

Group Dynamics: A Re-View

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Using knowledge derived from his psycho-analytic studies Freud attempted¹ to illuminate some of the problems which had been raised by Le Bon, McDougall and others in their studies of the group. In this article I shall briefly summarize² some theories at which I have arrived by applying to groups, in which I was participating, the intuitions developed by present-day psycho-analytic training. These theories differ from many others, in merits and defects alike, in having been forged in the actual emotional stresses they are intended to describe and they therefore constitute a different approach from that made by Freud. It will be noticed that I introduce some concepts new to psycho-analysis; this is in part because I am dealing with different subject-matter and in part because I wished to see if, by making a start disencumbered by previous theories, I might reach a point at which my views of the group and psycho-analytic views of the individual could be compared and thereby judged to be either complementary or divergent.

I assume that every individual acts as if he believes that the group has an attitude to him and that it is possible to put into words what this attitude is. Translation into precise speech of what I suppose to be the attitude of the group to me or to someone else, and of the individual to the group constitutes the interpretations.

The conclusions that follow represent the distillation of some eight years of work. These are they:

In any group there may be discerned certain broad trends of mental activity. Every group, however casual, however idle it may appear to be, meets to 'do' something. In this activity, according to the capacity of the individual, they co-operate. This co-operation is voluntary and dependent on some degree of sophisticated skill in the individual. Participation in this activity is a product of years of training, experience, and individual mental development. Since this activity is associated with the performance of a task it is related to reality, its methods are rational and therefore, in however embryonic a form, scientific. It follows that its characteristics are similar to those attributed by Freud to the Ego.³ This aspect of group mental activity I have called the Work Group (W).

The activities of W. are obstructed, diverted, and on occasion assisted by certain other mental activities which have in common the attribute of powerful emotional drives. These activities, at first apparently chaotic, are given a certain cohesion if it is assumed that they spring from basic assumptions common to all the group. The first assumption is that the group exists in order to be sustained by a leader on whom it depends for nourishment, material and spiritual, and protection. This mental state I have called the basic assumption of dependence (D.) and its leader the dependent leader (D.L.). The second basic assumption is that the group has met for purposes of pairing; I have called this mental state the basic assumption of pairing (P.). It is suffused with messianic hopes and its leader (P.L.) can best be described as the unborn genius. The third basic assumption is that the group has met to fight something or to run away from it. It is prepared to do either indifferently. I have called it the fight-flight basic assumption (F.) and its leader (F.L.). Participation in basic assumption mental activity requires no training, experience or mental development. It is instantaneous, inevitable and instinctive. In contrast with W. it makes no demands on the individual for a capacity to co-operate but depends on the individual's possession of what I call valency—a term I borrow from the physicists to express a capacity for instantaneous involuntary combination of one individual with another for sharing and acting on a basic assumption.

W. function is always in evidence together with one, and only one, basic assumption. But though W. may remain unaltered the contemporary basic assumption that pervades its

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¹ Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. Totem and Taboo. Moses and Monotheism.*

² A more complete account may be found in *Human Relations*, Bion, W. R., Vol. 1, Nos. 3 and 4, Vol. 2, Nos. 1 and 4, Vol. 3, Nos. 1 and 4.

³ Freud: *Ego and Id*, 1927, p. 30.

⁴ Bion, W. R.: *Human Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 1.

activities can be changing frequently; sometimes there may be two or three changes in an hour, sometimes the same basic assumption remains active for months on end. To account for the fate of the inactive basic assumptions I have postulated the existence of a proto-mental system in which physical and mental activity is undifferentiated and which lies outside the field ordinarily considered profitable for psychological investigations.⁴

Many techniques are available, and are in fact daily used, for the investigations of W. For the investigation of basic assumption phenomena I consider psycho-analysis, or some extension of technique directly derived from it, to be essential—a point I shall elaborate later. But since W. functions are always pervaded by basic assumption phenomena it is clear that techniques that ignore the latter will give misleading impressions of the former.

The emotions which can be detected in the activities associated with a basic assumption may all be described by terms in common use such as anxiety, fear, hate, love and the like. Nevertheless it seems to me that the emotions common to any basic assumption are subtly affected by each other as if they were held in a combination peculiar to the active basic assumption. That is to say the anxiety in evidence in D. has a different quality from anxiety which is evident in P., and so on with all other feelings which individuals exhibit.

Whatever basic assumption is active the leadership of the group may be identical with the W.L. But D.L., P.L., and F.L., need not be identified with any individual in the group. The identification may in each case be with an inanimate object or with an idea.⁵ It may also be identified with the history of the group, a phenomenon I have most often noticed in D. On these occasions the group, complaining of an inability to remember what took place in a previous session has set about making a record of its meetings. This record then becomes a 'bible' to which appeal is made if the leader proves to be refractory material for moulding into the likeness proper to the D.L. Bible-making is an activity to which the group resorts when threatened with an idea the acceptance of which would entail development on the part of the individuals comprising the group. Such ideas must be regarded as deriving emotional force, and exciting emotional opposition, from their association with characteristics appropriate to the P.L. In particular when D. or F. are dominant a struggle takes place to suppress the new idea or P.L. so that these basic assumptions should retain their dominance in the emotional life of the group. If the P.L. is not suppressed in its incipient stage then a period of dominance by P. is ushered in. The dominance of P. in a group continues until feelings of anxiety give way to feelings of persecution whereupon a period of dominance by F. supervenes. This in turn, after a similar sequence of emotions, gives way to a period of dominance by D. In my experience this is the most common sequence of events.

