

### ***Introduction.***

A patient announced in a psychotherapy group that he now realized how controlled he had been all his life by other people's wishes and desires. From now on, he proudly said, he was now going to try to follow his own desires and if others did not like it – well, they could go hang, that was their problem.

This attempt at health is a rather peculiar proposition, as it implies that the patient can live without other people, as some kind of pure individual. The point of view the patient is expressing is a form of the not unusual belief that to know one's true self, one has to look within; and being with others is of necessity a contamination of this truth. The patient's problem, as he himself defined it, was that in the presence of the Other he disappeared. His solution to the problem was to make the Other disappear instead. It is clear that the cure is no better than the disease. This is an expression of an age old dilemma – which is often put in terms of a conflict between individual interests and group interests. It is thought that the individual inevitably loses something by being in a group – at the very least attention is diluted.

It is exactly at this point that the psychoanalyst and group analyst S. H. Foulkes (1898-1976) made his contribution, by questioning the very basis of the division between individual and group. This questioning formed the basis of his group analytic theory. Foulkes' theory problematizes the patient's solution by providing a new model of the relationship between individual and group. His theory is potentially a fusion between psychoanalysis and sociology. This is reflected in the fact that Foulkes has two theoretical masters, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, and the sociologist Norbert Elias. Group-analytic theory as expounded by Foulkes is an

attempt to bolt these two disciplines together, which he has done to some degree.

However, in the process he has left a trail of inconsistencies and contradictions, which to my mind have never been spelled out, and has led to many confusions, leaving the theoretical field of group analysis in some disarray.

The most critical of these inconsistencies is the fact that Freud and Elias derive the individual from opposite directions. Freud moves from biology to the individual to the social; his theory is then made more complex by the fact that the social then curls back and re-enters the individual. Meanwhile, Elias begins with the social, which precipitates not only the individual, but also the structures of experience, both internal and external. The social, according to Elias, does not lie outside the individual to determine her/him from without; the individual also contributes to and constructs the social. These two view points as they stand, contradict each other. However, the structure of both theories is similar in that neither is simplistically linear. Each theory is recursive, that is, circular and systemic – the snake eating its tail. So in Freud, society is born out of instinctual conflict and the resulting sublimation, but then society enters the individual as the Superego, from whence it moderates the individual's engagement with the social. Meanwhile, Elias uses the notion of 'constraint' to describe the situation where individuals are limited to what they may do, be and think by social forces, but says that they also contribute to the construction of these cultural and social forces.

Despite these structural similarities, the fact remains that the metaphysical assumptions of each theory stand in contradiction to each other. To my mind, Foulkes tries to slide past this difficulty by using the Gestalt notion of 'figure-and-

ground'. He implies that sometimes it is the individual that is in the foreground, and thus Freudian psychoanalytic principles operate, and at other times it is the group that is in the foreground, when it is assumed that group dynamic formulations are more appropriate. This strategy is a theoretical sleight of hand.

One of the most exciting ideas launched by Foulkes (taken from Elias) is that there is no such thing as an individual that exists apart from and outside the social. This idea eventually leads to a subversion of a number of dichotomies, that of individual and group, of external and internal, and of nature and nurture. But now, we have a problem. Having said this exciting thing, we then have to ask so what difference does it make to one's practice as a group analyst, what difference does it make to how one views group phenomena? If one looks at Foulkes' clinical writings, then the answer is very little difference. In the *practice of group-analysis* almost all of Foulkes interpretations are couched in individualistic terms, and often in Freudian language. Even group specific concepts like scapegoating are given an individualistic basis.

It is this that gives this book its title. It seems to me that although Foulkes tried to take the group seriously, for a variety of reasons, he was unable to do so. To my mind, to take the group seriously, means to evolve a new language, a new way of thinking, and a new way of *experiencing* oneself and the group. This is a large task indeed; it was in fact one of Foulkes' intentions: "All concepts used in discussing group behaviour should be concepts specifically derived from the study of groups. The application of ready-made concepts from individual psychotherapy only serve to blur the sharpness of our observation and distort it," (Foulkes and Anthony 1957,

p 250). Unfortunately, this intention is in direct conflict with his insistence that first and foremost he is a Freudian.

It seems to me that in the contemporary clinical practice of Foulkesian group analysis, group events are primarily understood in the light of the mother-infant paradigm, which has its basis in individual psychoanalysis. What I mean by this is that group events (why patients behave as they do) are understood through the transference by reference to past history, and the history that is used is the *history of asocial individuals*. Whilst this in itself is important and useful, it does throw into relief the absence of a group analytic paradigm, one which might take account of the *history of social groups*.

These are some of the preoccupations that have given rise to the idea of this book. The book as project is heading in the direction of constructing a group analytic paradigm. It would of course be complete hubris to think that the entire task of re-inventing group analysis can be completed in one book. This work seeks to *begin* the process of rethinking group analysis, to move past Foulkes' confusions, to a place from which one can *begin* to take the group seriously.

