

Richard Kitzler

The Ambiguities of Origins: Pragmatism, the University of Chicago, and Paul Goodman's Self¹

Gestalt therapy's theory of self principally is derived from the works of Paul Goodman and Frederick Perls. In this paper, Richard Kitzler examines the contribution of Paul Goodman and shows how unaware conflicts in Goodman's loyalties during his education at the University of Chicago are responsible for the inconsistent treatment of self in gestalt therapy theory. When Goodman presents self as an emergent function of experience, he is showing the influence of American pragmatism, and specifically, of William James. On the other hand, when he describes self as a synthetic unifier of experience, his *Creator Spirit*, he is showing the influence of his mentor at the University of Chicago, the Neo-Thomist Richard McKeon. This paper begins with a brief interview of Richard Kitzler by the editor.

Key words: Paul Goodman, self, American pragmatism, William James, Neo-Thomism, University of Chicago, George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, Frederick Perls, The New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy, Creator Spirit, synthetic unity of apperception.

Introduction: An Interview With the Author

Editor: Richard, you taught gestalt therapy at The New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy for more than 30 years by leading your students through a close line by line reading of *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, by Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951). In the past you often said that this book was perfect in all respects. You challenged us to find a single error and were adamant in your defense of every

¹ Edited by Dan Bloom. The editor is a longtime student of Kitzler's.