

On the Psycho-historical Psychodynamics of Bonding Processes

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Abstract: In the past decades the importance of early mother-child bonding was “discovered”. This reflects an increase in empathy in the western societies. An important precondition for this was the increased security in these societies. Inversely the great insecurity in the historical societies had the effect that the level of bonding was unsettled and traumatized. The dimension of the early mother-child relation was always most that exposed to insecurity, illness, hunger and violence. This had the effect that in the historical societies the early bonding needs from the pre-speech period remained in projection namely in magical, mythical and religious feelings. It was in this world of projected feelings that the security and bonding so painfully lacking in the misery of the real world was sought. People remained fixated in a fantasy world of prenatal symbolism. As a result the historical cultures have a childlike quality. The age of enlightenment is the turning point of shifting this dependency in the direction of greater relationship and responsibility. The historical psychological developmental processes can be understood as a process of retrojection and internalization of the projections of early unintegrated bonding needs and the parallel growth of the capacity of the ego. These psycho-historical processes can only be understood by the inclusion of the pre- and perinatal viewpoint. This contribution is a psycho-historical essay on the topic of the psychodynamics of the psychohistory of bonding processes that brings the aspects together that form the background to Christian Neuse’s contribution.

Keywords: psychohistory, prenatal, perinatal, developmental process

Introduction

Parents have always known, more or less intuitively, that children have psychological experiences and are dependent on bonding. However, the tradition bearers and “Science” didn’t possess such knowledge. Until the 70s in the previous century infants were considered to be biological beings. As result children were left to cry as this was supposed to strengthen their lungs. This implies a great deal of alienation. This alienation was greater the further one goes back in history. A turning point towards relationship and bonding was the age of enlightenment. The science of education starts with the enlightenment and poets begin to discover and describe psychological experience in relationships. This is psychosocial new land. And this begins when people begin to take themselves seriously as personalities during the enlightenment. Previously above all “God” was taken seriously and people were in effect nothing or worms. Schiller formulates the turning point as: “nehmt die Gottheit in euren Willen, und sie steigt herab von ihrem Weltenthron” (“take divinity into your will and it descends from its world throne”) (Schiller 1795, p. 204). That is: if you are aware of your identity and your life force and accept

responsibility for them then you lose fear of princes and worldly authorities that draw their power from the projection of your infantile fears and dependencies.

This is an alteration in the structure of our personality and this creates other problems. Some problems we no longer have; we no longer have to burn witches, we no longer have to go on crusades, but internally we have more problems, those problems depicted by the 19th century poets up to Kafka and Beckett in the 20th century. This is a historical process of the collective retraction of projections which especially dominated the world of experience in the Middle Ages. The problems which had up to then been dealt with at the level of heavenly beings were now problems of the people themselves. As a result, life's problems reach the level of increasing preoccupation with responsibility. The previous regulation through externalization to witches and heretics was not real responsibility but took effect by referring to heavenly authorities and were thus apparently in their responsibility. However, as these heavenly authorities were in reality projected and unintegrated psychological elements they were divested of their responsibility. This occurred without a conscience as we understand it.

A first step away from this anonymous projection was taken by the personalization of the relationship to God in Protestantism and individualization during the Renaissance. The decisive breakthrough to the modern self-responsible ego took place, as mentioned, during the enlightenment.

This great alteration in our identity is accompanied by a change in the mother-child relationship, which became more personal (Shorter 1986). In the 18th century the middle class family, the subject of 19th century novels and described psychologically by Freud with its inner feelings and conflicts, emerges. Father, mother and children remain together for many years whereas previously the gentry sent their children away or consigned them to the servants' charge. Then I am unable to define myself within me but only in some terms of dependence and idealizations.

Hypotheses of Psychohistory

This is concerned with taking this historical change seriously and trying to comprehend its dynamics. In this respect the psycho-historian Lloyd DeMause put forward the hypothesis that the historical change was furthered by the fact that parents tried to create better conditions for their children than they had experienced themselves: if I was beaten a lot, I'll try to beat my child less; or I'll try not to beat my child at all. In the past nearly all children were beaten. People thought it was the right thing to do. In the second half of the last century there was a radical development in this respect. This created different human beings. Beaten children are different from children who have not been beaten. These are also collective conditions. Here is a background to the extreme barbarity of the world wars: In the past Russian and German children were beaten with exceptional brutality and this is one reason why both peoples sought leaders in Hitler and Stalin, both of whom had been severely beaten as children, and why both peoples could take part ruthlessly in murderous wars. (DeMause 2001; Janus 2006).

