

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH

BY HOWARD B. LEVINE

After briefly reviewing Freud's search for "the truth" in psychoanalytic treatments, the author discusses Bion's views on truth and its prominence in his thinking. The author then addresses various definitions of truth, drawing particularly on recent comments by Ogden (2015). Considerations of the relationship between truth and philosophy, and of that between truth and the arts, follow; the author then returns to a focus on psychoanalytic truth as emergent. Our view of the latter has been strongly influenced, he notes, by changing views of therapeutic action and the goals of psychoanalysis.

Keywords: W. R. Bion, truth, Freud, unconscious, emergent unconscious, concept of O, philosophy, intersubjectivity, countertransference, interpretation, analytic process, analytic constructions.

Psycho-analytic procedure pre-supposes that the welfare of the patient demands a constant supply of truth as inevitably as his physical survival demands food.

—Bion 1992, p. 99

INTRODUCTION

Does truth matter in psychoanalysis? If so, in what ways? At first glance, the answer might seem self-evident. Throughout his career, Freud ana-

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lyzed patients with the explicit goal of unearthing the forgotten, unacceptable, anxiety-producing, “true” facts—experiences, traumata—and the forbidden fantasies, wishes, and desires of early childhood. Hence the therapeutic power inherent in his understanding of the structure and dynamics of dreams, neurotic symptoms and the psychopathology of everyday life, the archeological metaphor, and the analytic technique to which all these gave rise.

In the various accounts of Freud’s actual clinical practice that have survived, either in our literature or by word of mouth, we have the archetypal scene of Freud intuiting or deducing a crucial childhood wish or experience that had been forgotten, interpreting it to a patient and thereby setting off a dramatic chain of events. Two well-known examples are (1) his interpretation that the Wolf Man (Freud 1918) had witnessed and then repressed all conscious memory of the *actual experience* of the primal scene and that the memory was forgotten until it later returned, disguised, in the wolf dream; and (2) his reconstruction given to Princess Marie Bonaparte that presumably sent her rushing back to Paris to confront her governess and receive third-party confirmation of Freud’s conjecture. More recently, a newly discovered diary of an account of an analysis with Freud in 1921 reaffirms the kind of fact-based, reconstructed “truths” that were so central to Freud’s interpretive interventions.¹

POST-FREUDIAN DEVELOPMENTS

Other analysts have been impressed with the value of revealing and helping patients acknowledge, reclaim, and reintegrate the “truth” of the split-off, often hostile, sometimes depressive, envious, omnipotent, aggressive, destructive wishing parts of themselves, thereby enabling mourning processes to occur that proved essential for further psychic de-

¹ The account, described in Maetzner (2015), is: “*We Benimmt Sich Der Prof. Freud Eigentlich?*” *Ein Neu Entdecktes Tagebuch von 1921 Historisch und Analytisch Kommentiert* [“How Does Professor Freud Actually Behave?”: A Newly Discovered Diary from 1921 with Historical and Analytic Commentary], ed. A. Kollreuter. Giessen, Germany: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2010.

velopment. Still others, myself included, have been persuaded by Bion's assertion that the mind needs truth to grow in the same way that the body needs alimention.² He wrote: "There can be no genuine outcome [in an analysis] that is based on falsity. Therefore the outcome depends on the closeness with which the interpretive appraisal approximates to truth" (Bion 1970, p. 28).

But Bion also warned us about the impossibility of ever truly knowing or surmounting that ever-present spur toward tendentiousness and self-deception that we call countertransference.³ He argued that the true subject of analysis—psychic qualities, the unconscious, and indeed any experience viewed from the *psychoanalytic vertex*—is ineffable and not available to perception via the modality of the senses; that when it comes to the recognition of and verbal communication (*publication*) about the *psychoanalytic object*, there can be a big difference between theoretically valorizing the truth and finding the actual words needed to state it.

