

THE LAW OF THE HERD: A PSYCHOANALYTIC DISCUSSION OF MADNESS IN GROUPS

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NARAVNI ZAKON CREDE: PSIHOANALITSKA DISKUSIJA BLAZNOSTI PRI LJUDEH V GRUPAH

POVZETEK

Prispevek obravnava pomembnost psihoanalitičnega razumevanja posameznika kot člana skupine. Prikazano je delo britanskega psihoanalitika Wilfreda Biona. Članek vsebuje diskusijo o pomembnosti Bionovih opazovanj in dognanj pri razumevanju pojavov, ki so ključni pri mentaliteti fašizma. Avtorica poudarja potrebo po temeljitem razumevanju tistega dela

človekovega delovanja, ki je nezavedno, da bi mogli bolje razumeti nevarnosti, s katerimi se sooča posameznik, ko se znajde v skupini. Na kratko je predstavljeno tudi delo Roberta Langsa, ki zadeva tesnobo, katera nastaja v nevarnih okoliščinah, obenem pa se prispevek dotika tudi vznemirjenosti kot posledice medčloveških odnosov, ki obetajo duševno varnost. Avtorica vključuje tudi svoje bogate izkušnje na področju komunikativnega razumevanja nezavednega transfernega odziva.

THE LAW OF THE HERD: A PSYCHOANALYTIC DISCUSSION OF MADNESS IN GROUPS

A slightly revised version of a lecture given at the Holocaust Education Centre, Vancouver, B.C. 2 March 1995 as part of the seminars organized in British Columbia to celebrate 50 years after the end of World War II (Organized by Simon Fraser University and the Institute for the Humanities)

ABSTRACT

Author proposes that the emerging democracies need to understand and stay alert to the dangers inherent in human groups in order to avoid the possible deterioration of their functioning with devastating consequences. Author takes the theory of functioning of human groups by Wilfred Bion and relates it to some historical events that led to the excesses of fascism. Characteristics common to all groups that function on the basis of basic assumptions, such as being out of touch with reality and reliance on fantasy, are explored. The important issues of personal responsibility and of blind obedience to authority are emphasised in the context of Bion's findings that the 'conspiracy of anonymity' is characteristic, rather than the exception, of all basic assumption groups. Such anonymous contributions of the individual to the group rarely remain innocent and usually result in merciless and cruel actions of the group. The functioning of the individual in groups might quickly deteriorate and start spinning in a vicious circle which is difficult to control. Learning from experience proves to be enormously difficult. To prevent overt expressions of madness in groups, real work is required. It is essential that the group is appropriately organised, that its members possess skills and maturity, and that they engage in thought. Spontaneous actions usually end up in chaos and

irrational violence. Author believes that deep psychoanalytic understanding of human functioning in groups can lead to actions necessary to prevent the dangerous consequences in reality of fascist mentality by way of psychological treatment of our deepest fears and by way of resisting the allure of any effortless secondary gains no matter how illusory or transitory this gain may be. Author's own work on transference demonstrates that not only chaos but also opportunity for safety and order generates anxiety which can lead to irrational functioning.

If there is a message, central to the discussion of fascism, it is that fascism can take many different shapes, from raw violence to subtle manipulation of the mind. Fascism is always dangerous for its victims, and, in the end, also dangerous for its propagators. Fascism is a phenomenon observable in human groups. When we talk about a Fascist leader, we mean to say not only that such leader has very specific characteristics that make him or her a fascist, we are also aware that this is a leader of a very specific type of group, where something, that we recognize as fascist, is going on. Fascist leaders have been called mad. The impression we get from the observation of groups who follow such leaders is that much in their behavior, too, is mad. I will propose that fascism is a form of madness that belongs to people in groups.

Although there remains the perennial question whether fascism is the state of the mind or the state of the State, theories of fascism are theories of the complex interplay between the individual and the group. - I would like to focus on the powerful struggle, experienced for the most part totally out of our consciousness, that goes on when individuals are part of groups. I will also discuss the enormous potential for a destructive outcome of this struggle.

