



May 2017 p: 79 – 83

## Hellenic Network of Group Analysts

### One Day Workshop, January 28, 2017, Athens, Greece

Presentation of the Greek publication of Tom Ormay's book: **The Social Nature of Persons. One Person is No Person.**

Kostas Morogiannis Psychiatrist – Group Analyst  
morkost10@gmail.com

Translation: Varinou Eirini- Theodora



Norbert Elias, speaking about his work “The civilizing process”, states that his major discovery consists in the ascertainment that the processes of socialization are always developing simultaneously with the processes of individuation. The individual is a level of the group, and the two parts, individual and group, cannot be considered separately; on the contrary, they constitute different levels of the same field of observation. Therefore, both levels should be examined simultaneously. The group, any group, consists of individuals, but the collective or social level has its own organization that cannot be traced to individuals. This means that the group is beyond the individuals which is formed of.

According to Foulkes and Elias, the social permeates the individual and the individual respectively co-constructs the social. The processes of socialization and individualization always evolve simultaneously and comprise conscious and unconscious mental and social events.

Thus, the need for new notions arises, that will represent and describe this global image. That is to say, “the individual as a whole and the total situation” as Foulkes outlined it. Foulkes had realized this need when he wrote “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 while the study of groups will help us to understand more clearly the phenomena in both cases” (Foulkes and Anthony 1957, p. 250).

Ormay responds to Foulkes’ advice by introducing such an innovative concept. It is the concept of NOS (‘We’ in Latin), which he defines in various ways. We retain the following definition:

NOS, Ormay states, corresponds to what Elias called the organization of the social level. According to Elias, the term organization of the social level, describes what the term Social Structure describes, perceived from the viewpoint of the parts. Elias introduces the term configuration in order to designate the whole, the configuration, from the standpoint of the individuals who constitute this configuration.

Every human group could be seen as a configuration. Every individual occupies a particular position within the configuration, according to the power he holds. There are power differentials that lead to corresponding power relations. What is more, there are certain constraints. Every individual is constrained with regard to what he will think, feel and do, by all the other individuals of the configuration, while at the same time he constraints all the other individuals. This is another way of saying that the individuals of every configuration are interconnected, interdependent and interactive. This interconnection stems from the mere coexistence of the individuals within the configuration.

We could therefore say that NOS is a concept that describes aspects of this coexistence of individuals within every configuration, within each group. It describes in particular the social aspect of the person – or, as Dalal would say- the person in "social relation".

Within the united field of observation that comprises the individual and the group level, the NOS concept describes the group level, that is the social aspect of personality or else the social person.

Thus, we can more fully comprehend Foulkes’ formulation: «The individual as a whole and the total situation». Ormay, in order to better depict this configuration, takes a major step forward: he introduces the NOS notion along with reviewing Freud’s structural theory of personality. Accordingly, Ormay takes us from the Freudian system of “id-superego-ego” to the “id-ego-nos” pattern. Henceforth, Psychology becomes Social Psychology, as Foulkes points out (Foulkes, 1964).

It seems that Freud also had been aware of this fact when he wrote “...group psychology is the oldest human psychology; what we have isolated as individual



psychology, by neglecting all the traces of the group, has only since come into prominence out of the old group psychology” (Freud, 1921).

Freud, however, made a choice. Out of the entire field of observation, he chose to focus on the individual level. Thus, he arrived at his structural theory on personality, to the schema “id-superego-ego”.

We now know that this was due to the fact that he aimed to develop psychoanalysis according to the model of the scientific disciplines of his time. That model could not sustain more than the study of the individual level, to the “detriment” of the social dimension of the person.

Foulkes proceeded from this point on. Now Ormay proposes some of the conceptual tools that Foulkes required in order to complete his endeavor.

Ormay introduces NOS that describes the social aspect of the self. Nos, as well as the ego– Ormay says– starts developing soon after our birth. Infant observers, such as Stern, can confirm this, by noting that the newborn baby reveals social responsiveness and interaction from the very beginning of his/her life (Stern, 1973).

Nos, according to Ormay contains the Collective which includes the Social, where the Individual stems from. “We live our lives on all three levels at the same time. The Collective and the Social are embedded in Nos, while the Individual level is managed by the ego” (Ormay, 2016). This, of course, is not axiomatic. He persuasively indicates the way that leads to his conclusions, observing all the safeguards of scientific investigation. He is convincing because he combines the breadth of a ‘homo universalis’ “with the audaciousness of an adolescent’s scientific fervour, one would say. Thus, he makes us feel that the restructuring of Freud’s theory is “natural”: from the initially familiar, virtually “natural” configuration (id-superego-ego), he leads us to his own configuration (id-ego-nos). The superego does not vanish in the new pattern, nonetheless it constitutes the bridge between the id and the nos, liberating the ego. Furthermore, Ormay makes an excellent analysis of the superego function and the beneficial impact of the new configuration on clinical practice. The reader comes to feel fully at home with the new pattern, even though it reflects a revolutionary change...

