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On the Dynamics of Social Structure

A Contribution to the Psychoanalytical Study of
Social Phenomena Deriving from the Views of
Melanie Klein*

Many observers have noted that there is a strikingly close correspondence between certain group phenomena and those processes in the individual that represent what Melanie Klein has called the psychotic level of human development. Schmeidler (1931), for instance, has pointed to the psychotic-like content of primitive rites and ceremonies; and Bion (1955) has suggested that the emotional life of the group is only understandable in terms of processes at this very primitive level. My own recent experience (Jaques, 1951) has impressed upon me how much institutions are used by their individual members to reinforce mechanisms of defense against anxiety, and in particular against recurrence of the early paranoid and depressive anxieties first described by Melanie Klein (1932; 1948a; 1952a). It is as though the members of groups unconsciously place part of the contents of their deep inner lives outside themselves and pool these parts in the emotional life of the group. May not sufficiently deep analysis of the individual take us into the group?

Answers to these last questions may be forthcoming in the light of recent advances in the understanding of psychotic processes as a normal part of personality development. It is the purpose of this paper to examine to what extent these developments in psychoanalysis provide a bridge linking individual and group behavior: and to what extent an understanding of them in the individual contributes to the comprehension of the dynamics of group behavior. In connecting social behavior with mechanisms pertaining to this very deep stratum, I in no way wish to suggest that social relationships are totally determined by unconscious factors, or indeed that they are purely defensive in character. I do propose, however, to limit my present considerations to these particular connections. The specific hypothesis I shall consider is that one of the primary cohesive elements binding individuals into institutionalized human

*A reproduction of the original—*Human Relations*, 6:3–24, 1953.

association is that of defense against anxiety emanating from the psychotic developmental level (and conversely, although I shall not deal with the hypothesis here, that psychotic-like desocialization occurs in those who have not developed the ability to use the mechanism of association in social groups to avoid psychotic anxiety).

Social institutions, as I shall here use the term, are either social structures or cultural mechanisms. Social structures are systems of roles, or positions, which may be taken up and occupied by persons. Cultural mechanisms are conventions, customs, taboos which are used in regulating the relations among members of a society. For purposes of analysis institutions can be defined independently of the particular individuals who occupy roles within them. But in real life the workings of institutions take place through real people using cultural mechanisms within a social structure; and the unconscious or implicit functions of an institution are specifically determined by the particular individuals who are associated as members of the institution, occupying roles within it and operating the culture. Changes may occur in the unconscious functions of an institution through change in personnel, without there necessarily being any apparent change in manifest structure or functions. And conversely, as is so often noted, the imposition of a change in manifest structure or culture to resolve a problem may often leave the problem unsolved because the unconscious relationships remain unchanged.

Some Recent Developments in Psychoanalysis

The extensions to psychoanalytical theory made by Melanie Klein concern the early infantile or pre-oedipal phases of development. She has described two early developmental phases which correspond to two predominant types of anxiety—paranoid and depressive. The period when paranoid anxiety predominates normally extends over the first three to four months of development. Depressive anxiety normally predominates for the subsequent months to the end of the first year. The terms paranoid-schizoid (or simply, paranoid) position and depressive position are used to connote the predominance of the particular pattern of impulses, anxieties and defenses which characterizes each of these phases in development.

The infant projects its libidinal and aggressive, or good and bad, impulses onto external objects. The earliest of such objects are the mother's breasts, and these are experienced as good or bad depending on whether good or bad impulses are projected into them. The good and bad breasts are introjected and constitute the primitive good and bad internal objects which lay the foundation of the ego and super-ego. The strength of the libidinal and aggressive impulses will determine the degree of goodness and badness of the internalized objects;

and will determine the degree to which the infant will be disturbed by phantasies of persecution by bad objects, that is to say, disturbed by paranoid anxiety.

The conception of phantasy requires separate comment. It is here used in the sense, elaborated by Susan Isaacs (1948), of completely *unconscious* autistic activity. The early infantile processes being described have, however, a physical or object-like content rather than an autistic mental content. To the infant, projection and introjection are physical acts—acts of regurgitating and excreting, of eating and incorporating. And the objects which are incorporated are unconsciously real inside, in the sense of constituting an inner world, or an internal society, the functioning of which has real effects on conscious perceptions and behavior. Thus, phantasy persecution, for example, refers to intrapsychic activity in which the infant feels under actual attack by its internal objects and through unconscious projection of the inner situation may perceive and behave towards persons in the outside world as though they are hostile and threatening.

