

What is a Group? A New Look at Theory in Practice. Ed. Chris Oakley. Rebus Press. £19.99. 1999.

If Chris Oakley, the editor of this collection of papers on group psychotherapy, is to be believed, this series of papers was commissioned on an ad hoc, almost by chance basis, and the result is "a curious manifesto of odd cullings in which any purported links between the contributors would be more an effect of the contingent rather than of any meticulous planning". This statement is surprising, however, given that the themes that run throughout this book are remarkably consistent and there is a central preoccupation: of returning to Freud to examine his ideas on group psychology. The contributors to this book use Freud as a springboard to engage in an exploration of power and authority in the group and of the mutual identifications that occur between group members and group conductor. As well as coming from psychoanalytic and group analytic traditions, they also include a management consultant and a philosopher.

This book, then, is largely a debate about Freud's "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", with some smaller interest in "Totem and Taboo" and "Civilisation and Its Discontents", the contributors using these texts to compare them with more contemporary theory, and as a basis on which to develop their own ideas. "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" is one of the neglected books of Freud's oeuvre: group psychotherapists, including the main tradition of group psychotherapy in the UK, which is Group Analysis, have certainly neglected it. This seems odd bearing in mind that Foulkes, the founder of Group Analysis, was himself a Freudian psychoanalyst. However, this "going back to Freud" seems to allow these contributors to call into question some of the received ideas about group psychotherapy and to offer some interesting and seldom explored slants on the group process.

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud assumes that group processes arise directly from individual psychology and can be conceptualised using the tools and ideas used to explaining individual mental life. His focus is on unconscious processes in groups and he argues that these unconscious group forces are based on individual unconscious events. He extends this idea by also claiming that we can have no real understanding of unconscious processes in the individual without also thinking about, and taking into account, the group context, dynamics, and processes within which that individual operates. Thus:

"...only rarely and under certain exceptional conditions is individual psychology in a position to disregard the relations of this individual to others. In the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper or as an opponent: and from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the words, is at the same time social psychology as well".

Later in the text, Freud clearly asserts his view that group processes come first, and that a focus on individual psychology is an artificial isolation of psychological processes to the individual, and as such, can only give incomplete understanding.

Freud's stance, in this quotation, is close to an object relations perspective: we are indissolubly linked to our objects, which determine our identifications, ideals, and the structure of the mind itself. The phrase "the group in the mind" seems to adequately summarise Freud's view, and his interest in this paper is to try to say something about how this group in the mind is formed, how it is structured, and how it influences the individual. The conceptual tools that Freud uses to understand these psychological processes include the concept of the ego ideal and identification. His focus is on identifications with the father as a metaphor for the relationship towards

authority and how these become part of the internal world. Freud's interests also include issues of hostility and competitiveness in groups, and the types of identifications made, particularly towards group leaders, who exist, and are related to "in place" of parental authority figures. Freud's claim is that libidinal ties are at the heart of any group and he elaborates this by telling us that groups are held together by the illusion that the leader loves all group members equally, as a substitute father. Thus, in any group each group member is bound together by libidinal ties, first to the leader and then to other members of the group, that are ties of mutual identifications based on earlier childhood relationships with parents. These affective ties explain the reduction of individual freedom in the group and changes in individual personality in the group context.

Norman Vella's initial chapter, "Freud on Groups" seeks to integrate central Freudian ideas, on the Oedipus Complex and the superego, into group theory. His thesis is that groups are, at base, parricidal in nature, and these destructive impulses are only kept in check by authority and institutionalised taboo. The problem then, in group psychotherapy, is one of keeping these potentially destructive forces in check until more mature identifications and an identification with a mature group ego ideal can be made. Vella makes telling use of group vignettes to underline his arguments.

