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"Family Constellations": An Innovative Systemic Phenomenological Group Process From Germany

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The "Family Constellation" process is a trans-generational, phenomenological, therapeutic intervention with roots in family systems therapy, existential-phenomenology, and the ancestor reverence of the South African Zulus. Although the Family Constellation process is sanctioned by family therapy associations in Europe and is being integrated by thousand of licensed practitioners worldwide, the work is virtually unknown in the United States. This article serves as a broad introduction to the Family Constellation method and includes a biographical sketch of its originator—Bert Hellinger (born 1925).

Keywords: *Family Constellation; family systems therapy; existential therapy; phenomenology; Bert Hellinger*

The Family Constellation process is a therapeutic intervention that integrates family systems therapy (Moreno, Satir, Boszormenyi-Nagy), existential-phenomenology (Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger), and the ancestor reverence of the South African Zulus. Although it is rooted in the psychotherapeutic tradition, the method is distinguished from conventional psychotherapy in that (a) the client hardly speaks and (b) its primary aim is to identify and release prereflective, trans-generational patterns embedded within the family system, not to explore or process narrative, cognitive, or emotional content.

There are no published, peer-reviewed, English language outcome studies evaluating the efficacy of the approach. There is a growing body of anecdotal and case study data that suggest that participants benefit from the insights that come to light through the process (Lynch & Tucker, 2005; Payne, 2005; Steifel, Harris, & Zollmann, 2002; Stuart, 2005; Ulsamer, 2005).

The process evolved from Moreno's (1945) *Psychodrama*, Satir's (1987) family sculptures, and Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's (1973) *Invisible Loyalties*. It retains the feature of a client presenting a narrowly focused, pressing personal issue and selecting members from a group to stand in as representatives of members of the client's system. It diverges from its antecedents because once placed, the representatives do not speak, act, or pose.

In the silence and stillness of the constellated scene, the client and representatives are able to tune into the unconscious, collective will of the family system. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) recognized this as an extremely complex and essentially unknown "mechanism" that influences individual behaviors within the family system. From within this knowing field (Laszlo, 2004; Sheldrake, 1995), the interplay among the conservative forces of systemic integrity (balance, bonding, and order) and the expansive forces of animated existence (physical survival and reproduction) come momentarily into conscious awareness.

The client is able to perceive both a prereflective, systemic connection between the ancestral field and the presenting issue and a possible healing movement. Once this insight appears, the process is brought to a gentle conclusion and the facilitator withdraws. The client integrates the image of healing over time. For many clients, a constellation is an adjunct to a conventional course of therapy.

Constellations are a form of somatic psychology. The knowledge of trans-generational loyalties are held not in the mind but from a deeper level of systemic, genetic, or cellular consciousness (Gottesman & Hansen, 2005).

As the originator of this method, Hellinger's (2001, 2002a, 2003a, 2003b; Hellinger & ten Hövel, 1999; Hellinger, Weber, & Beaumont, 1998) name is most closely associated with the emergent field of Family, Systemic, or Structural Constellations. He has published more than 30 books, translated into 10 languages, with more than one million copies in print. At the age of 80, he continues to travel worldwide, demonstrating his methods, and to publish prolifically.

Practitioners in a broad range of healing professions are free to adapt, modify, and integrate Hellinger's methods within their modalities. The foundations of Hellinger's insights can be found in the works of psychiatrists (Mahr, 1998; Walsh,

Author's Note: Visit the following Web sites for more information on this topic: Zeig, Tucker, & Theisen, www.zeigtucker.com and Carl Auer International, www.carl-auer.com.

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2005a, 2005b; Weber, 1993), psychologists (Franke, 2003; Madelung, 2001; Ulsamer, 2005), biologists (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004; Sheldrake, Hellinger, & Schuetzenberger, 1999), organizational consultants (Brick & Horn, 2005; Simon, 2004), and educators (Nowhere Foundation, 2004).

The 2005 International Congress on Systemic Constellations in Cologne, Germany, included presentations by well-known specialists such as Peter Levine (2005) on healing trauma, Holocaust survivor and Israeli psychiatrist Haim Dasberg (2000) on family systems and the German-Jewish past, chiropractor Dale Schusterman (2003) on Kabbalist principles and constellations, and Dutch shaman Daan van Kampenhout (2003) on shamanic healing principles in constellations.