In the paranoid position, the characteristic defense against anxiety is that of splitting all internal objects into good and bad, the idealization of the good and the projection of the bad. The more intense the aggressive impulses, the more intense are the phantasies of persecution; and correspondingly, the more profound and complete the splitting, the more intense the idealization, and the greater the projection. Given a balance between libidinal and aggressive impulses, and given loving parental support, the internal world is felt as sufficiently replete with good objects to ward off persecution by the bad, and paranoid anxiety is kept within tolerable limits.

After the first three or four months of life, aggressive impulses and persecutory anxiety diminish if external parental support is sufficiently consistent. Concurrently, the infant begins to recognize mother, father and others as real persons; relationships undergo a fundamental change. He or she now sees whole objects, compact of both good and bad, instead of dealing with parts—for example breasts—split into either wholly good or wholly bad objects. The perception of both good and bad in a whole object, however, creates a new type of anxiety: that of losing the good loved objects by virtue of sadistic attacks on its bad aspect. To the extent that greed and sadistic impulses are strong and uncontrolled, the infant's loved objects are destroyed and torn into pieces. This destruction goes on in both the external and the internal world. In consequence the infant suffers persecution at the hands of the internally attacked object, and depression as a result of pining for the lost good object, also guilt for the attack upon it. The depressive anxieties, comprising persecution and guilt, may be dealt with by mourning, in which the underlying feelings of loss, guilt and love are experienced and tolerated because of successful restoration and reparation of the lost bad object. Successful mourning of this kind depends upon the

experience of real, good loved objects in the outside world incorporated in the paranoid position and reinforced in the depressive phase.

To the extent that mourning is unsuccessful, good objects outside and inside are felt to be irreparably damaged and lost. Despair and depression are experienced, and mechanisms of defense are brought into play. These defense mechanisms, characteristic of the depressive position, are known as the manic defenses. The essential feature of the manic defenses is a denial of psychic reality, including a denial of the loss of the loved object. This denial is accompanied by an omnipotent control over, and contempt for, the damaged object as a means of avoiding persecution by the damaged bits. Omnipotence is accompanied by splitting, and a reification and idealization of the good part of the original whole object, and projective identification with it. Finally, the manic defense system may be bolstered by a regression to the paranoid position and its defenses. This regression, however, strengthens the fear of persecution and may lead to an intensification of omnipotence.

The paranoid and depressive anxieties here described color the character of the relations with parents during the oedipal phase of development. These anxieties are incorporated, but not necessarily resolved, in the oedipal relationships; and they continue in greater or lesser degree into childhood and adulthood. Analysis of patients reveals the early infantile object relations as forming the unconscious core of conscious relationships and activities in adult life. And the attendant defenses against paranoid and depressive anxieties are found at the core of the pattern of adult defense mechanisms against anxiety and guilt. After infancy, the child or adult, in making whole object relationships, turns largely to the use of the mechanisms of projective and introjective identification. Projective identification, unconsciously puts internal objects, good or bad, or good or bad impulses, into persons (or things) in the external world. Introjective identification takes persons and things in the outside world into the self, so that what one does comes not so much from oneself but from the internalized other influencing one's behavior. Much of the rest of this paper will be devoted to illustrating these mechanisms.

Projection, Introjection and Identification in Social Relationships

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* Freud (1922) takes as his starting point in group psychology the relationship between the group and its leader. The essence of this relationship he sees in the mechanism of identification—of the members of the group with the leader and with each other. He gives a definition of a primary group as a number of individuals who have substituted one and the same object for their ego ideal and have consequently

identified themselves with one another in their ego. Group processes in this sense can be linked to earlier forms of behavior and in particular to oedipal relationships, since "identification is known to psychoanalysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person." But Freud did not explicitly develop the concept of identification beyond that of identification by introjection, a conception deriving from his work on the retention of lost objects through introjection. In his analysis of group life he does, however, differentiate between identification of the ego with an object (or identification by introjection) and what he terms replacement of the ego-ideal by an object. Thus, in the two cases he describes, the Army and the Church, soldiers replace their ego-ideal by the leader, whereas Christians take Christ into themselves and identify with him.

