

Gelassenheit, from Three Points of View



*I said to my soul, be still and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing*

TS Elliot

East Coker, from the Four Quartets

I. An introduction to Bion

Bion starts with the phenomenology of the clinical situation, a focus on the inner processes of the mind (Symington and Symington, 1996)). He assumes two principles: the emergence of truth and the process of mental growth (Bion, 1962, 1965, 1989). What Freud calls impression of objects, Bion calls β -elements. While for Freud, these objects are a form of thought, for Bion β -elements are the matrix from which thoughts can arise. They are undigested facts, things in themselves, the raw material of thinking but not thinking itself. They are nameless sensations which are devoid of meaning or coherence. β -elements can be stored but are only suitable for evacuation by projection or through acting out. For use in thought, β -elements must be transformed by α -function into α -elements. α -elements are comprised of visual, auditory and other sensory patterns that are now available for dreaming and unconscious waking thought; Ferro (2005) calls these visual pictograms. Only with α -elements can a sense of subjectivity develop. Dreaming, for Bion, is a form of psychoanalytic work (Ogden, 2004b), in which pre-conscious thoughts are pressing toward awareness. Dreaming allows the undigested facts of experience to become unconscious. Further integration with reality is necessary for the unconscious α -elements to become conscious. Ferro (2005) believes that α -elements can be gradually transformed into narrative derivatives, what he and Bion call the waking dream. The narratives can take many pathways: transference, a sleeping dream, a memory, the outside world. To develop narratives, the person must have the ability to withstand paranoia and have the capacity to mourn. Bion has a constructionivist view of thinking; the mind constructs thoughts and perceptions out of unformed and incoherent sensory elements.



For Bion (1995), the mind starts out in catastrophe. Mental space cannot be represented, leaving an immensity that is accompanied by violent and psychotic fear. What is left are fragments and debris. Communication is impossible. The self is born and evolves in a state of catas-

trophe (Eigen, 1985). There is a free-floating fundamental sense of dread at the ground of our lives (Bion, 1957). The only link possible with the analyst is projective identification because β -elements can only be evacuated by projection (Bion, 1959). Attacks on α -function, from envy or hate, destroy the person's ability to make contact with himself or others. The self and objects become inanimate, lifeless, dead. The need for love is deflected and turn into overwhelming greed. He feels a dependence on material comfort but, as he experiences objects as lifeless, they are of little use.

For Bion (1965) (Ogden, 2004b), the container is the capacity for unconscious psychological work, while the contained are those thoughts that have been processed out of the undigested facts. In the concept of container and contained, the infant projects β -elements into the containing mother, who at first provides the α -function to transform the contained β -elements into α -elements and feed them back to the baby at an appropriate moment. The mother must be in a state of reverie, a dreamlike state, in order to contain the infant's β -elements. Over time, the infant can acquire his mother's α -function and perform his own transformations. The capacity for α -function makes possible the development of thinking and the possibility of thoughts. If the mother cannot process the infant's β -elements and returns them to the infant, they are experienced as a "nameless dread" (Bion, 1962). The container may drain life from the infant's experiences and return dead objects (Ogden, 2004b). Or the infant may experience the contained experiences as overwhelming the containing mother.

Many analyses, while they accumulated knowledge of the unconscious workings of the patient, do not achieve any real growth in the personality. Bion emphasizes that growth means a real change in object relations, not just knowledge about oneself. This is a central problem for psychoanalysis. For Bion, this clinical question contains a contradiction. The most vital and basic experiences of the patient are pre-verbal, contained in β elements or what Bion later called the no-thing. β elements are fragments of hate and terror. However, these pre-verbal elements are never available to consciousness. How, then, can the analyst understand what is not available to him in words and not even available to the patient? How can the analyst communicate interpretations to the patient when the analyst is addressing experience that the patient can never be aware of? How can the analyst determine which of the patient's words are authentic transformations and which are saturated and deaden authentic meaning? I think we can posit two basic modes of therapeutic action, that of interpretation and that of transformation. I will be concentrating on transformation.

This account of elements and functions is taken from what Ogden (2004a) calls early Bion, up to and including *Learning from Experience* (1962), where he does not depart significantly from Klein. Only in the later papers (Bion, 1995) does he move beyond Kleinian theory (Symington and Symington, 1996))

II. Bion and Mysticism

Bion was born in India in 1897 of British parents where he lived for his first 8 years before being sent to school in England, never to return to India (Symington and Symington, 1996). He retained a “passionate interest” (Bléandonu, 1994) in India throughout his life. As an adult, Bion was familiar with the Baghavad-Gita and other philosophical works of India. They reminded him of the stories told to him as a child. Within Christian mysticism, Bion was particularly interested in Meister Eckhart.

