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"Bion's Place in the Troika"

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BION'S PLACE IN THE TROIKA\*

J. O. Wisdom

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want first to express my very deep gratitude for the kind invitation you have given me. It's a very real gratitude for various reasons. First, there's the honour itself but perhaps even more than that, it is the opportunity of meeting again with some old friends whom I made and whose discussions I attended when I lived in Los Angeles for two years and whom indeed, I never expected to be able to see again, at any rate in this part of the world.

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I was somewhat puzzled to understand why you invited me - I hope it wasn't because somebody thought I was an expert on Bion. I'm sure there are many people here who know more about him and his work than I do; at any rate, be assured that I am not an expert on Bion. There are many features of Bion and his work that I want to comment on. His actual contributions are strange in their own way and I hope I shall be able to say why. I also want to try to bring out the interesting and almost unbelievable continuity that there is between Freud, then Melanie Klein, and then Bion, in fact with the whole world of psycho-analysis.

I think the first topic that I ought to take up is Bion himself. Now I didn't know him at all well - I met him, I believe on five occasions, of which two or perhaps three were more or less personal. The first one was at a party given by Mrs Betty Joseph when he was still a very young analyst and I had no idea of the great figure that he was and got very little impact from him when

\*Lecture given at the invitation of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society, 13 Oct. 1955

and the right to have it said that he has not written understandably; and I think it is only the best contributors that have that right. However, that may be, his sentences are lucid, and his books have an unusual merit - they are short.

I met Bion briefly at one of the lectures he gave in Los Angeles when I happened to be living here for a couple of years but that was an extremely brief moment in one of the breaks between talks. Perhaps I should mention that I was never aware of being 'in a presence'. The most important meeting I had with him was an occasion when he asked me to lunch in his south London house with his wife and himself. After lunch he took me into the garden (it was one of those rare summer days that turn up occasionally like the zero at Monte Carlo). We sat down and spent the whole afternoon talking. Tea came out in due course and we went on talking. I don't know what time I left but I suppose in decent time to let them have dinner. What we talked about I don't know, but he did say something that will interest everybody, though I don't unfortunately remember what the context was, as it is a something, naturally that requires a context. What he said was that it was difficult to know how to handle one's personal difficulties; it was really not feasible to go back into more analysis. One understood that he meant at his age and in his position as an established analyst, and that he rather thought the way to handle one's problems was through work, and I take it he meant in particular by writing. So I tend to assume that these numerous books of his were not only an attempt to deal with important psycho-analytic problems but were also some kind of self-analysis. Whether I should say this I don't know. I doubt if he would mind and I doubt if Mrs Francesca would mind. Incidentally, I don't know

how to refer to her. I have met her once, and I come from Edwardian days where one does not call people by their (what are called in the British Isles) Christian names on meeting them. In fact one used to know people for maybe ten or fifteen years before one got on to first name terms. Well, about Bion and Mrs Francesca (that is, or was, a Norwegian mode of address) I can mention a couple of things. In some context, again I don't know what, and I don't know where it was or how it came about (I suppose it may have been in that afternoon in the garden because I can think of no other), he mentioned that what he enjoyed most was to be with Francesca. He had an enormous regard for her, which I can best express in a somewhat different way by what I might call an 'omega' element. That's a new element to you I might have to explain in a paradoxical way. To a beautiful invitation I can say something of her reply, for she gave a memorial address to The British Society which was published in their Bulletin (unfortunately for private circulation only). In it she related how she had been working at the Tavistock clinic (well known to you, no doubt) and in the lift one day somebody said to her "Well, how do you find being engaged to a genius?" and up to that point she didn't appear to realise that Bion was something totally different from the rest of mankind; but the memorial address was very beautiful and produced. On this matter of genius, I would say that Bion did not think of himself as a genius, not that he didn't recognise genius at all, for after all, he did regard Freud as a genius, and various painters and so on, but I don't believe it ever occurred to him that that characterized himself. I look on Darwin, Maxwell, Marx, Freud, and Einstein as geniuses not only because of the tremendous new theories they put together but because in doing so each of them created a whole new weltanschauung. Bion had fine theories but I'm not sure about the weltanschauung.

