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PROBLEMS OF THE FUNDAMENT AND THOSE OF FUNDAMENTALISM

PLENARY LECTURE

"Thought (consequently) is not seen as offering freedom for development, but is felt as a restriction; by contrast 'acting out' is felt to yield a sense of freedom."

(Bion: *Attention and Interpretation*)

"Facts do not gain access to the world where our convictions live their own lives."

(Proust: *Remembrance of things past*. My translation)

I thought it was quite easy to write an abstract for the theme of this congress and I was grateful to the Scientific Committee for accepting it. So - thanks for this opportunity to explore further my psychoanalytical fundament.

'Fundament' - I wrote - is an achievement which is arrived at after working through mourning; it is the order of the depressive position. The object is accepted as both good and bad and the same applies to the self, an individual different from and separated from the object. The problem of the depressive position, the problem of the fundament, is the task to work through the painful process of mourning and the sense of guilt pertaining to the phantasy of having damaged the good object. From having worked through the process of mourning one has found ways to repair the object in a symbolic way, and regained a certain sense of order. One knows what it is like to endure jealousy and envy aroused by the primal scene and the creative couple, one has learnt to accept sometimes feeling an outsider and one knows oneself better; one is enabled to keep an eye on one's own destructiveness so as to make peaceful cooperation possible.

'Fundamentalism' on the other hand I thought of as fundamentally different, with the splitting into bad or good, black or white, superiority or inferiority, of the pathological paranoid-schizoid position – with violent projections serving as a defence against the pain of mourning. Fundamentalists attack life's complexities, idealise death, create adversaries and paranoia and try to drag the one and only Good forcibly to their side. The omnipotent defences and the projections, characteristics of the paranoid-schizoid position, weaken the ego and impair reality testing, damaging the capacity to cooperate. Symbols are equated with that which they were meant to stand for and are not experienced as mere symbols. Acting out supersedes thinking.

The idea was that successful mourning processes are the fundamentals of the depressive position and of the reality principle and of lasting human relationships, and I looked forward to elaborating on these aspects of psychoanalytic theory.

Soon after, on Friday November 13th 2015, the Islamic State attack hit Paris and the next morning I woke up to a message that my goddaughter had been wounded and her best friend shot dead.

Now, in one single blow the theories of fundamentals and fundamentalism were no longer mere theories. The theory of the death drive had been convincing to me, all the more so after a patient told me: 'I hate

you for having made me wish to live!' - and still is, but now it appeared all too abstract and somehow too easy to assert in clinical discussions; limited to clinical analysis and the resistances toward psychic development that we all deal with every day. The resistances both of the analysand and of oneself.

Having very nearly lost my goddaughter and she actually losing her very best friend in a massacre by the Islamic State opened up an abyss under my theoretical fundament, the fundament that up until then had helped me have a fairly secure sense of having understood something about human nature; this fundament now turned out to have very shaky foundations indeed and I fell helplessly towards the realization of the reality of humankind's supreme destructiveness.

Now the theory of the death drive was carried into palpable effect by the random murders we associate with fundamentalism; primitive, brutal violence aiming at inducing fear in people unknown to the murderers had had its effect on me too, even though I was peripheral to the actual event. I had to start thinking more deeply about the theme of this congress. Compared to this reality it was an irrelevant triviality to be hated by an analysand idealizing her own death wishes.

My goddaughter was right in the middle of the massacre on that horrifying night in Paris, when fundamentals of our society, our freedom to choose what we think of as ordinary life, was under attack.

I was struck by a certain detail of her story: She finds herself lying on the floor of a tiny restaurant, surrounded by eighteen dead and dying people and some wounded. They have just been shot by a murderer from the Islamic State, but she happens to be uninjured. On getting up from the floor she catches the eye of the murderer who is still there, and the words: 'he didn't shoot me' pass through her mind.

Then he lifts his kalashnikov and fires at her; two bullets hit her shoulder. The shot is not fatal and after the bullets have been removed her shoulder will eventually function normally.

I associate the eye contact with the theme of this congress. There's always an emotional reaction to eye contact, isn't there? How did the murderer react? Was his bloodlust stimulated again, now by the eye contact with a living human being and was this same bloodlust mitigated by libido, so that he failed to kill her? He is trained to shoot to kill and he shoots from a short distance, but fails to kill her whose eyes he just met. Did perhaps for a moment his fundament falter? His fundament being literally to despise life.

We name it fundamentalism that which is his fundament, a fundament of ideas that furnish his life with meaning and coherence: to despise those who love their lives.