Much of Bion's later work, from 1970 on, centered increasingly on the structural problem of how the truth of psychic qualities can come to be known:

The psycho-analyst and his analysand are alike dependent on the senses, but psychic qualities, with which the psycho-analyst deals, are not perceived by the senses but as Freud says, some mental counterpart of the sense organs, a function that he attributed to consciousness. [Bion 1970, p. 28]

Given all that we know about the way unconscious forces impact the mind, a "mental counterpart of the sense organs" that is an attribute of consciousness seems a rather shaky foundation on which to build a

² In a memoir, Francesca Bion (1995) said of her late husband: "First and foremost, he placed respect for the truth, without which effective analysis becomes impossible. It is the central aim and as essential for emotional growth as food is for the body; without it the mind dies of starvation" (p. 106). See also Grinberg, Sor, and de Bianchedi (1977), who described Bion's belief that "truth is essential for mental growth. Without truth the psychic apparatus does not develop and dies of starvation" (p. 108).

³ "One of the essential points about counter-transference is that it is *unconscious*. People talk about 'making use of' their counter-transference; they cannot make any use of it because they don't know what it is" (Bion 1980, p. 16, italics in original).

search for truth, especially when recognition of that truth is apt to be painful,⁴ because it may:

- expose our previous ignorance and lack of omniscience;
- be based on and require that we tolerate frustration;
- be linked to the disturbing concomitants of psychic growth that Bion called *catastrophic change*.

And yet, that shaky foundation is all we have. Clearly, the problem of truth is not a simple one.

DEFINITIONS OF TRUTH

Traditionally, “truth” has been defined as “that which is in accordance with fact or reality; conformity to fact or reality; exact accordance with that which is, or has been; or shall be” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary* 1913). At the heart of this definition is a *correspondence theory*—that which is “true” is a statement or proposition that asserts something that *corresponds* to something else that exists or is real. We might hesitate at the thought of truth conforming to what is “not yet but shall be,” because how do we know what shall be when it has not yet happened? But for the most part, this definition seems to make good sense in terms of everyday parlance and experience.

But does this definition serve as well for psychoanalysis? If Bion is correct and psychic qualities cannot be directly perceived by the senses, does this definition hold up when examined in the light of psychic reality, intersubjective narrative co-construction, and other transformations of unrepresented and weakly represented states? How does it fare in regard to conceptualizations of the *unformulated* or *emergent unconscious* and the investigation of psychoanalytic objects? Is there some inherent difficulty in the concept of truth in psychoanalysis that produces an inevitable slip-page or even confusion in usage as we try to define and apply it?

⁴ According to Grinberg, Sor, and de Bianchedi (1977), Bion believed that “the human being’s capacity to tolerate truths about himself is fragile; truth is a permanent source of pain and the wish for knowledge can never be satisfied or completed; therefore the tendency to evasive action is great and the mind is always prepared to create lies to oppose this pain” (p. 110).

Consider, for example, the recent paper “Intuiting the Truth of What’s Happening: On Bion’s ‘Notes on Memory and Desire,’” by Thomas H. Ogden (2015), undoubtedly one of our most prolific, influential, and sophisticated analytic writers. I feel very much aligned with the main thrust and conclusions of this paper, which affirms Bion’s assertion that analytic interpretations of the unconscious rely more on the analyst’s *intuition* and *at-one-ment* than they do upon objective, empirical observations.⁵

Among the many cogent and useful points that Ogden (2015) makes are the following:

- “Bion supplants ‘awareness’ from its central role in the analytic process and, in its place, instates the analyst’s (largely unconscious) work of intuiting the psychic reality (the truth) of the session by becoming one with it” (p. 287).
- “*Genuine thinking, which is predominantly unconscious, seeks out the truth (reality)*” (p. 290, italics in original).
- “Without the truth (O), or at least openness to it, thinking is not only impossible; the very idea of thinking becomes meaningless” (p. 290).
- “The realm of the unconscious, Bion vehemently insists, is the realm of the psychoanalyst The unconscious is the realm of thinking and feeling that together form the psychic reality (psychoanalytic truth) of an individual at any given moment” (p. 292).
- “If the psychoanalyst is to be genuinely analytic in the way he observes, he must be able to abjure conscious, sensory-based modes of perceiving, which draw the analyst’s mind to conscious experience and to modes of thinking (for example, memory and desire) that are fearful/evasive of the perception of the unconscious psychic reality (the truth) of what is occurring in the session” (p. 293).

