do not see me.

The parts of the head are taken away from their roles. A new triangle is formed consisting of God, Sin, and Evil.

GOD: I am freedom.

SIN: I have fun.

EVIL: (to God) You created everything, but it all ends with me.

GOD: I make everything new. Evil has its limits. I see Christ.

EVIL: Nations go down, all is under my power, everything ends in death.

GOD: Death is part of life.

EVIL: Man wants me.

SIN: Life would be boring without me.

EVIL: This is a joke.

In the process of the sociodrama three students have role-reversed with God. They are asked to give names to the side of God they have played.

GOD 1: Goodness.

GOD 2: Blind forgiver, Christ.

GOD 3: Humanity, Yin and Yang.

Evil identifies himself as 'Hopelessness and Despair'.

After deroling, the students discuss their experiences and thoughts. Some comments they made were:

'Sociodrama opened my eyes to see things in different light. Our thoughts about God are usually too clean and sterile, too distinct from the real world.'

'The issue of choice is a burning theme for me.'

'Sin has to do with God, in a way it is in God.'

'Death is not necessarily bad.'

'God is helpless and theology is boring.'

'Only poems can express religious truths.'

When the group met for the next session, the contents of the drama were discussed. The students said how illuminating it was to see the discrepancy between their theoretical/theological ideas and their inner feelings. Most of them said how they had changed in their religious opinions from the time when they had their first strong religious experiences and internalised basic religious symbols like heaven, hell and sin.

A long discussion ensued about the relationship between God and evil on the one hand and God and sin on the other hand. Many participants agreed that God cannot be totally separated from evil otherwise reality would be divided into two separate parts. Controversy is inherent both in the image of God and in man's self-image.

This drama shows how, in a sociodramatic process, rigid dogmatic concepts of God can be turned into dynamic interplay between various creative aspects of universe and history. In a real Morenian sense, in the sociodrama, there was a touch of mystery connected to the eternal struggle between good and evil in the whole of creation.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen that Moreno's fundamental idea of the spontaneous-creative process in the form of drama has a much wider background and scope than just the clinical setting of therapeutic psychodrama. Moreno's vision was essentially a theological one. This also shows how Moreno's approach differed from that of Freud.

Freud has failed in two respects, first by the rejection of religion. This cost him the opportunity to learn in an existential way of the contribution which saints and prophets (who are not identical with theological theorists—one can be a saint without any or a minimum rationale) have made towards psychotherapy. Some of the most ingenious agents of psychotherapy before the advent of natural science, were saints or prophets. Second, by his indifference towards social movements such as socialism and communism. His ignorance cost him another opportunity—to study group structure. It remained for psychodrama to take the God-act seriously and to translate it into valid therapeutic terms, and for sociometry to take the group seriously—as a process *sui generis* and so to broaden and deepen the scope of analysis beyond any visions Freud ever had on the subject.

(Moreno 1985:8)

In his famous anecdote Moreno reveals what he said to Freud: 'You analyzed their dreams, I try to give them courage to dream again. I teach people how to play God' (Marineau 1989:30–1).

Williams emphasises, rightly, that the metaphysical side and the therapeutic side of psychodrama need not compete with each other. There is a difference between psychodrama as therapy and psychodrama as revelation.

In psychodrama as revelation, the ‘full subjective oneness’ of the protagonist is totally supported and explored. The drama is a personal epiphany, a revelation of personal history and potential, an education and support for the passion to know the meaning of one’s experience, and the drive to find, show forth, and enhance the inner spirit. These are all excellent pursuits. Psychodrama as therapy is neither ‘higher’ nor ‘lower’ than psychodrama as revelation: it merely has a different purpose—the solving of problems. The difficulty emerges if the two are confused, and revelation, or therapy for that matter, becomes part of the client’s problem-causing system.

(Williams 1989:225)

In the last instance Moreno sees Man’s alternatives as either becoming a robot or restoring his original spontaneity.

Why should man want robots? It is perhaps the same reason, in reverse, as the one which at an earlier period made us want a God to whom we were robots. Therefore, if we could understand what we mean to God, we could understand what robots mean to us.

(Moreno 1975b: 263)

According to Moreno the fate of man threatens to become that of ‘the dinosaur in reverse’. The dinosaur perished because he extended the power of his organism in excess of its usefulness (Moreno 1975b: 266). We extend technological control of the world into an extreme without seeing how the living creative process inside us is diminishing. This is not a concern for therapists only. The survival of humanity is at stake.

## REFERENCES

- Blatner, A. (1988) *Foundations of Psychodrama: History, theory, and practice*, 3rd edn, New York: Springer.
- Fox, J. (ed.) (1987) *The Essential Moreno: Writings on psychodrama, group method, and spontaneity by J.L. Moreno, M.D.*, New York: Springer.
- Leutz, G. (1986) *Psychodrama. Theorie und Praxis. Das klassische Psychodrama nach J.L. Moreno* (First revised reprint), London, Paris and Tokyo: Springer-Verlag.
- Lindqvist, M. (1992) *Unelma rohkeasta elämästä. Ryhmämatkoja luovuuteen*, Helsinki: Otava.
- Marineau, R.F. (1989) *Jacob Levy Moreno 1889–1974: Father of psychodrama, sociometry, and group psychotherapy*, London and New York: Tavistock/ Routledge.
- Moreno, J.L. (1953) *Who Shall Survive? Foundations of sociometry, group psychotherapy and sociodrama*, New York: Beacon House.
- (1975a) *Psychodrama*, vol. 2, New York: Beacon House.
- (1975b) *Psychodrama*, vol. 3, New York: Beacon House.
- (1983) *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, Ambler, PA: Beacon House.
- (1985) *Psychodrama*, vol. 1, New York: Beacon House.
- Williams, A. (1989) *The Passionate Technique: Strategic psychodrama with individuals, families, and groups*, London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge.