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Bion Revisited

Group Dynamics and Group Psychotherapy*

Bion's First Statement

Bion's account of his experiences with groups falls into two parts. The first contains the description of his method of work, the phenomena he noted following its use and the tentative theories he evolved to understand them. While he regards his views as an exten sion of Freud's (1922), his whole thinking has a quite distinctive character. Like Freud, he refers frequently to very different entities by the word group, e.g. , to organizations, or institutions such as the church and the army, and to such ill-defined groupings as "the aristocracy." His theories, however, stem from his observations in his "laboratory," the small group, and it is against the background of this "pure culture" that we have to appraise them.

In *Experiences in Groups* (Bion, 1961), he refers to two groups, each with a different task as perceived by the members at the start. In one, composed of "non-patients," the accepted aim was to study group behavior. In the other, the members were patients seeking help from a medical clinic. After an interview, the psychiatrist explained to each prospective patient that an

understanding of his conflicts in personal relationships could help in the amelioration of his symptoms. Such understanding was facilitated by meeting in a group in which relationships could be studied as they developed. To Bion, the use of his approach, i.e. one in which the sole activity of the leader or therapist is to make interpretations of the phenomena in the group as these develop, made any difference between the two groups irrelevant. The different expectations of members in the opening phase, however, are reflected in the groups. In fact his main references are to the therapeutic groups in which a strictly group-centered stance is stressed.

We readily recognize that the development of his method was in itself a major achievement. With a remarkable courage from his convictions, he

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showed that a psychoanalytic approach permitted the exposure of unrecognized, irrational and powerful relationships that were specific to the group situation. Bion was explicit on the highly subjective nature of his method, especially in its use of counter-transference feelings and in the detection of processes of projective identification wherein the therapist picks up the feelings of the members through what he senses they are projecting into him. As in psychoanalysis, the observer learns to attend to two levels of mental activity: the manifest conscious and the latent subconscious and unconscious. It is its subjectivity that arouses so much antipathy in those who consider that scientific research into human relationships can rest only on behavioral data. Nevertheless, that he had described something that illuminated the depths of group phenomena was clear from the remarkably rapid and widespread interest in his observations. There was little doubt that his work had made a profound stir in the new field of group dynamics. Nearly four decades later it continues to be as evocative as it was at the start—and a short scan of the history of theoretical views in psychology and the social sciences during the century readily shows that to be a quite unusual distinction.

To sustain the efforts of any group around its task requires in the first place a readiness to co-operate, which, for Bion, is a sophisticated product from years of experience and training. Next, the mental activity required to further the task must be of a particular kind, because judgments about the nature and origin of actual phenomena and actions designed to overcome

difficulties presented by them have to be tested against constant interaction with reality. In short, as opposed to any magical solutions, it must involve rational thinking with consequent learning and development, i.e. , ego-activity. It is this capacity to sustain task-focussed activity that the unorganized group greatly alters through the persistent interference from competing mental activities associated, in Bion's view, with powerful emotional drives. These conflicting forces at first seemed to have little in common except to oppose the task by creating a group that would satisfy the emotional needs of members as these become prominent. This state of the group Bion termed the "group mentality," and the way in which it might express itself, e.g., to find another leader, he described as the "group culture." These concepts, however, he soon found did not clarify sufficiently what his further experience perceived, namely, patterns of behavior that gripped the group into a relatively specific group mentality in opposition to the work activity. Bion named these patterns "basic assumptions" *(bas)* of which he identified *baD* (dependence), *baF* (fight/flight) and *baP* (pairing). In the *dependent group,* the basic assumption is that one person is there to provide security by gratifying the group's longings through magic. After an initial period of relief, individuals tend to react against the assumption because of the infantile demandingness and greed it engenders. Nevertheless, when he confronted the group with the dependence assumption taking over, Bion noted that

a hostile response to any intervention by him frequently revealed more than a resentment against his refusal to provide the magical pabulum. A longing for a more permanent and comprehensive support was to be seen in the raising of religious themes, with the group feeling that its "religion," in which the therapist is a phantasied deity, was being taken from it. *Fight and flight* appeared as reactions to what the group wanted to avoid, namely, the work activity (W) that forced it to confront the need to develop by giving up primitive magical ideas. The ineffectiveness of these solutions led at times to a different activity, for which Bion postulated the assumption of pairing. Pairing occurred repeatedly in his groups in the form of two members, irrespective of sex, getting into a discussion. To his surprise, this was listened to attentively, with no sign of impatience from members whose own problems usually pressed them to seek the center of attention for themselves. There seemed to be a shared unconscious phantasy that sex was the aim, with reproduction as a means of meeting a powerful need to preserve the group as a group.

As mentioned, the group dominated by an assumption evolves an appropriate culture to express it, e.g. , the dependent group establishes a leader who is felt to be helpful in supplying what it wants. Moreover, the assumptions can be strong enough for members to be controlled by them to the extent of their thinking and behavior becoming almost totally unrealistic in relation to the work task. The group is then for each member an undifferentiated whole into which he or she is pressed inexorably to conform and in which each has lost independent individuality. The individual experiences

this loss as disturbing, and so the group is in more or less constant change from the interaction of the basic assumptions, the group culture and the individual struggling to hold on to his or her individuality.

Basic assumptions originate within the individual as powerful emotions associated with a specific cluster of ideas which compel the individual to behave accordingly and also to be attracted to those imbued with the same feeling with an immediacy that struck Bion as more analogous to tropisms than to purposive behavior. These bonds Bion termed "valency" because of the chemical-like nature of the attraction.