Robin Cooper then outlines the ideas of Foulkes on group psychotherapy and he includes a brief biography including a discussion of significant influences on the development of his theory. In common with most papers in this collection, concepts about identification in groups, authority and conformity loom large as problematic areas in group psychotherapy. For example, Foulkes says that the tendency to make the therapist into a leader is one of the greatest resistances and he noted, in his writings, the tendency of the group to do and say what the therapist expects and wants to hear, constituting a complete submission to the conductor's conscious and unconscious opinions. Cooper's concern about this is one of how it is then possible for the conductor to use his authority to wean group members away

from this authority. Both Cooper and Vella are interested in the power of conformity in groups and both are concerned with how it is possible to create an analytic group that does not conform and rely on the leader, but is able to challenge and think for itself in the face of powerful forces and resistances against this. For both, one part of an answer is that a group must be safe enough for group members to be able to do this, and also that the development of an independent thinking capacity is dependent on a specific kind of authority taken up by the group conductor that eventually helps group members to wean themselves away from the authority of the therapist. Cooper convincingly problematises areas of group psychotherapy that have previously tended to be taken as "givens", for example, the idea that group members, although they may individually deviate from "health", have as a group a developmental thrust towards regaining the norm.

Michael Halton reviews the ideas of Bion and Foulkes, comparing and contrasting their ideas and practices, and pointing to the importance of each man's personal history in forming their group psychologies. Bion's history of personal trauma, for example, led him to an interest in primitive levels of experience and behaviour, whereas Foulkes viewed the group as more of a good object, and was influenced by his classical Freudian background as well as influences outside the psychoanalytic arena. In common with the other papers in this collection Halton is interested in the role and position of the therapist in the group and the dynamics of the therapist's authority and position in the group context. He examines Oedipal dynamics within the group and takes the view that the central conflict in group therapy is between the desire for (or the fear of) an exclusive one-to-one relationship with the therapist, and the maintenance of a link with the other group members. He convincingly asserts that both Foulkes and Bion idealised the group and did not effectively utilise the transferences within the group in their theories. Thus, they denied the reality of generational differences in group psychotherapy and therefore of Oedipal dynamics, and his claim is that the essential asymmetry of the parent-child relationship is side-stepped, and the

resulting emotions of dependency, rivalry, envy and jealousy. Halton argues, therefore, for a therapeutic stance that is more interpretatively active than that advocated by either Foulkes or Bion in order for group members to be able to process persecutory experiences and anxieties and in order to prevent a culture of comfortable collusion from developing in the group. In arguing this position, however, he is advocating the consensus of the Tavistock tradition, with whom he identifies, and the tradition in which he has been trained, and his essay therefore provokes thought about the identifications and ego ideals of psychotherapists and our relationships towards our own authorities.

Kernberg's paper on Mass Psychology again discusses Freud's thoughts on the psychology of large groups and he reviews many of the ideas outlined in earlier sections of the book, in addition to introducing the ideas of newer thinkers, such as Bion, Chasseguet-Smirgel and, of course, Kernberg. The power of the group is a theme that is shared with other contributors to this book, the focus is on the power of the leader and the capacity for the group leader to take on a position of being a "pseudo paternal promoter of illusions", confirming the group members narcissistic wish to fuse with the group as an ego-ideal. Kernberg's preoccupation is on the power of the group to draw group members into regressive forces and destructive forms of relating, based on identifications and projections onto the group leader. His view of unstructured groups is one in which a group will inevitably draw group members into powerful anxieties and regressive forces and where the group leader is a central force in creating a group context that is either positive or negative. Given the discussions in the earlier part of this book, however, one may well go on to ask whether an expectation that a group will develop in a certain way will actually create a group that performs and functions according to these expectations: it is not unreasonable to suggest that if a group therapist goes into a group with the expectation that the leader is the central figure in the group and the central determinant of the success of the group, he or she will encourage a type of group functioning that confirms these expectations. If this is accepted the question is: given the inevitability of

the influence of the group leader, what expectations and influences are most helpful in creating a group that is therapeutic and where the group members will be able to grow and develop in a positive way? Although Kernberg does propose leadership attributes that help to promote a healthy group, he does not take the additional step back of examining his own preconceptions about group functioning and how these might influence group functioning. They are simply "'givens" and are not the subject of analysis.

