

Introducing James Anthony Dyson

by David Tresemer, PhD

James A. Dyson trained as a medical doctor who extended the writing of prescriptions into a holistic approach to the whole human being. For the last twenty years he has championed the cause of anthroposophic psychology and psychotherapy. For more than fifty years he has studied the esoteric teachings of Rudolf Steiner, as well as the spirit at work in the substances that he prescribed—and the spirit-imbued form of therapeutic movement, eurythmy. Much later he studied Psychosynthesis Psychology, nonviolent communication (NVC), and aspects of organizational development. His synthesis of these paths is unique and powerful, as this book makes evident.

Dr. Dyson grew up in a family with close connections to the spiritual movement known as Anthroposophy, begun by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). Dyson’s father ran a small, one-man butcher’s business, and both he and Dyson’s mother were very active in organizing meetings of anthroposophic groups in the Manchester area of the UK. Once, as a young child, Dyson asked his mother, “That picture on the desk next to the fireplace—is that your father?” The picture was in fact of Rudolf Steiner. This story that Dyson tells gives two hints: the first that the young child didn’t personally know his mother’s father, who had, in fact, died decades earlier, and the second, that there must have been something intimate and warm in the way in which his mother looked at that picture, some quality that the young boy observed streaming out of her. After a pause in telling this story, Dyson recalled his mother replying, “No, that picture is of someone whom your father and I hold in high regard.” As things turned out,

Anthroposophy and Rudolf Steiner were soon to become foundational in guiding Dyson's life and work.

Pursuing anthroposophic studies from adolescence onward, initially alongside humanities and later medical sciences, and after qualifying as a medical doctor and gaining further clinical experience in his late twenties, Dyson went on to cofound (initially with Dr. Michael Evans) a residential therapeutic center, soon to become a registered clinical facility—Park Attwood Clinic—devoted to anthroposophic medicine. That is, it had an integrated approach, addressing the whole person, body, soul, and spirit. The Clinic embraced extended nursing skills, therapeutic arts, and eurythmy, as well as anthroposophic massage, evening storytelling, festival celebrations, and many other healing modalities. Sadly, due mainly to an increasingly hostile socioeconomic environment, the clinic was not able to continue beyond thirty years and closed in 2009.

Dyson practiced as an anthroposophic physician and counselor at Park Attwood for the first twenty-five of those years, becoming formally accredited professionally by the Medical Section of the School of Spiritual Science. After leaving the Clinic at the age of fifty-four, he was inspired to embark on a five-year training in Applied Psychosynthesis at the Institute of Psychosynthesis in North London, under the direction of Joan and Roger Evans. Psychosynthesis is a psychology and psychotherapy originally conceived and launched by Roberto Assagioli, MD (1888–1974), and developed further since then by others. Dyson soon became convinced that Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy, as well as being one of the best-kept secrets of the twentieth century, provided an invaluable and seamless complement to Steiner's more cosmologically based spiritual psychology. While psychology is implicit throughout Steiner's legacy, and always linked to both matter and spirit, it has never been consolidated as a practical psychotherapeutic discipline.

Dyson is now connected to the Medical Section of the School of Spiritual Science and many individuals and institutions have sought

and continue to seek his consultancy and guidance; his current affiliations are many. His work as an adult educator has led to extensive travels to various countries as a regular seminar contributor and lecturer in anthroposophic medicine, psychology, and more general aspects of Anthroposophy. His most recent work has been with the Association for Anthroposophic Psychology (AAP) in North America, where he is on the Core Faculty.

Allow me now to share a vignette about James Dyson. In one seminar, forty of us were all seated in a circle. From behind his chair, Dyson pulled up a medium-sized backpack, frayed at the edges and looking like a relic from World War II trench warfare. He began, “Everyone needs a rucksack,” and one thought of schoolchildren or hikers, with necessities for survival.