As primal motivating forces, the basic assumptions supply a fundamental thrust to all activity, yet the drive towards interaction with the real environment remains the more powerful dynamic in the long run, for, without that adaptive urge, survival would not be possible. The difficulties of reality interactions, however, are great. The physical environment may present insoluble problems; but it is the social factors that become prominent in their effects on the capacities of the individual when work demands co-operation with all the give and take that entails. The frustrations in sustaining work activity are thus perpetually liable to induce the regressed behavior of the assumptions. The more the individual becomes identified with a basic assumption, the more does

he or she get a sense of security and vitality from fusion with the group, along with the pull back to the shared illusory hopes of magical omnipotent achievement inherent in the phantasies of the assumption. From all these sources there is derived what Bion described as a hatred of learning, a profound resistance to staying in the struggle with the reality task until some action gives the experience of mastery of at least a part of it, i.e. , until development of new inner resources occurs.

The appeal of each assumption rests in the associated emotion which gets a characteristic quality from the specific phantasies and ideas it involves. The assumptions do not conflict with each other. Instead, they change from one to another and conflict occurs only between them and the work group. When one *ba* is combined with work activity, however, the other *bas* are suppressed. A further observation Bion made was the way in which the *ba* group could change to its "dual." Thus the dependent group under the frustrations of the leader's failure to gratify its longings could reverse roles so that the group treated the leader as the one in need of help. In this connection, he also noted the tendency of the dependent group when left to its own devices to choose as leader the most disturbed member, as if it could best depend on someone of its own kind, as dependent as itself—the familiar genius, madman or fanatic.

The interrelations of the *bas,* plus the tenacity and exclusiveness with which the emotions and ideas are bound together in each *ba,* led Bion to what he felt was a theoretical impasse which no available psychological explanation could illumine. He therefore postulated a

metapsychological notion that transcends experience in the form of a proto-mental system in which the prototype of each *ba* exists "as a whole in which no part can be separated from the rest." The emotion in each individual that starts the *ba* progresses to the psychological manifestations that can be identified.

The physical and the mental are undifferentiated in the basic levels of this system, a feature which led to his suggestion that certain illnesses, e.g. , those in which a substantial psychosomatic component has long been recognized, might well be diseases of certain conditions in groups. To test such ideas needed much larger populations than the small group could provide, but he hoped it might be done in order to establish the basic assumptions as clinical entities.

Bion's concluding observations become increasingly concerned with aspects of group dynamics in general, e.g. , the oscillations in attitudes to the leader as leader of the assumption group or of the work group, or splits in the group. On the relationship of the individual to the group, he agrees with Freud that a group instinct is not primitive and that the individual's groupishness originates in his or her upbringing within the family. Bion adds to these, however, from his observations the view that, while the group adds nothing to the individual, certain aspects of individual psychology cannot be explained

except by reference to the matrix of the group as the only situation that evokes them. The individual loses his or her distinctiveness when in a basic assumption group, i.e. , one in which individuality is swamped by the group valencies. When it has to deal with realities, such a group has to change, or perish.

Earlier I noted that most of Bion's references were to his therapeutic groups and he states how he believes their aim is furthered. His first and most emphatic view is that any help individuals may get from the group situation towards understanding themselves more fully rests on the extent to which they can recognize themselves as torn between the pull of the basic groups and membership of the work group which represents ego functioning. For this reason, any interventions from the therapist directed to the psychopathology of the individual must be avoided because they are destructive of the experience of the basic group. By adhering strictly to his standpoint, he concluded that individuals do become less oppressed by basic group activity within themselves. In other words, what he asserts is that by showing the group the ways in which it avoids its task through regressing to dependency, fight/flight or pairing, it can become more work oriented and so further the development by learning of all members.

Much of the subsequent criticism of Bion's approach as a psychotherapeutic method arises, I believe, from a failure to keep his aims clear and especially to avoid the confusion which the use of the word therapeutic, and especially psychotherapeutic, has engendered. To those seeking to use the group situation in a

psychotherapeutic way, i.e. , to cope with the enormous diversity of neurotic behavior and its unique configuration in every individual, work has to be based on our understanding of psychopathology. The group processes must therefore be directly relatable to the latter. Bion's approach in fact originated in the problem of neurosis as a social one, i.e. , how does the large organization cope with the failures of its members to comply with its work task. The opening sentences in his book make plain that, for him, "group therapy" can mean the therapy of individuals in groups, in which case neurosis is the problem of the individual, but that in the treatment of the group it has to be a problem of the group.

His conception of group therapy may then be put as follows: the individual contains within his or her innate endowment certain potential patterns which are released in the unorganized group. This unorganized group is not a special kind of group identifiable by its external features, but a state of mind that can overtake any group. Once elicited, these patterns or basic assumptions bond the individuals together to give security by preserving the group as a unity and by seeking a course of action for it governed largely by magical phantasies. These patterns remove the individuals' distinctiveness, i.e. , their overall modes of dealing with their own purposes as fashioned by their learning from the experience of reality. Because these modes—ego functioning—are always

present in some measure, a conflict between ego and absorption in any basic assumption behavior is never absent. Such group-determined behavior is a serious limitation to the individuals in any group when faced with an unfamiliar task. They tend to feel in an unorganized state, so their capacity to tackle the task realistically becomes quite unreliable. (The commonest remarks after intensive exposure to the unorganized group situation at Group Relations Conferences run on the Tavistock model are those describing feelings of being "de-skilled.") To have developed a method whereby these group dynamics can be experienced in adequate depth, and to have shown some of the requirements in the leader for the application of this method, is an extremely valuable contribution to the whole study of group dynamics. His findings can assist those responsible for groups coping with tasks to note when their effectiveness is impaired by *ba* behavior, and this kind of experience features prominently in many management training schemes.