Despite the constellation method's roots in family systems theory and the burgeoning expansion of the constellation approach abroad, the method is virtually unknown among family therapists in the United States. There are several contributing factors. One is the method's phenomenological stance that renders it ill suited to rigorous, objective testing and documentation. As with other systemic approaches, it is unwieldy to control variables and collect methodologically sound, longitudinal outcome data. Another is the lack of standards of best practices to protect licensed practitioners from ethical and liability exposure.

The following sections serve as a broad introduction to the constellation process. They encompass a biographical sketch of Bert Hellinger, a discussion of the influence of family systems theory, existential-phenomenology, and Zulu ancestor worship, a description of the process, and an outline of important prereflective fundamental structures of existence that Colaizzi (1973) suggested would be an outcome of empirical phenomenological research.

BERT HELLINGER BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hellinger was born into a Catholic family in Germany in 1925. His parents' "particular form of [Catholic] faith provided the entire family with immunity against believing the distortions of National Socialism" (Hellinger et al., 1998, p. 327). The local Hitler Youth Organization tried without success to recruit him. As a result of his reluctance, the Gestapo classified him as suspected of being an enemy of the people (Hellinger, personal communication, May 15, 2004).

In 1942, Hellinger was conscripted into the regular German army. He saw close combat on the Western front (Hellinger, personal communication, May 15, 2004). In 1945, he was captured and imprisoned in an Allied POW camp in Belgium.

The brutality and destructiveness of the Nazi era is central to Hellinger's lifework. Sixty years after the cessation of warfare, with all the victims and perpetrators either dead or aged, Hellinger continues to focus on acknowledging and reconciling the echoes and reverberations of this massive collective trauma.

Following his escape from the POW camp and return to Germany, Hellinger entered a Catholic religious order. In the early 1950s, he was dispatched to South Africa, where he was assigned as a missionary to the Zulus. He lived in South Africa for 16 years, became fluent in the Zulu language, participated in their rituals, and gained an appreciation for their distinct worldview.

He left the priesthood during the 1960s and married after returning to Germany. He trained in psychoanalysis at the Wiener Arbeitskreis für Tiefenpsychologie (Viennese Association for Depth Psychology). After completing his formal studies, he took additional training in primal therapy and transactional analysis. His training in the Family Sculpture method, pioneered by Virginia Satir, came from Ruth McClendon, Leslie Kadis, and the German child psychiatrist Thea Schoenfelder.

Another major influence in his work during this period was the hypnotherapy of Milton Erickson. He trained with Jeffrey K. Zeig, Stephen Lankton, Barbara Steen, and Beverly Stoy. Later, he studied Gestalt therapy and Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

By 1985, Hellinger, then 60 years old, had completed a 15-year cycle of education and training. He had a small private practice in southern Germany. He would likely have remained a sole practitioner of eclectic existential therapy had it not been for his encounter with a prominent German psychiatrist, Gunthard Weber. Weber was Director of an inpatient eating disorder clinic at the University of Heidelberg Hospital. In 1988, Weber observed a training demonstration of Hellinger at work. "It was amazing for me," he recalls. "I knew it was something new" (G. Weber, personal communication, February 12, 2004).

Weber arranged for a series of sessions for patients from his clinic diagnosed with anorexia and bulimia. He found the results remarkable, though Hellinger refused to allow formal research to confirm longitudinal outcomes. As an experienced physician in psychiatric hospitals, Weber was particularly impressed with the responses of patients with the most daunting symptoms, such as schizophrenia, eating disorders, and persistent suicidal urges (G. Weber, personal communication, February 12, 2004).

In 1993, Hellinger and Weber (1993) published *Zweierlei Glück* (Capricious Good Fortune; aka Second Chance). They expected to sell 2,000 copies within the German psychotherapy community. To everyone's surprise, the book was received with acclaim and became a national best-seller, selling 200,000 copies.