“You need some basics,” he continued. He then began pulling out books. “You definitely need to have this one: *Inner Realities!*”

That was Steiner’s *Inner Experiences of Evolution*, lectures given in 1911. He brandished the book, describing it as “essential and foundational.”¹

He then lifted another, and said, “Nancy McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis*, the best of its kind!” He smiled at the book, and set it down.²

“And here’s Nocelli’s new book, *The Way of Psychosynthesis.*”³ He went on. People scribbled names in their notebooks, but it was the gesture, more than the content of each prize he held aloft, that affected us: the grasp of the hand, as his mind must have grasped the contents, the worn edges, seen even at a distance, that affirmed deep

1 R. Steiner (2006). *Inner Experiences of Evolution* (previously published as *Inner Realities of Evolution*).

2 N. McWilliams (2020). *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis: Understanding Personality Structure in the Clinical Process*.

3 P. Nocelli (2017). *The Way of Psychosynthesis: A Complete Guide to the Origins, Concepts, and the Fundamental Experiences, with a Biography of Roberto Assagioli*.

study and respect for words and for these explorers of the wilds of human consciousness.

“Yes, and Firman and Gila, *Primal Wound!* Irrespective of some problems, you can’t do without it!”⁴ And then, he concluded, dipping down deep inside, “Here are a few more of Steiner’s.” Out of the little backpack came book after book, all worn from travels here and there, the peripatetic scholar’s friends. It almost seemed like a circus trick—more came out of the rucksack than could possibly have fitted into it.

This is what the backpack means to a doctor of the soul. The root of the word *doctor* is *docere*, to teach. Doctors signify learned individuals, those who were originally theologians, persons expected to know about things unknown to their listeners. And this is who Dyson is. He has committed himself to integrating the insights of many traditions and scholars, further integrating them within the province of the medical doctor, penetrating the physiological correlates of the psychological and vice versa.

Dyson, meanwhile, is also a translator and avid collaborator. With his wife Carlotta, he has spent a great deal of time retranslating and adding contextual footnotes to two volumes of lectures by the renowned anthroposophic physician and founder of the Camphill movement, Karl König, MD (1902–1966). Much more about Dr. König will appear in detail later in this book. Another person whose name and ideas appear in these forthcoming pages is the psychologist and psychotherapist William Bento. In 1996, Bento and Dyson met for the first time as keynote presenters at a mental health conference organized by a Camphill village in Upstate New York—a meeting that turned out to have a huge creative impact on both of their lives. Dyson and Bento went on to collaborate in an experimental seminar to develop a curriculum in what they termed “*psychosophy*.”

4 J. Firman and A. Gila (1997). *The Primal Wound: A Transpersonal View of Trauma, Addiction and Growth*.

What followed spanned four years, 2001 to 2004, in which Dyson and Bento engaged others for five-day periods three times a year in building foundations for an anthroposophic psychology. Dyson's central contributions to this course focused on linking the seven life processes to sense psychology and pathology, building further on König's earlier formulations. Then, between 2005 and 2014, Dyson worked with Glen Williamson to evolve a movement-based curriculum that draws on Bento's original suggestions for deepening an understanding of the somatic basis of personality structure and personality disorders. They most recently delivered their course, titled *Personality and Personality Disorders*, in California, designed primarily for graduates of the first basic three-year program of the Association for Anthroposophic Psychology (AAP).^{5,6}

Anthroposophic Psychology and Psychotherapy

Anthroposophy has contributions to offer not only in medicine, but in many other areas as well, including agriculture, education (Waldorf schools), special needs education, community building, new forms of movement (eurythmy), sociopolitical governance structures, architecture, and the arts. A difficulty for someone attracted to these new paradigms in any one of these fields is to feel overwhelmed by the scope of what Steiner seeded (six thousand lectures and more than a dozen written books, taking up more of a bookshelf than is humanly possible to embrace). These seeds have since been developed further by others. Well acquainted with some of these streams, Dyson has developed a particular fluency in combining and cross-referencing insights gained, whether in medicine, psychology, cosmology, cognitive science,

5 Although Dyson does use the technical term *disorder* in this course's title, he prefers the more psychologically neutral term of "disturbance."