It is a quite separate issue, however, to appraise the value of the principles underlying Bion's work in relation to the use of groups for analytical psychotherapy. The distinction between the study of group dynamics and group therapy has become a clear one in the courses developed by A .K . Rice and his associates, as was seen in the staff attitude to any individual who got into serious personal difficulties during a conference. The staff arranged to get the help needed, but it would not confuse its own role by attempting to provide psychiatric help itself. The strict use of B ion's approach has never been widely adopted by analytical psychotherapists, not even in the Tavistock Clinic. Many have, however, made

more systematic use of the group situation in their interpretations than have most other therapists, in the sense of trying to base these strictly on the here-and-now dynamics in the group situation as a whole.

Although we can agree on a separation of these two tasks, we are left with many unsolved questions that affect our understanding of both. To state that the individual's groupishness is an inherent property in his or her makeup as a social animal has not really carried forward our understanding of its nature and origin. Are the phenomena of the basic assumptions as specific to the group situation as he asserts? There is no question that, when activated by them, individuals can show a remarkable capacity to abandon their distinctiveness. The group gives a prominence to these responses by intensifying them, yet they do not appear to be different from the primitive relationships that can be seen in individual treatment, especially in light of our further knowledge of the earliest stages of the development of the person.

One feature of Bion's thought that I believe is unrecognized by him is his underlying adherence to concepts of energy as in the classical psychoanalytic theories of Freud. Thus basic assumptions originate as emotions which are viewed as sources of energy, and Bion is then puzzled by the specific clusters of phantasies around them. Phantasies are of imagined relationships and, if we

take emotions to be the affective coloring accompanying any relationship, their specific quality is determined by the specifics of the relationships. The dependence and pairing assumptions are much more complex in this respect than the others. They can be readily seen as the prototypes of human relationships, e.g. as infantile dependence in which the self and the object are not differentiated, becoming the more differentiated clinging or attachment to a differentiated object in *ba* pairing. Fight and flight are the basic responses of all animals to situations that evoke pain or the threat of danger. Bion seems to sense the problem of the individual and the group as needing a good deal of further clarification, and the choice he made for his next step was to turn his microscope, to use his own metaphor, back to the earliest stages of individual development. This move leads to a major amplification in his understanding of the dynamics of all groups.

Re-View of the First Statement

In his re-view of the dynamics of the group, Bion "hopes to show that in his contact with the complexities of life in a group the adult resorts, in what may be a massive regression, to mechanisms described by Melanie Klein as typical of the earliest phases of mental life." This task of "establishing contact with the emotional life of the group . . . would appear to be as formidable to the adult as the relationship with the breast appears to be to the infant, and the failure to meet the demands of this task is revealed in his regression." The two main features of this regression are, first, a belief that the group exists as

an entity which is endowed with characteristics by each individual. Distinct individuals become lost and the group is treated as if it were another person. Second is the change within the individual that accompanies his or her regressed perception of the group. For this change Bion quotes Freud's description of the loss of the individual's distinctiveness, with the addition that the individual's struggle to retain it varies with the state of the group. Organization helps to maintain work group activity, and indeed that is its aim.

In the work group, individuals remain individuals and co-operate, whereas in the basic assumption group they are swept spontaneously by the "valency" of identification, the primitive gregarious quality in the personality, into the undifferentiated unity of the *ba* group in which inner realities overwhelm the relationship with the real task.

Although starting his re-view with the regression in groups as their most striking feature, he emphasizes again the fundamental dynamic of the work group, which also has its combination of emotions and ideas. Especially important is the idea that development and the validity of learning by experience is the impetus in the individual to possess the autonomy of his own mental

life. It is as if there was a recognition "of the painful and often fatal consequences of having to act without an adequate grasp of reality." Despite the dominant influence of the basic assumptions over it at times, work activity is what takes precedence eventually—as it must. Freud, following Le Bon, believed the intellectual ability of the group was reduced, but Bion disagrees. His experience is that, even when basic assumptions are active, the group shows high-level intellectual work in the assimilation of interpretations. Although this work goes on in a segregated part of the mind with little overt indication, its presence has to be assumed from the way in which interpretations, ostensibly ignored, are nevertheless worked upon between sessions with subsequent reports from individuals of how they had been thinking of them, though they meant nothing at the time they were made. It is only in activity of the work group that words are used normally, i.e. , with their symbolic significance. The basic assumption groups, by contrast, use language as a mode of action and are thereby deprived of the flexibility of thought that development requires.

Bion considerably amplifies what he now discerns in the *bas.* This development is related to his much greater familiarity with primitive mental processes and their detection by an increased responsiveness to projective identification as described by Melanie Klein (1940). He believes this method, which requires a psychoanalytically trained observer, is the only one that can detect the important subjective processes. Conclusions based on its use have to be appraised by the effect of interventions

and by the experience of many observers over time.

In the dependent group, he adds to the expectation of treatment from the therapist, a much more primitive phantasy of being literally fed by him. At a less primitive level he again stresses the presence of a projected deity who is clung to with tenacious possessiveness. The sexual phantasies which characterized the pairing group, with the possible implication of reproduction as preserving the group, are now taken to be the result of a degree of rationalization. Nevertheless, Oedipal sexual phantasies are present much of the time in all of the assumptions. They are not, however, of Freud's classical type, but of the much more primitive nature described by Klein (1932). According to her, the phantasies of very young children show, as the self is emerging in relation to its objects, themes of the parents mutually incorporating parts of each other. Hungry sadistic urges abound that the child attributes to one or both figures by its identification with them. The child can then experience a psychotic or disintegrative degree of anxiety from the fear of being the object of retaliatory attacks. It then splits off the part of its self involved in the relationship and attempts to get rid of it by projective identification. These primitive Oedipal relationships, according to Bion, are distributed in various ways among (i) the

individual, (ii) the group felt as one fragmented individual with (iii) a hidden figure, the leader, used here by detaching him from his role as leader of the work group. A further addition to the Oedipal figures, one ignored in the classical formulation, is the sphinx— a role carried by the therapist and the work group. The curiosity of the individual about the group and the therapist evokes the dread associated with the infant's phantasied intrusions to get at and to devour what is inside the mother and what goes on in the phantasied primal scene.