I will center my talk on the mostly hidden dynamics that underlies the expression of madness in groups and in their leaders. The perspective from which I am speaking is psychoanalytic. I will talk about forces and processes that are not readily observable and are not easily inferred from our observations of overt behavior. In fact, I believe that the critical underlying processes which give expression to the phenomena of madness in groups can only be revealed, in their depth and complexity, by the application of psychoanalytic methods of investigation.

I think that the most revolutionary ideas about the way people behave in groups have been expressed by the late British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion. I believe that a careful study of his work is quintessential for a deep understand of all social phenomena. His findings shed light on what we find most inexplicable and most horrifying about groups: their expressions of madness as it is observable in irrational thinking, blind obedience, cruelty, unpredictability, extreme acts of violence, and the like. When we think about the extreme acts of violence, committed by fascist groups in the pasts, and as we hear about outbursts of violence in the present, the issues that we are left struggling with involve questions like: How can they obey so blindly? How can they be so cruel? Don't they see what they are doing? Are they human at all? and, finally, Can they change? The answer that seems to bring us some immediate relief is, They must be mad! I think that, in a way, madness is the correct answer to these disturbing questions. However, the conclusion that "they are mad" may also serve as a powerful defense against our experiencing painful helplessness in the face of the horror that seems too overwhelming. The consequences of such defensive thinking may lead to dangerous neglect of the ever-present potential for violence in reality and therefore to the danger of unconscious complicity by way of passivity. In a way, the study of the psychology of fascism is a study of madness in groups, and, yes, also a study of individual persons that comprise such groups.

Later in my presentation, I will try to include another question related to our endeavor of understanding fascism. It is, I think, a question that most disturbs our sense of balance: How can seemingly rational, cultured persons behave totally irrationally, or, to put this question a step further: Are there situations that can make most of us (all of us?) behave in a fascist way?

The work of another great psychoanalytic thinker, Robert Langs, comes to mind as it helps to explain why so many people end up acting in a destructive way even though there is, at least for the observer, a choice to take another path and to act constructively. I will talk about what communicative psychoanalysis has contributed to our understanding of destructiveness and how the understanding of unconscious communication illuminates the deep reasons for violent behaviour.

Let me start with the discussion of the work of Wilfred Bion. He based his theories of groups mainly on the empirical material that he carefully and systematically gathered during his psychoanalytic work with small groups. Bion began to work with groups at the Tavistock Clinic in England right after the end of the Second World War. At the age of eighteen, young Bion joined

the Royal Tank corps as a volunteer in the battles of the First World War. He was one of two soldiers who survived from the entire regiment. His writing about this time of his life is full of rage at the stupidity of commanding officers, and at the dreadful conditions the soldiers had to endure. He would not accept unnecessarily suffering. In the second World War, Bion was the first of the psychiatrists who entered the army from the Tavistock Clinic. I think you will appreciate Bion's theories more if you know that he spent his lifetime struggling to understand the truth about his own life, about people in general, and especially about people in groups. In his monumental work, *Experiences in Groups* (Bion, 1985), first published in 1961 and comprising only about 200 pages, he said that the psychoanalysis of the individual and psychoanalysis of groups are dealing with facets of the same psychological phenomena, as they provide us with the binocular vision of human nature. Although Bion studied small groups in detail, he studied large social institutions as well, like the army and the church.

To start with, I would like to clarify an important point: when talking about "the group" it becomes almost inevitable that we imagine a certain entity, a compact unit. An image of the animal herd may come to mind, something with a mind of its own, a mythical unit. This is not what Bion meant. On the contrary, it is his important empirical finding, and critical message to us, that the concept of the group as an entity is the very illusion in the individual that needs to be cured. It is precisely this illusion that is at the very source of difficulties the individual has when he or she is in a group. The experience of the group as an entity is a symptom of regression. When in a group, if we get the impression that there is something like a "group mind" rather than, that the group is a function of a number of individuals, we are victims of our own distorted imagination says Bion.