What I would like to call the reader’s attention to in this selection of excerpts are the different but related assertions or equations concerning

⁵ It was Bion’s distrust of empirical evidence in relation to the *psychoanalytic object* that led to his admonition to attempt to encounter the patient at each moment without memory or desire. (See, for example, Bion 1970, 2005.)

truth and *psychoanalytic truth* that they contain. Truth is equated with “reality” (p. 290), “psychic reality” (p. 287), “unconscious psychic reality” (p. 293), and O (p. 290), and there is a reference to something called “psychoanalytic truth” (p. 292) that may or may not be equivalent to any of these or to the more common and socially validatable meanings of the word *truth*.

If we look closer and assume that these cognates are not all equivalent and interchangeable, we must then ask: what *is* “truth” in psychoanalysis, and is there a “psychoanalytic truth” that is different from what we mean by *truth* in its ordinary social sense? This parsing of the truth and truths inevitably leads us back to some of the foundational questions that have bedeviled psychoanalysis from its inception and are perhaps insoluble in any definitive form: What do we think we know and how do we think that we come to know it? What is our data and what is our evidence in regard to our observations, assumptions, and beliefs? How are each of these categories verified or proven false, and do they affect and influence each other?

Later in his article, Ogden (2015) refers to “multiple coexisting, discordant realities, all of which are true” (p. 300). If there are “multiple coexisting, discordant realities,” are there also multiple coexisting, discordant truths? In the everyday world of external reality, truth tends to *feel* singular and never discordant: a shirt is blue or not blue. It might be blue and white, but its white stripes do not nullify the fact that it is also partly blue; its blueness is not in question.

As described by Ogden (2015), his patient Ms. C (pp. 297-300) both loved and did not love her baby. One could characterize this condition and try to solve the problems that it might entail by saying that she was ambivalent or that she possessed both feelings, alternately or even simultaneously. But I would suggest that to do so might miss something of what Ogden was describing: that perhaps an oscillating or ambivalent “love/no love” relationship with the baby did not feel “true” to something of this patient’s feeling state or Ogden’s belief about it, and that “all love and only love” *and* “all no love and only no love” felt more to Ogden to be the “truth” of the patient’s O—what both Ms. C and her analyst had to accept and face. Hence Ogden’s assertion in regard to his patient that “the baby was dead, *and* the baby was alive” (p. 300, italics in original).

Ogden posits a truth that we might call *conditional*: “The truth of each component of this emotional situation was real only when in dialectic tension with its counterpart” (p. 300). And, more to the clinical point, he asserts his belief that:

If I were to have sided with one component or the other . . . I believe the patient would have felt that I was afraid to know who she really was at that moment—a mother who loved her baby and a mother who was unable to love her baby. [p. 300]

Ogden also offers a comment on the very unique, very precious, and sometimes strange-seeming domain of psychic reality, when he wonders to whom these feelings belong:

Ms. C and I were experiencing a wide range of deeply felt emotions . . . the origins of which were unclear; were they my feelings or were they the patient’s feelings, or were they those of a third subject that was the unconscious creation of the two of us . . . ? Probably all three, in ever-shifting proportions. [p. 300]

Here, too, the reader can feel the once seemingly obvious and solid ground beginning to shift. We find ourselves per force caught up in the complexities of epistemology, a subject defined as the study of “the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its scope, methods, and validity, and the distinction between justified belief and personal opinion” (Horvath 2013). Perhaps a philosophical vertex will prove useful here.

TRUTH AND PHILOSOPHY

Turning to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2013), we learn that:

Truth is one of the central subjects in philosophy. It is also one of the largest. Truth has been a topic of discussion in its own right for thousands of years The problem of truth is in a way easy to state: what truths are, and what (if anything) makes them true. But this simple statement masks a great deal of controversy. Whether there is a metaphysical problem of truth at all, and if there is, what kind of theory might address it, are all standing issues in the theory of truth.

As confirmation, the encyclopedia then lists many different philosophical theories about and formulations of the meaning of truth and plunges us into deeply complex discussions of such things as correspondence theories, coherence theories, pragmatic theories, pluralistic theories, etc.