Starting with *Transformations* (1965) and more fully in *Attention and Interpretation* (1995), Bion recasts his theory of α and β -elements into a contrast between K, O and F. He speaks of Eckhart’s concept of the Godhead, which he compares to the dark and formless state of O. Out of the Godhead, through the transformation of K, comes an object of knowledge, the Trinity. Bion defines O as: “I shall use the sign O to denote that which is the ultimate reality represented by terms such as ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself. O does not fall into the domain of knowledge or learning save incidentally; it can be ‘become’, but it cannot be ‘known’. It is darkness and formless but it can enter the domain K when it has evolved to a point where it can be known” (Bion, 1995, p.26). When Bion states that O is Ultimate Reality or Absolute Truth, he means something akin to Plato’s ideal forms, which act as potentials or absolutes. They do not exist in nature. Bion does think of O as a transcendental term. Why did Bion find it necessary to invent a new language that cannot be defined precisely and has its roots in philosophical and mystical traditions, rather than the scientific? It is not that he repudiated his previous theories. The theory of the development of thought remains unchanged and fully incorporated into the new terminology.

O as a dynamic system is distinct from the knowledge or K system. O precedes and anchors the K system. O, then, denotes the mental space of an unconscious of formless elements of experience, distinct from conscious and unconscious knowledge. O is the unforeseen emergence of the unsymbolizable, unknowable, and inexpressible into the realm of knowing (Ogden, 2004). O is found in the present moment and in the particular experience. We can best think of O as the particular experience of the analytic pair at any one moment, both the patient’s experience of O and the analyst’s experience of O. Only the transformations of O are available to the patient and analyst to work on.

The presence of O is terrifying. For Bion (1995), the mind starts out in catastrophe. Mental space cannot be represented, leaving an immensity that is accompanied by violent and psychotic fear. What is left are fragments and debris drifting in a vast space or time. Communication is impossible. The self is born and evolves in a state of catastrophe (Eigen, 1985). There is a free-floating fundamental sense of dread at the ground of our lives (Bion, 1957). Grotstein (2007) suggests that O captures more of the traumatic self, the nameless dread and the ‘black holes’ than either the Freudian emphasis on infantile sexuality or the Kleinian emphasis on infantile hate. Working in K is appropriate for neurotic level conflicts but, for Bion, this is never sufficient. A nameless trauma is coded in O that inhibits real moves toward growth unless it can be

addressed directly. In this schema, the paranoid-schizoid position forms as a reaction to O, to contain and process O. A personal persecutor is an improvement over the nameless dread.

O, then, denotes a non-symbolic, sensorimotor dynamic system of emotional meanings that is distinct from the K system. Bion (1965) states that the analyst must both have an ability for intuitive capacity in the O system and have a grasp of the facts of the analytic experience in the K system. For Bion, the relevant requisite knowledge is the basic Kleinian theory but any coherent psychoanalytic theory would be sufficient.

To understand the transformation of O into K, the analyst must have faith (F) (Bion, 1995). “The ‘act of faith’ (F) depends on disciplined denial of memory and desire.” (Bion, 1995, p. 41) Faith, for Bion, is decidedly not a religious term. He means rather a discipline. F belongs to the O system. It is a faith in the existence of O, faith that O can emerge as a selected fact if one waits and is open to O, faith that the experience of living in a void is creative and sustaining, faith in the unknown, faith in the presence of terrible, hopeless trauma and pain. It is faith in the preservation of the good objects, even in their physical absence. It is faith that the good breast will arrive. In faith, the analyst has the discipline to wait for the evolution of O.

Yet the analyst cannot work only in K. To do so would blind the analyst to O. The analyst wants to achieve a state of receptiveness to O. Working in O means putting K aside and aiming for a direct perception of knowledge, Elliot’s ‘wait without thought’. Bion wants us to refrain from thinking and arrive at an intuition of the object relations of the patient

. How then is the analyst to work in this receptive mode? Bion notes that Freud listened at the level of conception and pre-conception. Bion would say that this is working in K, already partially saturated. Bion would want us to work at a level before pre-conception and conception. This is the famous dictum of Bion, to listen without memory or desire. He later added that we should also listen without understanding. Memory, desire and understanding saturate the mind and prevent the intuition of O. Memory and desire are equated with possession and a predetermined direction. For Bion, both memory and desire represent an anxious driven use of the mind that interferes with receptivity by a clinging to security, to what is known. Memory and desire in the analyst become a counterresistance, a defensive maneuver in the analyst when the patient’s emotional state cannot be tolerated. The analyst attempts to work in a zero state of mental expectation (Grotstein, 2007).