### Some Contributions

Now I want to turn to his contributions. I think they were: groups, the psychology of the neonate, and alpha and beta elements. I want to say very little on his work on groups, although in my assessment it was perhaps his greatest contribution; one reason why I don't comment on it now is that it has been discussed here by Dr Ganzarain and also because I've more or less written myself out on the subject with the paper in Dr Grotstein's collection (Wisdom, 1981), and also one much more recently in the International Review of Psycho-Analysis (Wisdom, 1986). However, there is a remark that I would make about it - Bion brought the subject of groups into an altogether new domain of discussion - his discovery of the use of projective identification and intrajjective identification I think were crucial not only for his theory of groups but also for their application to psycho-analysis in general. The influence of his war experience as a young officer of 17, 18, 19 years of age in World War I was of inestimable importance both for his work with groups and also for his work with psychotics, and perhaps I may elaborate on that straight away. As you will know, many of you, he had terrible experiences as a tank commander in the First War, from the very first tank engagement that ever took place, after the Trojan Horse, I suppose. His experience of terror is more graphically brought out than by anybody else I know of (even Norman Mailer). But it fostered a superlative capacity to stay functional under stress; in other words, for Bion, what it meant to be brave was not to feel no fear, but to be able to operate and continue to do what one had to do, and, of course, give confidence to one's men, no matter how great the terror of the situation. Now, taking a group may not be terrifying in the

same way but it does place you - as I believe it placed him - in an equally uncomfortable situation, or nearly as bad, when he didn't know what it was all about; at any rate, I am convinced that at the beginning Bion did not know what group therapy was all about, and he had to face groups with the knowledge that he didn't know what it was about and also the knowledge that they would have it in for him if they found out he didn't know and wasn't able to do something <sup>positive</sup> for them. Another point I would like to make about groups is that according to Mrs Menzies Lyth (1981) in the volume I've mentioned, Bion treated a group as an entity in itself over and above the individuals that composed it. He explicitly disavows this somewhere (Bion, 1968), but I feel Mrs Menzies' view is nearer to his practice and I think it's rather an important line to pursue. A further point about groups is that it may well be, or at least this is a possibility, that group-analysis might supersede individual analysis. Apart from the fact that group-analysis does do incredible things, individual psycho-analysis is not a practical reality at all: given a population of 3 billion people, and say, one or two billion of them need analysis, say three times a week for a very short time like three years, how is this to be possible, and where are the analysts to be found? From the point of view of sheer numbers and time group-analysis is in a ~~very~~ <sup>very</sup> better position. I'm not suggesting there may not always be some sorts of things that group-analysis may not be able to cope with, but with lots and lots <sup>of</sup> ordinary, what one might call 'social relations disorders' group-analysis would seem to be therapy of choice.

I get the impression that Bion learnt more about projective identification from groups than he did from anywhere else and I have to acknowledge that the greater part of my knowledge of projective identification does in fact come from Bion on groups.

Before turning to his other main contributions, a few comments may be in order. It may easily puzzle some of his colleagues to know what were his contributions and why he is so highly rated, and why I have put him next after Melanie Klein, who is next after Freud. I don't think that Bion made all that number of new contributions that are specific, conceptual, and specifiable. One of his very curious abilities was his capacity for aphoristic-type comment. He could put something in a few words where most people would be unable to put the same thing even in paragraphs. This, I think, was part of his genius (may I say) in the handling of psychotics as well as in his writing. It may be what makes his writing telling though at the same time making it difficult. It is a peculiar personal characteristic. Bion was also blunt, though in a very benign way: in a rougher writer one would call his remarks scathing, say about mechanical interpretation, whether Freudian, Kleinian, or Bionian. He liked rocking the conservative boat.