Clearly, the investigation that we have embarked upon is far more complex than a cursory first glance has suggested. Might the arts offer us some clarification?

TRUTH AND THE ARTS

Here are some relevant comments drawn from literature, painting, and film:

- Playwright Luigi Pirandello is said to have described truth as a blur in motion (Bentley 1986).
- Pablo Picasso's portrait of author Gertrude Stein was originally not well received by those acquainted with its subject. Stein (1933) wrote about Picasso's response to the complaint that the portrait did not look like her: "Yes, he said, everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will, he said" (p. 12).
- Film director Werner Herzog began his documentary about the oil fires in Kuwait that followed the first Gulf War, *Lessons of Darkness*, with what turned out to be a spurious quotation from philosopher Blaise Pascal: "The collapse of the stellar universe will occur—like creation—in grandiose splendor." Herzog later explained: "The words attributed to Blaise Pascal which preface my film *Lessons of Darkness* are in fact by me. Pascal himself could not have said it better. This falsified and yet . . . *not* falsified quotation should serve as a first hint of what I am trying to deal with To acknowledge a fake as fake contributes only to the triumph of accountants. Why am I doing this, you might ask? The reason is simple and comes not from theoretical, but rather from practical, considerations. With this quotation as a prefix, I elevate [*erheben*] the spectator, before he has even seen the first frame, to a high level from which to enter the film. And

I, the author of the film, do not let him descend from this height until it is over. Only in this state of sublimity [*Erhabenheit*] does something deeper become possible, a kind of truth that is the enemy of the merely factual. Ecstatic truth, I call it” (Herzog 2016).

- Author David Vann (2010) recalled: “I had this class once with Grace Paley in which she told us that *every line in fiction has to be true*” (p. 3, italics added).

Fiction, of course, is by definition “not true,” and yet what is more true in the sense of being “true to life” than *Macbeth* or *King Lear*? What is the truth of a poem—especially if we look at its psychological impact, beyond its ideational content? And what are we as analysts to make of the truth of the unconscious or of psychic reality, those ineffable realms that are of the greatest concern to us and our patients?

Returning to our starting point, we can see that the penumbra of associations that surrounds, accompanies, and influences our use and sense of the word *truth* tends toward binaries and the absolute.

PSYCHOANALYTIC TRUTH, EMERGENT TRUTH

In common parlance, something is either true or false, right or wrong, correct or incorrect. Psychoanalytic truth, however, the “truth” of psychic reality, like that of poetic truth, aesthetic truth, ecstatic truth, may be of another order. If we agree with Bion—and a broad range of philosophers, from Plato to Kant and beyond—that raw existential Experience, what I have termed *Capital-E Experience* (Levine 2011, 2015a), can never be fully known, then all truths, especially unconscious truths or those that partake in or follow from unrepresented states or reflect psychic reality, are apt to be partial or incomplete. They are emergent and therefore ineffable, in search of representational expression rather than fully formed and disguised or hidden, and so not capable of being spoken unless or until they undergo some form of transformation.

Bion’s (1970) examination of the distinction between O and K—that is, between ultimate reality and the portion of that ultimate reality that can become known to us—alerts us to the fact that there may be dif-

ferent levels of truth and different idioms and levels of ideational saturation through which these truths may be expressed or the terms within which they may come to be known.

In relation to the analytic situation, the (repressed) hidden truth that is one-half of a binary (that is, true and not false), fully formed and discoverable, may best correspond to the truth of Freud's topographical theory and the dynamic unconscious. It is what we know, but what we cannot let ourselves know or do not consciously notice that we know. (That is, repression requires us to constantly unconsciously "remember" what it is that we are supposed to forget!⁶) This truth is the truth of the archeological metaphor, the dynamic or repressed unconscious, represented mental states, and the treatment of the organized, neurotic sectors of the mind in conflict (Levine 2012).