According to Bion, the first task of the analyst is not to listen to sensuous content. Sensuous content is associated with knowledge (K) and the pain-pleasure principle. O cannot be perceived by the senses. You can know something through the senses but not see it directly. Mental reality can only be apprehended directly. Preoccupation with sense makes perception of elements without sense difficult. Sensory perception leads to sensuous greed and possessiveness, becoming another counterresistance.

I think that the mystical elements in Bion's later writings have been underappreciated by most modern commentators of Bion. Many Kleinians and commentators on Bion have ignored this aspect of Bion as unimportant, misguided or even dismissed as crackpot. It is true that his writings became more ambiguous and evocative, speaking in aphorisms and metaphor. I will argue in this paper that mystical thinking played a key role in his conception of his most radical and innovative thinking, that of pre-verbal elements in thinking and the container/contained. His dictum, without memory or desire, cannot be appreciated fully without knowing of its mystical origin. I will further argue that we can understand O without invoking transcendental language.

Meister Eckhart (1260-1329)
Joined the Dominicans age 15
Prior of the Dominicans in Erfurt
Study in Paris twice – chair in theology
1303 – Provincial of the Dominican province of Saxonia
1313 – Vicar-general in Strasburg
1323 – Cologne
1326 – charged with heresy by the Arch-bishop of Cologne
1329 – Died before his condemnation by the Pope



III. Meister Eckhart

There was a great flowering of mysticism in fourteenth century Germany. It followed the apophatic or via negativa form of mystical experience. The apophatic believes that there is a radical gap between the divine and human. To approach the divine, one must empty the mind of all thought and enter into a cloud of unknowing (Meissner, 2005). In the cloud of unknowing, one knows nothing and feels nothing, rejecting all clear ideas. One must be at home in the darkness. The cloud of unknowing comes from the cloud of forgetting, including all awareness, memory, attachment to things or persons. Only love and desire stripped of all knowledge can penetrate the cloud to unite with God.

Meister Eckhart was a late 13th century Dominican friar and mystic. He was steeped in the medieval philosophy of Aquinas, which he used as a springboard to write about the mystical experience



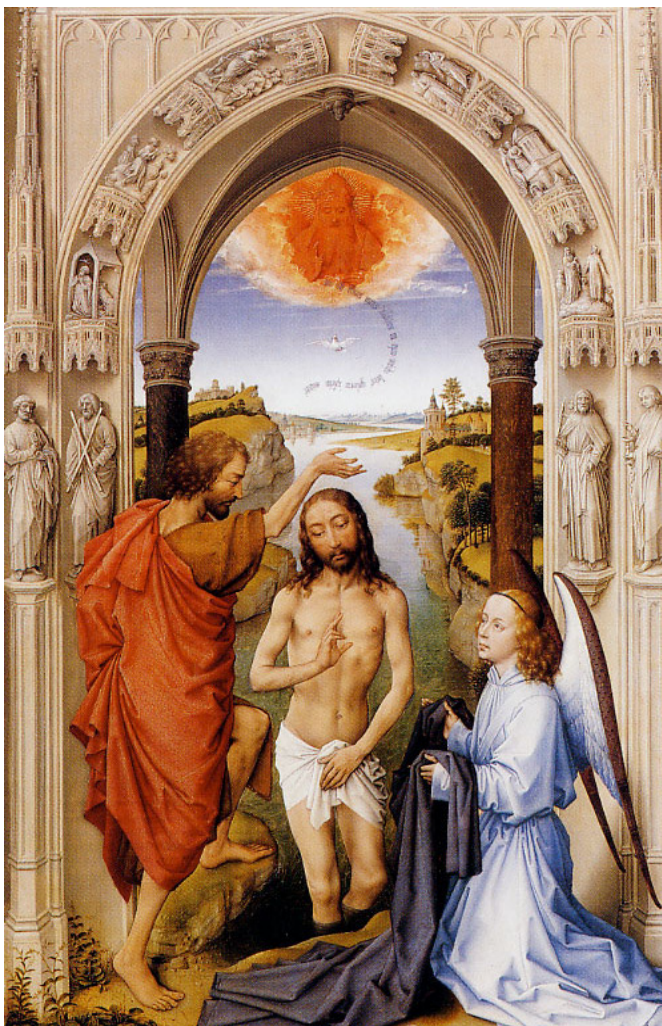
The rose is without why; it blooms because it blooms;
It cares not for itself, asks not if it's seen.

-Angelus Silesius (Book One, 289)

Pseudonym of Johannes Scheffler (1624-1677), a German mystic who converted to Roman Catholicism. His poetry, written as epigrams expressed the late medieval German mystical tradition. The poem is from *The Cherubic Wanderer* (1986).