Of course, it is also true that this illusion becomes a powerful driving force to commit irrational acts when, and if, most of the people in a group believe in this illusion and thus make it real in its consequences. This happens when we experience a threat to our individual distinctiveness, when we sense a certain loss of our individuality, as is inevitably the case when we find ourselves part of a group.

Bion does not believe there is a herd instinct, although one certainly gets the impression that some groups of people resemble the behavior of a herd. Bion defines the group as a set of functions of an aggregate, a collection, of individuals. The group is not a function of any one part separately, nor is the group an aggregate without a function. To give you an example, imagine a

certain number of people, who do not know one another, by chance sitting on the lawn in a park. These people do not constitute a group. They do become a group however, as soon as they engage in a common action, for example, if all of them respond to the call for help from someone who had fallen and broken a leg: now these people have a common function, that is, to help the person with the broken leg. As long as they have a common function, they are a group.

We, you in the audience and I on the podium, gathered in this room tonight. We are trying to understand the phenomenon of fascism through the understanding of groups. This is our common function tonight, we are a group. We belong to a larger group of people, however, most of whom are not here tonight, who also are engaged in understanding fascism through lectures and discussions throughout Canada and thus they, too, share the same function. As you know, people throughout Europe are doing much the same, therefore, we are all part of that large groups with the common function to discuss and understand violence in groups. Bion tells us that a hermit, for example, also, is a member of a group, although separated from this group physically. We need to get to know about this group in order to fully understand this hermit. However, we need to have a group of people present in a room together, in order to be able to observe and to study group phenomena. Of course, group phenomena, of the Vancouver group studying fascism for example, exist even when we are physically present at different locations and at different times.

Bion observed that every time five or more people get together to perform a task, they become a group and the groups phenomena are observable. He also observed that there are two distinctly different types of group behaviors present at any given moment, or, to say this more clearly, that these five or more people function at two distinctly different levels of group functioning. Bion gave to these levels of group functioning short-hand names : **work group** and the **basic assumption group**. They are called groups mostly for theoretical reasons, so that we are better able to see the differences. These groups, although very distinct in their behavior, are the same group of people who function, behave, in two very different ways as a group. From my experience, it is a common misunderstanding of the work of Bion to imagine two groups of people when we talk about the work group and the basic assumption group. As I had alluded to earlier, Bion emphasized that it is the unconscious fantasy of the people in the group to experience their group as two different groups.

Let us first look at the leader of the work group, that is, at the time when a group of people function in accordance with their real task, that is when they have become organized in a way that promotes real work, which is the fulfillment of the task for which they had gathered. The leader of a Work group is observably very different from the leader of a group of people who do not behave in a sensible way, who are ineffective, and contradictory. The work group leader is, one among many in the group who have skills for the task. The leader leads the group only as long as the work the leader does is in the service of this task. This description of the leader leaves out many leaders we know, such as despots, autocrats, aristocrats, dictators, leaders of *coup d'etat*, and the like. The people who are led by such rational leader function as distinct individuals, they work in a co-operative manner and out of their own free will. The work group, that is the functioning of a group of people who work seriously on their task for which they had gathered, also has a distinct set of characteristics that makes the work group very different from any other functioning of a group.

In fact, it is a seminal finding of Bion that a rational leader can only lead a work group, or, looking at the same phenomenon from the other lens of the binocular, that only a work group will tolerate the presence of a rational leader. In short, the quality of the leader and the quality of the group go hand in hand. It is not that one depends on the other, that one can blame the other. In his work with groups, Bion observed again and again that his interpretations, his verbal comments to the members of the groups, about what he understood was happening in the group went unnoticed by the group, but that he was heard by each individual in the group. This is one aspect of the process of the constant interaction between the individual and the group mentioned earlier. I think that this point is very important to keep in mind when we attempt to understand the roots of violence such as in personal assault, or of the historical events like the burning of the books, the lynching blacks, the shooting at peaceful demonstrators, the killing of hostages.