But as analysts have been becoming increasingly aware, the saturated, formed, and hidden truth of repression, representation, and neurosis is not necessarily the only or central truth relevant to the analytic encounter. This awareness has been accompanied by a shift in our understanding of the aims of analysis. We have become less exclusively interested in helping analysands find the formed, preexisting truths that they have not allowed themselves to know, and equally interested, and sometimes more so, in helping them develop the capacities that would make the discovery/creation of the truth—indeed, knowing itself—possible.

Thus, Hartke (2013) noted a shift in the goals of contemporary analysis, which he suggests aims "primarily at the expansion of the mental container, instead of the predominant work on unconscious contents" (p. 132); Ferro (2015) stated: "the purpose of analysis is to work not so much on insight, the overcoming of splits, repression, or historical reconstruction, as on the development of the instruments for thinking" (p. 512); and Botella (2014) argued that the true object of study for psychoanalysis is not remembering, but what lies behind, generates, and forms the memory and makes it capable of reorganizing psychic life.

Nosek (2015) summarized the work of analysis in the following terms.

⁶ I am indebted to the late Harold Boris (1970) for this witty and epigrammatic formulation.

We do not capture knowledge but expand our expressive repertoire. As when climbing, we broaden our field of vision and also see what we do not know further away. We do not fill in gaps, we gain height. We create new stories and successively reinterpret old accounts. If we do not do this, we tend to become paralyzed in the security of dogmatic narratives. [p. 527]

A number of Bion's analysands have reported that he sometimes said to them in regard to an interpretation that he had offered, but one that they did not recognize as "correct": "You do not now agree with what I have said. Perhaps some time in the future you will agree with what I have suggested to you" (Brito 2015). Parsing this intervention, one can see several possible meanings of Bion's remark. At its most direct level, it is possible that he felt the patient had not yet arrived at the point at which he/she could understand and accept an existing "truth" about him-/herself that the analyst was offering.

At a somewhat more ambiguous level, Bion may have been planting a seed or laying down a direction in which the patient's thinking *might* evolve. But at its most ineffable and complex, perhaps he was saying to them something like what Pablo Picasso said to Gertrude Stein—not that someday she would look back and recognize that he was right because he knew something that she had yet to learn, but rather that he had an intuition about what she would become, and the truth of that intuition might emerge over subsequent time. For purposes of my argument, I would like to think that both Bion and Picasso were saying that they had an *imaginative conjecture* about something that was potential and emergent, but that did not yet exist, and that perhaps in the future, this conjecture would be realized through further evolution of the subject.

This shift in the aims of analysis, from the recovery of repressed thoughts to the development of the capacity for thinking, from "a metapsychology of contents to a metapsychology of process" (Roussillon 2014), may be further illustrated by considering certain ideas and assumptions in Freud's (1937) paper on constructions and contrasting them with those of Bion. Freud's paper, which presages a shift toward a more fully intersubjective view of the analytic process and relationship (Levine 2011, 2015b), nevertheless still, for the most part, implies that the aim of construction is the positing of actual but unremembered

childhood experiences—i.e., construction attempts to get at the “truth” or probability (Collins 2011) of what actually happened as event, wish, or fantasy.

The potential problems of suggestion and compliance that this might entail are, in my view, too easily dismissed. Freud’s archetype of construction continues to center around the “truth” of what “really” happened in a form that is similar to his interpretation of the dream of the Wolf Man (Freud 1918). In contrast, Bion’s writings offer a subtle but profound shift in relation to the fundamental questions of psychoanalytic epistemology. Bion’s (1970) focus upon O, ultimate reality, its distinction from K, that part of our reality that is knowable, and his introduction of the terms *becoming* and *at-one-ment* serve in some sense as replacements for the analyst’s *insight into*, *understanding*, *realizing*, and other forms of *knowing* and *knowing about* the factual truth of real events, concrete and psychic.