What is being put into verse here is the thinking of Meister Eckhart and the German medieval mystics (Caputo, 1978, Eckhart, 1958). Eckhart states: life...would only say, "I live so that I may live." This is because life lives out of its own ground and springs from its own source, and so it lives without asking why it is itself living." (Sermon 5b) . For Eckhart, there is a formal opposition between God and his creations. We, as his creatures, possess nothing in ourselves and can possess our being only in participation in the divine essence. God is simultaneously immanent, that is, totally available to creatures, and transcendent, beyond existence.

To understand the question of “without why”, I want to explore two concepts of Eckhart, which are keys to his mysticism and will later be picked up and reinterpreted by Heidegger. In the mystical union with God, there are two separate movements. The first movement is the *via negativa*, characterized by detachment and letting-be. Eckhart distinguishes between the outer and the inner man. The outer man may remain involved in the world, receptive to the five senses but the inner man, the soul, is fully removed from material life, from the world and the self. The inward man is the seat of “immovable detachment”. This is a split between outward man, who may be “undergoing trials” (p. 167) while the inward man can practice detachment. The detached heart does not ask for anything or have anything it would like to get rid of. In the state of nothingness or emptiness, Eckhart sees the soul in a state of readiness and receptivity, “it must aim at a pure nothing...in this there is the greatest receptivity” (p. 168). The way to God is the way of detachment. Detachment makes the soul receptive only of God because it is free of all other creatures. The soul lives without why; it has no will and does not act. It only exists.



Eckhart defines detachment (*abgeschiedenheit*) as the state of having cut off one’s affection from everything created, “free from all creatures” (p. 160). By creatures, Eckhart means all attachments and relationships, all emotional needs or fears, even all internal objects. It is the state of being “untroubled” (p. 160). Detachment does “not wish for this or that...detachment wishes to be nothing” (p. 163). It is an inner state of emptiness or a vacuum. Letting-be expresses the soul’s attitude toward detachment. For Eckhart, God is completely without why; there is no external cause or aim for his being. This is the model for the soul, to also live without cause or aim. What is found is a hidden ground of the soul, where there is no time or space, but an eternal now. Eckhart speaks of the hidden ground of the soul processing a ‘little spark’, a small share in divine Reason. It is in this place, this clearing, where God and the soul can meet.

In the second positive movement, God the Father wells up and spills over into the Son and then into

the heart of the detached soul. God's will takes over the will of the soul. Eckhart speaks of the detached soul forcing or drawing God to love the soul. In this sense, God must fill the empty place. We must simultaneously be the virgin, perfectly detached, free of all alien images, and the wife, married and fruitful with God (sermon 2). Eckhart calls the act of God entering into the soul, the birth of the Son. The Father bears his Son in the soul. "as he gives birth to his Only-Begotten Son into me, so I give him birth again into the Father" (Sermon 22) It is the way of speaking his Word, a silent and hidden language. The soul is released in God's indwelling presence. "When the soul comes to this she loses her name and God draws her into Himself, so that she becomes nothing in herself" (p. 169). When the soul is perfectly silent and empty of objects, then God can speak in it. For Eckhart, the soul has a passionate relationship to God. This is the *unio mystica*, where the distinction between the soul and God is overcome, a nameless unity.



Martin Heidegger

Born Sept. 26, 1889

**Early study of theology at University of Freiburg
1909-11**

Switched to philosophy, graduated in 1916.

Married 1917. Had an affair with Hannah Arendt.

**Worked as an assistant to Edmund Husserl until
1923.**

Professor at University of Marburg 1923-28

**Successor to Husserl at University of Freiburg
1928-1951**

**Elected Rector of the University and embraced
National Socialism.**

**Resigned as Rector 1934 after opposition by the
faculty.**

Died May 26, 1976

III. Martin Heidegger

I would consider Martin Heidegger the greatest philosopher of the 20th century and one of the most controversial, especially his slide into National Socialism and his betrayal of Jewish colleagues.

For Heidegger, there is a radical difference from Eckhart. For Heidegger, there is no divine consolation. He is transforming Eckhart's mystical-theological orientation into a phenomenological-historical orientation, where truth is no longer absolute. Each historical age fixes its own vocabulary about what is truth.