For example, Bion tells us that it is close to impossible for a rational leader to lead a violent group because the group **will not be lead**, will not tolerate such leader, the violent group will not even hear what the rational leader has to say. In fact, a violent group, as long as they are violent, will only hear and follow a violent leader, whether the leader is physically present or not. We can readily imagine that no compelling appeal to reason will stop a group engaged in, or determined to be engaged in, an act of violence. On the contrary, the person attempting such an appeal, to stop violence, will very

likely be the first victim of their violence. It is thus possible to understand how, for example, an appeal to peace can paradoxically and tragically, serve as the immediate trigger that will unleash the latent aggression and turn it into actual violence. Herein, I think, lies the power of the illusion.

For those of you who have seen the film "Battleship Potempkin" by Eisenstein, there is, at the end of the film, the famous unforgettable scene: armed soldiers, bayonets pointing, march like one unstoppable machine down the long stretch of steps in the city of Odessa, with blind eyes and deaf ears, they are obeying the order to get rid of the people gathered there. At first, people try to approach them, talk to them. At the very first obstacle to their steady marching, the soldiers start shooting at random at anything in front of them. Among the citizens on the steps, there is a young woman with a baby carriage who pleads with them, don't they see whom they are shooting at? I think the answer is that they don't see, and yet, they saw. In the film, the soldiers give the appearance that they do not know what they are doing, and in a way they did not know, yet, they did know.

I think this is one of the central questions that permeate the enigma of the power of fascism. The shooting of civilians in cold blood is an example of a horrifying event beyond belief and beyond immediate comprehension. Yet, it is possible to observe, and learn from, the principles of aggressive behavior of groups on a much smaller scale and in our everyday lives. This is the way Bion studied groups: a small number of people met at regular times in a room with Bion present. Similar phenomena, which history marked as unforgettable and unforgivable, were observable by Bion, albeit on a very different scale. So called group events were open to psychoanalytic observations and to psychoanalytic interpretations. To a degree, the individuals in the group were also open to modification of their madness.

I will now describe what Bion found about the functioning of groups when they demonstrated madness. As I have mentioned before, he named the groups who functioned any way other than as a work group, **basic assumption groups**. With this, Bion meant just that, namely that there are certain assumptions in operation which are basic to all types of functioning of groups other than when the groups truly work. People in a basic assumption group behave as if there existed certain specific basic assumptions, Bion also called them **tacit assumptions**. People in groups share these assumptions and their behavior is based on them. These basic assumptions operate mostly out of their consciousness and usually in contradiction to what the group is overtly expressing to be the reason for

their behavior. The basic assumptions are deductible from the emotional state of the group. The content of the basic assumption gives meaning to the behavior of the group.

Bion observed that there are three main categories of irrational functioning of groups. One, he named the **dependency group**. It is the basic assumption of this group to gain the sense of security from one person, their leader. The members of this group need to gain protection given to them by one individual. The critical point, I think, is to keep in mind that this aim at gaining security is in fact assumed to be the reason for the formation of the group. To contrast this group with the work group we observe that the dependency group has not met to work on a task the best way it can and is not utilizing the working potential of its members. On the contrary, the members of this group behave as if they have no knowledge, no skills and as if they are child-like, helpless beings in need of protection to be provided by someone stronger. For the members to feel safe, their leader must be all knowing and all powerful, omniscient and omnipotent. The leader must also be wise, giving and loving. It is quite incredible to watch how these wonderful qualities of the leader are not tested in any way and yet they are heavily relied upon. As you can see, the members of the group are relying on something that they only **imagine** is there. We can therefore conclude that they have not come to this idea by scientific means of testing the reality of the situation, by checking out their leader's qualities. We can also conclude that they expect their welfare to be provided by magical means because there is no basis in reality that their expectations will be met. We also see that the members of this group feel no need to provide their leader with the information needed for him or her to be able to provide the very security they seek. This is another example of how the members of the group expect that things will happen by magic, rather than by the application of the scientific method that requires both data and the application of work. After all, their leader **can do anything**. The members imagine that it is up to the whim of their leader to fulfill their expectations. Such a leader is imagined to have super-human qualities, the members idealize the leader out of all proportions and the person who is the leader is strongly tempted to fall into this incredible role. If the leader does this, he or she follows the basic assumptions of the group and the group functions effortlessly and spontaneously until realistic problems and conflicts appear. They always do.