Bion’s terms imply a change of existential state on the part of the mind of the analyst that is promoted and made possible by the analyst’s reverie.⁷ It is the latter that enables the analyst to be open to and to absorb the patient’s projections, allowing these projections to “sojourn” (Bion 1958, p. 146) within the psyche and personhood of the analyst long enough for them to be worked upon by the analyst’s alpha function and transformed into something that can be either *thought with* or *thought about* by the analyst. This transformed something can then become the basis for an alteration or shift in the analyst’s listening stance, style, tempo, pace, or other quality of intervention, or of a more saturated and specific interpretation based not on the analyst’s “knowing the truth” about the patient, the analytic situation, or the analytic relationship, but rather on what the analyst may *believe* to be the truth at that particular moment. Hence, the paradox—of (ill) timing and *après coup*—that a factually correct intervention may interrupt analytic process and psychic growth, while a well-meaning but incorrect (false) interpretation may lead to a new experience or new thought that opens the mind to true discovery.

⁷ The Botellas’ (2013) description of *regredience* provides a similar view within a different, but I believe analogous, conceptual model.

While these formulations have been found by many analysts to be clinically useful, particularly in the treatment of non-neurotic patients and areas of the mind (e.g., Botella [2014]; Botella and Botella [2005, 2013]; Ferro [2002, 2015]; see also Levine 2012, 2015b), they also preclude certainty as to what is true or where that truth lies, thereby returning the issues of compliance and suggestion to the forefront of analytic concern.

Although Freud never used the word *intersubjectivity*, I believe that a dawning recognition of the inherently intersubjective nature of the analytic enterprise was a truth that ultimately came to haunt Freud, and that this explains his repeatedly returning to the question of suggestion and compliance after 1920.⁸ His 1937 paper on constructions contained the seeds of the assertion that it was not only what was true (uncovered from hiding) that counted in analysis, but also *what came forth and was created and co-created in the analytic situation for the very first time, which could also prove to be decisive*. This tilt toward the importance of and reliance on *de novo construction* rather than discovery valorizes *emergent truth*, exposing the subjective and intersubjective roots of many successful analytic treatments. And subsequent experience with more severely disturbed patients, leading to formulations concerning the less verbalizably structured, non-neurotic portions of the mind, have only further underlined their importance.

From this perspective, the challenge for the patient is not simply to remember what is unacceptable, terrifying, or painful, but also to appropriate and assimilate the sources of that terror or pain to one's sense of self in the service of psychic growth. Roussillon (2011) described this eloquently, noting that an important implication of Freud's structural theory is that:

The work of analysis has to take into account the conditions and preconditions under which meaning can be brought forth and become conscious Meaning, therefore, is no longer always there, hidden somewhere in some corner of the analysand's unconscious. It will gradually be produced within the psycho-

⁸ See Roussillon (2011) for a discussion of suggestion, compliance, and intersubjectivity in Freud.

analytic process itself and with the—often active—help of the analyst. Meaning, therefore, is more produced than revealed; by the same token, it is inevitably more relative than a truth that has been placed somewhere awaiting revelation; it is more polysemous. Interpretation and hermeneutics make way for the work of construction or of reconstruction of meaning and of psychic impulses; associative or symbol-making generative capacity replaces the quest for truth. [p. 53]

In the context of our present discussion, I would take Roussillon's conclusion even further by pointing out that the singular quest for an unchanging, interpretive truth of yesterday has been broadened to include the creation and co-creation of the emergent truth of today—and even tomorrow's truths, which may not yet have come into being (cf. Picasso and Stein).

To put the matter in still another way, the "factual truth" of an analyst's intervention may be necessary, but may not in itself prove sufficient to effect a necessary or desired transformation in the patient's psychic state or development. The goal of that intervention, should such goals prove necessary, might be stated as twofold: "to say something that feels both true to the emotional experience of any given moment of an analytic session, and that is utilizable by the analytic pair for psychological work" (Ogden 2003, p. 593).

It is the processual, potentially transformative dimension to the patient's encounter with and recognition of truth, uncovered or created, upon which the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis often stands. As Bion (1967) noted: "In any session, evolution takes place. Out of the darkness and formlessness something evolves . . . This evolution is what the analyst must be ready to interpret" (p. 18). And that interpretation, in turn, will produce further evolution, *ad infinitum*.

Is it, then, the process and what it gives rise to that are of importance, beyond the static moment of any statement's factuality? How often do we find that an interpretation an analyst offers because he or she believes it to be true, and that the patient feels is not correct, turns out to be useful because it helps the patient feel or see something, or put

something into words, that the patient then deems to be true but had not quite noticed or articulated before?