The change need not be from one basic assumption to another but may take certain aberrant forms depending upon the dominant basic assumption at the time of the increase in persecutory tension. These aberrant forms always lead to the involvement of an extraneous group. If D. is dominant the emergence of P.L., particularly in the form of an idea, is countered by provoking the influx or invasion by another group. If F. is dominant the tendency is to absorb or invade another group. If P. is dominant the tendency is to schism. This last reaction may appear anomalous unless it is remembered that the P.L. should be 'unborn', or, in other words, non-existent. The crux of the matter lies in the quality of the new idea to demand development and the inability of the basic assumption groups to tolerate development. The reasons for this I shall educe later.⁶

There are certain specialized W. Groups whose task is peculiarly prone to stimulate the activity of a particular basic assumption. Typical groups of this nature are provided by a church or an army. It is possible to regard the church as a group peculiarly prone to interference by D. phenomena and the army as suffering a similar interference from F. But another possibility has to be borne in mind and that is that these groups are budded off by the main groups of which they form a part for the specific purpose of neutralizing D. and F. respectively and thus preventing their obstruction of the W. function of the main group. If we adopt the latter hypothesis then we must regard it as a sign of failure in the specialized W. Group if D. or F. functions either cease to manifest themselves within the specialized W. Groups or else grow to overwhelming

⁵ Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Le Bon: *The Crowd*, Benn, 1947, p. 129.

⁶ This article, p. 245, Symbol Formation.

⁷ Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 51. Freud here brings close together, without linking them, W. and basic assumption phenomena. For contrast I would put my view thus: If the State stimulates (and the Church fails to neutralize) D., its policy will show D. characters; if a scientific group stimulates D it will also show D. characters. W. changes but basic assumptions remain.

strength. In either case the result is the same—the main group has to take over the functions proper to the specialized W. Groups. Something of this kind may underlie the evolution in church and D. functions of the so-called Welfare State, ⁷ or, in army and F. functions, outbreaks of war. In the small groups of which I have experience these phenomena appear, in D. as a tendency to form a small sub-group to interpret the D.L. to the group, or, in F. as a tendency to find a pretext to send a deputation to some external group. In my experience the formation of any committee or deputation can be seen as a response not only to some need deriving from W. function, but also to the rising pressure of a basic assumption.

I have not mentioned any specialized W. Group, analagous to church or army, for P. but an aristocracy may be such a group.

There are two important inherent characteristics of basic assumption mentality. Time plays no direct part in basic assumption mentality; it is a dimension of mental function that is not recognized: consequently all activities which require an awareness of time are imperfectly comprehended and tend to arouse feelings of persecution. Interpretation of group activity on the basic assumptions level always lays bare a disturbed relationship to time. The second characteristic, which I mentioned earlier, is the absence of any process of development as a part of basic assumption mentality. It is a point to which I shall refer later ⁸ but for the moment I concern myself only with the fact that stimuli to development meet with a hostile response on the basic assumption level. The fact that time is a component of all developmental processes tends to an exacerbation of hostile feeling and it is the growth of this hostility which helps to produce the situation, described above, in which a specialized W. Group fails in its function of neutralizing its basic assumption. It will be appreciated that this is a matter of importance in any group which purports, by the study of the group, to promote a therapeutic development of insight. It is the growth of hostility thus engendered that tends to determine that the reaction to the emergence of the P.L., ⁹ will take an aberrant form rather than spend itself in the cyclic change from one basic assumption to another. For, if a group wishes to prevent development, the simplest way to do so is to allow itself to be overwhelmed by basic assumption mentality and thus become approximated to the one kind of mental life in which a capacity for development is not required. The main compensation for such a shift appears to be an increase in a pleasurable feeling of vitality. ¹⁰

The defence which schism affords against the development-threatening idea (P.L.) can be seen in the operation of the schismatic groups; ¹¹ ostensibly opposed but in fact promoting the same end. One group adheres to the D.L., often in the form of the group 'bible'. This group popularizes the established ideas by denuding them of any quality that might demand painful effort and thereby secures a numerous adherence of those who oppose the pains of development. Thought thus becomes stabilized on a level which is platitudinous and dogmatic. The reciprocal group, supposedly supporting the new idea (P.L.) becomes so exacting in its demands that it ceases to recruit itself. Thus both groups avoid the painful bringing together of the primitive and the sophisticated which is the essence of the developmental conflict. The superficial but numerous schismatics are thus opposed by the profound but numerically negligible schismatics. The result reminds one of the fear expressed sometimes that a society breeds copiously from its least cultured members while the 'best' people remain obdurately sterile.

We have reached a point at which my description of the group is sufficiently far removed from that which Freud proposed; before considering in detail where the apparent difference lies I would bring my views into juxtaposition with some earlier theories of the group.

In his discussion of society Plato supposes that individuals are rational and that the governing consideration is the limitation imposed by reality. If the individual sticks to his task, if he co-operates with other individuals and lets them fulfil theirs, all will be well. In my

⁸ This article, p. 245.

⁹ The messianic idea, or person, evokes destructive attacks in the group in which the messianic idea or person appears. The essence of P. is that the P.L. is 'unborn.' Association of the P.L. with an actual idea or person heralds the break up of P.

¹⁰ The point is discussed by Reinhold Niebuhr in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.

¹¹ Interesting material on schismatic groups may be found in: Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm*, O.U.P., 1951.

¹² *The City of God*. St. Augustine. Everyman edition. The point is discussed by Ernest Barker in his introduction to this edition.

