THE FACTOR OF NUMBER IN INDIVIDUAL- AND GROUP-DYNAMICS.*

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THE term "Group-Therapy" can have two meanings, and it is well to keep the distinctions clearly in mind. It can refer to the treatment of a number of *individuals* assembled for therapeutic sessions, or it can refer to a planned endeavour to discover (and so make accessible to the understanding, and thus control) the forces which operate in the participating *group*.

The first is primarily a therapy of *individuals* (group behaviour and its study being a secondary but important consideration); the second is primarily a therapy of a *group* (individual behaviour and its study being a secondary but important consideration). These two may blend.

The first is found in several forms which we can name according to where the dynamic emphasis is laid. One kind is based on general explanations of the nature of neurotic trouble; this may be called *didactic* group therapy. The physician may, however, be less concerned with explanation and more interested in giving comfort; this may be called *reassurance* group therapy. The comfort and companionship may be carried far, that is, the aim may be to produce such a degree of happiness in the group as to deserve the name *companionate* group therapy; or the technique may be that of catharsis by a sort of public confessional in which case we may speak of it as *confessional* group therapy (without confusion with the other and older use of the word "confessional"). There is another kind of group therapy in which transference interpretations are given of the behaviour of individuals and by inference of the group, called *analytical* group therapy.

Let us now consider the second kind of group therapy, which we owe to Dr. Bion. This, if I understand him aright, is primarily concerned with the behaviour of the group as a group, and less with the behaviour of individuals in it. The difference is very important theoretically, and therefore, in the long run, practically.

One of the characteristics of individuals, as distinct from groups, is that individuals have an infancy characterized by a long development from immaturity during which they are physically and socially dependent: if groups, *as groups*, have anything comparable with this we know as yet very little about it. Very gradually we are beginning to know something about the integration of individual personality; we know that it is both threatened and stimulated by unresolved emotional conflicts during infancy, and that its final achievement,

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which we call maturity, is never as rigid or as stable as the instinct-ridden "personalities" (if we may use the word) of the wild members of the lower species. Following, and perhaps developing, Freud's theories in "Group Psychology," we can see one way in which the psychodynamics of the individual influence the behaviour of the group—the dependent state during human infancy and the unresolved problems of that three-person relationship called the Oedipus complex (in both direct and inverted forms) leads to a search for and veneration of Leaders, who are identified with the ego-ideal, and to a bond through positive identification with those who share the same ego-ideal figure, and through a negative identification a hostility towards those who do not.

Such concepts, which are now so much the common stock of our daily thought that we find them in leading articles of our newspapers, give a valuable theoretical structure to those group therapies which concern, explicitly or implicitly, the treatment of several individuals assembled for remedy of neurotic disturbances, but I venture to think that such concepts deal with only a portion of the operative *group* dynamics.

If we were to divide the kinds of psychodynamics according to the number of particles or bodies or persons concerned, we could speak of one- and two-body psychologies which deal with reflexology, with the "higher neurology," and with those strange researches using the brass instruments of psychology which study persons in sound- and social-proof rooms of our laboratories—all this is one- or, at most, two-body psychology. A three-body psychology deals with all of the derivatives of the Oedipus complex, and this, as we have seen, is very useful in group therapy. There is perhaps—I repeat, perhaps—a multi-body psychology, which would, if it were articulate, that is to say adequately conceptualized, deal with the psychological forces operative when several or many individuals are together.

If, in an endeavour to understand the psychodynamics of a group, we employ as a model for our thinking the three dimensions of space, one co-ordinate can be represented by the one- and two-body psychology, another by the three-body psychology, and the third by the multi-body psychology. On this reckoning the three psychologies are complementary; but there is a corollary, viz. that an event (if, indeed, the theory is right) can only be "placed," i.e. accounted for, if cognizance is taken of the forces in all three psychologies, or, as one might call it, the three regions of psychological space.

At this point I expect to be challenged with the question—am I not advocating a herd instinct, and is not the psychology of the individual and of the horde (to quote Freud's term) enough? My answer is that horde psychology carries us a long way, and usefully, but I suggest that it carries with it a "field determined" limitation. It is based on research done in the two-body situation of the psychoanalysis of single persons who have failed to master the complexity of the three-body (Oedipal) situation, and who therefore *transfer* into every other situation those as yet unresolved three-body problems. This is likely to be particularly evident where individuals, still Oedipally handicapped, are assembled for remedy of three-body problems.

When groups of people, having already a structured relation to one another, call in a psychologist because of their discontent with their group relationship

and wish it bettered—when this occurs we shall have a situation in which multi-body psychology can be studied more easily, though, of course, the investigation will be complicated by the two other psychological factors. Without Freud's three-body theory, an examination of a multi-body situation becomes unmanageably complicated ; in the study of human society Oedipean factors will always have to be reckoned with.

To return to the challenging question—about herd instinct. I see no objection to it ; many animal species exhibit it ; man certainly shows a tendency to shoal, or herd, or group together. Perhaps—again, perhaps—the herd impulse provides a matrix within which the multi-body as well as three-body forces operate. The trouble is that we lack as yet a wide-sweeping theoretical framework for multi-body psychology, without which group therapy (in the second sense I described at the outset) will lack its backbone of theory.

I am well aware that I have said nothing but commonplaces, and have added nothing whatever to the theories which may help us to explain in detail the behaviour of groups. My sole excuse for occupying your time with these banalities is that in our absorption with the tasks of applying three- and two-body theory we tend to overlook that groups, like animals, have, so far as we know, nothing like a human infancy.

[Transference, and transference interpretations, depend on the carrying-over into the present of past situations that have a different quality from those now existing. The child is different from the adult both structurally and functionally ; Freud laid stress on this about fifty years ago, when he emphasized the importance of infantile sexuality, and subsequent researches have in no way diminished the importance of that discovery. Interpretations which only compare similar structures and functions are not " mutative," to use Strachey's term,and it does them undue honour to call such interpretations explanatory, because they miss the point ; they are not, in fact, interpretations in the strict use of the term. Another feature of human infancy is that its most important behaviour and character-influencing qualities are repressed ; there is something preventing " closure " to the unresolved conflicts ; there is an amnesic gap in the experience of the individual which has to be filled in (not merely bridged by explanations) before the patient can obtain his full maturity. Furthermore, the therapeutic work with individuals mainly concerns the restitution of processes of growth within an organism whose boundaries can, generally speaking, be defined, and whose changes occur within a biological time scale proper to the species—" three score years and ten," as the Bible says. The art of interpretation lies partly in conveying to the patient the present operation of concurrent but discrepant patterns of behaviour which belong to different periods or positions in the time scale of that patient's growth. It is with these considerations in mind that one can say a group has no infancy, that the term " group interpretations " does not consist in filling in a gap between structurally and functionally different phases of an organism living in, and bounded by, a well-recognized and highly relevant time scale, and that such " group interpretations " are not intended to remove an amnesia. All this notwithstanding, it is possible that groups have phases (perhaps, indeed, lasting in some cases throughout their existence) characterized by such

instability of behaviour, such apparent unawareness of threats to their very existence, such unmindfulness of their relation to other groups and the community of which they are a part—because of these things it is tempting, but not useful, to speak of groups as being infantile. Our lack of comprehensive picture of group life inclines us to lean overmuch on analogies.*]

One of the main tasks of research, at least one that lies nearest to hand, is to discover the limiting factors in the operation of three-body psychodynamics in a multi-body situation.

* The portion in brackets was added to this paper as a result of the subsequent discussion.—J.R.