In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger contrasts fear and anxiety. Fear reveals Dasein as endangered and abandoned, thrown into the world (341-2). Fear causes bewilderment and forgetting, a closing off of awareness of thrownness. "Fear is anxiety that is fallen on the 'world', inauthentic and concealed from itself as anxiety" (189). In



Martin Heidegger



anxiety, we find everything ‘uncanny’ and not-at-home. Anxiety rips us away from the familiar and exposes the bare world. For Heidegger, it is anxiety that opens up the terror of the abyss. Dread reveals ‘Nothing’ (343). Heidegger describes a mixture of slipping away and a retreating from things in the face of anxiety, what he calls falling. The self is annihilated. “Anxiety is anxious in the face of the ‘nothing’ of the world.” (343) Yet at the same time, “Nothing’ crowds in on us in dread; we are drawn to and fixated upon the same things we retreat from. In this way, things stand out to us in a special way.

Only when Nothing is revealed to us is it possible to see the ‘utter strangeness’ of what-is. In the experience of Nothing, we awaken and wonder; it is a freeing from idols, a swing into the ground of creativity. Against the background of Nothing, things stand out in the world as they really are. Dread implies an intense desire to be in-the-world. This type of dread can only be felt by the courageous, those who do not drown themselves in action and denial. The mixture of dread and letting-be can best be captured in a sense of awe, a calmness in the face of the abyss of a primordial truth.

The moment of transformation from inauthentic falling to authentic resoluteness comes in the blink of an eye (Augenblick). It is a sudden and total switch. The form of the world



does not change but only my absorbed and involved activity. As Heidegger says, “to encounter for the first time” (388). As opposed to the forgetting in fear, there is a special kind of forgetting in involvement (354). In the moment of vision, time is stretched along to encompass the historical constancy of the self (463) and disclose the There as a Situation.

In this sense, Dasein can take its time and lose it.



Heidegger's essay, *Discourse on Thinking* (1966) is framed as a conversation among a scholar, teacher and scientist on a country path at night far from human habitation. The path symbolizes a going toward an unknown destination. The night sky, beyond the known horizon represent what is so far yet so near, what Heidegger calls moving-into-nearness.

In this essay, Heidegger takes up directly *gelassenheit* from Eckhart, which here is translated as releasement. Heidegger divides thinking into two categories, calculative thinking and meditative thinking. Calculative thinking is our ordinary realistic and scientific thinking that involves intentions and purpose. To think is to will and to will is to think. It is a waiting for, involving desires, goals, needs. It is a thinking that constructs objects. Objects are re-presented as internalized objects. Calculative thinking is ever present; it can be used defensively as a negation of thinking. However, calculating thinking does not take into account the incalculable. But calculative thinking, however useful and necessary, is also a flight from thinking, a flight from meaning. Man has lost his rootedness, his connection to place. Technology provides an illusionary connectedness. Technology chains and drags down meaning in man's life.

There is another kind of thoughtlessness, letting thoughts lie fallow. In letting his ground lie fallow, the farmer will bide his time to see if his seeds will grow and ripen. This is characteristic of meditative thinking. The aim is to stand outside technology and understand man's essential nature, what Heidegger calls Being. Meditative thinking is a discipline that must be learned and practiced, a craft. It is characterized by simply waiting, without forcing and without willing. We do not look, we wait, not expecting, for content to emerge, to meet us. It is not something above or beyond; it is what lies close to us, what concerns us in our here and now. For Heidegger, meditative thinking could be the basis for a new synthesis between meaning and technology.

Meditative thinking is characterized by releasement (*gelassenheit*). Heidegger wants to subvert the ego and the subject-object dichotomy. He wants to overcome the desire to impose catego-

ries, to find a “thinking which is not willing” (p. 60). Ordinarily, we live in a space bounded by a horizon, the world of known objects and thoughts. For Heidegger, releasement means calmness, composure, and detachment. He sees this as the antithesis of technology. “We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something that does not affect our inner and real core” (p. 54). In a negative movement (similar to Eckhart), it is a releasement from intention, from willing, a ‘loosening’ from conceptual thinking. It must resist the temptation to explain Being. Heidegger calls this a clearing within dasein. Then, in the positive move, *gellassenheit* is a releasement toward things, a serene openness toward a field within which contains things. It is a region beyond the ordinary horizon of consciousness where the unexpected comes to meet us. This is an openness for the mystery or a disinterested reflection. It lies beyond the distinction between activity and passivity and remains suspended between the two. Things that appear no longer have the character of objects. It is a sort of waiting, but not expecting and not waiting for anything in particular. It is a keeping oneself open without having anything particular in mind. It aims to find the meaning that reigns in everything, a spontaneity, a truth that is independent of man. *Gelassenheit* is the attempt to keep the open open, in the face of the mechanization of man. We cannot will to relax and yet we cannot get there by doing nothing. It is an intense attentive waiting. Heidegger states: “in it openness is halted and held, letting everything merge in its own resting.” (p. 66). These metaphors imply a radical intimacy, merging and holding, a radical taking in and a radical sense of fullness and peace. It is a kind of gift. The categories of calculative and meditative thinking appear to me to be a reworking of the inauthentic-authentic dichotomy in Being and Time.