¹³ Freud: *Totem and Taboo*. Trans. by J. Strachey, 1950, p. 75, footnote 1.

terms this implies that group mental activity is wholly comprised in W. functions and can be governed by reference to reality. But my contention is that W. is only one part of group mentality and cannot be understood without reference to other mental phenomena. Aristotle indeed appears to criticize Platonic theory because it is deficient in its grasp of the reality of human behaviour, but the real change comes with St. Augustine's

formulations in the 19th Book of *De Civitate Dei*.¹² He seems here to postulate a new dimension, and, by insisting that a right relationship with God is a pre-requisite for a right relationship with individuals, to be predicating a state of mind similar to that which I describe as D. For in D. the individuals do not have a relationship with each other but only with the D.L. Since St. Augustine there has been no return to the classical view. The liberal view is that emotion and reason are easily harmonized, that is to say, that the operations of the W. Group can be harmonized with the operations of the basic assumption group. Nietzsche reacts against what he feels to be the arid intellectualism that this view would produce, seeming to suggest that a group achieves vitality only in so far as it releases the aggressive impulses. This would mean that a feeling of vitality could only be achieved by the dominance of the basic assumption, notably F. These and similar views are expressed in the group as ideals to be sought after as a solution of the problems of the group. But from what I have already said it will be realized that in practice none provide any lasting solution. Group reactions are infinitely more complex than the foregoing theories, even in their full deployment, suggest. Freud expressly disavowed any but a superficial study of the group problem (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*), making his observations in the course of a criticism, derived from psycho-analysis, of the work done by others.¹³

In his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud points out that individual and group psychology cannot be absolutely differentiated because the psychology of the individual is itself a function of the individual's relationship to another person or object. He objects that it is difficult to attribute to the factor of number a significance so great as to make it capable by itself of arousing in our mental life a new instinct that is otherwise not brought into play. In my view no new instinct is brought into play—it is always in play. It is not necessary for a number of people to be brought together—the individual cannot help being a member of a group even if his membership of it consists in behaving in such a way as to give reality to the idea that he does not belong to a group at all. The psycho-analytical situation is not 'individual psychology' but 'pair'. The individual is a group animal at war, both with the group and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his 'groupishness'.

It is necessary for a group to meet because the conditions for study can be provided only in that way. Freud, and others whom he quotes such as McDougall and Le Bon, seems to me to consider that group psychology is something which comes into being when there are a number of people collected together in the same place and at the same time and in this respect I agree with Freud that too much significance is thereby attributed to number: I think he is mistaken in saying that a solution must only be sought in one or other of the two alternatives:

1. the possibility that the social instinct is not primitive, or
2. that its development begins in a manner such as that of the family.

There is a third. I would say that the importance of the aggregation of individuals into a group is similar to the importance of the bringing together of analyst and analysand: it is necessary for an analysand to come to a psycho-analyst for the transference relationship to be rendered demonstrable: the group should come together so that the characteristics of the group may be demonstrated. There is no intrinsic importance in the coming together of the group; it must come together sufficiently closely for me to be able to give an interpretation without having to shout it. Therefore the number must be limited and the degree of dispersion of the group must be limited. This is necessary also because all individuals must have an opportunity of witnessing the evidence on which interpretations are based. The congregation of the group in a particular place at a particular time is important for these mechanical reasons, but it has no significance for the production

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of group phenomena. The idea springs from the erroneous impression that a thing must commence at the moment when its existence becomes demonstrable. No individual however isolated in time and space should be regarded as outside a group or lacking in active manifestations of group psychology, merely because conditions do not make it possible to demonstrate it. The concept of the human being as a group animal would solve the difficulties which are felt to exist in the seeming paradox that a group is more than the sum of its members. The explanation of certain phenomena must be sought in the matrix of the group and not in the individuals that go to make up the group. Time-keeping is no function of any part, in isolation, of the mechanism of a clock, yet time-keeping is a function of the clock and of the various parts of the clock when held in combination with each other.

To sum up, there are characteristics in the individual of which the significance cannot be understood except as part of his equipment as a herd animal nor can their operation be seen unless in the intelligible field of study—which is the group.

Freud does not recognize, in his discussion of groups, the importance of his own revolution in looking for an explanation of neurotic symptoms, not in the individual, but in the individual's relationship with objects.

The apparent difference between group psychology and individual psychology is an illusion produced by the fact that the group brings into prominence phenomena which appear alien to an observer unaccustomed to using the group.¹⁴ Freud states that his contribution is visible only in his selection both of material and opinions (presumably from the standard works he cites in *Totem and Taboo*, p. 75, note 1, 1950). Explanations of group behaviour are derived from the psycho-analytic situation. It is possibly for this reason that Freud's description of the group reads strangely when compared with actual experiences in a group. I attribute great force and influence to the Work Group which, through its concern with reality, is compelled to employ the methods of science in no matter how rudimentary a form; despite the influence of the basic assumptions, it is the W. Group which triumphs in the long run. Freud himself considers—notably when he discusses the part that the group plays in the production of language, ¹⁵ folk song, folklore, etc.—that Le Bon is unfair to the group when he says it never thirsts after truth. Freud discusses McDougall's view that conditions in the highly organized group remove 'the psychological disadvantages of group formation'. McDougall here approximates to my view that the function of the specialized work group is to manipulate the basic assumption to prevent obstruction of the work group. Freud describes the problem as one of procuring for the group 'precisely those features which were characteristic of the individual and which are extinguished in him by the formation of the group'. He postulates an individual outside the primitive group who possessed his own continuity, his self-consciousness, his traditions and customs, his own particular functions and position. He says that owing to his entry into an 'unorganized' group, the individual had lost his distinctiveness for a time. In my view the struggle of the individual to preserve his distinctiveness, assumes different characteristics according to the state of mind of the group at any given moment. Group organization gives stability and permanence to the work group, which is felt to be more easily submerged by the basic assumptions if the group is unorganized. Individual distinctiveness is no part of life in a group acting on the basic assumptions. Organization and structure are weapons of the W. Group. They are the product of co-operation between members of the group and their effect once established in the group is to demand still further co-operation from the individuals in the group. In this respect McDougall's organized group is always a work group and never a basic assumption group. A group acting on a basic assumption needs no organization or co-operation. The counterpart of co-operation in the basic assumption group is what I have called valency—a spontaneous, unconscious function of the gregarious quality in the personality of man. It is only when a group begins to act on a basic assumption that difficulties arise. Action inevitably means contact with reality and contact with reality compels