Besides, there are several more revisions: Claiming that Nos is rooted in Biology, in the Social Instinct, Ormay also recasts the theory of instincts. He proposes, in place of the Freudian pattern, a dual system that now contains the survival instinct along with the social instinct. In addition, he discusses the relation of Nos with the social unconscious and the relation of both with the person and the individual unconscious. He also refers to issues that we usually dismiss as self-evident, for instance the notions of conscience and desire, which he discusses at length.



Consciousness is a creation of Nos, says Ormay. Indeed, etymologically the word conscious originates from the Latin con-scrire which means “to know in common”, confirming Foulkes’ assumption that therapy can be equated with communication-referring to the kind of communication that adequately describes each individual experience. Ormay’s sound philosophical background is clearly evident here, enriching older notions and illustrating new ones. One example of this is the discussion on Aristotle’s concept of “intention”. The theories of instincts, the notion of Nos can be better formulated through the Aristotelian viewpoint.

Besides, each person’s existence and pathway within the world are more effectively illuminated if we embrace the Aristotelian intention. Our pathway in the world “which awaits us but which we also create” acquires a fuller meaning in this way. Winnicott refers to this by stating that the newborn child comes to a world waiting for it, but the infant also co-shapes this world at the same time.

Foulkes also mentions this, when he declares that the social permeates the individual, while the individual co-constructs the social. In the analytic group, each person co-shapes the group by creating the group’s Nos which is particular for each group. The dynamic interaction of the ego of each group member with the group nos can sufficiently describe the therapy process in the group.

Moreover, he discusses the notion of empathy, as well as those of the group matrix and narcissism, which, as he demonstrates, are de facto connected with nos. He highlights the limitations of relational, intersubjective and object-relations psychoanalytic theories, with respect to their potential to sustain a truly group-analytic model, explaining in this way the fact that Foulkes did not show any particular concern for these approaches. Thus, he is led to reshape both the group-analytic and the psychoanalytic theory. Essentially, by introducing nos in the structural theory of personality, Ormay is led to an interlinking of the psychoanalytic theory with the group-analytic theory. Hence, group-analysis becomes the core psychoanalytic theory that can now sustain theoretically the completion of Foulkes’ and Elias’ endeavor which initially tended to connect Psychoanalysis with Sociology. Therefore, the bio-psycho-social field is unified, and the overall pattern comes to resemble that of Elias, whose work, his theory of social formation and symbol theory, served such a purpose.

Elias claims that the processes of thought, cognition and language “are not entities on their own, but functions connected with organs” (meaning body organs) (Elias, 1991). Freud had made an attempt to integrate bio-psycho-social, when he wrote that “the ego is primarily a somatic ego” (Freud, 1933), yet without further developing this notion.

Ormay bases the notion of nos on a function that involves the body. Nos



constitutes the expression of the Social Instinct, says Ormay, and supports this aspect with reliable biological data. This may clarify Elias' conception that "society is a level of nature" or, in other words, "Nature prepares us for the civilization" for Nos, in Ormay's terms. Also, this provides a better insight into the difference with the Freudian conclusion that civilization is a source of unhappiness.

With the introduction of Nos, the theories of Symbol are developed in a more refined way. Moreover, by founding Nos on the social instinct, we attain a more comprehensive connection with the neurobiological basis.

In fact, Ormay presents a change of scientific paradigm. He supports theoretically the new scientific paradigm introduced by the Group Analysis in the field of psychotherapy.

The psychoanalytic model of "mother-infant" had regarded the individual as the primary agent and the group as a secondary one.

Ormay's approach, by introducing NOS and revising Freud's structural theory, constitutes an original and elaborated contribution to a leading-edge shift. This promotes the establishment of a sound group-analytic paradigm. Other post-Foulkesean clinical psychotherapists and theoretical researchers have also moved in the same direction, most notably Malcolm Pines and Farhad Dalal.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Brown, D. (1997). Conversation with Norbert Elias. *Group Analysis*, 30(4): 515-524
2. Dalal, F. (1998). Taking the Group Seriously. Towards a Post-Foulkesian Group Analytic Theory. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
3. Elias, N. (1978). What is Sociology? London: Hutchinson
4. Elias, N. (1991). The Symbol Theory. London: Sage.
5. Elias, N. (1994). The Civilising Process. Oxford: Blackwell.
6. Foulkes, S. H., & Anthony, E. J. (1957). Group Psychotherapy. The Psychoanalytical Approach. London: Karnac, 1984.
7. Foulkes S.H. (1964). Therapeutic Group Analysis. London: Karnac, 1984.
8. Freud S. (1921). Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. London Hogarth Press.
9. Freud S. (1933). New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis. SE, Vol. XXII, London, The Hogarth Press.
10. Ormay, Tom, (2012). Ormay Tom(2012). The Social Nature of Persons. One Person is no Person. London. Karnac.
11. Stern, D. N. (1973). The Interpersonal World of the Infant. New York. Basic Books.
12. Winnicott, D. W.(1964). The Child, the Family, and the Outside World. London. Hogarth Press.