



Robert F. Hobson
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Dr Robert F. Hobson (Bob), who died on 13 November 1999, aged 79, made an immense contribution to the professions of psychiatry, psychotherapy and counselling. He was a pioneer in interdisciplinary work at many prestigious institutions, including the Portman Clinic, the Middlesex Hospital, the Bethlem and Maudsley Hospitals, and the University of Manchester, where he was active as honorary Emeritus Reader in Psychotherapy until his death.

He made a great contribution to the College and was a Founding Fellow. He acted as an important bridge-builder between the past, as represented by the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, and the then emerging Royal College of Psychiatrists. He also built important links with the profession of psychology serving on the British Psychological Society's Medical Psychology Section. He always saw himself as part of medicine, and represented psychotherapy at the Royal Society of Medicine.

He grew up in Rossendale, Lancashire, and was educated at Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School, then Selwyn College, Cambridge, and studied medicine in Manchester, graduating MB BChir (Cantab) in 1944, proceeding MD in 1951. In 1944/45 he served as surgeon lieutenant, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, on the Arctic convoys which gave him a model of how a captain must lead from the front while also supporting from the rear.

He trained in psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital under Professor Sir Aubrey Lewis and Professor Sir Denis Hill before developing a distinguished career as a psychiatrist, carrying out a classic study on the effectiveness of electroconvulsive treatment for his MD. His breadth of experience would be difficult to match as he worked extensively in the emerging fields of child and adolescent psychiatry, addiction and in forensic psychiatry. He then

extended the role of the psychotherapist into community and pastoral developments with a crucial report he wrote for the then Bishop of Southwark, pushing forward the development of pastoral counselling services.

He developed an influential therapeutic community at the Bethlem Hospital, but warned subsequently of the dangers of being drawn into a "charismatic leadership" style. As a pioneer in the field, he experienced considerable personal pain when his ideal of the community passed through the inevitable cycles of growth, dissolution, profound despair and rebirth. He was able to link this experience with his former role as Chair of the Jungian Society for Analytical Psychology, and his personal meeting with Carl Jung. These had prepared him to see that the cycle of dissolution and rebirth in a therapeutic community was not due to the personal failings of members of staff of that community, but was part of a larger system.

Having achieved so much in a little over 20 years, he surprised many London colleagues by returning to his roots in the north of England in 1974. He shaped psychotherapy training in the north from a base in the Manchester Royal Infirmary with sessions around the region. He persuaded the then regional training director to let him use the staff training college at Brindle Lodge. Through those intensive workshops he inspired a group of colleagues, many of whom are still active as trainers, and inspired the development of advanced training in psychotherapy in the north-west. Until a month before his death he continued his work as a supervisor of senior staff in the area. As a supervisor he modelled his own approach to therapy; being actively involved in a supportive but searching conversation about personal experience.

His acute powers of clinical observation were linked with a breadth of scholarship in folklore, literature, psychology, philosophy and religion and his work transcended the 'illness model' allowing him to develop a psychodynamic-interpersonal model called the 'Conversational Model'. This drew particularly on Martin Buber's model of the 'I-Thou' relationship. His model is an integration across the medical, the social, the psychological and the religious, and his finest work *Forms of Feeling: The Heart of Psychotherapy* (Hobson, 1985) summarises in its title his life achievement.

When his work is presented at scientific meetings, almost invariably the audience will say that his 'Conversational Model' of psychotherapy is no different from the model they practise. This is true whether the audience is of cognitive therapists, Rogerian counsellors, psychoanalytic psychotherapists or psychiatrists. He rarely disagreed with his audience about this, modelling one of the principal tenets

of his approach: being open to correction, and willing to negotiate until there was a shared meaning arising in a personal conversation between persons.

His central belief was that the therapist's task was to "reach to the heart of loneliness and speak to that". These values are consistent with many theoretical approaches, and Bob Hobson had seen enough splitting and rivalry within the world of psychotherapy to avoid stating that his model of therapy was pre-eminent. In fact, his model is now among the most widely researched paradigms, with good supporting evidence from many high quality scientific studies. But, his principle was always to avoid 'schools' of therapeutic dogma. In the education of countless psychologists, nurses, social workers, therapists and doctors, he was always looking to see how his approach to the therapeutic conversation might enhance what the practitioner was already bringing to the therapeutic meeting.

He believed that the existential position of 'aloneness-togetherness' was achievable:

"I distinguish aloneness from isolation and loneliness; and togetherness from non-differentiation or fusion . . . I can only be alone in so far as I can be together with another. I can only be together in so far as I can stand alone."

The state of aloneness-togetherness might be gained by paying attention to what Blake called the 'minute particulars' of the conversation. Blake wrote in *Jerusalem*:

"He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars: General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite & flatterer,
For Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely organized particulars."

Bob Hobson believed that close attention to the tiniest details of the conversation was essential to psychotherapy. This might involve a detailed discussion based on 10 seconds of a psychotherapy session, studied for an hour or more. This attention to minute shifts in meaning is as much the language of poetics as it is of empirical science.

He had a wide range of interests outside his professional life. Cricket was foremost, followed later in his life by golf, and walking in the nearby Peak District and the Lakeland Fells. He is survived by his wife Marjorie, a daughter and two sons, one himself an eminent researcher in psychotherapy.

Reference

HOBSON, R. F. (1985) *Forms of Feeling: The Heart of Psychotherapy*. London: Tavistock.

Frank Margison and David Shapiro