The anxieties inherent in the primitive phantasies, sexual and other, are instinctively responded to by an attempt to find "allies," figures with whom the feeling of a close contact can bring reassurance. Bion accordingly suggests this need as a powerful stimulus to the creation of the pairing group. Another factor in its establishment and maintenance, also operative with no regard to the sex of the pair, is the feeling of hope, not a phantasy of a future event, but a "feeling of hope itself." This feeling he takes to be the opposite of all the strong negative feelings of hatred, destructiveness and despair and it is sustained by the idea of finding a saviour, a Messiah essentially, an idea that must never be realized.

The fight/flight groups are, as would be expected, much less associated with complex phantasied relationships, since they have the relatively simple aim of getting rid of the threat of danger when no other assumption or activity seems appropriate. On this group Bion (1961) makes, almost as an aside, what I find to be a remarkable statement: "The fight/flight group expresses a sense of

incapacity   for   understanding *and the love without which understanding cannot exist"* (my italics). I do not think its full implications are taken up by Bion in regard to the emergence of any of the assumptions and to the role of the leader, topics to which I shall return.

Recognition of their more specific contents leads Bion to reconsider the status of his notions about the basic assumptions. There was no doubt they were helpful in ordering the chaotic manifestations in the group, but, in view of the primitive phantasies related to them, they now appeared as derivatives of these more fundamental processes. All the assumptions drive the group to find a leader, yet none of them is felt to establish a satisfactory state in the group. There is consequently perpetual instability with changes from one assumption to another with all those remaining opposed to learning and development. For all these manifestations, and for their very existence, Bion could find no explanation. The exposure of primitive phantasies and the anxieties they induce now made it clear that the basic assumptions were derivatives whose function is to defend the group against these anxieties becoming too intense. As defenses, however, they are all inadequate because of their segregation from any reality-testing. For Bion, the dynamics of the group could now be

adequately experienced and understood only by the working out of these primitive primal scene phantasies as the factors underlying the basic assumptions and their complex inter-relationships.

Bion always kept Freud's views on groups in mind, and so he now looked at where he stood in relation to them. Leaving aside the references made to complex social organizations such as the church and the army, he re-asserts his agreement with Freud in rejecting the need to postulate a herd instinct. For him the individual is a group animal by nature, yet at war with the group and with those forces in him that determine his groupishness. The latter is in no way created by the group; it is merely activated and exposed by it. The impact of the group on the individual's distinctiveness springs from the state of mind in the group, i.e. , the degree to which its lack of organization and structure fails to keep work activity, a contact with reality, the dominant activity. In the organized group the bond between members is one of co-operation, whereas in an unorganized state the bonds become the valencies of the basic assumption states. Bion sees McDougall's (192o) criteria for the organized group as the conditions that suppress the basic assumption trends in the members by keeping them related to reality.

The bonding from valency is a more primitive process than that from libido, which Bion takes to operate only in the pairing group. Freud's view of the bond to the leader as almost entirely an introjection of him by the ego (Bion does not mention Freud's ego-ideal as a separate structure) is again only part of the relationship to a leader. For Bion, Freud does not recognize the much

more potentially dangerous bonding that arises in the assumption groups. Here the individual does not introject a leader who carries power for him through his contact with external reality. The leader in the basic assumption exhibits features that appeal to the assumption state in the members, who therefore projectively identify with him. This leader is thus as much a part of the assumption state as the members and just as divorced from external reality, so that he leads as often to disaster as not. Freud's view of the leader as the ego-ideal led him to see panic in military groups as following the loss of the leader. Bion thinks this account is not right, for panic arises when the situation might as readily give rise to rage as fear. Intense fight/flight behavior may resemble panic, but for Bion the group can well be still related to the leader on such occasions. Panic occurs when a situation arises completely outwith the purposes of the group and its associated organization.

Freud saw in the group the kind of relationships present in the family when the individual has developed to the stage of the traditional Oedipus complex, i.e. , its emotional features were neurotic in character with the main sources of anxiety being the fears of loss of love or of being castrated. Bion saw them as deriving from much earlier phases in which the fears are of disintegration, i.e., loss of the self or madness. His belief that the only feasible therapeutic help in

the group lies in the   individual experiencing its primitive emotions and attitudes to him is again maintained.

Much as Bion has contributed, we are left with what seem to be the crucial questions about groups unanswered. What does the individual's groupishness rest on? We have Freud's libidinal bonds supplemented by valencies from primitive projective identifications with a great deal about "mechanisms," all manifested as the individual's distinctiveness is removed. This regressed state, moreover, can come and go with a high degree of lability. For Bion, this distinctiveness is placed in opposition to the groupishness conceived as the expression of emotions with which the individual has to be at war. Freud, on the other hand, sees the conflict as between the id and the culture of the individual's society internalized in his or her own super-ego and ego-ideal. Adult or mature groupishness, if we might put it that way, rests for Bion on cooperation, the sophisticated product of years of training. It is like an activity imposed on the freedom of the individual to be "doing his own thing" and accepted more or less reluctantly. How can such an achievement vanish within a few minutes in the unorganized situation of Bion's groups? Both Freud and Bion from their psychoanalytic studies have emphasized that individual and group psychology constitute the same field of study. If we accept that position we are a long way from understanding it. The intimate inter-relatedness of the individual with his social field strongly suggests that we are dealing with the individual as a highly open system maintained in his organization by appropriate input from a social field itself structured to provide this

input. The phenomena seem to require the organization concept of open systems, which neither Freud nor Bion had.