To go on with Bion's experiences in World War I. He found himself a soldier not knowing how to be a soldier, bewildered, and having to remain calm and collected in the most appalling circumstances. The use to which I think he put this, although he must have had the capacity already in some degree, though I think the war experiences augmented it, seems to me to be able to handle psychotic

patients, really raving mad schizophrenics, and of course, not to be frightened in the process, even though he had very little idea at least to begin with, how to handle them; and to be able to sit back and listen helplessly. The other great contributing factor in handling schizophrenics as well as groups was his peculiar ability to tolerate his own ignorance. I think Bion knew the value of ignorance. It was a discovery that he made very early in life, I don't know exactly when, but at the latest by the War. I indeed, came to realise that ignorance was (if not exactly bliss), well it had its advantages. It meant that it was possible to learn something - if you are not ignorant you have nothing to learn. I dare say its merits could be put better than that, but there is at least that value in ignorance. Probably the most important thing is not to be taken aback by it - feeling humiliated and feeling that there is something totally wrong about it. We begin ignorantly as babies and it looks to me as if we carry that to the grave. Something that has impressed me personally is that very little has been achieved in the course of this present century, or at any rate since about 1930. This is a very odd thing in fields that had been so active up to then. If you feel ignorant before a group or before a psychotic the first essential is not to be afraid of it. While I'm sure Bion would agree with this he is also very strong on the opposite point that we are all frightened of knowledge; and so ignorance is the position of choice with most of us.

We are ambivalent about knowledge, as about most things. In everything Bion touched he was vividly aware of ambivalence and in this he was totally at one with Melanie Klein, every line of whose work, whether it was in relation to the

baby and breast or whatever, had to do with ambivalence; and ambivalence, as we all know, was the great discovery of Freud, in fact I have claimed somewhere (Wisdom, 1984) that it was the central discovery of his entire psychology. Not far removed from this is Freud's basic distinction between reality and fantasy and it's quite astonishing to read how often and how deeply Bion is imbued with Freud's distinction. When following Freud about such matters, superficially what he has to say does seem very different, just to have a very different kind of flavouring from what Freud has said, but on fundamentals like reality and fantasy he and Melanie Klein and Freud are all identical: that is to say, the aim is to bring the patient out of his fantasies about himself and the world into the reality about himself and the world.

#### Theory and Method

Bion regarded theory and method as of equal importance. The grid - this has been regarded by numbers of analysts as one of Bion's most important contributions. It amounted to adulation in some places. It is not my task

to speak about it because it had been dealt with by Dr Patterson, beyond pointing out that the grid is a technological rather than theoretical affair, even though it was an adaptation from Cartesian co-ordinates; it amounts to what I would call Bion's filing system. It underlines, however, that Bion's interest in both theoretical and practical components of psycho-analysis. While it has been the general procedure down the decades to concentrate on method or what is for some reason called 'technique' in the trade, theoretical interests have not loomed very large, to, I think, the detriment of the subject. Bion had real theoretical

interests but he tried to use theory to help him with his methods and he tried to use method and observation to help him with his theoretical improvisation.

One other practical aspect concerns Bion's incredible capacity for observation. Whether it was in a trench, in a tank, with a psychotic patient or in a picture gallery, his powers of observation were something I had never met with before. I don't think there is much more to say about them except to note the use to which he put his observations; and that, of course, does not mean what I have tilted against for a long time, namely the faulty idea that science is built on observations. Such observations do stimulate and set one problems and possibly orient one's mind in certain directions. I think Bion's power of observation developed because he observed so much that was puzzling, which he had no theory to explain, and which he refused to brush off.