¹⁴ It is also a matter of historical development; the link between individual and group psychology cannot be forged until there has been sufficient understanding of Melanie Klein's work on the psychoses, and in particular of the papers on Symbol Formation and schizoid mechanisms to make its application to group work possible. I develop this point later.

¹⁵ In view of my suggestions on p. 245 of this article it seems significant that Freud picks on the development of language as an example.

regard for truth and therefore imposes scientific method and hence the evocation of the work group.

Freud deduces group situations from his study of the transference. For reasons I have given, the transference is likely to be coloured by group characteristics deriving from P. which are stimulated by the pair situation actually existing in psycho-analysis. Indeed, in the group situation we can find one source both of the prominence of sexual elements in psycho-analysis and the suspicions and accusations of the opponents of Freud that psycho-analysis was 'sexual'. He was able to deduce from psycho-analysis some of the characteristics of two specialized work groups, army and church, but was not led to a discussion of the specialized work group which attaches most importance to breeding and is therefore most likely to have to deal with P., namely the aristocracy. If W. characteristics were allowed to play a dominant rôle, the aristocracy would have a closer resemblance to the genetics department of a university, or a stud farm, than it has. As it is, we cannot regard the interest shown in breeding as having the scientific aura which should be pathognomic of the work group. The reason is that it is not dealing with a W. problem. It is a specialized sub-group split off to deal with P. in much the same way as the army and the church have to deal with F. and D. respectively. Therefore, the relationship of this sub-group with the main group will not be determined by the fidelity with which it conducts its love affairs on strictly genetic principles, but rather on the efficiency with which it satisfies the group demand that the P. should be so dealt with that it does not obstruct the W. functions of the group as a whole.

Now I have already said that in P. anxiety derives from the feeling that both group and individual are subservient to the unborn genius. The function of the aristocracy is sometimes to find an outlet for activity based

on P. without outraging the reality sense of the group; sometimes to prevent the reality sense of the group from undermining the institutions on the preservation of which the group depends for the neutralization of P.

Freud criticizes Le Bon's views on the leader of the group. Le Bon states that a collection of human beings place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief; that the leader must fit in with the needs of the group in his personal qualities and that he must himself be held by a strong faith in order to awaken the group's faith. Le Bon does not carry his view of the relationship between leader and group as far as I do by my description of the D.L., F.L., and P.L. The statement that the leader must fit in with the group in his personal qualities is compatible with my view that any leader of the group is ignored when his behaviour or characteristics fall outside the limits set by the prevalent basic assumption. I also think that the leader must be held by the same 'faith' that holds the group though I do not believe that this is in order to awaken the group's faith. On the contrary, my view is that the attitude of the group and its leader alike are merely functions of the active basic assumption.

Freud discusses McDougall's distinction between the simple 'unorganized' group and the 'organized' group, and gives an account of two states of mind which, in my opinion, do not belong to different groups but can be observed to co-exist in the same group. McDougall's simple 'unorganized' group resembles the basic assumption groups.¹⁶ I do not agree that the 'unorganized' group is suggestible, I consider that it is very difficult to put over any view that does not fit in with the prevalent basic assumption. It is possible that the idea that the group is suggestible arises because any idea that is conformable with the prevalent basic assumption is automatically accepted.

Freud quotes one point in McDougall's conditions for raising the level of collective mental life, to which I would draw attention and that is his statement¹⁷—'the first of these conditions, which is the basis of all the rest, is some degree of continuity of existence of the group.' This convinces me that in the organized group McDougall is describing what I call the W. Group. Meyer Fortes¹⁸ discussing Radcliffe Brown's views on social structure particularly the distinction between 'structure as an actually existing concrete reality' and 'structural form', says that the distinction is associated with the continuity of social structure through time. In my view the continuity of social structure through time is a function of the W. Group. Meyer Fortes states that the time

¹⁶ Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 29. McDougall: *The Group Mind*, p. 45.

¹⁷ McDougall: *The Group Mind*, p. 49.