Like Freud, Melanie Klein sees introjection as one of the primary processes whereby the infant makes emotional relationships with its objects. But she considers that introjection interacts with the process of projection in the making of these relationships. She expressed the view that "object relations exist from the beginning of life, that the relation to the first object implies its introjection and projection and that from the beginning object relations are molded by an interaction between introjection and projection, between internal and external objects and situations" (Klein, 1952a). Such a formulation seems to me to be consistent with, although not explicit in, the view of Freud expressed above. That is to say, identification of the ego with an object is identification by introjection; this is explicit in Freud. But replacement of the ego-ideal by an object seems to me to be one case of identification by projection. Thus, the soldiers who take their leader for their ego-ideal are in effect projectively identifying with him, or putting part of themselves into him. It is this common or shared projective identification which enables the soldiers to identify with each other. In the extreme form of projective identification of this kind the followers become totally dependent on the leader, because each has given up a part of him- or herself to the leader. Melanie Klein wrote that "the projection of good feelings and good parts of the self into the mother is essential for the infant's ability to develop good object-relations and to integrate his ego. However, if this projective process is carried out excessively, good parts of the personality are felt to be lost, and in this way the mother becomes the ego-ideal; this process too results in weakening and impoverishing the ego. Very soon such processes extend to other people, and the result may be an overstrong dependence on these external representatives of one's own good parts." Indeed, it is just such an extreme of projective identification which might explain the case of panic described by Freud, where the Assyrians take to flight on learning that Holofernes, their leader, has had his head cut off by Judith. For not only has the commonly shared external object (the fig-

urehead) binding them all together been lost but, the leader having lost his head, every soldier has lost his head by projective identification.

I shall take as the basis of my analysis of group processes the conception of identification in group formation as described by Freud, but with particular reference to the processes of introjective and projective identification as elaborated by Melanie Klein. Such a form of analysis has been suggested in another context by Paula Heimann (1952a)—“Such taking in and expelling consists of an active interplay between the organism and the outer world; on this primordial pattern rests all intercourse between subject and object, no matter how complex and sophisticated such intercourse appears. (I believe that in the last analysis we may find it at the bottom of all our complicated dealings with one another.) The patterns Nature uses seem to be few, but she is inexhaustible in their variation.” I shall try to show how individuals make unconscious use of institutions by associating in these institutions and unconsciously co-operating to reinforce internal defenses against anxiety and guilt. These social defenses bear a reciprocal relationship with the internal defense mechanisms. For instance, the schizoid and manic defenses against anxiety and guilt both involve splitting and projection mechanisms, and, through projection, a link with the outside world. When external objects are shared with others and used in common for purposes of projection, phantasy social relationships may be established through projective identification with the common object. These phantasy relationships are further elaborated by introjection; and the two-way character of social relationships is mediated by virtue of the two-way play of projective and introjective identification.

I shall employ the phrase *phantasy social form and content of an institution* to refer to the form and content of social relationships at the level of the common individual phantasies which the members of an institution share by projective and introjective identification. Phantasy is used in the sense of completely unconscious intra-psychic activity as defined above. From this point of view the character of institutions is determined and colored not only by their explicit or consciously agreed and accepted functions, but also by their manifold unrecognized functions at the phantasy level.

Illustrations of Socially Structured Defense Mechanisms

It is not my intention in this paper to explore either systematically or comprehensively the manner in which social defense mechanisms operate. I shall first examine certain paranoid anxieties and defenses, and then depressive anxieties and defenses, keeping them to some extent separate for purposes of explication, and giving illustrations from everyday experience. Then I shall

present case material from a social study in industry in which I may make some of the theoretical considerations more clear by showing the interaction of paranoid and depressive phenomena.