It is Bion's power of observation that makes much of his work read as so very comic. He doesn't really make jokes and he doesn't set out to be funny, but as many of you will know, his biography <sup>(Bion, 1952)</sup> of the early years of his life is extraordinarily funny; when I was looking around to see if I could find something in it as an example to quote I couldn't find anything suitable. I think the comedy lies largely in observing something in an incongruous way, in an incongruous situation, which, of course, is related very closely to his own comments on himself. I can give one example of an observation which he made in the Jeux de Paumes of a picture of poppies - he said that looking at that picture would make you say "I never saw a field of poppies until now; now I know what it looks like". In that brief comment he told me more about aesthetics than almost anyone since Aristotle. He has told me what a great painter does and similarly what a great musician or whatever does, which is to show you what isn't there (though I suppose others knew that already). His power of observation (if you prefer, frustrated observation)

was paramount when analysing psychotics.

At the opposite pole from observation comes Bion's unusual interest in both philosophy and mathematics. In philosophy he makes a number of allusions to Kant's Ding an sich which he regarded as a reality of the world despite the fact that it is intrinsically unknowable. Bion does not seem to be interested in the fact that most philosophers have disavowed any interest in this concept. However, Bion's idea is that the effort to get into touch with the Ding an sich is a striving towards knowledge and one of the strivings of life itself. It seems to re-appear in his interest in mathematics. Perhaps he thought of them as the royal method to knowledge - true knowledge uncontaminated by fantasy. But there is an omission. Bion was well aware that parallel lines don't meet though they look as if they're getting closer and closer - railway lines look that way in the distance, so he thought about infinity. But something he overlooked altogether, and I think would have been grist to his mill - a very Kleinian mill - was the idea of the circular points at infinity - quite well known. Now the circular points have curious properties; they are circular with zero radius, they are at infinity, they are conjugate, that means that they form a kind of pair through the looking glass, and they are imaginary (what mathematicians call imaginary). They are designated by what are called imaginary numbers (or more usually complex numbers) of the form  $a + ib$  and  $a - ib$  (but we needn't worry about that). What surprises me is that Bion overlooked these two circular points because they are such two obvious symbols of the breast for the baby, which at times would be imaginary and at times equally distant and inaccessible and too small. Each would

be a Ding an sich that was inaccessible and about which nothing could be known or about which all striving was directed. I have on occasion asked a newly-become mother whether her baby preferred one breast or the other one; this would bear on real preferences and perhaps manifest fantasy. I had in mind Castor and Pollux, the heavenly twins - which, by the way, are not near to one another at all. The circular points of infinity are (or used to be) designated as I and J; I can recall that I preferred J.

In this connexion I'm also surprised that Bion gave little thought to the concept of infinity which is one of the great concepts in all mathematics. I once heard it said that there were six main great ideas in mathematics - well, if so, infinity is one of them, and from our point of view, I think the fascination of it, apart from the mathematical achievements connected with it, is that one doesn't know how to represent it from a psychological point of view. The notion came into existence among the Greeks, in particular Archimedes and was very much involved in Newton's attempts at producing the differential calculus, however unsuccessfully; but then it formed the basis of a great problem for the 19th century mathematicians <sup>Cauchy</sup> Carrotet and Weierstrass who solved the problem of infinity from the point of view of classical mathematics. And then in connexion with this, but also requiring infinity, there was the Greek Pythagorean difficulty over square roots which were irrational numbers, a problem that was also solved in the 19th century by Dedekind; and then other work was developed on infinity

by Cantor, and of course, Russell. But however successful these advances were in mathematics they don't help us to understand the notion of infinity at all psychologically. Since I have no solution beyond making the rather trite remark that the infinite container is inexhaustible I don't propose to go on with the subject, only registering my surprise that it did not exercise Bion so far as I know, and I think it should have done. I think he might have been able to say something good about it. At any rate, I put it to you as an unsolved problem. When you reflect upon it, may I just remind you of something that you might easily overlook: and that is that from an infinity of say, natural numbers, you can remove an infinity of natural numbers and what is left is an infinity of natural numbers. Now don't say that mathematicians have no imagination. If Professor Matt-Blanco<sup>e</sup> is around, I hope he will throw some light on the subject. <sup>White</sup> And on the subject of mathematical ideas that are not understandable in any ordinary sense, there is one I've already drawn attention to - the complex number. In its simplest form the square root of -1. (And you couldn't have electricity without it!) But what on earth is the unconscious source or equivalent of that? Professor Matt-Blanco<sup>e</sup> (1981) does say something about infinity; he says quite simply and briefly that it is what is outside understanding. This seems to me to state a difficulty rather than throw light on it. I think the theory of the unconscious ought to be able to accommodate infinity (which might cover irrational numbers) and the square root of negative numbers.