At the age of 70, Bert Hellinger emerged as an internationally best-selling author. During the past 10 years, he has authored or coauthored 30 books. Those translated into English include, *Love's Hidden Symmetry: What Makes Love Work in Relationships* (Hellinger et al., 1998); *Acknowledging What Is: Conversations with Bert Hellinger* (Hellinger & ten Hövel, 1999); *Love's Own Truths: Bonding and Balancing in Close Relationships* (2001); *Insights* (2002a);

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On Life & Other Paradoxes (2002b); *Farewell: Family Constellations with Descendants of Victims and Perpetrators* (2003a); *Peace Begins in the Soul: Family Constellations in the Service of Reconciliation* (2003b); *Rachel Weeping for Her Children: Family Constellations in Israel* (2003c).

Hellinger continues to travel widely, delivering lectures, workshops, and training courses throughout Europe, the United States, South America, China, and Japan. He has made numerous trips to Israel, where his work often deals with issues relating to the Nazi Holocaust.

Because Hellinger has not sought to control proprietary rights to his methods and techniques, a new generation of practitioners has begun to expand and evolve the constellation process. Although they honor Hellinger as the originator of many important insights, they are not bound to adhere to his procedures. Most facilitators who come to the work are professionally credentialed. They freely adapt, integrate, and modify Hellinger's foundational contributions to fit their existing toolkits.

ROOTS AND INFLUENCES

Phenomenology

Phenomenological psychology began with Brentano (1838-1917), whose views on psychology's mission and methods stood in sharp contrast to Wundt:

> Brentano viewed consciousness in terms of a unity expressed by acts. Thus structuralism's inherent goal of finding the elements of consciousness was meaningless for Brentano because such study destroys the essential unity of consciousness, and such elements, if they exist, do not have psychological meaning. (Brennan, 1998, p. 176)

Husserl (1859-1938) was a student of Wundt, Brentano, and Stumpf. In the spirit of Brentano, Husserl rejected the premises of experimental psychology and sought to articulate a scientific methodology that would reveal a whole truth rather than discrete bits of truth. His contribution was the design of a scientifically rigorous qualitative methodology that did not require the totality of experience to be reduced to constituent parts to be studied and understood. Husserl (1964) is credited with establishing the distinctions among real, irreal, and mixed objects of consciousness.

Husserl's phenomenology and Kierkegaard's existentialism were fused in the work of Martin Heidegger, whom Hellinger refers to as his lifelong "philosophical companion" (Hellinger et al., 1998, p. 330). With regard to Hellinger's views, Heidegger's contribution to phenomenological philosophy was twofold. First, he diverged from Husserl on the question of how to draw meaning from the observation of the totality of existential reality. Husserl's emphasis was on the description of consciousness, whereas Heidegger placed greater emphasis on interpretation of being (Giorgi, 1970; Husserl, 1964). Second, Heidegger emphasized facing one's own eventual death as a necessity for living an authentic life.

Another phenomenological philosopher who anticipated Hellinger's method is Colaizzi (1973), who distinguished fundamental descriptions from fundamental structures. Fundamental descriptions are the raw data provided by participants in the course of phenomenological research. They are explicit products of the reflective dimension of awareness. Fundamental structures, in contrast, cannot be accessed or recognized by the participant in the course of reporting and reflection. They operate in the prereflective dimension, which is the sensed, but unlanguaged, realm of human experience. It is up to the investigator to elucidate these basic organizing principles of behavior, feelings, and beliefs through an act of interpretive reading.

Hellinger (2001) explains his phenomenological stances as follows:

> There are two inner movements that lead to insight. One reaches out, wanting to understand and to control the unknown. This is scientific inquiry . . . . The second movement happens when we pause in our efforts to grasp the unknown, allowing our attention to rest, not on the particulars, which we can define, but on the greater whole . . . . We pause in the movement of reaching out, pull back a bit, until we arrive at the inner stillness that is competent to deal with the vastness and complexity of the greater whole. This inquiry, which first orients itself in inwardness and restraint, I call phenomenological. (p. 2)

Zulu Ancestor Reverence

Hellinger's assignment as a missionary to the Zulus can be viewed as the hunter being captured by the game. Rather than converting Zulus to Christianity's promise of salvation, Hellinger became a convert to their views of the interdependence between the living and the dead.