DEFENSES AGAINST PARANOID ANXIETY

One example of social mechanisms of defense against paranoid anxieties is that of putting bad internal objects and impulses into particular members of an institution, who, whatever their explicit function in a society, are unconsciously selected, or themselves choose to introject bad objects and impulses and either to *absorb* them or to *deflect* them.

The process of absorption may be seen, for example, in the case of a First Officer in a ship, whose duty it is to take responsibility for everything that goes wrong. Everyone's bad objects and impulses may be deposited within the First Officer, who is regarded by common consent as the source of trouble. By this mechanism the members of the crew can find relief from their own internal persecution. And the ship's captain can be thereby more readily idealized and identified with as a good protective figure. Ships' officers in the normal course of promotion are expected to accept this masochistic role, and the norm is to accept it without demur.

The process of deflection may be seen in certain aspects of the complex situation of nations at war. The manifest social structure is that of two opposing armies, each backed and supported by its community. At the phantasy level, however, we may consider the following possibility. The members of each community put their bad objects and sadistic impulses into the commonly shared and accepted external enemy. They rid themselves of their hostile destructive impulses by projecting them into their armies for deflection against the enemy. Paranoid anxiety in the total community, army and civilian alike, may be alleviated, or at least transmuted into fear of known and identifiable external enemies, since the bad impulses and objects projected into the enemy return, not in the form of introjected phantastic persecutors, but in the form of actual physical attack which can be experienced in reality. Under appropriate conditions, objective fear may be more readily coped with than phantasy persecution. The enemy is fought against not in the solitary isolation of the unconscious inner world, but in co-operation with comrades-in-arms in real life. Not only individuals rid themselves of phantastic persecution in this way; the members of the army are temporarily freed from depressive anxiety because their own sadistic impulses can be denied by attributing their aggressiveness to the performance of their duty, that is, expressing the aggressive impulses collected and introjected from all the community. And members of the community may also avoid guilt by getting social sanction for hatred of the

enemy. Social sanction means that denial of unconscious hatred and destructive impulses against internal objects can be reinforced by turning these impulses against a commonly shared and publicly hated real external enemy.

Social co-operation at the reality level may thus allow for a redistribution of bad objects and impulses in the phantasy relations obtaining among the members of a society. This process may be compared with Freud's (1922) definition of the redistribution of libido in the group. In conjunction with such a redistribution, introjective identification makes it possible for individuals to take in social sanction and support. The primitive aim of the absorption and deflection mechanism is to achieve a non-return at the phantasy level of the projected phantasy bad objects and impulses.

But even where absorption and deflection are not entirely successful (and mechanisms at the phantasy level can never be completely controlled), the social defense mechanisms provide some gain. Paula Heimann (1952b) has described the introjection of projected bad objects and their related impulses into the ego, where they are maintained in a split-off state, subjected to intrapsychic projection and kept under attack. In the cases described above, the ego receives support from the social sanctions which are introjected, and which legitimize the intra-psychic projection and aggression. The First Officer, for example, may be introjected, and the impulses projected into him introjected as well. But in the phantasy social situation other members of the crew who also attack the First Officer are identified with by introjection, partly into the ego, and partly into the super-ego. Hence the ego is reinforced by possession of the internalized members of the crew, all of whom take part in the attack on the segregated bad objects within the ego. And there is an alleviation of the harshness of the super-ego by adding to it objects which socially sanction and legitimize the attack.

These illustrations are obviously not completely elaborated. Nor are they intended to be so. They are abstractions from real life situations in which a fuller analysis would show defenses against persecutory and depressive anxiety interacting with each other and with other more explicit functions of the group. But perhaps they suffice to indicate how the use of the concepts of introjective and projective identification regarded as interacting mechanisms may serve to add further dimensions to Freud's analysis of the Army and the Church. We may also note that the social mechanisms described contain, in their most primitive aspects, features which may be related to the earliest attempts of the infant, described by Melanie Klein (1948b; 1952b), to deal with persecutory anxiety in relation to part objects by means of splitting and projection and introjection of both the good and bad objects and impulses. If we now turn to the question of social defenses against depressive anxieties, we shall be able to illustrate further some of the general points.