Caputo (1978) describes the relationship in Eckhart between God and the soul as similar to the relationship between Being and dasein but the content is different.

Dōgen Kigen (1200-1253)

Ordained a monk at Mt. Hiei in Kyoto

Travel in China 1223-27

Studied with Chinese Zen Master Nyojō and became enlightened

Shōbōgenzō (Treasury of the Correct Dharma-eye) – first philosophical work in Japanese

Founder of Japanese Sōtō Zen Buddhism

Shikantaza – nothing but sitting

IV. Dogen Kigen

From the eastern philosophical tradition, I will cite Zen Buddhism, which I am more familiar with, than the Indian philosophy familiar to Bion.

Gelassenheit is similar to the Stoic term, apatheia, freedom from strong and turbulent emotions. The Taoist equivalent of releasement is wu wei (non-interference). It can be translated as composure or detachment. A central component of Zen Buddhism is the belief that reality is the “suchness” of nature, “just as it is”, apart from any particular thoughts about it.



Zen master Dogen Kigen (Dōgen, 1985, Kasulis, 1981) is a 13th century Buddhist monk who took the philosophy of Zen Buddhism from China to Japan. I find it fascinating that Eckhart and Dogen are roughly contemporary yet worked in parallel traditions that had no contact with each other.

Dōgen divided mental activity into three components:

1. Thinking includes all the acts of consciousness, always involving intentionality. It may be emotional, judgmental, affirming, believing, remembering, etc. We cannot deny thinking; if you had no thoughts, you would not be alive.
2. Not-thinking is the cutting off of consciousness. It is a negating or denying attitude, a blanking out one's mind, repression. Both these states are familiar to Western minds.
3. Without-thinking is beyond thinking and not-thinking. It is a form of emptiness, a more basic mode of consciousness than thinking or not-thinking. It does not deny forms in real life, but does not cling to them or take them to be the only reality. It is self-reflective yet intensely involved with things. It sees not objects but things in a continuous web of life and existence.





I think we can clarify the meaning of nothingness by examining the Buddhist conception of nothingness. In the West, we usually equate nothingness with absence, an attribute of being (Wilson, 2006). Nothingness is then associated with terror. Buddhism would understand nothingness as a critique of language itself (Kasulis, 1981).

In this sense, nothing (the Chinese wu or the Japanese mu) can take on two related meanings. Words and other linguistic concepts are ultimately empty in terms of a full experience of reality. Language is bound by its own constructs and internal rules and cannot provide a true and necessary relationship to nonlinguistic reality. All distinctions in language are arbitrary concepts that actually obstruct what is experienced. There is an unbridgeable gap between the signifier and the signified. In this sense, every assertion, every interpretation both reveals and conceals. We cannot do without words, they exist as practical instru-

ments for everyday use. Yet words rigidify and obstruct the grasping of new and surprising meanings.

The second meaning of nothing comes from the Chinese Tao, meaning way or path. It refers to the undifferentiated source of all things. All reality is grounded in something more primordial than either Being or Non-being, form or no form. Emptiness is another way to speak of impermanence, the lack of any individual essence. It is a consequence of oneness, where all entities are aspects of a constantly changing, interdependent whole. In the East, the unconscious is timeless yet contains all time. The emphasis is on the transient, the glimpse of the passing moment, in contrast with the West's interest in transcendence, the disclosing of timelessness. The unconscious means to have no-mind in all circumstances. In the experience of emptiness or blankness, there is a constant attempt in the Western mind to fill it up, through thinking, speaking or acting (Van Dusen, 1958). Pathology in this sense is a reaction to the void, an attempt to fill it up with objects. The without-thinking of Dōgen is an attempt to keep the void

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open and receptive. Creative individuals deliberately use the void to find creative solutions to problems. When a person sleeps in the void, he stumbles on surprising new things. Non-being, here, is not the negation of being but a third term, a kind of undifferentiated matrix.



To what shall
I liken the world?
Moonlight, reflected
In dewdrops,
Shaken from a crane's bill
- Dōgen Kigen

‘Patience’ should be retained without ‘irritable reaching
after fact and reason’ until a pattern ‘evolves’
Bion (1995) p. 124.