Though stressing the highly tentative and limited status of his study of groups, Freud has reached conclusions of great significance. He has made it clear that what happens in any group is a particular instance of the relationship between the individual's inner world and his social world. Thus he has answered his questions about the group by expanding an answer to the unstated question of what is an individual. He had to advance the theory of the ego and its relationships by showing that a sub-system within the ego, the ego-ideal, entered into relationships that differed in character from those of the ego. Moreover, the most striking feature from his conclusions is the open and rapid dynamic transactions that can occur in the group whereby the individual, sensing his own inability and that of the other members to act effectively, can promptly alter the boundary of his self to internalize the leader as a part of it and so to surrender his previous distinctiveness in favor of a less mature organization of his self. Viewed in terms of Freud's metapsychology, and the meta-science available to him, with the dynamics of the person based upon the redistribution of psychic energies, the phenomena could not be adequately conceptualized. We are clearly confronted again with problems of the organi-

zation of the individual as a highly open system in an environment which reacts with him in a correspondingly open way. Individual and environment are structured by, and within, each other.

Recent Psychoanalytic Conceptions of
the Individual and Social Relatedness

Clinical work and child observation studies of the last few decades have shown that the personality acquires the capacity to make effective relations with others only when there has been early experience of being treated as a person by the mother, and later the father, with stimulating encouraging interactions conveyed with joy. The satisfaction of physical needs has to be supplemented by a social input that meets the need to become a person. There appears to be from an early stage an overall Gestalt that gives to the potential self a feeling of things being right or not. Bodily sensations and the affects accompanying many specific behavioral systems all contribute to the affective tone in the self, yet a general malaise, even to the point of death, can follow from a failure in being personalized by appropriate mothering. Child studies show the dramatic results under certain conditions of deprivation, e.g. , when a consistent mater- nal relationship is absent (see Spitz, 1965). Clinical findings from the more seriously distorted personalities emphasize lifelong feelings of never having been valued for themselves as with cold or indifferent mothers or, more frequently, with mothers experienced as imposing preconceptions that denied powerful urges to develop

autonomously (see Lichtenstein, 1977). The self-system is thus structured by the internalization of the relationship between mother and child, undifferentiated at the start then progressively separated throughout the long period of human dependence.

Early structuring of the personality is inevitably dominated by the physical closeness in which the mother's attitudes are communicated through innumerable signals in her whole handling of, and responses to, her child. The emotional experiences are gradually cohered by consistent reliable mothering into a primary or central self. This integration is a labile process with threats to it producing at times intense anxiety and aggression. Negative feelings from the inevitable frustrations are separated from this primary self, but with ordinary care these divisions are diminished so that a sufficiently coherent, resilient self becomes the dominant mediator in relating to the environment. The primary self remains the visible self, the one adapted to the mother. Should the latter have failed to facilitate development sufficiently well, this primary self acquires distortions of its capacity to relate, and when negative experiences have been strong enough, substantial divisions within the structure of the self-system are formed. These sub-selves embody frustrated needs, especially for

unmet recognition as a valued person, and the aggressive reactions to the frustrating mother linked with fears of her retaliation. The self-systems each retain a self-pole and an object-pole, with an imago of the kind of parent desired or feared and hated. The primary self relates to the outer world and so learns from its expanding experience. The sub-selves, while remaining highly dynamic as portions of the original self, have to find covert outlets—the processes described in the whole of psychopathology—because their aims have to be hidden from the feared parental attacks.

Defenses or control measures are evolved by the central self in keeping with its reality pressures and incorporated into its patterning. When the urges cannot be managed in this way they constitute a secret self in conflict with the central one. Stabilizing factors such as family and work, or selected social groups, all assist in their control, though the precarious balance shows when the functioning of the central reality-related self is altered as by drugs or by changes in the social environment. The central self ordinarily copes with such changes but removal of security-pinnings from it rapidly leads to the emergence of subsystem dominance.

When the imagos constituting the object-poles in the inner relationships are facilitative, the impact of infantile sexuality is worked through without undue trouble. Marked divisions in the self make for serious difficulties because the new urges to closeness are dealt with in their terms, e.g., hostile imagos evoke anxieties about rejection and retaliation and so lead to the fusion of aggression and sexuality in sadistic and perverse expression in which the object becomes in varying measure de-personalized.

The essential change in this way of conceiving the person is from one based on theories of psychic energies to one dealing with the organization of experience of relationships in an open system interacting with the social environment. Because of the incomplete differentiation of self and object, relations in the primary self are characterized by identifications and urges to have omnipotent magical control with regressive clinging to objects for security against the threat of "going to bits." With growing appreciation of reality and differentiation of self and others, the primary self is progressively superseded by a strengthened definition of the self through satisfactions from talents and skills. Attachment to others changes to relationships based on shared activities. Goals and purposes become organized, and values add to the integration of the self. The personality acquires its characteristic configuration, i.e., its identity (see Erikson, 1959), and, in keeping with the uniquely evolved patterns from its specific experience, the individual requires constant affirmation from the social milieu. The constant need for this "pyschosocial metabolism" in maintaining a normal degree of effective integrated functioning is readily exposed when sections of the environment are removed, quite apart from any interference with the biologically rooted sexual and procreational needs. Populations dis-

placed from their usual cultural setting show widespread indications of disorganization as in the rise of illnesses of all kinds, not only psychiatric. Again, when individuals lose a feeling of personal significance in their work, similar stress manifestations occur (see Trist and Bamforth, 1951). These deprivations disorganize the most developed adaptive functioning of the social self, and lead to the increased dominance of the primary self with its insecurities and more primitive compulsive relations. Such regressive disorganization is almost universal. With individuals whose sub-systems are a constant threat, the loss of their usual sources of relative security confronts them with the extra danger of their secret selves being exposed.