I think that we can see this principle of group behavior repeated endlessly in history, mostly in times of despondency, whether physical as in a hospital, because of a natural disaster as after an earth quake, or social/economic as

during a recession, after a war, and the like. I think it is important here to emphasize once more just how **unaware** the members of such a group, city, or nation, are of their own basic assumptions which are at the very root of the behaviour of the group and of their leader.

In a treatment situation, it is up to the leader to not fall into the role imagined and expected from him or her by the group, no matter how appealing this role might appear, and, instead, to explain to the members of the group what is going on. A successful psychoanalytic interpretation would expose not only the unrealistic expectations of the group members but also the fact that it is not humanly possible to have a leader that is able to fulfill such expectations and, most importantly, to show to the group just how fruitless and full of problematic consequences such attempts at magical solutions are in reality.

My understanding of the situation in Europe in the period following the devastation of the first World War is that we may see a parallel experience of overwhelming helplessness in the majority of the population. At that time, many people seemed to have been ready to listen to anyone who promised them a quick and easy solution, no matter how difficult and complex the real circumstances of that fateful era. It seems possible that the most important “leaders” of groups of that era, in Bion’s sense, were those political and economic leaders who promised to do away with the immense problems without much effort on the part of anyone, and without communicating extensively about the tasks at hand. While thinking in this way, it is important to keep in mind Bion’s finding that, for example, expectations of a better life by depending totally on a leader, are the result of a basic assumption which remains out of awareness. We can infer this with some degree of certitude, by observing the events of the time, that is by studying historical documents. Historians, economists, social psychologists, philosophers, and artists have a lot to say about the great variety of forms that the various expressions of these basic assumptions can take. Considering the artistic expression alone of the era between the two World Wars, I can agree with those who see it as qualitatively very different from the works of art produced during other, more stable periods of European history. It may be up to the psychoanalytic investigation of the deepest processes that give rise to the behaviour in groups, to bring about a clearer understanding of the precursors of mass tragedy and, even more importantly, to show the way to prevent such tragedy.

During the time between the two wars, there were several well documented isolated events of violence, yet I think that the enormous potential for destructiveness that was to come in 1939 was already present in its dormant form in the shape of the sharp conflicts that are part and parcel of the human dependency group. Some of the ominous signs of destructiveness were, I think, hidden behind the frantic unconscious attempts to not suffer the pains of constructive remembering of history, to live in a way that does not remind of grim reality of economic poverty, to forget the haunting horrors of the first WW, at a time when so little was solved in a realistic manner and when economic disasters threatened.

One of the most important issues that need to be included in the discussion of fascism is the need for understanding of the unconscious processes by which conflicts, which result in violence, are brought about. Some unavoidable conflicts that arise out of the functioning of a dependency group are the following: Since no leader can ever satisfy the expectations of the dependency group, this inevitably leads to enormous disappointment in the leader by the group members and this in turn gives rise to hostility towards the leader. It is interesting and important to observe that interpretations of this hostility, which is the result of the unrealistic expectations, are strongly resisted in the treatment setting. The group denies hearing about their dependency and tries desperate measures to force the leader to care for them. The group clearly implies that the leader would prove a heartless monster if he or she did not fulfill their demands. Understanding Bion's insight into the functioning of the groups, it is easy to see that it is extremely difficult, if not quite impossible, for most people to be a rational leader. There is the glory of the idealized super-human to be resisted and abandoned. There are real threats of humiliation and shame when the leader does not behave in the way the group expects. As long as the leader does not take care of the members of the group, the members of the dependency group remain feeling insecure, inadequate and helpless, feelings that are quite painful to endure for long, so, they may turn against their leader at any time.