This time the murderer lost his focus on killing. We know nothing about him at that very moment just as we know nothing about why a suicide bomber threw away his bomb belt outside Stade de France that same evening or why another murderer momentarily loses his balance and stumbles just as he is about to behead the American journalist John Foyles in front of the video camera (Verkaik 2016). I shall have to make do with speculations within my own limited field of imagination.

Whether the eye contact possibly shook his bloodthirsty fundament a bit or not, I was inspired to look again into what Bion wrote on the capability of tolerating uncertainty, and how he, starting from the British poet Keat's concept 'Negative Capability', elaborates important aspects on the practice of psycho-analysis (Attention and Interpretation p. 125). Negative Capability denotes an ability to remain in 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats 1817). What if the murderer had allowed for his fundament to stay shaken a bit longer?

Not least during the psychoanalytic session it is important to consider the shift from feeling safe with your fundament to the only seemingly safe but in reality quite different sense of fundamentalist persuasion,

built on fantasies of omnipotence as a defence against the sense of powerlessness and insecurity that the complexities of reality tends to induce in us all.

Ron Britton, in his chapter "Before and after the depressive position" (in "*Belief and Imagination*" 1998) departs from Bion's description of the normal shifts between depressive and schizophrenic positions that continue all through life in normal development.

Bion writes in '*Attention and Interpretation*' (1972 p. 124):

'In every session the psychoanalyst should ... relate to what is unknown both to him and to the analysand ... achieving a state of mind analogous to the paranoid-schizoid position. For this state I have coined the term 'patience' to distinguish it from 'paranoid-schizoid position', which should be left to describe the pathological state for which Melanie Klein used it. I mean the term to retain its association with suffering and tolerance of frustration.

Patience... 'until a pattern 'evolves'. This state is the analogue to what Melanie Klein has called the depressive position. For this state I use the term 'security'. This I mean to leave with its association of safety and diminished anxiety ... Few analysts ... are likely to escape the feelings of persecution and depression ... associated with ... the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions."

Neither of Bion's terms 'patience' and 'security' have caught on, but Britton develops out of this a model to clarify the distinction between normal and pathological paranoid-schizoid positions, and between normal and pathological depressive positions. His ... 'model describes the movement through each position in turn as part of a continuous, lifelong, cyclical development ... '

In normal development there's a period of paranoid-schizoid insecurity followed by something new, a new pattern in the depressive position. Psychological development entails shifts between the order of the depressive position and the insecurity of the paranoid-schizoid positions.

The depressive and paranoid-schizoid phenomena shift during a psychoanalytic session, through an entire analysis and in normal psychic development as well as in pathology.

For an individual the problem of the fundamental is basically that mourning is painful and involves guilt and insecurity whereas the problem of fundamentalism is that it works as a violent defence against the pain of mourning, always involving denial of realities, of facts of life. The order of the depressive position provides a sense of a fundament to rest on. Fundamentalism too can seem to provide a sense of security, precarious though as it is being based on the splitting of the ego, as well as of the object, in good and bad, and on projecting states of mind leading up to a loss of a sense of reality, because the ego has been depleted in the process of projecting. An observer can distinguish a certain rigidity in the personality.

It is worth considering how the fundament of one person can be experienced as fundamentalism by someone else. It becomes particularly obvious when you take a look at politics as they are now and in history. When threatened by someone else's ideas it is easy to defend your own fundament in a fundamentalist fashion. Psychoanalysts are not immune to such processes and I hope we shall be able here at this congress to think about this kind of problem a bit more.

The term fundamentalist originates from a series of tracts called *The Fundamentals, A Testimony to the Truth*, published in the USA from 1910 to 1915 according to Wikipedia. The sole Truth, I suppose, with a capital T.

'These tracts based their authority on the infallibility of the Bible because it was said every word in it was the Word of God.' (Britton, 2015, p.78) Part of these Fundamentals was to identify inimical ideas, among them modernism, Catholicism, socialism and the theory of evolution. The propensity to find enemies

among those who think differently and not according to the Truth of your own thinking is ubiquitous through the history of mankind. The words 'those who are not for us are against us' were often heard in my youth. A person who says so basically isolates and projects his own hostility into his enemy where it must become fixated, while at the same time all that is good is kept to himself, in himself.

Sometimes we encounter milder forms of fundamentalism in our consulting rooms when an analysand resists our interpretations, especially those interpretations that should come as a surprise: 'No! I never thought like that!' is one reaction. Or, the analysand interrupts and dismisses his analyst by saying: 'I don't understand!' - without allowing any further associations.