In their traditional culture, the Zulus live and act in a religious world in which the ancestors are the central focal point:

> The ancestral spirits are of fundamental significance for the Zulu. They are the departed souls of the deceased. Although they are regarded as having gone to abide in the earth, they continue to have a relationship with those still living. (Lawson, 1985, pp. 24-25)

The ancestors are regarded as positive, constructive, and creative presences. Failure to show them proper respect invites misfortune; proper veneration ensures benefit. When a family member suffers the consequences of the ancestors' wrath, the punishment is not regarded as destructive. Rather, it is viewed as a legitimate expression of the failure of the individual to uphold his or her duty to the family (Lawson, 1985).

The dark shadows of material destruction and existential angst that enveloped Germany had not extended to Zulu

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villages in South Africa in the 1950s. Heidegger postulated that to be human is to find oneself thrown into a world with no clear logical, ontological, or moral structure. In Zulu culture, Hellinger found beings (*Dasein)* who were at peace with existence.

The Zulus to whom Hellinger ministered possessed a certitude and equanimity that were the hallmarks of Heidegger's elusive authentic self. These were not lost individuals thrown into being but temporary custodians of life knit into a tightly woven fabric of generations past and yet to be. As Lawson (1985) notes, when the ancestors are the source of power, group activity is mediated in every case by precisely defined roles.

Of particular importance is the Zulu attitude toward parents. The Hitler Youth Organization was notorious for encouraging children to betray their parents. In Zulu culture, Hellinger (2001) says, "I never heard anyone speak disrespectfully about their parents. That would have been inconceivable" (p. 443). The constellation facilitator attunes with this stance, in contrast to traditional psychodrama in which parents "were routinely depicted as villains" (Williams, 1998, p. 139).

Family Systems Therapy

Family Constellations are grounded in the epistemology of existential-phenomenology and the Zulu-influenced ontology of trans-generational connectedness. The clinical methodology originated with the family systems therapy of Virginia Satir and Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy.

Boszormenyi-Nagy posited that unconscious regulators of balance, merit, and entitlement bind individuals into narrow roles within the family structure. Because these regulators are not apparent in conscious awareness, he labeled them trans-generational invisible loyalties and said that, "Injustices that have not been resolved are doled out by a 'transgenerational tribunal' to future generations using a sort of debt and merit account" (Franke, 2003, pp. 66-67).

In mapping the functionality of these systemic regulators, Boszormenyi-Nagy recognized "the structuring of relationships, especially within families, is an extremely complex and essentially unknown 'mechanism.' Empirically, such structuring can be inferred from the lawful regularity and predictability of certain repetitious events in families" (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973, p. 1). Empirical support for this observation comes from Schützenberger (1998), who documented hundreds of cases where extreme fates (e.g., death of a child by drowning) repeated in clear patterns in the genograms of French families.

Boszormenyi-Nagy's invisible loyalties are consistent with Zulu attitudes toward ancestors. In technologically advanced societies, families are divided by geographic distance, divorce, and estrangements. As expected by Boszormenyi-Nagy and the Zulu models, the disintegration of family structure, particularly trans-generational exclusion or disrespect, contributes to emotional and somatic dysfunction.

Boszormenyi-Nagy's teacher, Virginia Satir (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001, p. 174), developed and popularized her family sculpture and family reconstruction methods in the 1960s by merging elements of Moreno's psychodrama with innovative systemic family therapy techniques developed at the Ackerman Institute in New York City.

The therapeutic objective of family sculptures was to reveal underlying systemic conflicts. In response to one or more clients being absent from the group appointment, Satir began to have assistants stand in their place. She observed, "If I put people in physical stances, they were likely to experience the feelings that went with that stance" (Satir, 1987, p. 68).

These techniques were aligned with the third force of existential-humanistic psychology. They were not designed for behavior modification but instead sought to expand the resources available to clients to deal more constructively with their circumstances. Satir, like Boszormenyi-Nagy, recognized that any given symptom was part of a larger tableau that connected not only to members of the immediate nuclear family but also to members of past and future generations (Franke, 2003).

PROCESS DESCRIPTION

The Family Constellation process removes the "drama" from Moreno's psychodrama and the "sculpting" from Satir's family sculpting to create an experience that is silent and still instead of vocal and kinetic. As the participants adjust to this emptiness, the prereflective dimension of fundamental structures (Colaizzi, 1973; Husserl, 1964) comes into view. In phenomenological terms, Constellations create a three-dimensional matrix of the ancestral lineage that is not generally presented to consciousness in material form. "Constellations function by transforming irreal field dimensions of human experience into real spatial symbolic representations, thereby allowing them to be worked with directly" (Donnan, 2005).