¹⁸ Meyer Fortes: *Time and Social Structure: an Ashanti Case Study*.

factor in social structure is by no means uniform in its incidence and adds that all corporate groups, by definition, must have continuity. As with McDougall's distinction between organized and unorganized groups, so with the incidence of the time factor. I do not believe that we are dealing with two different kinds of group, in the sense of two different communities, but rather with two different aspects which co-exist of the same community. Continuity in time is an intrinsic quality of W. Group activity, but is not a component of the basic group. All the functions of the basic assumption group are in full activity before ever the group comes together in a room, although their observation may be difficult, and continue after the group has dispersed. There is neither development nor decay in basic assumption functions and in this respect they differ totally from the W. Group. It stands to reason that observation of the group's continuity in time is likely to present anomalous and contradictory features if the operation of two different kinds of mental functioning within the group has not been recognized. It may help to clarify my meaning if I say that when an individual asks 'When does the group meet again?' he is referring to W. and W. only in so far as he is talking about mental phenomena at all. The basic assumption group does not disperse or meet and references to time have no meaning in the basic assumption group. The apparent impatience of the basic assumption group may therefore be read as an expression of anxiety aroused by phenomena associated with continuity, development, etc. which are intrinsically co-mingled with a dimension of which the basic assumption group knows nothing. It is as if an organism devoid of organs of sight were to be made aware of phenomena that could only be understood by someone acquainted with the properties of light.

McDougall's principles for raising collective mental life to a higher level seems to me to be an expression of the desire to prevent the basic assumption groups from obstructing W. His second condition appears to emphasize the need for individuals to have a clear knowledge of W. aims. His fourth point, namely the existence of abody of traditions and customs and habits in the minds of the members of the group, determining their relations to one another and the group as a whole, comes very near to the platonic view of group harmony based on individual function which I have already described as a W. phenomenon. It also

corresponds to the views put forward by St. Augustine in the 19th book of *The City of God*. At first sight this would seem to contradict my statement that McDougall is describing W. phenomena, but the discrepancy is resolved if it is remembered that in my view St. Augustine's theory is an attempt to postulate a specialized W. Group for dealing with D.

Freud bases the next stage in his discussion¹⁹ on the statement that in a group an individual's emotions become extraordinarily intensified while his intellectual ability becomes markedly reduced. From actual experience in a group I would say that this statement needs qualification. It will be appreciated that in the groups I have studied, the group naturally expects me to take the lead in organizing its activities. I take advantage of the position thus accorded me to lead the group in my own way—that is to say, in an exploration of group dynamics. This means that the desire for an organized group is frustrated. The group thereupon fears the emergence of the basic assumption groups and expresses its fear by an attempt to produce a structure and an organization, thus doing its best to suppress all emotion, emotion being an intrinsic part of the basic assumption groups. This produces a state of affairs which to the individual often appears as an intensification of emotion. Since attention is focussed upon this, since furthermore the lack of structure promotes the obtrusion of the basic assumption group in which intellectual activity is of the limited kind I have already described, it feels as if intellectual ability is markedly reduced. The belief that this is so is still further encouraged by the fact that the dominating position of the basic assumption causes the individuals to ignore all intellectual activity which does not fit in with the basic assumption. Actually I do not in the least believe that there is a reduction of intellectual ability in the group, nor yet that 'great decisions in the realm of thought and momentous discoveries and solutions of problems are only possible to an individual working in solitude', ²⁰ although the belief that this is so is commonly expressed in the group discussion and all sorts of plans are elaborated for circumventing the supposedly pernicious influence of the emotions

19 Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 33.

20 Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 25.

21 Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 37.

of the group. Indeed I give interpretations because I believe that intellectual activity of a high order is possible in a group together with an awareness (and *not* an evasion) of the emotions of the basic assumption group. My behaviour in doing this betrays, I hope, my indebtedness to psycho-analytic experience. If group therapy is found to have a value I believe it will be in the conscious experiencing of group activity of this sort. Freud turns to discussion of something that crops up under a variety of names such as 'suggestion', 'imitation', 'prestige of leaders', 'contagion'. I have used 'valency' partly because I wish to avoid the suggestions which already adhere to the terms I have listed, partly because the term 'valency', as used in physics in reference to the power of combination of atoms, carries with it the greatest penumbra of suggestiveness useful for my purpose. I mean the capacity of the individual for instantaneous combination with other individuals in an established pattern of behaviour—the basic assumptions. I shall not follow Freud's discussion in detail, but will pass on to his use of the term 'libido' which he takes from his study of the psycho-neuroses.²¹ At first sight it would appear that I conflict with him if he uses the word 'libido' and I use 'valency'. But in taking the word from his study of the neuroses, Freud is approaching his examination of the group through the technique of psycho-analysis and psycho-analysis, in the light of my theories of groups, can be regarded as a work group most likely to stimulate P.; that being so, the psycho-analytic investigation as a part of P. is likely to reveal sexuality in a central position. Furthermore, it is likely to come under attack as a sexual activity since, according to my theory of P., the group must assume that two people can come together for a sexual purpose only.

It is natural, therefore, that if Freud uses the discoveries that spring from psycho-analytic investigation in order to elucidate the phenomena of the group, he will see the nature of the bond between individual members of the group as libidinous. An investigation carried out in the group itself shows that the libidinous component in the bond is only characteristic of P., and that the bond has a different complexion in F. and D. I attribute it to the same cause that Freud later describes the Commander-in-Chief of the Church as Christ.²² In fact, as I hope to show later, the Commander-in-Chief in this context is the Deity. Christ, or the Messiah, as I have already said, is the Leader not of D., but of P. The Messiah is an accidental feature in religion, the Deity, intrinsic. In P. the Messiah is essential. It is significant that Freud makes this mistake which should be obvious on purely theological grounds. The point is, that in psycho-analysis, regarded as a P., the Messiah tends to occupy a central position and the bond between individuals is libidinous. The Messianic idea betrays its presence in the supposition that the individual patient is worth the analyst's very considerable devotion and also in the view, sometimes expressed, that as a result of psycho-analytic work a technique will be perfected that will, ultimately, save mankind. Freud's description of the nature of the tie between individuals of

the group, I regard as correct for only one phase, though an important one in the groupmental life, and feel the need for some more neutral term that will describe the tie on all basic assumption levels (but excluding the tie in the W. Group, which I regard as being of a sophisticated nature more aptly indicated by the word 'co-operation').