6 Dr. Dyson thought that many others with whom he has worked should be added to this all-too-brief introduction, including, but not limited to, Christine Hebert, Roberta Nelson, Jaimen McMillan, practitioners of the Michael Chekhov School of Acting, and the many eurythmy teachers from whom he has learned.

education, or eurythmy. His approach is therefore an interdisciplinary one rather than one of specializing.

Mainstream psychology tends to a materialistic model of the inner life, as the working of genes and chemicals, and something that responds to medications. Anthroposophy—from *Anthropos*, the possible human being, and *Sophia*, the divine feminine working through wisdom—complements this worldview with a sense for soul and spirit. Thus, an important flagship of anthroposophic psychology is *The Counselor... As If Soul and Spirit Matter*.⁷

The Purpose of This Book

This book is intended to demonstrate Dyson’s unusually synergistic cognitive approach, combining the synthetic and analytic. The editorial team that created this book formed out of a mutual recognition of Dyson’s immense competence in linking diverse areas. The chapters of this book reflect that, not just in subject matter, but also in form. The book is comprised of interviews of Dyson, previously unpublished transcriptions of lectures and talks by him—to professional, student, and general audiences—and some revised excerpts from his master’s thesis. We hope this work will stimulate the reader’s thinking and serve as a catalyst, a sort of companion to psychological studies, one embedded in Anthroposophy and also informed by other more well-established psychotherapeutic disciplines. The main apology of this book is that it cannot be Dr. Dyson’s legacy book, a place in which his main accomplishments are presented thoroughly and systematically. With this publication, we are not starting at the beginning and giving a retrospective or systematic digest of Dyson’s insights or approaches to teaching. We won’t even manage to flesh out the entirety of any single conceptual structure that Dyson presents. Rather, our purpose is to provide

⁷ D. Tresemer, editor (2015). *The Counselor... As if Soul and Spirit Matter*. One of the chapters by William Bento describes how personality disorders are related to movement styles. Also the book from SteinerBooks, *Slow Counseling*, edited by David Tresemer.

a stimulus that demonstrates how he thinks, combines, and transforms, thereby bridging Anthroposophy not just to Psychosynthesis but also to other more mainstream psychologies.

The Editorial Team

Christine Huston, a graduate of AAP's Three-Year Certificate Program and graduate program, "Personality and Personality Disorders," has been working for twelve years as an anthroposophic life coach/counselor. Cofounder of Cape Ann Waldorf School (Massachusetts) and past President of Kimberton Waldorf School (Pennsylvania), she worked from 1989 to 2015 in administrative and consulting roles for Camphill communities in North America and now serves as Chief Operating Officer of AAP and as an officer on its board of directors. She has achieved a certificate as an AAP Associate.

Zheni Nasi, MA, is a licensed psychotherapist. Her professional life extends beyond psychology, across countries (United States, Canada, Greece), and into the fields of diplomacy, conflict management, healthcare, and social justice. She is an AAP Associate, a member of the Board of the AAP in North America, and a representative of AAP to the International Federation of Anthroposophic Psychotherapy Associations (IFAPA) in Switzerland.

David Tresemer, PhD (Psychology), is past president and faculty of the Association for Anthroposophic Psychology. He is the editor of the books *The Counselor . . . As If Soul and Spirit Matter* (2015) and *Slow Counseling: Emphasize the Healing Power of Relationships* (2017). He has also authored several books, coauthored the book *Star Wisdom and Rudolf Steiner: A Life Seen through the Oracle of the Solar Cross* (2006), and written many articles on anthroposophic psychology for *LILPOH* magazine. He is also the cofounder of The StarHouse in Boulder, Colorado.