The origin and nature of the individual's groupishness is thus no problem. From the very start he cannot survive without his needs for social relatedness being met.

There is no phase in the life-cycle in which man can live apart from his groups. Bion's statement that the individual is at war "with himself for being a group animal and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his groupishness" therefore has to be examined.

Group Dynamics and Group Psychotherapy

GROUP DYNAMICS

From the view of the individual I have sketched, the important questions about groups are those devoted to the

conditions that take away the factors in social environment that ordinarily keep his self-system in its normal integration. Bion stated that the basic assumptions are states of mind the individuals in the group get into. He then described these states and what seemed to constitute them. What he uncovered was the emergence of the primary mechanisms of relatedness, those of the developing infant to the breast/mother, and it is the intense anxieties associated with these mechanisms that drive the group into the assumptions. The individual's state of mind in them, however, remains a more developed organization than would pertain exclusively to their earliest phase. In the latter, differentiation of external objects hardly exists, whereas in the assumptions there are intense needs to relate to a leader and to each other. The phase in development that appears to be activated here is that of separation-individuation (Mahler et al. , 1975). As described earlier, this phase extends over several years, and a range in the depth of regression is to be expected. The dominant characteristic of this early self is its primal instinctive type of relationship, the precursors of the maturer ones in which the external reality of others is appreciated. The more the developmental elaborations around the

earliest structures are put out of action the more primitive the levels that are exposed. *Ba* dependence can be interpreted as the re-emergence of this stage in which the need for closeness gives to identifications a considerable urgency and immediacy; and the phantasy clusters around them represent the ways in which this is evoked, e.g., by being fed or protected or held in parental security. Fight/flight responses similarly show this level of identification to provide security. As Bion described, the urgency of the identifications can make the whole group an undifferentiated object within which the greatest security is to be found. Pairing is clearly a more developed state in which more precise definition of the self is sought in the relationship with one other. At the deepest levels it can activate the mother-child pair, in which case the attraction affirms the existence of the self. As he puts it, an ally against the dread of isolation in face of mounting anxiety is then provided. The fact that the rest of the group preserves it by giving the pair their rapt attention suggests that for them it has become their security, either from the primitive relationship or by this combined with the parental sexual couple, by identification with the pair.

Regression to these stages represents the removal of the influence of later structuring and an inability to recover it. The awareness of the group remains in its regressed form because the group is there and so restrains further disintegration which would be tantamount to psychotic states, an eventuality that the early structuring of the self also resists desperately. The problems of

group dynamics thus become those of how the normal affirmations of the self system are removed. The situations of groups in this respect are of almost infinite variety. Thus when Bion said that certain illnesses might originate as diseases of the group, he thought specific illnesses might prove to be linked to specific states of the group. So far this has not been established, though there is much evidence now to show that disruptions of some areas of normal relatedness, as in groups displaced from their familiar environment, lead to increased illness of all kinds, physical and psychological. In view of this complexity of factors, it is best for present purposes to consider Bion's groups only. Here the most prominent stem from the task. Although there may have been some nominal description such as "to study group processes," none of the members has any clear notion of what that task involves. There is therefore immediately a considerable loss for the self of its ego anchorage in reality. Important also is the realization that the task, in whatever form it emerges, will involve members in some exposure of their private and even hidden self. This factor I believe to be important in the group dynamics group, although much more so in the therapeutic one. Since the origin of the secret self was its unacceptability, there is a great deal of anxious suspicion among members, alleviated only as each member demonstrates his participation in the task by the freedom with which he expresses some of his feelings about the situation. Likewise the intense

curiosity about the leader derives from wondering how he is going to help them with the task at its reality level and from the fears of what he will read into their minds and how persecutory or rejecting he will then be.

What characterized Bion's method of work is his waiting for developments to occur spontaneously no matter what the pressures on him "to help." There is no doubt his stance exposed the regressed basic states with, at times, considerable intensity and persistence. For him it is imperative that members should experience the primitive nature and power of these states, and to have contact with these layers of their personality contributes a great self-integration in that the boundaries of their self-understanding are thereby extended. By focusing exclusively on the group, however, one notes only those features in the shared assumption states. Such recognition is essential, but to learn more about how they are brought into being is as important.

Freud had noted early in his experience how individuals will only with the greatest reluctance give up a source of gratification. The group's hatred of learning has this quality for Bion when he confronts them with clinging to assumption behavior instead of learning to cope with reality. In emphasizing this reaction we have, however, to balance it with the impetus to develop, the impetus which in the work group Bion notes as eventually overcoming the irrational resistances to it. We may then ask if Bion fosters an exaggerated degree of basic assumption behavior by not giving help sooner. This is a question not easily answered. I referred earlier

to his almost incidental remark on love as a necessity for understanding, i.e. , in this context, some fostering assistance. Bion was an extremely caring person and so one is left wondering whether he was in part fascinated by the basic assumption behavior to the neglect of how much help from the leader the egos of the members required to be re-asserted for the learning task.