This symbolic representation of the ancestral field literally manifests new points of view. These are not dictated or scripted by the facilitator, nor are they expressions of the client's inner dialogue or emotions. Instead, they appear to emerge spontaneously from the constellation itself, as in sandtray therapy (Bradway, 1979; Kalff, 1980). It is as if the ancestral field, Boszormenyi-Nagy's mechanism, has a mind and message of its own and, now, a forum for expression. The ancestors' representatives become characters in a living novella, altering the meanings of past events and reconfiguring the family system.

The procedure described below represents a typical format.

A group of participants (10 to 30) sit in a circle. One participant is selected as the client to work on a personal issue. The others either serve as representatives or actively contribute by observing with concentration.

The facilitator asks, "What is your issue?" Ideally, the client answers in three sentences or fewer. The issue may be

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extreme: "Two years ago my husband and child were killed in an accident. I'm trying to learn how to live with that" (Hellinger, 2003d, p. 72). Or it may appear to be more commonplace, such as a college student who reports: "I'm 21 years old and have been diagnosed with clinical depression" (Cohen, 2005, p. 115).

The facilitator asks for information about the family of origin, looking for traumatic events from the past that may have systemic resonance. Such events include premature deaths, including aborted children, murders, suicide, and casualties of war, or when members of the family system were denied their right to belong, such as a disabled child who was institutionalized, a baby given up for adoption, a disappeared father, or a homosexual or apostate who was banished from the family. The client does not present narrative or commentary.

Next, the facilitator asks the client to select group members to represent members of the family system. Typically, these will be the client's immediate family or the issue itself. In the first case cited above, the facilitator began with the client and her deceased husband and child; in the second case, the client and a representative for depression.

The client stands behind each representative, placing his or her hands on the representative's shoulders, and moves him or her into place. In Hellinger's (2001) words, "Put your mother at the correct distance from your father, for example, and turn her to face the way you feel is right. Do it without talking, from your center and in contact with your feelings at the moment" (p. 18).

Once the representatives are in position, the client sits and observes. The representatives stand with their arms at their sides without moving or talking. They are not role playing. For several minutes, the scene is one of stillness and silence. The facilitator observes and waits.

The representatives tune into the resonance of the family field, accessing kinesthetic and emotional data (Laszlo, 2004; Sheldrake, 1995). The facilitator may inquire of each representative, "How are you feeling?" Sometimes the representatives are placid and without emotion. Other times they report strong emotions or physical effects. The reports are subjective and contain some aspect of personal projection. However, the intermixing of subjective personal projections with field resonance does not contaminate the process as a whole.

The emerging movements reflect a highly interpenetrative network of fields that are generally inaccessible to cognition (Donnan, 2005). Often, what underlies people's serious issues is that a living family member is repeating or compensating for past hardships in the larger family system. If this connection is to an excluded person or one who had a difficult fate, the living family member can be drawn to repeat this fate or compensate for what occurred in the past.

The facilitator slowly works with this three-dimensional portrait of the family. First, the hidden systemic dynamic comes into clear view. In the case of the young woman with depression, the hidden dynamic was the client's invisible loyalty to the grief of her deceased grandmother.

Next, the facilitator seeks a healing resolution. In the case above, the representatives for the client and grandmother faced a third representative who symbolized the object of the grandmother's undying grief. When the client perceived the effect her loyalty to grief had on her beloved grandmother, she felt a profound release. The representatives feel relieved when the excluded person is acknowledged, restored to his or her rightful place in the system and respected for the fate he or she endured.

Once a resolution comes to light, the client stands in his or her place in the constellation. The final step is for the facilitator to suggest one or two healing sentences to be spoken aloud or inwardly. In this case, the healing sentence was for the representative of the grandmother to say to the client, "Go live!" (Cohen, 2005, pp. 115-116).

Afterward, there is no processing by the facilitator. Clients who are in an ongoing course of psychotherapy can integrate these insights with their therapists.