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The book is continually preoccupied with a number of dichotomies which form an undercurrent below the main discussions. Internal and external world, nature and nurture, the infinite and the finite, the individual and society, the eternal and the transient – these are some of the dichotomies that will persistently make their presence felt, and test the arguments being presented. To be more precise, implicit in the ideas and proposals examined, we will find these dichotomies in particular

arrangements - which is prioritised over which, what are the consequences of each, and so on. The examination of these arrangements will help lay bare the hidden agenda in theory – what Foucault calls discourse, and Elias calls ideology.

As Foulkes gives so much weight to his Freudian antecedents, the book will begin with an abbreviated, critical overview of Freud. In particular we will take note of how Freud orders the dichotomies, and see what bearing these have on his understanding of the relation of group to individual. Partly this will be done in order to understand Foulkes position and confusion better.

The second part of the book engages critically with Foulkes theory as expounded in his writings, testing it for *self consistency* against the aims and objectives as set out by Foulkes himself. One of the things that becomes clear through this exploration is that Foulkes is constantly torn between Freud and Elias, and this gives birth to two different sorts of theories. The theoretical elements that take the group seriously I have called ‘radical’ and designated them to an idea of a Radical Foulkes. The elements of his theory that he is unable to free from his Freudian antecedents, I have designated to an Orthodox Foulkes. This separation helps unravel many of the confusions and contradictions in his work.

Before taking up the ideas of Elias, the third section gives two brief overviews. First, the roles allocated to the external and internal in some psychoanalytic theories is described, and second, an overview of structuralism and post structuralism is given. These prepare the ground for considering Elias’ contribution.

The next part of the book sets about describing the ideas of Elias. Interestingly, Elias is almost completely absent from group analytic discourse. On the Qualifying

Course at the Institute of Group Analysis, London (the main training for group analysts in Britain and perhaps Europe), he is not explicitly studied. There are some who are trying to change this, Dr. Malcom Pines and Dr. Earl Hopper to name two. The absence of Elias conspires to keep group analysis in an individualistic frame. So partly the task of this section is informative and educative, to raise the profile of Eliasian ideas. When this is done, it is discovered that many, if not most, of the ideas of Radical Foulkes have their basis in Elias. However, what is also discovered, is that Foulkes has had to water some of them down, in order to try and remain within a Freudian frame.

The fact that Elias has been so neglected in group analytic discourse, is a phenomenon to be investigated in itself. To my mind this has partly occurred for reasons that are central to Elias' preoccupations: the social current that has increasingly divorced the individual from society, and prioritised the individual over the group. Inevitably, this social current has organised and structured the internal politics of the world of psychotherapy. The first of these is that for a variety of reasons group psychotherapy is often thought of as a poor second cousin of individual psychotherapy. And secondly, in the hierarchy of status and power relations<sup>1</sup> between different schools of psychotherapy, psychoanalysis is clearly at the top of the tree. So whilst group analysis might lose some ground by virtue of being 'group' instead of 'individual', it gains status by virtue of it being an 'analysis', and thus in the vicinity of the rulers of the roost. I think that the discipline of group analysis has avoided looking too closely at its linkages with sociology,

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<sup>1</sup> Both notions that are central in Elias.

because to do so would threaten the status it has through virtue of it being a group *analysis* and not a group psychotherapy or a group sociology.

So another outcome of this work is to question the positioning of group analysis in relation to psychoanalysis, and individual psychotherapy in relation to group psychotherapy. In effect, the book is also a theoretical challenge to the assumptive world of individual psychoanalysis and humanistic psychotherapy.

The fifth part takes up insights from biology, evolutionary theory, and game theory. One of the things that is emerging in the general zeitgeist is a new way of reading the findings of biology and genetics. Until recently, through ideas like the ‘selfish gene’ and so forth, biology has been taken to be the champion of individualism. But now biologists like Dawkins and others, use descriptions at the genetic level that prioritise the notion of the group over and above the individual organism. This climate change will be described in some detail to lend weight to the general argument of the book.

The final part of the book is where the task of building a post-Foulksian group analysis will be begun, and this will have several elements. Some other theoreticians will be introduced, but in less detail. One of these is Matte-Blanco. To my mind his theory of thinking lends itself well to the development of a post Foulksian group analysis. So in this section, his ideas will be described, and parallels and overlaps with Freud, Foulkes and Elias will be delineated. The other theoreticians also to be brought in here are Fairbairn and Winnicott. It seems to me that each has a helpful contribution to make to the notion of taking the group seriously. For example, Fairbairn makes relatedness critical to the developmental process, and Winnicott

describes the genesis of the individual, the first I AM moment, as the first group. The discussions in this and previous sections will suggest new ways of thinking about several central concepts, for example group processes, identity, the unconscious and the superego. The domains of 'race' and racism are used as a test ground for the ideas being developed, and this in turn will shed new light on notions of similarity and difference.

Anticipating some of the content that is to follow, an inevitable consequence of the formation of a group is that other things are excluded. Thus this book leaves out many things – for example attachment theory and self psychology – lines have to be drawn somewhere. Additionally, in the following pages reference is made to generalised groupings like 'the psychoanalysts' or 'the Kleinians' and so forth. This inevitably misrepresents the positions of some of those pooled together. The inevitability of misrepresentation is also part of the subject matter of the book, the problematic of homogeneity and heterogeneity. Another way of putting it is that in order to say something, something else needs to be left unsaid.