Ron Britton described in *'The Missing Link - parental sexuality in the Oedipus Complex'* (1989 p.88) how his analysand interrupts him by shouting: 'Stop that fucking thinking!' - as if his psychoanalytical fundament, to think, threatened her existence.

Such seemingly minor details of an analytic session demonstrate the analysand's resistance to deal with what is foreign to her, what he or she doesn't immediately recognize as familiar, and they express a wish to keep one's fundament intact, even though it sets limits to life, even painful limits.

A sense of mental balance creates a fundament to rest on and a person can then, when feeling threatened, use it in a fundamentalist way to fend off uncertainty, as if uncertainty were dangerous. In the firm analytic setting, with its attention to minute details in the interaction between analysand and his analyst, this can become very obvious and amenable to exploration.

What we believe to be of fundamental value in our society - openness, tolerance and freedom of speech - is questioned and shaken by murderous Islamic fundamentalism. This kind of fundamentalism is prevalent with its daily proclaimed and acted out death drive, its hatred of life itself - or at least the life of others is hated. Islamists in turn now remind us of the violent Crusades - and 'The Fundamentals' were written a mere hundred years ago, one might add.

On a naval base monument to commemorate the victims of airplane crashes there during military exercises 1919 to 1944 the Book of Revelations (12:11) is quoted thus: 'they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.' The clergyman who chose the quotation thought it entirely justifiable that the deceased did not consider their lives more important than that even in times of peace. It reminded me of hearing a young Islamist saying on the radio how much he despised those who value their lives more than death.

The Book of Revelations describes a battle between Michael with his angels and the Devil with his followers. Michael wins and Heaven, salvation, power and kingdom now belongs to 'our God'. Quite a few people wish to have God on their side because, as Bob Dylan (1963) puts it: 'You never ask questions with God on your side' - you don't have to think and you can easily disregard the fact that the Revelations describe an intrapersonal fight between good and evil, and not an actual fight between individuals or groups.

Every analysand is confronted with the task to reevaluate his fundament, his equanimity, and this applies to the analyst, too, especially when his interpretations are met with immediate resistance. The analyst's equanimity is already at stake during the uncertainty of the evenly-suspended attention, and it is necessary to use this state as an opportunity to grasp something new without closing the case with a ready-made idea, disguised as psychoanalytical theory.

Our present-day fundamentalism seems to have taken us by surprise with its brutality and glorification of death, obvious manifestations of the death drive, and we need to rethink both ourselves and our communities. It is not always easy to rethink and serious thinking does take time.

The concept of the death drive sometimes arouses resistance - although the daily slaughter is not easy to understand without it. This is not new: In 1929 Freud remembered 'my own defensive attitude when the idea of an instinct of destruction first emerged in psychoanalytic literature, and how long it took before I became receptive to it.' (S.E.XXI *Civilization and its Discontents* p. 119)

Melanie Klein further developed the concept of the death drive, she coined and described the concepts of depressive (1935) and paranoid-schizoid (1946) positions. I find these concepts useful in trying to understand the concepts of fundament and fundamentalism, by comparing them and by delineating the fundamental and important differences. The important difference is whether necessary mourning has been worked through or not.

From the very beginning of psychic development it is normal for the baby to split the object in two: one only good, and one only bad; this enables the child in due course to differentiate good from bad. A well established good object is also a prerequisite for the difficult task of working through the depressive position, especially of bearing the sense of guilt for having damaged the good object while at the same time having faith in that reparation is possible. Klein describes how, when the mourning is too painful a regression can take place to the paranoid-schizoid position as a defence against unbearable guilt, and by splitting and projections the world and the ego can then continue to be imagined as either ideal or persecuting.

Freud wrote in his '*On Transience*' in 1916, how, when there is an inability to mourn, the good objects are depleted and he describes the value of the capacity to mourn as in that process libido will be liberated to invest in new objects, in the future.

It is painful but necessary to mourn losses - to step by step (Freud *Mourning and Melancholia* S.E. XIV, 1957) cut the bonds to loved ones, to cherished ideas that provided a sense of identity and of belonging to a group, but which proved destructive - and to adjust to a comparatively bleaker kind of reality. Fantasising according to the pleasure principle is so much easier, despite its dangerous consequences which threaten when thinking about realities is impaired.

Bion notes in '*Attention and Interpretation*' (p 16) how 'inability to tolerate frustration' damages the capacity to think.