There is another reason for using the term valency; Freud's notion of the leader as important because the group depends upon him and derives its qualities from his personality is I think mistaken; the leader is as much the creature of the basic assumption as any other member of the group. That is to say, the leader does not create the group by virtue of his fanatical adherence to an idea, but is rather an individual whose personality renders him peculiarly susceptible to the obliteration of individuality by the basic assumption groups' leadership requirements. That is, if it is true to say that in F., for example, the individual loses his distinctiveness, this applies to the F.L. as much as to anyone else. He only appears to have a distinctive personality because his personality is of a kind that lends itself to exploitation by the group demand for fighting or flight as the only two techniques its leader should require of it; the leader has no greater freedom to be a person than any other member of the group. This does not agree with Le Bon's idea that the leader must possess a strong and imposing will, nor yet with Freud's idea that he corresponds to a hypnotist. Such power as he has derives

22 Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 42.

from the fact that he has become, in common with every other member of the group, what Le Bon describes as 'an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will'. In short, he is leader by virtue of his capacity for instantaneous, involuntary (maybe voluntary too) combination with every other member of his group and only differs from them in that, whatever his function may be in W., he is the incarnation of the leader of the basic assumption group.

Freud's view does not seem to me to make possible an understanding of the dangerous possibilities that exist in the phenomenon of group leadership. His view of the leader, and indeed all other views of which I am aware, is not easily reconciled with my experience of leadership as it emerges in practice. The usual description of the leader seems to me to be a mixture of different group phenomena with the characteristics of the W.L. predominating. Now, for reasons I have already given, the W.L. is either harmless through lack of influence with the group or else a man who carries weight on account of his grasp of reality. It is likely, therefore, that descriptions of leadership which are coloured mostly by the characteristics of the W.L., would tend to be optimistically tinged. My view of the basic assumption group leader does not rule out the possibility of identity with W.L. function, but it allows for the existence of a leader, apparently evoking the enthusiastic allegiance of the group, but devoid of any contact with reality other than the reality of basic assumption group demands. When it is realized that this can mean that the group is being led by an individual whose personality has been obliterated, an automaton, 'an individual who has lost his distinctiveness', but who yet is so suffused by the emotions of the basic assumption group that he carries all the prestige of a W.L., it becomes possible to explain some of the disasters into which groups have been led by leaders whose qualifications for the post seem, when the emotions prevalent at their prime have died down, to be devoid of substance.

We can regard Church and Army either as work groups whose task is of such a nature that they are likely to have more experience than usual of D. and F., or alternatively as sub-groups of the main group with the specific tasks of coping with D. and F. manifestations in such a way that the W. function of the main group is, as far as possible, unobstructed.

I turn to Freud's views on panic. Freud says that panic is best studied in military groups.²³ He does not appear to claim actual experience of panic in a military group. I have experienced panic on two occasions with troops in action and have on several other occasions in small civilian groups had reason to think that the emotional experience bore a sufficiently close resemblance to my military experiences to deserve the name panic. In some respects to which I shall shortly refer these experiences do not appear to me to bear out Freud's theories, though I think he is discussing the same phenomenon. I consider that McDougall's description of panic refers to an experience which is the same as mine. I am confirmed in this belief when McDougall says²⁴ 'Other of the cruder, primary emotions may spread through a crowd in very similar fashion though the process is rarely so rapid and intense as in the case of fear', and then describes in a footnote an instance he witnessed in Borneo of the almost instantaneous spread of anger through a crowd.²⁵ McDougall has thus brought very close together, though without making the connection, anger and fear, and thus supports my view that panic is an aspect of F., and that there is no essential difference between panic flight and uncontrolled attack. But here is my difficulty: if it is argued, not merely that my theories offer a false description of the phenomena of the group, but that the experiences on which I base them were not panics at all, I do not really

know what reply can be made, nor what steps are open to me to discover where my error lies, so long as the problem is approached as if it were an academic one, soluble apart from contact with the group itself.

Here then are my findings: panic can never arise except in a situation which might as easily have given rise to rage: rage or fear in the given situation is offered no readily available outlet: frustration of the rage or fear, which is thus inescapable, cannot be tolerated because frustration is a function of time and time is not a dimension of basic assumption phenomena. Flight offers a vehicle, for expression of the emotion in F., which is immediately available and therefore meets the demands of F. for instantaneous satisfaction of impulse.

The group, in F., will follow any

23 Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 45.

24 McDougall: *The Group Mind*, C.U.P., p. 24.

25 McDougall: *The Group Mind*, C.U.P., p. 26.

leader, and, contrary to all views hitherto expressed, retains its coherence in doing so, who will fulfil the characteristics of F.L., namely give only such orders as are recognizable as licensing instantaneous flight or instantaneous attack. Provided that an individual in the group conforms to these limitations of the F.L. he will have no difficulty in turning a group from headlong panic flight to attack, or from headlong attack to panic.