There is a wealth of anecdotal and case study reports that over time the new image of the family system—with belonging, balance, and order restored—gradually melts the archaic image that supported the entanglement. For example, Wolynn (2005) documented cases of client self-abuse (cutting, trichotillomania) where perceiving, acknowledging, and honoring trans-generational systemic entanglements resulted in a sustained cessation of injurious behaviors. Rigorous research is needed to objectively test the longitudinal outcomes of clients' experiences with this method.

PREREFLECTIVE FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURES

The constellation process is both a therapeutic intervention and a means for casting light on Boszormenyi-Nagy's (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973) "hidden and unknown mechanism" or Colaizzi's (1973) fundamental structures. Hellinger identified three such principles, which he named the orders of love (Hellinger et al., 1998). In their simplest articulation, these are (a) parents give and children receive, (b) every member of the family system has an equal and unequivocal right to belong, and (c) each family system has an unconscious group conscience that regulates guilt and innocence as a means to protect the survival of the group. These principles are in harmony with many indigenous cultures' attitudes toward bonding, balancing, and order (Boring, 2004; Lawson, 1985; van Kampenhout, 2003).

Individuals who participate in multiple group sessions and serve as representatives in the constellations of others can begin to recognize common themes behind common human experiences. It is a challenge to articulate these observations because of the lack of suitable English-language vocabulary. The subtopics below discuss some of these thematic principles.

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Soul

The term *soul* used in constellations refers to the source of drives and impulses that are deeply embedded, their origins lost to memory and their intentions not accessible to the conscious mind. This soul is neither the Christian soul that may achieve salvation, nor the Hindu Atman that carries karma through multiple reincarnations, nor the scientific soul-mind that is the accumulation of identity and awareness content produced by cellular activity in the body.

The main point of departure between the soul that can be observed influencing the representatives in a constellation and the vernacular soul turns on whether it is something personal. The Western concept of the soul emerged from early Greek philosophy, and although it has become furcated by Judeo-Christian-Islamic theology and 400 years of scientific understanding of the physical universe, it has retained its essential function. The concept of soul exists to mediate the collision between our irresistible will to live forever and the immutable inevitability of death (Rank, 1998). The common mythology, to both the theist who believes the immortal soul survives the body and the atheist who insists that death is the extinguishment of all personal identify, is that the human being exists as an *I*.

The view of soul in constellations is consistent with certain non-Western traditions (Boring, 2004; Lawson, 1985; van Kampenhout, 2003) and is shared in similar form in Taoism and Buddhism (Walsh, 2005a). Hellinger (2003a) writes,

> When we look objectively it becomes clear that it is not we who possess a soul but rather a soul which possesses us; and that the soul is not there to serve us but rather that we are in the service of the soul. (Hellinger, 2003a, p.8)

In this view, individuals are not independent entities but more like

> links in a long chain connecting all those who have lived and will live, and those living now, as if we were all part of one life and one soul. Therefore soul reaches beyond us into another space: into our families, into larger groups and into the world as a whole. (Hellinger, 2002a, p. 121)

Conscience

Conscience is another term that changes its nature when viewed through the lens of a constellation process. In philosophy, conscience is considered an internal regulator of ethical values and behavior (Langston, 1998). For Christians, a good conscience encourages righteousness, leading ultimately to the soul's salvation. Conversely, a bad or guilty conscience is the product of thoughts and deeds that are against God's beneficence. If not atoned for, confessed, or absolved, the corrosive effects of a bad conscience lead to eternal damnation.

In scientific psychology, conscience serves to regulate in favor of ethical behaviors that support mutual survival and to enforce taboos against behaviors that society and culture have determined to be destructive or evil. With or without a soul, conscience is seen as an internal driver that praises the good and deplores evil.

Seen within the field of constellations, feelings of conscience tell us nothing about what is good or evil, only what serves to connect or separate us from a particular person or group. Conscience tells us what we have to do to belong to our parents, lovers, religion, nationality, or any group. Its basic function is to bond us to our family and to the group that is essential for our survival. Therefore, when we follow our conscience, it is not a personal conscience; it is the conscience of our group.

As conscience bonds us with our group, it separates us from other groups. So the divisions among peoples and families and bigger groups come from good conscience. The stronger the adhesion is within the group, the greater the aggression against outside groups. The more dangerous the threat from outside, the more persistent the perceived voice of conscience is in defending the good and attacking the bad.

