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## Good Groups, Bad Groups

I should like to add my two penn'orth to the continuing saga about the evaluation of groups, starting from the common observation that some groups are better than others.

I know about the Stanford survey which showed that brilliant, 'charismatic' leaders tend to produce more spectacular immediate results but also eventual casualties and breakdowns than relatively passive but caring leaders - irrespective of technique used. All this does is confirm the classical psychoanalytic aphorism that 'the physician's love heals the patient' - or however that would be expressed in the group idiom of today. It tells us little about the particular kinds of behaviour that promote the functioning of groups. What are the distinguishing marks of love in action?

Free communication between all members of a group, and between members of groups with similar aims and values, is said to be a very important positive sign. I have taken part in gestalt groups which were not really group events at all, but a series of dyadic encounters between various members and the leader in which the former revealed their pain and the latter his virtuosity and all attempts by other group members to participate and contribute were put down by the leader with various degrees of harshness or impatience as interference. In the worst example of this I have seen, the closing session of appreciations and resentments exploded into violence both verbally and non-verbally. In psychodrama there is little *free* communication once a protagonist has emerged and roles been allotted to auxiliaries. Spontaneous expression is expected from the director but it is modified and channelled by his technical skill and confidence in the process. Free communication is modified in encounter-type groups by rules against gossip, questions, intellectualisations and so on, in co-counselling by its compulsive suppression of hostility and invalidation and there is a general tendency, widely remarked on, to establish a group ethos and force members to conform.

Only in the Grubb/Tavistock model is there a genuine attempt to establish the paradoxical rule of freedom - paradoxical because the allotted task, to 'study the group's behavior as it occurs,' is as inherently self-contradictory as the psychoanalytic instruction, to a person with emotional problems, to 'lie down, relax and say everything that comes into your mind.' If a prospective analysand could do that he would not need analysis, and if a Grubb/Tavistock group were functioning wholly freely in the present time its members would surely burst the bounds of sitting in a neat circle, eschewing non-verbal contact and generally conforming to the expectations of a Kleinian practitioner whose interpretations are steeped in death instinct and primary anxiety.

In short, the question of free communication in humanistic psychology is as vexed and complicated as the corresponding problem of free will in philosophy, and the

functional answer to it is as simple as it is unsatisfactory, viz. that a person is free except insofar as he is bound or restricted. As for free communication between members of different groups with similar aims and values - imagine a do-your-own-thing self-actualisation event drawing on practitioners and devotees of all the multifarious disciplines and techniques. The Tower of Babel in the Age of Aquarius!

It is frequently asserted and believed that group techniques, if assiduously practised, will enable a person to develop his ego towards an ideal, absolutely desirable condition variously described as ego-directedness, self-regulation or actualisation. The goal may be to become a 'clear-clear,' a 'genital character' or to 'know that you are God.' Two leaders of important segments of the humanistic psychology movement have even formulated theories of personal immortality. Will Schutz says there is no inherent necessity for any individual cell of the human body to die. The difference between a living organism and a dead one is the cessation of certain kinds of energy flow. Similarly the difference between a normally functioning body and a dis-eased one is the existence of blockages impeding energy flow. And these blockages can be dissolved by maximising self-awareness. It follows that total cellular awareness by an organism would prevent the formation of blockages and thereby indefinitely postpone the conditions leading to death. Harvey Jackins' theory of personal immortality starts with the assertion that in re-evaluation counselling some people have completely discharged their fear of death after being confidently told that death is really not inevitable. This alone appears to be sufficient evidence in Jackins' world-view of absolute rationality where it is inconceivable that a good result like the discharge of a distress pattern could flow from an untrue statement or an erroneous belief. Jackins amplifies his argument by saying that death was useful and necessary for simple creatures to give rise to more complex creatures. With the advent of rational man, however, and with the discovery that members of our species can become wholly rational through re-evaluation counselling, death becomes useless and unnecessary because no other individual could develop any greater ability to take complete charge of the environment.