### The Psychology of the Neonate

It will have been noticed that Bion makes penetrating comments on all sorts of things; he doesn't always add them up. Let us see what happens if we assemble his war experience, projective and introjective identification, his handling of psychotics, the maturation of beta-elements and transformation-backwards. We can take many items from his war experience: being on your own, no supervisor, you have to do something, it is dangerous if you do it and it is dangerous if you don't, you may never know whether you've done the right thing or the wrong thing, like your mother you have to take whatever is slung at you. It seems to me a matter of indifference whether these remarks apply to the war in a tank or in the consulting room. Where Bion got his knowledge of projection identification (introjection was in Freud (1917) after all) I don't know. Presumably much of it from his analysis with Melanie Klein, but I suspect that much of it was self-taught as a result of uncomfortable feelings in himself which he could not account for but was inquisitive about.

Having learnt this mechanism Bion was able to conduct the most extraordinary conversations, at least verbal exchanges, with schizophrenics. One of the most novel ideas in that area was that of the patient's trying to annihilate the whole of his mental apparatus, his own and Bion's; from there also Bion learnt of the schizophrenic's terror of knowledge. Bion in his various discussions, not in any one place, seems to me to give a picture of the schizophrenic mind unequalled since Freud first gave his picture of the hysteric's mind.

So far as I can see, all this transforms totally into the baby's mind. Not only does Bion depict the paranoid-schizoid position before entering the depressive position, but he is depicting a state in the earliest weeks of the paranoid-schizoid position. In other words what he has discovered about schizophrenia is equivalent to a psychology of the new born.

In this area his work comes closest to that of Dr Clifford Scott, with which it needs to be connected. As put by Dr Scott (1980) in a paper you may not easily have come across, early narcissism (I understood him to mean primary narcissism) is an original state with plenty of consciousness but with no boundaries. This, of course, relates to Dr Scott's earlier conception of the body-scheme in which the person is concerned with every kind of experience from his centre to the outermost positions of space and time (Scott, 1949<sup>8</sup>). I suspect, but do not know, that Dr Scott regards this body-scheme experience as characteristic of the very earliest times in the baby's life well before the depressive position is ushered in, before there are isolated objects. Put otherwise, this is where it connects with Bion. What Dr Scott is saying, I think, is that narcissism is concerned with the paranoid-schizoid position and that that leads him to conclude that disillusionment with narcissism is what ushers in the paranoid-schizoid position. All this suggests that there is an earlier position or phase prior to the typical state occupying the first four months. Thus I see both Bion and Dr Scott as developing very similar theories about the neonate period.

### The Problem of Alpha- and Beta- Elements

I turn now to one of the most important problems of all; that is the relation between alpha- and beta- elements. This is a distinction which, outside the work on groups, is Bion's greatest contribution to the whole subject and a very odd one it is. He states quite clearly, I think, what they are; alpha elements are ordinary kinds of objects or emotions and beta- elements are, so to speak, the outside of an object. He sometimes calls them sense-data but since that idea has been given up in 20th century philosophy I think it is not a very good term to use. Why not simply the old 17th century term 'sensation'? and that would cover sensations to do with objects or sensations to do with emotions and feelings and so on. Anyway, the infant begins life with beta-elements which constitute its world and by the time of the depressive position these become transformed into alpha-elements and the question is 'how'? Bion gives no very clear theory about how this transition takes place, nor do his followers. Before I comment on them there is a theoretical point worth making in the meanwhile to do with his idea of transformations. This gives another of Bion's mathematical ideas which he took very understandably from Einstein's theory of relativity, both the early one and the later one. The idea is simple enough: that the structure of a theory at one stage must be the same under transformation as the structure at a later time. This in fact was one of Einstein's great theoretical contributions to the construction of theories. Now transformation, according to Einstein and according to Bion, involves invariance. Transformation is the way the idea is changed from its state at one time to its state at another time and invariance is the idea that it has to have the same structure in both cases. Invariance was one of the innovations