Earl Hopper's paper concentrates on the social, rather than the psychological, and the main thrust of his chapter is on "the constraints of social systems on individuals and their internal worlds, and at the same time, the effects that unconscious fantasies, actions, thoughts and feelings have on social systems". His own critique of the Oedipus complex is that it only makes sense within a social context: this means that it has to be interpreted within the values and norms of a particular society, and that it will be expressed differently within differing social contexts. An example from our own culture of secretaries and their relationship with their sons, husbands and bosses, echoing the kind of family pattern we see in D.H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers" provides a telling example. This chapter can be seen as further building on Freud's use and extension of concepts derived from individual psychology to the group situation: for example, Hopper states that the examination of envy and greed and the impulses to bite and chew must be contextualised not only in terms of the body, but also in terms of family, class and status groups in society at a certain point in time. Just as Freud's group psychology is fundamentally based on family psychology (what else is the Oedipus Complex if not a family dynamic or relationship conflict?), Hopper reasserts this and extends this to more fundamentally social and group forces. His two clinical vignettes of group psychotherapy sessions effectively illustrate his points. He ends with a plea for the study of the social unconscious in the training of psychotherapists.

Philip Boxer, in *The Dilemmas of Ignorance*, looks at "the Tavistock paradigm". The central question he asks is why this paradigm has become so

marginal, and his answer is that it fails to relate to and consider power and authority relationships, in particular, his claim is that systems thinking, on which this paradigm is based, conceals the effects of the observer and the effects of power in the systems examined. Boxer examines the history of the Tavistock as a means of understanding the development of theory (the central role of phantasy in Kleinian theory, the emphasis given to the schizoid and depressive positions, for example), and he looks at other traditions for contrasting ideas that might reveal the weaknesses of the Tavistockian tradition, for example, Foulkes' making problematic the relation between the individual and the group. He asks a central question that is central for most writers in this collection: what is the role of the interpretative statements of the therapist? A case study of an institution employing external consultants is discussed which illuminates the failure of these consultants to think about real authority and power issues in this institution.

Alan Rowan and Eric Harper again take us back to Freud as we might expect from a chapter on a Lacanian approach to group psychotherapy. They also review the ideas of Foulkes and find his approach lacking in its focus on the ego, rather than on deeper unconscious forces. A case vignette in which a group therapist has apparently imposed his own fantasies on the group so that "the group developed them as though they were their own" also takes us back to earlier discussions about the dangers of an over-identification with the therapist and the unavoidable influence of the therapist in the group context.

The last paper in the book is well placed since it, for me, summarises and develops some of the discussions and themes of earlier chapters. Steven Gans, a philosopher and psychotherapist, comments first on Freud's Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, concluding that the question Freud poses in this paper is how it is possible to be responsible in a group given that the first victim of collective thinking is responsibility. He extends this to the psychoanalytic community, and the question is now of how it is possible for psychotherapists to identify with Freud (or any other "father of

psychotherapy") and yet be independent of this paternal figure. He raised the issue of ethics in group psychotherapy and finds something of an answer to the problematic nature of authority and the power of the group leader in Laing's position that "the art of the therapist is to dispel the illusion of "an answer" to suffering and to show how seeking "the answer" from one "supposed to know" perpetuates the state of need and demand that is the source of suffering in the first place". Together with a "taking the other by the hand....converting useless suffering into meaningful inter-human intimacy", this constitutes a beginning towards understanding why psychotherapy works.

Overall, this book is a compelling contribution to the debate about what is important and significant in group psychotherapy. In going back to Freud, the contributors manage to cast fresh eyes on issues of authority and power in groups and thus widen the range of understandings we might use in thinking about groups. It is only in meeting with challenge and difference that we are able to establish our own positions, values, and ideas and the questioning of established theory and practice found here will usefully help us to examine our own assumptions and practice. This is a thought provoking and instructive book that is well worth reading.

Koinonia: From Hate, Through Dialogue, To Culture in the Large Group. Patrick le Mare, Robin Piper and Sheila Thompson. Karnac Books. 1991.

In 1930 in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud predicted that "one day someone will venture to embark upon a pathology of cultural communities". The study of the workings of the large group, largely pioneered by members of the Institute of Group Analysis in London, involves the study of the workings and development of group culture and the study of

cultural pathology. This is achieved by means of an examination of large group dynamics, of how inner worlds are linked with the cultural context, and a study of the influence of subcultural and macro cultural ideas on large group events and processes.