The stimulus for panic, or the rage which I consider to be identical, must always be an event which falls outside the W. Group functions of the group concerned. That is to say, that the degree of organization of the group is not relevant unless the organization, part of W. function, is concerned with the actual external event as part of its *raison d'être*. In Freud's example of the fire in a theatre or place of amusement²⁶ the W. Group is devoted to the watching of a play but not to the witnessing of a conflagration, still less to the extinguishing of it. The essential point about organization is that it should be suitable both to the pursuit of the external aim of the group and to the manipulation of the basic assumption such a pursuit is most calculated to evoke. Panic in an army is not produced by a military danger, though military danger is, in the nature of things, very likely to be present. It is not likely to be produced by any situation in which attack or flight are appropriate to the operations of the W. Group. If it appears to arise in such a situation it is because the actual cause is not observed.

Before I express further views about the causes of panic it would be useful to consult early views that cannot be impugned on the grounds that they are tainted by theoretical psychological presumptions. To go to origins, the word itself derives from the belief that this fear was inspired by Pan, ²⁷ to whom is attributed the ability to induce in man terror like that of a frightened and stampeding flock or herd of animals. Pan is amorous and has as his chief function originally the making fertile of flocks. To him is attributed also the source of nightmares. He is formidable if disturbed at mid-day. There appears to be very little mythology about Pan and although there are attempts comparatively late to make him a universal god, these do not seem to have been very successful.

It seems from this that panic fear was from the first regarded as a group phenomenon in which fear possessed all members of the group instantaneously. It appears also that to the individual the fear is felt as something induced by an 'internal object' in the sense in which I understand Melanie Klein to use those words. It is noteworthy that the power of evoking nightmares is attributed to Pan because it would appear from this that the induction of panic fear was felt to be a quite different activity. My experience is by itself too limited to draw any conclusions from it, but it is worth remarking that such experience as I have had suggests that panic is in fact far more likely to arise in broad daylight or at least in a fully waking state. At any other time what occurs is not a panic but a nightmare and this is an individual, not a group phenomenon.

It is now clear that between the theories Freud suggested, approaching the problem from the psycho-analysis of the individual, and the theories I have suggested, making my approach from the study of the group itself, there is a considerable gap. It is possible that the gap appears to be more considerable than it is because of my deliberate use of new terminology. I am disposed, however, to believe that more than a question of terminology is involved and for this belief I shall now advance my reasons.

My first relates to the group's capacity for enduring almost endless periods of trivial conversation or none at all. There are protests, but endurance of this monotony appears to be a lesser evil than action to end it. When interpretations are made, they are as likely as not disregarded. Allowing for the possibility that the disregard is, as in psycho-analysis, more apparent than real, that the interpretations are faulty and on that account inefficacious, there yet remains a residue of inertia that is not explained by this or any suggestion that the F.L., D.L. and P.L., are so dominant that statements which lie outside the characteristic functions of these three are disregarded.

I have been forced to the conclusion that verbal exchange is only understood by the W. Group. In proportion as the group is dominated by a basic assumption verbal communication is important only as a vehicle for sound. Tacitus gives a description of the operations of the bard in a German tribe—a

26 Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 47.

27 *Oxford Classical Dictionary. Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition. Articles on Pan.

28 Tacitus: *Germania*. Everyman edition.

description that might be prophetic of Hitler addressing a Nazi rally—which illustrates my point.²⁸ The key to this is provided by Melanie Klein in her discussion of the importance of symbol formation in the development of the individual. The W. Group understands that particular use of symbols which is involved in verbal communication: the basic assumption group does not. In the basic assumption group the individual *is* the totem animal. He is not identified with it, or equated with it, he *is* it. Similarly he *is* the D.L., P.L., or F.L., or a function of those symbols (as a sense of reality demands that we should call them).

The 'language' of the basic assumption group is therefore a method of communication devoid of the precision that is conferred by a capacity for the formation and use of symbols. The basic assumption group therefore lacks a powerful aid to development and remains fundamentally unaffected by stimuli that would provoke it. But the basic assumption group has a means of communication that might well lay claim to the title of the Universal Linguistic which Croce conferred on Aesthetic. Every human group instantaneously understands every other human group no matter how diverse in culture, language and tradition—but only within the limitations of the basic assumptions.

In the light of these speculations we may re-read the biblical account of the building of the Tower of Babel.²⁹

The myth has these components: a universal language, a tower which is felt by the Deity to menace his position, a 'confounding' of the universal language and a scattering abroad of the people on the face of the earth. Using my theories to interpret this myth, I suggest that it embodies an account of the development of language, which development is itself an expression of the capacity for symbol formation. This capacity is exemplified in the myth by employment of the building of a tower to reach to heaven as a symbol of the increased potency achieved through the development of language. The inability to use symbols, which is shown even by recent commentators, is also suggested by the literal way in which the tower is mentioned. The growth of language would be a group event of the kind which I have mentioned as demanding development in the individual members of the group and would be opposed as an attack upon the D.L. The reaction to this development is the formation of schisms.

Melanie Klein has shown that the inability to form symbols is characteristic of certain individuals³⁰; I would extend this to all individuals in their functions as members of the basic assumption group.