which Einstein applied to the Lorenz-Fitzgerald transformation in space-time. - that's where Bion got it. Now that's all very well. The idea is that the mental structure had to be invariant under transformation from the time when it existed in a baby to the time when it existed in an adult, and through his life; that sounds very good, plausible, and acceptable, and one is inclined to go on and forget it; but Bion did leave us with problems because a beta-element does not transform into an alpha element with invariance. At least, if it does, he has not explained that it does or how it does. So my criticism of Bion's idea here is that there is a hiatus in his theory such that there is no invariance between beta-elements becoming alpha-elements and, later, alpha-elements deteriorating into beta-elements.

Now we come to what Bion says about this transformation. He says that the baby projects beta-elements into the mother and the mother's Fantasy transforms the beta-elements into alpha-elements and then returns them by the baby's introjection or by her own projective identification into the baby. This process to my mind is not at all clear. It sounds very nice to say that the mother develops, modifies, or creates, or somehow renders beta-elements into alpha-elements by her reverie (reverie is the term used but it is not at all clear to me how reverie does the trick). When we come to Bion's followers, many of them repeat this scenario as if it were self-evident, and not in need of further explanation. Dr Hanna Segal, who was one of Bion's close colleagues, does not elaborate the relationship though she does make a number of useful additions. She wrote "a mother capable of containing projective identifications can elaborate the projections

in her own unconscious ....". And she adds that it is in this container where alpha-function can take place. <sup>P</sup> My difficulty is to understand how the process occurs of transforming betas into alphas. So I am going to make an attempt at providing some speculative process.

Another contributor to the whole discussion, Dr Thorner, <sup>IV</sup> writes that the mother, or rather her breast, acts as a recipient or container for the baby's projection; and that the mother works on these projections by means of her reverie. The undigestible fact, that is the beta-elements in the child, thus become digestible and transformed into alpha-elements, but again, this seems to me to be a restatement rather than a solution. It is just that he puts it rather nicely.

> In a number of places Bion associates, or closely connects, beta-elements with faeces, and I think that it will suit our purpose well enough to take faeces, including urine, as typical specimens of beta-elements. The first part of the process is that the faeces by projective identification are fired into the mother. At this point there seems to me to be a curious gap in Bion's thinking; he seems to overlook that when something is ingested by a person there are different things that can happen to it inside. It can become part of the bloodstream or it can become part of the gut: so as to be expelled from the colon. Also overlooked would be the possibility of the ingested elements becoming milk. Now, of course, we happen to know that this is a by-product of whatever is ingested going into the bloodstream. The baby does not know that, but the baby may be aware of something going inside the mother in such a way as to grow. How could this occur? The model on which I want to draw is the simple one of fertilisation of the land.

on the mechanism of repression which I think Bion would hold was subject to the structure of the id, ego, and super-ego, or at least subject to the super-ego. This comes not in the essay where he discusses the nature of the psychotic personality because just there I don't think he makes it quite clear what the distinction is. He is clear about what constitutes a psychotic personality but he doesn't make it clear to me in that context what he means by a neurotic personality; but a notion I get in another place is that the neurotic personality is subject to a different kind of structure, namely repression. He puts this very sharply when he claims that a neurotic uses repression in order to keep unpleasant feelings out of consciousness; the psychotic tries to get rid of the whole structure of the normal and neurotic mind altogether; and he gives a lot of illustrations of the psychotic simply trying to destroy the whole superstructure of the normal or neurotic personality. So much so is it that in the psychotic or in cases of hallucination anything that is introjected which might be at all normal or pleasant or rationally integrated is immediately, absolutely immediately, forthwith ejected. Bion interprets the solution, however, as attempts made by the psychotic to defend himself. That seems to me fairly neat; as he puts it - the psychotic goes in for delusions where the classical Freudian hysteric generally goes in for the hysterical fantasy. I think we could do with further elaboration of the difference between a delusion and a hysterical fantasy. I'm quite sure that Bion could have supplied it if asked. Moreover, for Bion, the psychotic, when he has anything approximating to a dream, evacuates it, which precludes seeing connexions between it and dream objects or between any other kind of object.