DEFENSES AGAINST DEPRESSIVE ANXIETY

Let us consider now certain aspects of the problem of the scapegoating of a minority group. As seen from the viewpoint of the community at large, the community is split into a good majority group and a bad minority—a split consistent with the splitting of internal objects into good and bad, and the creation of a good and bad internal world. The persecuting group's belief in its own good is preserved by heaping contempt upon and attacking the scapegoated group. The internal splitting mechanisms and preservation of the internal good objects of individuals, and the attack upon and contempt for internal bad persecutory objects, are reinforced by introjective identification of individuals with other members taking part in the group-sanctioned attack upon the scapegoat.

If we now turn to the minority groups, we may ask why only some minorities are selected for persecution while others are not. Here a feature often overlooked in considerations of minority problems may be of help. The members of the persecuted minority commonly entertain a precise and defined hatred and contempt for their persecutors which matches in intensity the contempt and aggression to which they themselves are subjected. That this should be so is perhaps not surprising. But in view of the selective factor in choice of persecuted minorities, must we not consider the possibility that one of the operative factors in this selection is the consensus in the minority group, at the phantasy level, to seek contempt and suffering. That is to say, there is an unconscious co-operation (or collusion) at the phantasy level between persecutor and persecuted. For the members of the minority group, such a collusion carries its own gains—such as social justification for feelings of contempt and hatred for an external persecutor, with consequent alleviation of guilt and reinforcement of denial in the protection of internal good objects.

Another way in which depressive anxiety may be alleviated by social mechanisms is through manic denial of destructive impulses and destroyed good objects, and the reinforcement of good impulses and good objects, by participation in group idealization. These social mechanisms are the reflection in the group of denial and idealization, shown by Melanie Klein (1948a) to be important defenses against depressive anxiety.

The operation of these social mechanisms may be seen in mourning ceremonies. The bereaved are joined by others in a common display of grief, and in public reiteration of the good qualities of the deceased. Bad objects and impulses are got rid of by projection into the corpse, disguised by the decoration of the corpse, and safely put out of the way through projective identification with the dead during the burial ceremony; failure of the mechanism increases the prospect of persecution by demonic figures. At the same time good objects and impulses are also projected into the dead person. Public and

socially sanctioned idealization of the deceased then reinforces the sense that the good object has after all not been destroyed, for the person's "good works" are held to live on in the memory of the community as well as the surviving family, a memory which is reified in the tombstone. Failure of the mechanism increases the prospect of haunting by guilt-provoking ghosts.

Hence, through mourning as a social process, the community and the bereaved are provided with the opportunity of splitting the destroyed part of the loved object from the loved part, of burying the destroyed bad objects and impulses, and of protecting the good loved part as an eternal memory. And even where the mechanisms fail, there is a partial gain in facing demons and ghosts in company with others, rather than whistling past the graveyard alone.

One general feature of each of the instances cited is that the phantasy social systems established have survival value for the group as well as affording protection against anxiety in the individual. Thus, for example, in the case of the mourning ceremony the social idealizing and manic denial make it possible for a bereaved person to reduce the internal chaos and weather the immediate and intense impact of death, and to undertake the process of mature internal mourning at his own time and his own pace. Melanie Klein (1948a) states that "many mourners can only make slow steps in reestablishing the bonds with the external world because they are struggling against the chaos inside." But there is a general social gain as well, in that all those associated in the mourning ceremony can further their internal mourning and continue the life-long process of working-through the unresolved conflicts of the infantile depressive position. As Melanie Klein has described the process, "It seems that every advance in the process of mourning results in a deepening in the individual's relation to his inner objects, in the happiness of regaining them after they were felt to be lost (Paradise Lost and Regained), in an increased trust in them and love for them because they proved to be good and helpful after all." Hence through the mourning ceremony the toleration of ambivalence is increased and friendship ties in the community can be strengthened. Or again, in the case of the first officer, the ship's crew, in a situation made difficult by close confinement and isolation from other groups, is enabled to co-operate with the captain in carrying out the required and consciously planned tasks by isolating and concentrating their bad objects and impulses within an available human receptacle.