Horkheimer and Adorno (1944, p. 62) said that a theme running through history is the "internalization of sacrifice". Unfortunately they did not elucidate further, but this gives food for thought. The fact is that human beings in the past made

never ending sacrificial offerings. The morning began with a sacrificial offering, at midday there was a sacrificial offering, in the evening there was a sacrificial offering. There were endless sacrificial offerings. In some areas of Egypt the first child was sacrificed in antiquity in order to keep the birth canal open, which is, from a modern viewpoint, a somewhat odd obstetrical procedure. But seen from the mindset of the time, sacrifice was the all that held the world in balance. In particular, we have in the Spanish reports about the Aztecs a vivid insight into the central importance of sacrifice in early civilizations.

The great uncertainty in which the people of these early cultures lived made them resort to compromises in projected regulation of guilt such as: somehow we are to blame, we have done something wrong and we can atone for this by sacrificing. Then we have in the early modern period an alteration in mindset through internalization. What sacrifice was previously has become since Luther and Protestantism guilt feelings. As a good Christian I woke up in the morning with a bad conscience, I had a bad conscience at midday and I went to bed with a bad conscience. I had a bad conscience all the time; just as people in the past concerned themselves with their sacrifices so the Christian concerns himself with his sins and feelings of guilt. (I must ask you to excuse my somewhat casual terminology: it is supposed to clarify the psychological relationships and not to reduce religious matters to psychological matters.) This internalization is however a culture-psychological advance. The sacrificing of Jesus was an advance compared to concrete sacrifice in antiquity because it was a symbolic sacrifice. Compared with the Lutheran conscience the psychological concept of conscience and the superego was a further advance, insofar as the terms of reference of conscience could now be reflected. Conscience can be dealt with, its origins in childhood can be clarified and it can be appeased.

The improvement in the mother-child relationship is also a moving power and a guideline in history. Parallel to this runs an increasing strengthening of the ego in the course of history. Improved parent-child relationships facilitate differentiated formation of the ego. And this in turn facilitates more responsible parent-child relationships. Human history is in this sense a “psychological process of development” (Janus 2008). The members of a tribal culture, of an early civilization, of a mediaeval culture and of the enlightenment are different personalities with varying and increasingly differentiated mindsets.

DeMause (2005) attempted to distinguish the typical characteristics of the personalities of the different historical eras in psychological terms. The peoples of antiquity with their manifold sacrifices and rapid emotional changes seemed to be as borderline characters, the peoples of the baroque age with their obsessive castigations seemed to be anankastic (obsessive-compulsive) personalities and so on (DeMause 2005). However DeMause used categories here which are inappropriate because they are characterizations of illness. Borderline describes someone who cannot come to terms with our cultural conditions. A person who displays such symptoms has often experienced traumatic and difficult early circumstances which prevent them from integrating positively in this society. It really does not make sense to characterize early cultures as “sick” even if the categories do include important elements of earlier mindsets.

The Stages of Development of Mindset

How did we come to perceive ourselves meaningfully as persons? It used to be permissible only for a god or the pharaoh. The individual Egyptian was not a person. There was only one person and that was the pharaoh. State life in these early cultures was to all intents and purposes a *mise-en-scène* in order to find or to invent oneself.

Prior to that lies the magical level and there one can say that the members of the magically defined tribal cultures still lived entirely in the projection of their womb world. It was important that the *mana* “functioned”. It is important for the fetus that the exchange with the mother functions because otherwise everything breaks down. Here the sacred trees provided strength in that they symbolized the placenta. The strange thing was that these magically defined people changed nothing in the real world other than themselves. A primate lives simply and undemanding in its environment. Human beings added something with their *mise-en-scène* and gave themselves very special significance. Everything depends on the rituals which secure the contact to the prenatal world of origin as is particularly clear among the Australian aborigines: drawing a circle creates the feeling of being at home. The magic of the circle originates from the pre-birth experience of the sensory-motoric cavity of the womb. In the same sense by carrying a holy staff (as an offshoot of the umbilical cord) the world is recreated as a cosmos where they can feel at home. This is then a substitute for the lost home in the womb. The authority for these cultural psychological conclusions is derived methodologically from innumerable individual case studies in psychotherapeutic situations that allow concrete pre-birth and birth situations to manifest themselves in the symptoms of patients in psychotherapy (Rank 1924; Janus 2000 et al.) and in the symbolic games of children (Ley 1997 et al.).