If the leader cannot fulfill the expectations of the group, and it is easy to see that sooner or later this becomes realistically impossible, the group is in search of another leader who can. This search brings to the surface ambitions of glory of many members of the group who try to become the new leaders. Some are more ambitious than others.

This conflict which is always present and inherent in human nature is that of the dependent tendencies versus mature needs of the individual: this

conflict is observed between the members of the group as well as within each individual, the conflict is thus both inter- and intra-psychic. This conflict is expressed in various forms, one of the important ones is the conflict between dogma and science. Science here is meant in the most general sense: as a way of testing the data and conclusions against the reality of the situation. When the members of a dependency group feel that their leader has deserted them (by failing to satisfy their irrational demands), they may abandon all quarrels which have existed among them and huddle together in a spontaneous way which will provide them with a sense of security and warm comfort no matter how imaginary. This sense of security does not last and in fact has little basis in the reality of their situation. Again, an interpretation of this state is experienced as a challenge. A challenge is then treated as heresy and anyone who is felt to be a heretic is persecuted. We can all think of infamous historical examples of cruel persecution of people who have spoken the truth in a society which functioned predominantly as a group which was irrationally dependent on a leader, because it was the truth that they spoke.

Bion found that all basic assumption groups attempt to solve their problems by magical means. The second type of irrational functioning of a group has been named by Bion as a **fight and flight group**. The group that functions as a fight and flight group has a different assumption than the one active in the dependency group. People in this group assume that they have come together in order to **preserve the group** and that they can achieve this by either fighting someone or else by fleeing from someone or something. The inevitable consequence of this assumption is the need for real immediate action, which makes this group particularly dangerous. As much as members of the dependency group are mostly passive, the members of the fight and flight group engage in action, imperative for the act of fighting as well as for running away. Bion observed that the group as a whole does not care for the individual member, in fact he or she is quickly abandoned when the interests of the group are perceived to require casualties. This group cannot tolerate people who are perceived as weak in any way because the need for action demands physical strength. We can easily see here the parallels with the doctrines of the Third Reich which glorified power and physical strength.

I would like to propose that the 'aestheticization' of violence, so prevalent during the fascist rule in Europe and, in fact, typical for all manifestations of fascism, is basically an expression of the need for strength which is the most important and necessary quality valued in the fight and flight group. I think that in graphic design and in art promoted during fascism, the concept of beauty is taken as a symbol of strength and power, not of goodness and

pleasure. As a further abstraction of this aspect of beauty, I think that the concept of **pure order** is the symbol of control over, and of destruction of, any life left in something beautiful. Thus I see the full cycle of regression: from physical strength to beauty, through the beauty found in order, leading to the fascination with the power of the **machine**. The machine is power in motion and its orderly movement is the absolute abstraction of beauty. A group that functions as a powerful machine has no consideration for the weak individual, no matter how falsely perceived this weakness is, who is ruthlessly dealt with as a **casualty** necessary for the survival of the group. When I describe the functioning of basic assumption groups, the understanding is easy and examples in history numerous. What I would like to remind you of is that these descriptions of group phenomena were derived by Bion not from Nazi groups or groups comprising violent prison inmates, they were derived from his observations of groups of patients, students, candidates, psychiatrists, practicing psychoanalysts. What Bion observed was the functioning of human nature.