## Dying

I want to refer lastly to what I think is a significant contribution by Dr Bernard Ball; an account of a patient who was dying. According to Dr Ball, such a person knows he is dying and you don't have to tell him. In other words he is in a state to be described as moribund. The reason I have brought this subject in here is that it occurs to me that the moribund condition may be the infantile baby growth period in reverse. As we understand <sup>it</sup> according to Bion, in the first four months or so, our concern <sup>is</sup> with the baby's having turned beta-elements into alpha-elements; so now I make the hypothesis the other way round, that towards the end of life and particularly when a person is actually dying and somehow knows that he is, what he is experiencing is the change of alpha-elements into beta-elements. The horror of dying would be when he was beginning to be swamped by beta-elements. Otherwise expressed in Kleinian terms, the depressive position is disintegrating into the paranoid-schizoid position; but more than that, the paranoid-schizoid position is disintegrating to a time when there is a decay of paranoid fears. What is terrifying in this position is that the beta-elements have nowhere to go. Whereas with the baby they have somewhere to go, i.e. the mother, the moribund person would be like a baby whose mother refuses to house its projective identifications and expels them immediately.

I think it follows from Dr Ball's account that the only way to keep a man alive who is beginning unconsciously to die (the emphasis is unconsciously since he may not be conscious of it) is to surround him with those people he is in tune

with and who could possibly receive his accelerating growth of beta-elements, though of course, this could be very difficult in the case of the old. So we might have a little light thrown on the fact that it is dangerous to move the old out of their homes. Homes probably mean memories, memories of, receptors of, or containers of, beta-elements. If we follow this line of thought the conception of the 'death-instinct' can possibly be given a meaning. Now I have to admit that I have never been very taken with this idea, either in its Freudian or Kleinian form. I simply try to see whether it can theoretically be given a niche in terms of Bion's framework. The meaning it might be given would be that of attaching alpha-elements and turning them into beta-elements. What might well be the mechanism for turning alpha-elements into beta-elements? It would clearly be the reverse of beta-elements becoming alphas, betas become alphas by projective identification, and the failure would occur when the mother's reverie was not working. The end would come about when the world, life, or one's surrounding social environment, gave back beta-elements as they are; whatever beta-elements an unconsciously dying person may have and tries to get rid of, all that happens is that they bounce back at him like balls hitting a wall - no longer transformed - that is the end. What I am suggesting here is that there isn't an actual process of reverging<sup>s</sup> alphas into betas, it is simply that there is no longer a mechanism for transforming betas into alphas, no longer a home for betas - unless one likes to invoke the death-instinct position.

So having travelled from birth to death that is a good moment to bring the lecture to a close. (Since psycho-analysis is about words you may think an appropriate quotation to end with would be from the Bible "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with Freud, and without him was not anyone analysed that was analysed.")

### SUMMARY

The lecture began with a small attempt to say what little I know of Bion. I named three of his most important contributions to psycho-analysis and interspersed commentary on various things of which his war experience was prominent, and the use to which he put his own, as he felt it, profound ignorance. Some comment was made on his search for knowledge, by acute observation, philosophy and mathematics. Melanie Klein provided him with a new framework: what Freud did for the theory of neurosis Bion did for the theory of psychosis. Application was made to the neonate, and an attempt made to solve an acute problem left by Bion on the relationship between alpha- and beta-elements. Finally an application was made to the patient's knowledge of dying.

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