We may now consider afresh a point that has struck many observers—namely the loss in a group of the individual's distinctiveness.³¹ The individual sees in the group a source of infinite frustration but the psychiatrist will be impressed by the opportunity it affords for externalization of problems. One consequence is that the individual splits off his aggressiveness and projects it into the 'leader'. His wish to fight, to nourish, to choose a partner or his parents, all are in turn deposited in some external figure. Thus one source of the characteristics of F.L., D.L., or P.L., is activated. On this account, and because of the individual's feelings of guilt at being in possession of the group which is equated with the breast, the leader thus formed arouses feelings of persecution and steps then have to be taken to split off these feelings and to denude the leader of noxious persecutory qualities.³² This is done by a variety of complex mechanisms which may for the moment be ignored while we notice that such activity, in which every member of the group participates—incidentally it is at this point the therapist in charge of the therapeutic group must be most on his guard against becoming a protagonist of the idea that the 'group' is 'good for' the patients—must be felt by the group as a process of 'curing' the leader. This feeling helps to explain one component in the belief that the leader is the patient to the welfare of whom all group energies must be devoted. To turn now to the mechanisms employed in 'treating' the persecutor. One is by reassurance which is directed towards allaying the anxieties both of the individual chosen to be the leader and of the group as a whole. This process is, however, only a comparatively

29 *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 11, v. 1–9. This account is a part of the Jahvistic code and could therefore be regarded as an example of recording by a group with D. dominant when threatened by the emergence of P.

30 Melanie Klein: *The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego*, 1930.

31 Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 32.

32 Melanie Klein: 'Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms', *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, **27**, 1946.

superficial one, and is consequently easily observed. The leader is congratulated, in a great variety of terms, on his goodness, the group on its good fortune in having such a leader. It is in the course of these manipulations that ritual and ceremony come in to their own, as do also the presentation of gifts or sacrifices. The sacrifices again may take many forms, the commonest being the abandonment by the rest of the group of all ambitions for cure or hopes of personal achievement. Their characteristics will vary according to whether the chosen individual is D.L., F.L. or P.L. For example, if D. is prominent the rituals and sacrifices bear a resemblance to the procedures of religious groups; if F. then the army; if P.L. then the privileges often associated with aristocracy.

A more profound movement in the group dynamics, which is implicit but not obvious in the superficialities of reassurances and the like is the attempt to rid the group of feelings of persecution by a shifting of the problems produced by projective identification from the basic assumption group to the work group. In practice this means that the most ill member of the group becomes the object of the group's attentions and becomes its leader, a situation I have described as the dual of D.; the choice of descriptive term really depends on the emphasis the observer wishes to give to different components of the situation. It cannot be fully described as W. because in theory the W. Group is occupied with a real task, which in the groups of which I speak is the study of the group although in fact this theory is an idealization that is never achieved. It cannot be justly described as a basic assumption group because in theory the basic assumption group is wholly characterized by an instinctual emotional absorption in acting on the given basic assumption—again not a state ever achieved in practice. Its interest for me lies in its resemblance to an incipient spontaneous development of psychotherapy. It is as if the group tried to cure itself by the concentration of its illnesses into one person and then to cure or expel the one person.

To sum up, 'the loss of the individual's distinctiveness' is a phenomenon indistinguishable from depersonalization. The link between my findings from the study of the group and those of psycho-analysis is provided by Melanie Klein's formulations in her *Notes on Schizoid Mechanisms*.

I conclude with the following propositions:

1. Individuals in a group must be considered to possess a capacity, called valency by me, for holding each other in involuntary and inevitable emotional combination. Activity arising from this is quite different from that which springs from co-operation, a term I reserve for describing voluntary combination.
2. In every group two kinds of mental activity can be recognized as co-existent, W. Group activity and basic assumption Group activity, co-operation being a function of the former, valency of the latter.
3. The individual, regarded as a participant in the basic assumption group is unable to form or employ symbols. This gives rise to the sense of 'collective lowering of intellectual ability' described by McDougall and others. In consequence, the group, in its basic assumption activity, does not, and cannot develop.³³ What is more the sense of intellectual deficiency produced by the interplay between the basic assumption group, which is incapable of symbol formation, and the W. Group, which constantly employs it, can be so strong as to pervade W. Group function and inhibit intellectual activity in it.
4. It follows that the employment of symbolism in a group is a W. function only. In consequence when a group appears to be employing symbols, especially if emotions are engaged, it is in fact doing no such thing—it is equated with them.³⁴
5. From this it follows that words, if they are to elucidate basic assumption group phenomena, must not be interpreted in the light of their value as symbols (which would only elucidate W. Group function) but as sounds having pre-verbal significance. Their manifest content must be ignored and an attempt made to view them as identical, in their basic assumption function, with the bizarre verbalizations of the psychotic. Their rational content must be ignored as accidental.
6. Just as the psycho-analysis of the psychotic must be regarded as differing from the psycho-analysis of the neurotic so, and for similar reasons, the interpretation of basic assumption group phenomena must be regarded

33 Melanie Klein: *Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego*, 1930.

as differing from the interpretation of W. Group phenomena.

7. The understanding of the emotional life of the group, which is a function of the basic assumptions, is only comprehensible in terms of psychotic mechanisms. For this reason advances in the study of the group are dependent upon the development and implications of Melanie Klein's theories of internal objects, projective identification, and failure in symbol formation and their application in the group situation.
8. Further investigation of group dynamics, and especially of basic assumption group phenomena, might be directed to the investigation of:
 - a. depersonalization, as the essential feature in the 'loss of individual distinctiveness',
 - b. failure in symbol formation, and the use of symbols as an essential feature in inhibiting development of the basic assumption groups; and
 - c. interpretation of basic assumption phenomena in terms of psychotic, rather than neurotic, mechanisms.
9. From these propositions follows a final proposition that theories of the kind I have proposed should be tested only against actual interpretation in a group at the moment when the phenomena are demonstrable.

History of life on this planet shows that decay of a species is often associated with over-development of some portion of its organism. In effect such over-development defeats its end and leads to the supersession of one species by the next. Is there a possibility of similar over-development of mental function? The group may provide evidence for an opinion.

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