Bion further observed that the leader of a fight and flight group must be able to demonstrate the skill to organize the group for an attack or for flight. The leader is thus very important to the functioning of this type of group. He or she must be able to identify the enemy to be attacked and to identify a danger to flee from. When there is no enemy, and the group functions on the fight or flight assumption, then the leader must produce an enemy. The consequence of this requirement is that persons, best suited for the role of leaders of such groups, must contain some paranoid streak to be able to invent an enemy even when there is none and therefore in spite of the reality of the situation. The leader must thus provide opportunity for the members to either engage in acts of aggression or to flee. To be acceptable as a leader by the fight and flight group, the leader must demonstrate hatred for the enemy. Again, it is not difficult to find examples in history that show how well some leaders matched this description.

To me, the most frightening, and I think the most important, finding of Bion is his observation that a leader who is not able to provide opportunity for the group to engage in aggressive or fleeing action is not tolerated as their leader and would be ignored by the group if he or she tried to lead the group away from aggression or away from flight. Whenever intense hatred or extreme avoidance is observable in a group one can suspect that the group is functioning on the basic assumption of having come together to fight. A group in the state of avoidance is perhaps difficult to identify, because there is little in the overt behaviour of such group that would stand out clearly.

However, the type of the group becomes unmistakable when avoidance suddenly switches into hatred and aggressive action.

Bion's contribution to the study of panic in groups, or "mass hysteria" as it is sometimes called, is I think, of great importance. He found that the fight and flight group is particularly prone to panic reactions. His observations led him to conclude that panic, flight and **uncontrolled** attack are really one and the same reaction. Bion taught that panic arises in all situation that might have caused intense rage. It is when rage, or fear, cannot be reacted to in an ordinary way, that is, when there is no appropriate outlet for the rage or for the fear, that intolerable frustration results in panic. Intolerance of any frustration and the need for instantaneous satisfaction is yet another characteristic, typical to all basic assumption groups. I think that it is not difficult to see that both, attack and flight, offer immediate feeling of satisfaction by providing the necessary exit out of the intolerable experiencing of intense hate or intense fear. Bion's observed that a leader of a fight and flight group can easily turn the group, which is engaged in flight, to change course and start attacking, or to change from an attack into panic. I think that this observation sheds light not only on events common to the military, but also on all situations which involve action. I think that sudden changes in tactics of certain groups become more understandable if we consider Bion's findings.

Bion named the third basic assumption group the pairing group because it comes together for the purpose to create something new, as in procreation, and because the leadership of such a group is held by two persons. The functioning of this group is relevant to the theme of fascism only marginally, I think. This group seems to be able to hold at bay, temporarily at least, the feelings of hatred and despair and may change at any time into any of the two groups discussed before.

In conclusion, I would like to accentuate the characteristics common to all groups that function on the basis of basic assumptions. Such groups are out of touch with reality, they rely on fantasy, and this fantasy is made real by their actions. Impulsiveness, confusion, uncritical thinking, disregard for consequences of actions, as well as poor sense of time are all typically observed in groups when they function as basic assumption groups.

When considering the important issues of personal responsibility and of blind obedience to authority, it is important to take into account Bion's findings that the anonymity of contributions by the members of a group is

characteristic of all basic assumption groups. Bion found that the "conspiracy of anonymity", where statements and names get confused and are vaguely or wrongly attributed, is not only typical, but is critical to the functioning of all basic assumption groups. It is as if the responsible individual has abandoned responsibility for its own immature and irrational functioning. It appears that he or she fears so much his or her own helpless and confused state of mind that this individual has disowned these parts of themselves and left them "floating" anonymously in the group. These anonymous contributions of the individual to the group rarely remain innocent. Anonymous contribution typically result in merciless actions of the group. The propensity for cruelty of the group then becomes one more reason why the individual fears basic assumption groups. The functioning of the individual in the groups quickly deteriorates and starts spinning in a vicious circle.