What does this mean in plain English? Simply that the large group is a forum in which events, fantasies, and ideas from the external context in which the group operates loom large and there is then an opportunity to think about them and examine them. Gregory Bateson's ideas about difference communicating information is important in this context: the differing reactions and interpretations of large group members to cultural and contextual events conveys information that produces thought that is then available to be understood and to generate meaning. Thus, the question of how cultural forces are taken in, thus generating internal psychic structures and of how internal psychic structures in turn create specific cultural and group climates is a major focus of group work and study.

I am unable to do better than to quote Patrick de Mare to give a flavour of the issues explored in this book. He states that "whilst psychoanalysis explores the individual, and small groups examine the family, only larger group settings can feasibly explore the social and cultural contexts in which we all reside usually as helpless onlookers....The culture of the group is the group equivalent of the individual mind. In so far as this culture can be inappropriate (for the culture's tasks), and even pathologically destructive, so it can be seen as the equivalent of neurotic disturbance in the individual". He goes on to comment on the fact that other psychotherapeutic and psychiatric traditions do not comment on the influence of cultural context, seeing its examination as too difficult a task to undertake. While one can take issue with him about the mutual exclusivity of what takes place, and what is worked with, in different psychotherapeutic settings, his general points about what is possible in different contexts seems generally valid.

The approach to large groups discussed here is based on the small group analytic principles of Foulkes involving a leaderless and apparently

aimless discussion occurring in groups of 20 individuals or more in order to understand the evoked group dynamics and to explore how communication is possible in this situation. The authors propose that hate inevitably occurs in the large group arising from the frustrations of the setting, and hate and frustration are necessary to produce symbolisation and a resulting group culture. The relationship between hate, dialogue, and culture within the group is said to be crucial in determining whether destructive or constructive forces predominate. Dialogue is seen as a liberating force away from helplessness, hate, destructiveness, and non-creativity, leading to a culture of *Koinonia* or interpersonal fellowship and the formation of a powerful and sensitive thinking group.

Apart from outlining these ideas we are also informed about the history of the large group approach and the way in which object relations theory, systems theory, and structuralism provide valuable perspectives on large group phenomena. There is an interesting final chapter, on ecological perspectives, that discusses the design and organisation of human social environments and institutions that are maximally related to human needs and functioning. The appendix usefully summarises 37 consecutive large group meetings, grounding us in the events that occur in one large group after the more theoretical discussions that precede it.

This is a wide-ranging, sometimes complex, but always stimulating read. The examination of the forces and dynamics occurring at the large group and cultural level must be of relevance to all, faced as we are with the reality of often destructive cultures within large social groupings and within organisations. This book addresses the question of how we are to create more responsive and benign cultures, of how it might be possible to effect positive change within these environments to prevent apparently unstoppable destructiveness.

The Generations of Adam. Eric Rhode. Free Association Books. 1990.

This is a book that is both difficult and rewarding. Part of its difficulty lies in its originality and creativity, the profusion of ideas and images conjured by the text making it difficult to capture and pin down the sense in a single reading. I came to think of it as something essentially unfinished that has to be completed by the reader through a process of setting off thoughts and associations that make personal sense of the material - the reader is perhaps intended to do his own work on this book and this is therefore a book to free associate with.

The main focus is the Genesis story. Following Freud, Rhode sets out on an imaginative reconstruction of the Genesis myth to find psychological meaning in the story treated as metaphor. Myth is taken as a statement of the psyche about itself, an attempt to experience and express universal aspects of internal reality. Using psychoanalytic insights, particularly those of Bion, he attempts to excavate and unfold the manifold meanings in the Genesis story. He views the Biblical Genesis as a non-allegorical story, similar in form to non-symbolic mentation processes found in psychotic forms of thought.

An important theme is the exploration of "the spiritual" in human life, in relation to human consciousness, meaning, and the nature of experience, an exploration of the basic characteristics of thought and experience. We are left with a picture of the puzzling and multi-layered nature of experience, experience as a puzzle, both complex and non-obvious.

"The Generations of Adam" is a wonderfully fruitful and thought-provoking read. My impression is that it is only a beginning that the reader is invited to process and progress. It has the feel of a contemplative read that seems to induce in the reader a parallel mood, as if the text were offering a space for private, internal dialogue.

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