What are we to say about these theories of personal immortality arising from the humanistic psychology movement? The first thing is that there would be nothing to say if the theories could be exemplified, i.e. if their proponents could point to or cite the case of an immortal human being. But the theories remain theories - strictly in the heads of those putting them forward - and this in itself is an odd thing to emanate from a way of life that purports to be based on personal experience. In fact, the reasoning is based on absolutes - absolute honesty, absolute responsibility, absolute validation, absolute love. This leads to the inductive necessity at the heart of metaphysical views of the 'really real' - there must be an ideal state of affairs where these absolute virtues result in the absolutely desirable state of self-actualisation, knowing the God within or whatever. In the end, we have a hard choice to make between two mutually exclusive extremes of absolutism - absolute change or impermanence (which is really relativism) or absolute bullshit.

Don't get me wrong. I love Will Schutz and I have grown and learned a great deal from

experiences at workshops run by him - particularly from a session of rolting when he opened out my upper chest and I discharged huge gusts of repressed homosexuality in pain and ecstasy. But some of my learnings have been negative ones - in spite of his theories and techniques rather than because of them. e.g., in the dominance-submissiveness game at the beginning of a leaders' workshop I put myself about fourth from the top on the dominance scale but I was pushed to first place by other members of the group and stayed there at the end of the game. Subsequent discussion and events revealed clearly, to my satisfaction at least, that there was an intractable contradiction between two of the absolutes earnestly advocated and called for at the beginning of every Schutzian workshop - absolute honesty and the absolute self-responsibility of every person for everything she/he experiences. In this case, I was not responsible for being placed first and other group members were less than honest in putting me there. The reply to this, in the jargon and circular logic of groups, would be that I must have been responsible for it because it happened to me. According to the same reasoning, if murder was attempted in a subsequent session (and I believe it was) the victim was responsible for being attacked (and I believe she was not). Remembering the results of the Stanford survey, I as a group leader cannot shelve responsibility by simply disclaiming it. On the other hand, I as a group member can learn a great deal by acting *as if* I am responsible for everything that happens to me. But it is important for me to understand that I am only acting, consequently psychodrama is probably the best technique for exploring the dark world of 'as if.' In Moreno's words, 'the catharsis has to be interpersonal.' Compare this with the total egocentricity of 'I choose to be bored. . .or attacked.' the theory of absolute choice and responsibility is the solipsism of humanistic psychology.

In the sociology of groups, any behaviour of a member based on the feeling of being emotionally cut off (a 'lone wolf') is a negative sign and the group work may be expected to suffer until he actually is split off, either voluntarily or by the use of as much force as necessary. For the group then to re-form and resume goal directed behaviour is a positive sign. So runs the theory, and in the 'Blackboard Jungle' situation it may well be beneficial to forcibly get rid of the delinquent. But I have been in a group that expelled one of its members, and I have been in another group where all the other members walked out on me. I remember the first instance with feelings of regret tinged with shame. It was a psychodrama workshop, and one of the members was J, a medically trained group leader and theoretician. During the Friday night session, J acknowledged his hidden agenda - to compare the leader's technique and methods with his own. Fair enough. But then came Saturday morning, and J did not arrive till nearly noon. He explained he had slept in, adding that he was working through a lot of emotional material concerning his sleep patterns. The leader hit the roof. He resented J's attitude in the first session, his late arrival for the second and he called for a vote of expulsion which, I am ashamed to say, I helped to make unanimous. The situation was difficult for me because, when J arrived, I had been working on a psychodrama of my childhood with my father yelling at my mother and me. J sat down on one side of me, the leader on the other, and they yelled at each other over, around and through my skull. My vote to expel J was really a vote for the yelling to stop, and the leader should have been sensitive enough to know that. Of

course I should have been stronger, but we go to groups to acquire strength, not demonstrate it.