Case Study

I shall now turn to a more detailed and precise discussion of phantasy social systems as defense mechanisms for the individual, and also as mechanisms allowing the group to proceed with the sophisticated or survival tasks, in examining a case study from industry. It may be noted that the conception of

sophisticated tasks derives from Bion's (1948–51) conception of the sophisticated task of the work or *W* group. I am refraining from using Bion's more elaborate conceptual scheme defining what he terms the "basic assumptions" of groups, since the relationship between the operation of basic assumptions and that of depressive and persecutory phenomena remains to be worked out.

The case to be presented is one part of a larger study carried out in a light engineering factory, the Glacier Metal Company, between June 1948 and September 1951. The relationship with the firm was a therapeutic one in the sense that work was done only on request from groups or individuals within the firm for assistance in working through intra-group stresses or in dealing with organizational problems. The relationship between the social consultant (or therapist) and the people with whom he worked was a confidential one; and the only reports published are those which have been worked through with the people concerned and agreed by them for publication. Within these terms of reference a detailed report on the first three years of the project has been published (Jaques, 1951).

The illustration I shall use is taken from work done with one department in the factory; a department employing roughly 60 people.* It was organized with a departmental manager as head. Under him was a superintendent, who in turn was responsible for four foremen, each of whom had a working group of 10 to 16 operatives. The operatives had elected five representatives, two of whom were shop stewards, to negotiate with the departmental manager on matters affecting the department. One such matter had to do with a change in methods of wages payment. The shop had been on piece rates (i.e., the operatives were paid a basic wage plus a bonus dependent on their output). This method of payment had, for a number of years, been felt to be unsatisfactory. From the workers' point of view it meant uncertainty about what their weekly wage would be, and for the management it meant complicated rate-fixing and administrative arrangements. For all concerned the quite frequent wrangling about rates which took place was felt as unnecessarily disturbing. The possibility of changing over to a flat-rate method of payment had been discussed for over a year before the project began, but in spite of the fact that the change was commonly desired they had not been able to come to a decision.

A PERIOD OF NEGOTIATION

Work with the department began in January 1949, by attendance at the discussions of a subcommittee composed of the departmental manager, the superintendent, and three of the workers' representatives. The general tone of the

*This case material is a condensation of earlier published material (Jaques, 1950; Jaques et al., 1951).

discussions was friendly. The committee members laid stress upon the fact that good relations existed in the department and that they all wanted to strive for further improvement. From time to time, however, there was sharp disagreement over specific points. These disagreements led the workers' representatives to state that there were many matters on which they felt they could not trust the management. These statements of suspicion were answered by the management members, who emphasized that they, for their part, had great trust in the workers' sense of responsibility.

The workers' suspicion of management also revealed itself in discussions which were held at shop floor level between the elected representatives and their worker constituents. The purpose of these discussions was to elicit in a detailed and concrete manner the views of the workers about the proposed change-over. The workers were on the whole in favor of the change-over, but there was some doubt as to whether they could trust the management to implement and administer it fairly. What guarantees did they have, they asked, that management had nothing up its sleeve? At the same time, the workers showed an ambivalent attitude towards their own representatives. They urged and, indeed, empowered them to carry on negotiations with management, but at the same time suspected that the representatives were management "stooges" and did not take the workers' views sufficiently into account. This latter negative attitude towards their representatives came out more clearly in interviews with individual workers, in which opinions were expressed that although the elected representatives were known as militant trade unionists, nevertheless they were seen as being outwitted by the management and not carrying their representative role as effectively as they might.

The day-to-day working relationships between supervisors and workers were quite different from those to be expected from the views stated above. Work in the shop was carried out with good morale, and the supervisors were felt to be doing their best for the workers. A high proportion of those in the shop had been employed in the company for five years or more, and genuinely good personal relationships had been established.

The discussions in the committee composed of the managers and elected representatives went on for seven months, between January and July 1949. The participants had a great deal of difficulty in working towards a decision, becoming embroiled in arguments which were sometimes quite heated and which had no obvious cause—other than the workers' suspicion of the management, counterbalanced by the management's idealization of the workers. Much of both the suspicion and the idealization, however, was autistic in the sense that although consciously experienced it was not expressed openly as between managers and workers. These attitudes came out much more sharply when the elected representatives and the managers were meeting separately. The workers expressed deep suspicion and mistrust, while the managers ex-