This change in the orientation and understanding of therapeutic action and analytic process has also altered and deepened our understanding of interpretation, which no longer has an exclusive emphasis on uncovering or decoding. Just as Freud has helped move the goals of analysis from “making the unconscious conscious” to “where id was there ego shall be,” Bion, Ferro, and others have led us even further to create the conscious and the unconscious from the formless void of the unrepresented. Thus, Capello (2015) has written:

An interpretation can be said to work well not insofar as it discloses a hidden ultimate truth about the patient, but insofar as it can be used by the latter as a tool to build a more sustainably multilayered point of view on his reality (internal and external); a point of view, in other words, that allows him to create new, more meaningful stories—stories that do not merely reflect a rational or operational way of thinking, but which resonate with emotions in relation to which the patient can increasingly afford to feel more alive without the need to split them off or deaden himself to them. [p. 472]

In regard to truth and the analytic process, an emergent truth may sometimes take precedence over a hidden, unnoticed, or forgotten “fact.” It is for this reason that Green cautioned that sometimes questions of vitality—which in our current context may relate to the truth of what has occurred but has not yet been experienced (Winnicott 1974), or even what has not yet occurred—must preempt those of “factual truth” of the moment. Green wrote:

Sometimes, paradoxically, it will be less damaging to the process to allow a lively countertransference reaction to be expressed, even if negative, in order to gain access to the internal movements animating the analyst. These are all evidence of . . . spontaneity . . . having more value for the patient than a conventional pseudo-tolerant discourse which will be experienced by the patient as artificial and governed by technical manuals. [2005, p. 35]

(IN)CONCLUSION

Bion (1962) asserted that: “In psycho-analytic methodology the criteria cannot be whether a particular usage is right or wrong, meaningful or verifiable, but whether it does or does not promote development” (p. ix).

In one of his Tavistock Seminars, when he was asked if there was a psychoanalytic way to the truth, Bion replied, “None whatever.” And he cautioned that:

Psychoanalysis is only a technical instrument, something we can make use of for any purpose we want—to make confusion worse confounded, or to mislead or deceive people, and so on The profound question . . . is the problem of whether the person who is searching for the truth is genuinely trying to arrive at the truth, or is a fake, an artificial representation of a seeker after truth. It is a very difficult question to answer. [Bion 2005, p. 87]

In his tenth São Paulo lecture, Bion (1980) reminded us that:

It is questionable whether any patient ever comes to a psychoanalyst unless they feel the situation is desperate; it is usually a last resort when everything else has failed. So in spite of appearances to the contrary the whole weight of the experience when a patient comes to an analyst suggests that the patient himself feels that he needs a powerful injection of truth even though he may not like it. [p. 126]

Reflecting on our innate discomfort and even hatred of any reminders of our own ignorance, and how little of the truth of life any of us may truly come to know, Bion (1976) seemed to question the entire enterprise of psychoanalysis when he mused: “What if the whole of psychoanalysis turned out to be one vast elaboration of a paramnesia, something intended to fill the gap—the gap of our frightful ignorance?” (p. 244).

Is the whole—or large portions—of psychoanalytic thinking merely a bedtime story for analysts and their patients, and, like all bedtime stories, is it meant to calm and reassure us in the transition from one psychic state to another? For children, it is the separation and aloneness of

the transition from wakefulness to sleep. For analysts, it is the transition from consensually verifiable social reality to the psychic reality of the analytic process; from K to O; from separation of self and object to intersubjectivity; from the wakefulness of negotiating the “real world” (so called) to the oneiric state of free-floating attention and reverie without memory and desire.

Where, then, does all this leave us in regard to the question of truth and psychoanalysis? I myself feel left with the dizzying perspective of standing upon oscillating, ever-shifting ground. And yet, it *is* the ground upon which I believe, as analysts, that we must stand. As Bion (1979) put it, all that analysis can ever do is make the best of a bad job. We have no recourse other than doing what we can, with the means that we have, in the situation that we find ourselves. And so we go on

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