Humanity now and through its entire history has quite a lot to mourn as a consequence of the death drive and fundamentalism and 'frustration' is an inadequate word for the ghastly losses that people suffer and have suffered due to other people's uncontrolled aggressions. Freud noted this in '*Civilisation and its Discontents*' (p 111), quoting Plautus: 'Homo homini lupus' (man is a wolf to man).

Two German analysts, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, have in their book '*The Inability to Mourn*' (1975) studied the collective consequences of this inability in post-Hitler Germany. Departing from Freud's distinguishing mourning from melancholia, but not mentioning Klein, they argue that mourning is crucial for the kind of psychic maturity that eventually leads to a better capacity to cope with frustrating realities. It goes without saying that mourning comes easier when the good object is well established, when frustrations in early childhood have not been excessive, so as to damage the ego.

'The work of mourning can be accomplished only when one knows what one has to sever oneself from' (op. cit. p. 66)

Part of what has to be given up, they write, are bonds to a leader and to ideals that, when narcissistic, deplete the ego. '... Germans were prevented by their total self-dedication and the dissolution of their own ego in the Führer's ideals and claims from feeling any sympathy for the victims ...' (Op. cit. p 65). In Germany the leader was Hitler and the ideal Nazism, but there is not much point here in confining and

projecting problems to these phenomena. It would perhaps also be rewarding to reflect upon our own bondages to leaders and ideals and to understand to what extent we too suffer impoverishment of our egos along with narcissistic involvements in our own limited contexts, where authoritarian tendencies and cultures of silence are no unknown phenomena.

The battle between the life and death drives constantly going on in every human being is for me one psychoanalytic fundament. Yet I am often surprised to realize how relevant it is when it is again revealed in the interaction with an analysand and in everyday life, too. Death drive is a very worrying phenomenon. The surprise leads to a momentary disturbance of my equanimity, my depressive position, and puts me in a certain state of confusion that doesn't necessarily have to be pathological (it could be) and is not if I can hold on to it waiting patiently for a pattern to begin to emerge; a pattern that will be part of a new depressive position as it becomes possible to be formulated in words.

So how do we as analysts deal with a situation when our own fundamentals are called into question? We formulate our fundamentals in various ways, in different analytic theories and different analytic languages. I can easily feel a passing sense of fundamentalism, ferociously wanting to defend my theoretical fundament when it is questioned or under attack. For a moment then my relationship to a theory that provides me with a professional identity is at risk and my further equanimity depends on my ability to bear with the frustration, to try and think while feeling insecure and, if needs be, to mourn the passing of my favourite idea. Such things take time, but the alternative is fundamentalism.

A fundament can be dealt with in a fundamentalist way. The depressive fundament with the symbolising thinking needs to be restored time and again as the depressive order is never constantly won once and for all. There are always some unexpected experiences to be dealt with.

Here is a comment from an analysand reflecting over a new point of view: 'If I would have to give up my superiority in order to make room for someone else's wishes then it would be like losing part of myself. That is an extremely difficult sacrifice. Would it really be worth it? Just for mere cooperation?'

He or she hesitates to give up the unique sense of omnipotence without competition that is part of the paranoid-schizoid position, to give up the illusion of power and merely be content with ordinary life's compromises as part of cooperating with other people. To give up on an illusion that used to give life a sense of meaning.

To conclude:

1. A natural resistance to accept new ideas and to the necessity of changing one's mind if new facts emerge, for example the need to deal with the theory of the death drive, a resistance we find ourselves sharing with a period in Freud's thinking, might be thought of as a regression to the paranoid-schizoid position described by Melanie Klein. Preferring to idealise, refraining from seeing human nature as it is saves us from painful mourning. The disadvantage is losing the kind of orderly fundament that an adjustment to realities through a process of mourning will eventually make possible. Not least we miss the chance to free the libido to be invested in new objects, in the future. We miss opportunities to communicate with fellow human beings by using word symbols rather than mere showing and acting. Successful mourning is the fundament upon which the depressive position and enduring human relationships rest.
2. My first thoughts about the differences between the depressive and the paranoid-schizoid positions now appear to be simplistic and static and in a way fundamentalistic; as if depressive was simply good and paranoid-schizoid simply bad. Bion, and Britton, instead formulate a 'praise of uncertainty' to

emphasise the importance of bearing moments, or periods, of uncertainty until patterns emerge, patterns to think about and put into words for new insights; in analysis as well as in life outside analysis. The trouble is that by the time you arrive at a sense of safety in your profession as an analyst, standing firmly on your fundament, you will find yourself less inclined to let go of that fundament and give it the benefit of the doubt. In those moments we are all the more in need of tolerant colleagues to help us keep an open mind to what is yet unknown to us.

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