The assumption made about the leader's role is that the group will by itself progressively learn to tackle the reality of the task through the leader pointing out what it is doing. Since, however, much of the overt behavior is determined by the need to avoid unrecognized feelings, these must require more explicit interpretation than Bion gives. Interpretations would seem to need more of a "because" clause—an attempt to identify what it is that is feared. Without this "help" the work group cannot function effectively. A group met to study its dynamics is, like any other task group, a socio-technical system and here, as elsewhere, the technical job has to come into the sphere of the ego's resources for mastering and using it. The specific complexity of this situation is that undoing the depersonalizing of the members because of their lost ego-involvement is itself the aim of the technology. A degree of understanding does go on much of the time, but it has to be asked whether it is optimal; when once in the grip of the basic assumptions it is all the more difficult to get back to normal ego-functioning. It thus seems that, as in analytical psychotherapy, a simultaneous

relationship with the   members' egos and the regressed state has to be kept alive.

Bion referred to the struggle of the individual against his groupishness. We can put this in another way. The groupishness he describes is clearly that of the regressed separation-individuation stage from which the individual has developed to inhabit his adult distinctive identity. This new development, however, has its own needs for group relatedness, namely, in groups in which his identity is affirmed and enriched by the extent of the ego's reality involvement in them.

The situation created in Bion's groups takes away the anchorage of the adult self-identity and it has to be asked whether the resentment of groupishness is because of this loss. The self-identity requires identification by others of its ordinary status plus the engagement with the task in a meaningful way. The organization of the group has to match the nature of the work, and if the latter presents a puzzle the group does not see how to cope with, then the leader has the task of dealing with the tendency of the group members to regress as well as enabling them to see that their belief that they have no resources is not entirely founded in reality. The experience of the latter, i.e. , of regaining ego-function, brings back the work capacity.

GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

As Bion mentions at the start of his book, this term is itself ambiguous as to whether it means therapy of the group conceived as an entity and so concerned with

facilitating the group in overcoming barriers from its internal conflicts to its effectiveness as a work group or whether its purpose is therapy of the individuals comprising it. In practice, the latter purpose would be more accurately described as analytical psychotherapy in groups.

When Bion says that his method of work cannot be called psychoanalysis he means that the fundamental principles of psychoanalysis do not apply to it. There is here a source of widespread differences of view even amongst analysts. Both the classical and Kleinian analysts believe that a comprehensive exploration of unconscious processes is possible only in the traditional setting with the analyst preserving a somewhat distant stance in the interests of objectivity, maintaining a certain intensity in the conduct of the process, usually five times per week, and avoiding any other activity than the analytic one, e. g. , no reassurances of any kind nor advice; offering understanding of the unconscious solely by interpretation. The value of this approach is not in question. What is, however, is the common assumption that other less intensive and rigorous approaches are relatively poor substitutes and, in short, "not analysis." Analytical psychotherapy on a less intensive pattern than the standard psychoanalytical one has in recent years altered this view; it is widely

practiced by analysts themselves with the conviction that it can be of considerable help for the individual. Many unconscious factors in the personality can be exposed and their disturbing effects ameliorated in a range of patient-therapist settings. The critical factors are not so much the latter as the therapist's understanding of the unconscious and the extent to which he focuses on that.

The psychotherapeutic factor in Bion's method—again to be recalled as directed towards group dynamics—can be considered if we take one of his examples, the events in a group occasioned by a woman talking about a fear of choking in restaurants or, on a recent occasion, of her embarrassment during a meal in the presence of an attractive woman (Bion, 1961:182). About half of the group responded by saying they did not feel like that, and the others were indifferent. Bion notes that in analysis such a statement would have evoked various possible interpretations, none of which he felt could be regarded as appropriate to the group. What he did point out to the members was that the woman's difficulty was also theirs, although in repudiating it they made themselves superior to her. Moreover, in doing so they made it difficult for any member to admit any problem because they would then be made to feel more inferior and worthless. From an analytic point of view he appreciates that the woman got no help and is left in discomfort because in fact group treatment is the wrong treatment. He then adds that her manner of speaking suggested that she felt there was a single object, the group, that had been split into pieces (the individual members) by her eating; and that being the recipient of the members' projective identifications was

her fault and so reinforced her guilt which, in turn, made it difficult for her to grasp how the actions of the others had affected her. For the other members, they have not only rid themselves of the woman's troubles as part of their own, but they have also got rid of any responsibility for her by splitting off their caring parts into the therapist. The result of this process is akin to a "loss of individual distinctiveness" through the basic assumption state of dependence. The group dynamics are clear; the psychotherapeutic effect is not only nil, it is negative.

The question is why Bion could not have made an interpretation along the lines he indicated in this reflection about the situation, at least to the extent of conveying the woman's hunger (perhaps felt as greed) as destructive to the group, with the latter attacking her, as they did these feelings in themselves. Also, by treating each other's problems in this way they were perpetuating the feeling that there was no help to be had from the group, only from the therapist. The precise interpretation is not so important as long as enough of the underlying dynamics of the total situation are articulated. By focusing exclusively on the group as a whole, certain awareness of group attitudes is made possible. Has that been as helpful as it might have been for the development of each individual? Kleinian analysts frequently use the term "the correct interpretation." It is doubtful if such an achievement is ever possible, especially in the

group situation, so that a degree of metaphoric latitude helps to catch some of the wide range of processes going on in each individual. Psychotherapuetic change is a developmental process requiring considerable time, and Bion mentioned, as evidence of intellectual work going on in spite of its covert nature, the fact that patients came back to his comments in later sessions. In other words, reflection on what is happening in the group with delayed assimilation is a necessary part of the individual's "work" activity. The therapist's task, I believe, is to further this by giving individuals as much awareness of all sides of their responses in the group situation, including especially the apparent reasons for abandoning their "distinctiveness" when faced with their own intolerance toward their unconscious processes. In my own experience with groups over thirty years, I have never ceased to be impressed by the importance that members attach to their group meetings, even though only once per week. It is common after only a few months for them to remark that what goes on in the session plays a prominent part in how they feel for the rest of that week. By commenting along the lines I believe Bion could have done in the light of what he described, he would have avoided in some measure in at least some of the members the depressing feelings of the badness of the

group as almost inevitable.