A Digression on the Psychological Significance of “Physiological Premature Birth”

Just why are we primates that have such strong projections and need to create alternative worlds? The background for this is the so-called “physiological premature birth” (Portmann 1969). We are lacking nine to twelve months of pregnancy, which would mean we would come into the world as small children and we could master the world as toddlers and everything would be fine. Then we would be satisfied. As it is, we come into the world as extra-uterine fetuses. The period as a suckling infant is also called the “extra-uterine premature year” by biologists. This is why we are extremely helpless as infants and have to attach ourselves to the parents by means of relationship. We are unable to cling to our mother and have to secure her care through eye contact, gestures and voice. Herein lay the beginnings of civilization. By means of mystical, magical and imaginative-mythical endeavors infants make certain contact and find a home in the mother after birth by making her into an imagined substitute for the womb world that was lost too early. The psychological intensity of the relationship replaces the biological deficiency of “premature birth” and this projection is transferred to the world. This is an essential prerequisite for the process of cultural development and the de-

velopment of continually differentiated mindsets which will now be explained further.

The Stages of Mindset – Continued

After the magical mindset of the tribal cultures came the discovery of agriculture and livestock breeding. This is the so-called Neolithic Revolution. This is the beginning of something new. Human beings changed the earth into a sort of Garden of Eden. Where previously 10 human beings could live from a square kilometer one thousand were suddenly able to. This was a population explosion. And the peoples of this era then created a new *mise-en-scène* which not only changed them but also the world. The peoples built huge ramparts as they were no longer content with a simple circle. The city walls in Sumer were 30 meters thick. This was not due to military necessity but the magical-mystical evocation of prenatal primeval safety, although coupled with real restructuring of the world in the form of the early cities. The city established mythical safety by association with the gods or the prenatal parental primal beings.

And in the city there lived a king and the king lived in a palace and this king was in reality a fetal being. He was not allowed to touch the earth, he was wrapped in cloths, he was carried about and he was fed. This was the *mise-en-scène* of a fetal-self, a higher or prenatal self as it would now be termed psychologically, and the people partook of its mana and power. This gave people security. The higher self was produced as a *mise-en-scène* and gradually this became more and more internalized. It used to be that only the pharaoh could travel into the other world and have contact with the gods. And later during the New Kingdom every Egyptian could open the Book of the Dead and make a symbolic journey to the gods. This is a reinforcement of the ego. Finally, in Christianity everyone possesses an immortal soul and lives through the church in union with heaven, which in Freud's opinion is a projection of the world before birth.

Childhood in these early advanced civilizations and also later on was very brutal and full of hardships. There was very little contact with the children who were generally separated early and were often given away. Women were much devalued. A woman who receives little recognition cannot recognize herself; only a woman who feels herself accepted, valued and loved can really develop a bond with her child. Luhmann (2003) was even of the opinion that partnership-based love was an invention of the 19th century. The heavenly love of earlier times was sought during the Romantic age in love affairs on earth. That is a new way of behaving towards each other. The fact that people build their life planning on this is a new story which was produced in the 19th century.

Closing Remarks

The underlying idea of this contribution is that our identity and our relationship structures are the product of a historical process. We need kings to find kingliness in ourselves. We need gods to find godliness in ourselves. Rank speaks of our having a dual ego structure, an earthly self as well as a higher self as the progeny of the fetal self. The *mise-en-scène* of this higher self is the kings and gods. The

psycho-historical process consists of the convergence of ego and self so that the true self seeks and finds itself in me. That would be in the sense of Schiller and in modern times of Jung. When you no longer project your true self then you are a human being and can accept responsibility for your own life. The purpose of this contribution is to demonstrate that it is possible to view the history of our identity as just such a history of development (Janus 2008).

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