Belonging, Balance, and Hierarchy

In the initial setup of a Family Constellation, it is commonplace to see the system disordered: Children appear in a superior position to their parents; a father is at a great distance from his wife and children; the mother's back is to her daughter as she gazes to the horizon. These images reflect the Hopi term *koyaanisqatsi*—life out of balance. In seeking a healing image, the facilitator physically moves the representatives guided by a phenomenological orientation toward belonging, balance, and hierarchy.

Belonging controls membership in the system. Balance maintains equilibrium between giving and taking in relationships. Hierarchical order positions the members of a system in relation to each other. Together, these three regulators influence the tendencies toward centralization that support survival.

Who belongs to the family system? At a minimum, the individual and his or her parents, siblings, grandparents, and biological first aunts and uncles belong. The living and the dead have equal right to belong. If that right is violated, the consequence is that a child born into the system may become a placeholder for the missing or excluded person.

In special circumstances, others become members of the system. If someone makes room, sacrifices, or is victimized for the benefit of the family or commits a crime or atrocity against the family, that person may become part of the system. For example, Madelung (2001) writes,

> It's been more than 50 years since the Nazi regime ended, yet the task of coming to terms with those fateful years is far from over. The after-effects can be observed in systemic constellation work over and over again, often with dismaying clarity. The fates of those people who experienced the Nazi regime continue to affect their family systems today.

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The victims of Nazi crimes become members of the perpetrators' family system, and the perpetrators become members of the victims' system.

Balance is the oscillation between entitlement and obligation that results from giving and taking in relationships. A primary expression of this dynamic is that parents give and children receive. The process of accepting what has been given can be impeded for people who have been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused by their parents. People who reject their parents may be fully justified in their assessment of fault and blame but unaware of the heavy consequences that often results from this attitude.

Hierarchal order means that each person has a specific place within the system. For example, parents come before children and older children come before younger ones. This may seem like a banal observation until one considers the consequences of disruptions to this order. The hierarchy is often violated by young children out of love for their parents. For example, a mother who received an inadequate upbringing may seek to receive from her daughter the love she missed as a child. The young daughter will comply out of love, but in doing so, she violates that order of hierarchy.

The ill effects from violations and disruptions to belonging, balance, and order contribute to illnesses, accidents, estrangements and all varieties of dysfunctional and deviant behavior. Such effects can also be seen in ethnic and religious conflicts (Cohen, 2005). When excluded members are acknowledged and restored to their rightful place, giving and taking are balanced, representatives stand in comfortable relation to each other, and the constellation presents the client with a new image of the family system.

Existence

Existence is the animating force that energizes a living being from conception until death. It comes to each of us from our parents, who received it from their own. Existence passes through countless generations who were born, lived for some time, passed life on, and then died. The will of existence acts as an expansive force that counters the conservatism of the family system.

In Family Constellations, existence and the system are often observed to collide with severe consequences for individuals. Existence cares nothing for the system; it only wants to extend itself. The system cares nothing for existence; it only wants to sustain order. Unwanted pregnancies, forbidden romances, abandoned loves are frequent outcomes from the struggle of existence, in the guise of love, to rise above the system.

Children and adults can get whatever they need to survive from multiple sources; they can only receive existence from their mother and father. This basic biological fact is a cornerstone of Constellation work. Hellinger (2002b) said,

> All therapy, as I understand it, has to go to the source. For each one of us, the source is, first of all, our parents. If we are connected to our parents, we are connected to our source. A person who is separated from his or her parents is separated from his or her source. Whoever the parents are, however they behaved, they are the source of life for us. So the main thing is that we connect to them in such a way that what comes from them can flow freely to us and through us to those who follow. (p. 14)

CONCLUSIONS

The Family Constellation process can serve as an adjunct to a conventional course of psychotherapy. The insights that come to light through the process can inform and illuminate the background and be integrated with conventional interventions.

Although the efficacy of the process has not been properly researched, family therapists can test the suitability of the method against their own understanding and experience. Within the European family therapy community, constellations have been widely accepted and integrated, though not without controversy regarding methods, applicability, and qualifications of facilitators (Ulsamer, 2005, pp. 224-243).

Family therapists who share an affinity with the early pioneers of family systems theory may be interested to see how the legacies of Moreno, Satir, and Boszormenyi-Nagy evolved in European circles in recent years.

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