“I mean Negative Capability [attributed to Shakespeare], that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”.
John Keats

V. A Technique of Transformation

Let us return to the position of listening without memory or desire or understanding in the clinical situation. I want to take seriously a theory of transformation, in which non-symbolized elements, what Bion calls beta elements, can be transformed into a form that can be thought. Bion is proposing a radical subjective move. It totally ignores the scientific attitude of causality, motivation or symbolization, which is seen as an interference in this seeing and is thus set aside. The analyst is then totally reliant on his or her own subjectivity as a means of listening. The discipline of the analyst is to clear or set aside his or her personal subjectivity, to be a pure receiver of the patient’s subjectivity. It is an attempt to grasp the lived experience of the patient, of asking about the what of things. The subjective side of truth is given priority.

The first move is the *via negativa* of Eckhart. I start an hour by deliberately putting aside what I consciously know about the patient, what the previous hour was like, my dynamic thinking, the patient’s history, technical approaches, etc. I want to have an empty mind without any desire to move in a particular direction or even to move at all. I want to feel receptive, both to my patient’s immediate communications and to my inner states, fantasies and affects. I want to have no prior understanding. It is important at this stage to put aside the question of why, of motivation, of connections. Asking why interferes with the direct perception of the intuitions. Patients often use why as a defense to avoid full immersion in the what of the phenomena. Perhaps analysts, even more, are prey to this temptation. The traumatic fears of death, violence and humiliation are easily dismissed or euphemized.

I empty myself and wait. It is this step that requires an active discipline. One has to deliberately cultivate this stance. I believe this is a meditative state of without-thinking, trying to avoid either over-thinking or not-thinking. Without-thinking is an attempt to move beyond linguistic categories by putting them aside as a category. It is Heidegger’s releasement from intention and willing. As Bion notes, it takes a bit of faith to wait in emptiness; there is the constant wish to fill up. We create a clearing within our being. I am often intensely aware of my own anxiety of not knowing and I feel its dread. I think Heidegger is stating a paradox when he finds the strangeness of what is in the face of dread. I try not to verbalize anything that is already known by my patient. I try not to say anything that springs from a theoretical understanding. If I can take a stance of contentment in waiting, I find that I can let go of my

will. It is truly letting thoughts lie fallow, to germinate when they will. I believe it is important not to have desires of the patient for progress, for speaking, for any particular content. Bion states that we must wait for the evolution of O, for O to meet K. By this he means that I wait until I have absorbed the O of the patient to the point that it reaches a level of understanding in me. That level of understanding often presents itself as an intuitive flash. Suddenly I see the patient's meaning in a radically new way, unexpected; now it makes sense.

This is also an attitude of detachment toward my countertransference. By seeing my countertransference non-defensively and reflectively, it actually brings my own reactions into sharper focus. I find that if I have no wish for the patient to progress or to respond, if indeed I have no attachment to failure or success, then I can identify more easily the subtle and ubiquitous enactments that we are drawn into. Since many of these enactments serve as unconscious resistances, intuition can often capture a way to speak about them. My counter-transference is still there, but I am freer to puzzle over my own reactions. If I find myself withdrawing or getting irritated, I can wonder about it and continue to wait, to see where my reactions will go.

It is not that there is no memory. It is rather a non-attachment to memory. If I am empty of conscious memory as I encounter my patient and let thoughts drift in and out, then any memory that does come to me is a product of the subjective interaction between my patient and myself.

The second move is the positive one of the unio mystica of Eckhart. In this mode of clearing, I want to be receptive to all communications from my patient. I am allowing my patient to pour into me. Like Eckhart, I believe my emptiness attracts the patient's transferences and projections. It is Heidegger's serene openness toward things. Without my own anticipations, it is much easier to see what the patient has remembered from previous hours and what she finds important. I am content to wait. In addition to the verbal flow, I am listening for the moment-to-moment state of the relationship between my patient and myself. Transference is understood, not so much as a repetition, but as a total experience (Joseph, 1985). By this is meant everything that the patient brings to the analysis. In the traditional understanding of transference, the patient's attitude toward the analyst is framed in verbal fantasy. As Joseph puts it, this part of transference is found in associations, in defensive systems, in conflict. There is another part of transference outside of verbal systems. Rather than "getting stuck on the individual associations" (p. 447), part of the transference is lived out in the relationship with the analyst. What we are dealing with are character structure and very early traumatic relationships. It is communicated by pressure on the analyst and a tendency toward fragmentation. What is important to grasp is how the transference is lived out in the moment to moment aspects of the session. I am interested in my reveries, metaphors that light up, images and sounds, a bit from a movie or book or song that comes to me. What I do is hold these images or thoughts until they coalesce into a new whole, a new understanding. Insight here is often grasped instantly and fully, in a glance of the eye. It is Athena springing out of the head of Zeus.