The observation of any group thus provides the composite picture of two ways of our functioning of individuals when we are in groups: as part of a work group and as part of the many faces of the basic assumption group. It is important to keep in mind that these two distinctly different levels of functioning are nevertheless present and active simultaneously in any group activity in a flowing and overlapping way. The dangers of extreme emotions and extreme actions are real when the work functioning of a group gives way to the spontaneous and impulsive intrusion of the functioning that is based on the basic assumptions. Bion found that basic assumptions act unconsciously and irrationally and that they are difficult to control. Bion concluded that learning from experience is a difficult task indeed (Bion, 1962). Real work requires that the group is appropriately organized, that its members possess skills and maturity, and that they engage in thought.

I have been discussing groups and the individual as member of a group. The mature individual is constantly faced with decisions that involve his or her own well being as well as the well being of others. In the discussion of fascism I have concentrated on the extreme actions which have serious, sometimes tragic, consequences for all involved. One of the questions I posed in the beginning of this paper was this: How can seemingly rational, cultured people on occasion behave totally irrationally. I would like to put this question a step further and ask, Are there situations in groups that would cause all of us to behave in a fascist way? Do we all carry within us seeds for fascist actions? I think that this fear regarding the strength of our own integrity was amply answered by the contributions of Bion. The answer is not simply, Yes. I think that the knowledge contained in Bion's work also provides us with the power to translate the deep psychoanalytic

understanding of our functioning in groups into the actions necessary to prevent the dangerous consequences in reality of fascist mentality by way of treatment of our deepest fears and by way of resisting the allure of any effortless secondary gains, as they appear to be offered by the basic assumption groups, no matter how illusory or transitory this gain may be.

There is another perspective that sheds light on the way our decisions are influenced by the powerful forces that lie out of our conscious awareness. The findings of Robert Langs (e.g.: 1978, 1988) illuminate motivation from the angle of communicative psychoanalysis which serves as an explanation complementary to the theories of Bion, Freud, and others.

Our decisions are multi-determined, as Freud had written. Among many forces shaping a decision, there is also a powerful influence of unconsciously experienced anxiety that is generated by a set of conditions that would put the individual, paradoxically, in a safe place. A secure relationship, a mature role which is appropriate to the reality of the situation, which would ensure full communicative interchange with others, and which would benefit others as well the individual, is at the same time a source of satisfaction and pleasure and a source of intense anxiety. This anxiety, shortly termed "secure-frame anxiety", has been observed in all human beings. It is understood, in the therapeutic setting, by understanding the unconsciously communicated meaning verbally communicated by the individual in the context of a current situation. These communications tell us that secure-frame conditions invariably bring about a state of anxiety that involves several unconscious states, the most important, and the most consequential of which is claustrophobia, a sense of being trapped, a sense of intolerable emotions. Many times the sense of claustrophobia is partly conscious and the need for some sort of escape becomes great.

The individual may sense some uneasiness or even panic or unknown origin with the immediate consequence being that action of one kind or another is experienced as the only way out of the situation. The consequence of unresolved secure-frame anxiety, specific to certain situations, inevitably leads to attempts at changing some aspects of the secure and mature relationship, or of set of relationships, as in a group, in order to make a rapid change in the situation which leads to the "escape". The resulting changes in the relationship bring some immediate relief, but also new troubles and anxieties and the search for a secure-frame relationship begins anew. I have described clinically the anxiety generated by the securing of the analytic space

by the patient and defined such response as communicatively defined transference (Bonac, 1996).

I hope I have presented the ideas about the working of human groups that are relevant to the understanding of fascism, as it is essential for the understanding of democracy, in a way that can serve us as a starting point for thinking about human groups as both necessary and potentially beneficial while keeping in mind that every one of us carries within the potential for an anonymous contribution to the madness of the whole group. When building new ways of organizing people into democratic entities one is on safer grounds if one gives serious consideration to the pitfalls inherent in the behaviour of all human groups. It does not appear to be enough to know what democratic principles are in order to avoid fascistic tendencies - it seems that an active understanding of the moment-to-moment functioning of people in groups is necessary to enable new developments on democratic principles.

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