In the second instance, when all the other group members ostracized me, I felt lonely, scared and, oddly enough, strong. I wrote at the time: 'The worst that can happen is to fail - to feel alone - to be afraid. The best is to know it's OK because of inner strength - to survive.' I slowly came to realise that two people were afraid of me, and more slowly still - in fact after the workshop - the penny dropped and I felt inwardly sure I had been punished by the group for opening up the area of bisexuality, which had opened up for me when I was rolled by Will Schutz. Does it seem farfetched to say an open encounter workshop imposed a taboo of this kind? Surely we groupies - we band of brothers and sisters - exemplify the ultimate in sexual swingingness and tolerance. Spurred by the goad of absolute honesty we sometimes reveal Peyton Places - even Sodoms and Gomorrahs - beneath the suburban sensuality of our bear-hugs. But how often in groups do we grope in fullness the dark worlds of orality, bisexuality, incest and the terrible mutual wounds that men and women can inflict on each other? Not too bloody often, in my experience. I have even seen group leaders lead their groups at a smart pace away from such areas by means of asinine 'guided fantasies' that seemed irrelevant at the time - and still do in retrospect.

In general, group behaviour that indicates mutual pleasure with each other, and with the leader, is a positive sign, to be contrasted with the emergence of social anxiety. But, as Erikson pointed out in *Childhood and Society*, social achievements are threatened by developing fears and anxieties which arise from the mere fact that human life begins with a prolonged period of dependence during which sexuality is firmly attached to parental figures. This very real Small-Big polarity of childhood is moulded by social and cultural influences either into the capacity for love, work and knowledge or into one or more of the psychosomatic and social expressions of anxiety. What then are we to say about sexual expressions between members and leaders?

This is a big question and I intend to deal with it more fully in a later article. But there are few things to be said on the outer, anecdotal edge of the topic. It used to be called sexual transference and counter-transference. It bugged Freud and Breuer before him. It was the occasion for Reich to make his well-known interpretation of unconscious hostility, when a young woman patient wanted to go to bed with him and he saw this as evidence that she wanted to destroy his efficacy as a therapist. It is something which does not occur between 'reputable' sex therapists and their patients, according to the otherwise liberated Australian *Forum* magazine. Yet the topic is receiving attention from academic journals (e.g. *Psychotherapy*, New York, particularly since Masters and Johnson started publishing their findings. A group leader told me that the people who attend his groups are his friends and he sometimes goes to bed with his friends. He added that the same could be said of every group leader he knew. And a young woman said she preferred groups run by female leaders because 'too many men believe they have therapeutic tools.'

Both Erikson and Benedict (a psychoanalytically-oriented social anthropologist) pointed out the focal significance of children's play. It is not the equivalent of recreational adult play, although it features in common with the laboratory, the stage and the drawing board. In our complex technological culture, 'child's play' has a derisive ring, especially in comparison with the aura of respect we place around an adult's life work as an extension of the developed individual self. It seems there is a similar discontinuity in our cultural attitude to sexual expression. As child's play is to adult work, so loveplay is to genital intercourse. We tend to minimise the importance of the former in each case, except as a preparation or rehearsal for the latter. Similarly we minimise the significance of love that is for sale - as for example in the case of a group leader and a fee-paying member. But in my experience, sexuality between member and leader is likely to denote a loveplay inhibition ('pregenital fixation') or a problem about prostituted love. Certainly these deserve to be worked on as impairments of sexual enjoyment, but when the expression of sexuality in groups is followed by signs of social anxiety (not pregnancy anxiety - the pill has taken care of that) something of vital importance has been glossed over or ignored

Social anxiety and social alienation are terms that denote a breakdown of interaction, a cleavage between persons and their environment. Depth psychology is the study of the vast web of human relationships to which Freud brought the concepts of the unconscious and repression, Jung introduced the notion of the collective unconscious, and so on. Today we are learning from the medium, the mystic and the physicist that the general and relational aspects of 'reality' are much more important than individuality and discreteness.

And so I suggest we see love in action in groups that help us to go beyond appearances - particularly that essentially discrete apparent reality called the individual self or ego, which on analysis divides and disappears in a plethora of roles, self-images and early identifications. Practically the entire group rigmorole of self-development, self-regulation, self-directedness and so on pushes people inwards to a complicated illusion instead of outwards to a profound reality.

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## A JUNGIAN BRANCH

At the July Conference a number of people expressed interest in the work and ideas of C. G. Jung and particularly the relationship of his work to humanistic psychology.

Following this response, Nick Owen has decided to organize a Jungian branch within the humanistic movement. Will anyone interested in this please get in touch with him at Garden Flat, 44 Colveston Crescent, E8.