I want to suggest a trio of emotional stances that characterize this stance. The first is submission. Ghent (1990) discusses the difference between submission and surrender. Submission

means to be controlled and dominated by another. It is accompanied by violence and resignation and constitutes a conscious choice. Surrender, on the other hand, occurs in the presence of another but is not controlled and not voluntary. Ghent describes both a receptive surrender, an intense feeling of recognition and an active surrender, to penetrate and know the other. He sees these experiences as transcendent, as liberation, a breaking free of the ordinary, a finding of a true, silent, inviolable self, intensely alive. There is an inner drive to take in the truth, to perceive self and others as they really are, a giving up of the conventional view. My stance, thus, is one of surrender.

The second is ruthlessness. I mean it more as pitiless, unsparing, or merciless. I would follow Winnicott's (1945) use of the term. He postulated a stage of primitive ruthlessness when the infant can freely use the mother without concern for any consequences. In excited love, the infant can attack the mother's body and in quiet times, the infant can discard the mother. The ruthless self is the core of the true self. The analyst can be ruthless in his ability to see clearly, to have the confidence and freedom to point to conflict and trauma, no matter how painful it is. It is an attitude of not waiting, of going after difficult things. Ruthlessness comes from the clarity of vision in the meditative stance. To see clearly is to act clearly. My stance, thus, is one of ruthlessness.

The third is compassion. Compassion is often thought of as the opposite of ruthlessness. The idea of compassion in psychoanalysis has been colored by Freud's formulation of compassion as a reaction formation against sadism (Freud, 1915). I would define compassion as suffering together with another. It is not pity, not feeling sorry for, not the urge to care for. Dogen would hold, as is the tradition in Buddhism in general, that compassion itself is a part of the prereflective state. Compassion and intuitive wisdom are the same thing. He would hold that states of thinking or non-thinking can inhibit the awareness and performance of compassion. To enter the state of non-thinking, then, is to realize and release compassion toward the world of humans and non-humans. Compassion is open to the nature of the difficulty at hand, even when that difficulty stirs up hatred, envy, or shame. It is a compassion for human limitations. It is open to questioning, has a respect for interdependence, an acceptance of blind spots and uncertainty. Compassion can result in a deeply transcendent feeling of love and mutual care at the endpoint of an analysis. My stance, thus, is one of compassion.



I would like to finish with some questions that I think the intuitive approach generates. I would be interested in your thoughts about these questions and would be happy to expand on some of my thoughts as well.

1. The first question is academic. Is it legitimate to appropriate theological and philosophical insights into a psychological system? Meister Eckhart's mysticism is wholly orientated toward a relationship with God. Heidegger is speaking, at least in *Being And Time*, of transcendental concepts. I am using an ontic rather than ontological interpretation. Zen Buddhism is not transcendental and perhaps closer to my project. There is an active body of work of importing Buddhist concepts into psychoanalysis.
2. How can we reconcile the Western and Eastern view of nothingness? Bion sees terror and aggression at the beginning of development in pre-verbal states. Nothingness is fragmentation and dissociation. Heidegger sees dread and guilt as the primordial constituents of *Dasein*. We flee into the 'they' to escape these primordial fears of death and thrownness. Yet the Eastern view of nothingness is quite different. Nothingness is seen as the creative source of all phenomena. The dread comes from attachment to linguistic concepts. We are afraid to let go of what we know and seek the creative path.
3. Bion states clearly that his concept of O is non-sensory, that we must seek the non-sensory to be in contact with this pre-verbal world. This is consistent with a mystical concept of transcendence. Is this possible? Are there other alternatives? This question I have already attempted to answer.
4. Turning to the clinical, what is being advocated here in listening without memory or desire is a radical subjective move. Whatever evidence we can gather about the patient is found only in our own subjective experience. How, then, can we distinguish reliable information about our patient from our own subjectivity, our own transference to the patient? What prevents this from becoming a wild analysis? Can this radical subjectivity form a dialectic with a radical objectivity?
5. A similar question concerns interpretation. How do we know when to speak? Bion puts it thusly, when O meets K. As we listen to the patient, we can be aware of subjective reactions, our private reverie, memories, hypotheses in an ongoing stream of consciousness. How do we know that we have arrived at a point where we can say something to the patient that is timely and truthful?
6. How do we evaluate after an interpretation if it has been effective? Is it possible to remain in a subjective state and still evaluate the truth of an interpretation?
7. I would hold that this intuitive method is vitally important in a discovery phase of analysis but it cannot be the whole of analysis. How can we integrate these concepts with working through, with construction of narrative, with memories of the past?

8. Is this intuitive method equally useful with all psychoanalytic patients? After all, traditional methods of free association and resistance analysis work perfectly well with patients in the predominately neurotic area. Is this method more useful with patients operating at the schizoid-paranoid position? Bion suggests that everyone has a psychotic and non-verbal part of the mind.

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