In regard to pairing, he again warns against concentrating on the possible unconscious contents of the pair interaction. Here too, however, it is not at all difficult to comment on the group's interest in this interaction and in what this interest might consist. I have frequently heard reports in groups that certain sessions with marked pairing on which interpretive comments were made, were recalled vividly for long periods as having been particularly helpful.

Bion likened the problem of the individual coming to terms with the emotional life of the group as closely akin to that of the infant in its first relationship, viz., with the breast/mother. In his later analytic work he spelled out the nature of the infant's task in overcoming frustration, i.e. , when instead of the expected breast there was a "no breast" situation. For this achievement he took the mother's role as a "container" to be crucial. This is perhaps an inadequate term for the active contribution of the mother in making her comforting and encouraging presence felt. It could readily be said that, for the group therapist, Bion advocates a role of considerable withholding.

The importance of Bion's strictures can be granted. The essential aspect in all these issues is whether or not enough of the total dynamics in the group are being

brought to notice when an individual is being referred to. Basic assumption behavior occurs in groups, whether the task is explicitly therapy or not. But when the aim is therapy, the individuals need to understand much more of themselves than the tendency to regress to the primal self of their separation-individuation stage of development. I have stressed that the paramount consideration is much more our understanding than using an assumed correct tech-

nique. Understanding the unconscious is notoriously subject to individual bias. Increasingly over recent years my bias has been a much greater focus on the state of the self that underlies the particular expression of the unconscious motives. To revert to the example just quoted, one may ask whether Bion's reluctance to use the individual in the group situation is influenced by the Kleinian view of greed as stemming from a high degree of oral sadism. Melanie Klein retained the view that aggressive phantasies were mainly the product of the death instinct. If one takes the view that the most profound aggression arises from the universally desperate struggle to maintain the self—a view that Freud took— then the greed of Bion's patient might well be seen as a primitive expression of her attempt to get possession of the object she needs to maintain a security in her self. In this case the social relevance of her symptoms, and hence their importance for the group, is different from what it would be had her greed been taken as a problem of excessive oral sadism.

The need to cope with anxieties over the self can be seen in another of the examples he quotes (Bion, 1961:144). The members discuss a suggestion to use Christian names. Three are for it as a good idea that would make things more friendly. Of the other three, one doesn't want her name to be known because she dislikes it, another suggests pseudonyms and the third keeps out of it. I do not want to make unjustified use of the example, especially as Bion mentions only certain aspects of the episode to make his point. What he takes up is the way the group seems to regard friendliness or pleasant emotions in the group as a means of cure, as a

contribution to their work group. Perhaps more immediately relevant to the work group are the anxieties about whether or not the selves of the three dissidents will be secure if they begin to be looked at by the others.

The disadvantages of groups as a therapeutic medium are well known. They do, however, have several advantages. The sharing of humiliations, shame and guilt is a different experience for many when they receive sympathetic understanding from other members. Also, whereas the projective identification of self-objects from the segregated systems has to be done mainly one at a time with the therapeutic pair, the projection of several around members of the group is active much of the time and their recognition can be used by all.

The individual in psychotherapy has to learn about his or her split-off relationships. This task can become a life-long one for any individual. Therapy, as in other learning, has to give enough capacity to carry on the work. Psychotherapy in groups has to make much more of a contribution to this capacity than can be done through confining attention solely to the group dynamics equated with the basic assumptions.

Bion, like so many creative thinkers, confined his study of the work of others to relatively few. Perhaps he felt, like Winnicott who once said to me, "I did not pay close attention to Fairbairn as I was too absorbed in my own

pregnancies at the time." I never heard Bion discuss Foulkes, and I do not think he knew much about his work because he had left groups by the time Foulkes was publishing his accounts of it. He was not given to disparaging the work of others if it differed from his own; for him, experience would eventually find its survival value. Foulkes was convinced the total group interactions had to be used in therapy, and I believe that B ion, had he done more group therapeutic work, would have accepted that position though he would have insisted on what might be loosely put as more rigor and more depth, more attention to the primitive relationships.

None of Bion's Tavistock colleagues engaged in group therapy, in contrast with those concerned with group dynamics, adhered to his view about the sole use of the latter in their work. Ezriel's formulation (195o) of using a common tension in the group once it could be identified as coming from the wish for a specific relationship with the therapist, and adding to its exposure by showing how each individual dealt with it, was considered to be more appropriate. Revisiting both led me to conclude that Ezriel's views could not account for the group dynamics in general, and I believe our understanding of the individual should be such as to account for both. It has seemed to me for some years that a theory of the organization of the self is the emerging task for psychoanalysis and so I used my own rather rough and ready gropings in this direction. Analytic group psychotherapy has usually been considered by its users as a valuable therapeutic medium in spite of the negative findings of Malan and his colleagues (Malan, 1976). Perhaps we expose here the inadequacies in our concepts

of the nature of psychotherapy as well as our means of assessing change. Because of my interest in the self as an independent variable in the therapeutic task, Gill and I (197o) carried out an exploratory trial using spontaneous sentences as an indication of conflicts within the self system. Significant changes in patients after eighteen months of treatment were found, so Malan's criteria seem to have referred to different processes.

For me Bion has always been the *preux chevalier* making his doughty forays into the confused tangles of psychoanalytic thought and the complexities of human relationships. His power to look at phenomena with fresh challenges remains a permanent questioning legacy.

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