

It is clear, then, that fleeting perceptions of reality, and fleeting intimations of guilt cannot be long tolerated in the paranoid-schizoid position; they are annihilated or fragmented or projected. But it is important to understand that they exist as fugitive perceptions and that their denial or projection brings consequent persecutory anxiety. In normal development, as the ego strengthens, the reality of ambivalence, the pain of guilt, and the loss of narcissistic omnipotence will be gradually more tolerable. When such reality cannot be faced then the gradual integration of good and bad, inner and outer, me and not-me cannot take place. In these circumstances, the splits are widened, the dichotomies strengthened and made more rigid. In fact, throughout life, when guilt feels too intense to bear, an individual will return to the rigidity and safety of the paranoid-schizoid position, where he can tell the Good Guys from the Bad Guys and maintain with absolute certainty that he is on the side of the Good.

## CHAPTER 4

# The depressive position

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In 1935, with her paper 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states', Klein began a theoretical reorganization of her insights in terms of 'positions'. A position refers to 'a state of organization of the ego - the nature of the internal object relations and the nature of the anxiety and the characteristic defences'. In the 1935 paper she refers to manic and paranoid positions as well as to the depressive position, but in her eventual formulation there are two positions, the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive.

The paranoid-schizoid position precedes the depressive position developmentally and although Klein describes the six-month baby as struggling with the depressive position, the oscillation between these positions continues throughout life.

Klein is an instinct theorist in that she held that from the beginning of life the infant has to contend with strong instinctual impulses towards life and towards death. In this she continued Freud's last and contentious restatement - in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920a) - of the instinctual conflicts governing human subjectivity. These drives are experienced in terms of unconscious phantasies involving the subject (his ego) in relation with an object, towards whom the drive is expressed. The hungry baby searches for a satisfying breast or rages at one that frustrates him.

For fear of the death instinct which threatens it from within and because of its own initial frailty, the early ego protects itself with the mechanisms of splitting and projection. As described in the previous chapter, it splits off what feels disturbing and dangerous in itself and projects these aspects of itself into the object. It also splits the object, seeing its gratifying aspects as ideal and its frustrating aspects as hostile. At this stage the object is in any case apprehended only in part, as a satisfying or frustrating breast, for instance, rather than as a whole person. The infant seeks to strengthen its

inner world both by splitting off and projecting its disturbing aspects into external objects and by introjecting into itself the part objects it has idealized. In this way it seeks to protect itself against its primary anxiety which is for its own survival in the face of internal and external persecutors (see Chapter 3).

The transition to the depressive position involves a gradual integration both of the ego and of the object. With the maturation of the perceptual apparatus the child's capacity to modify his phantasies by comparing them with reality usually reduces anxiety. The internalization of good experiences and good objects reassures him about his inner state and he has less need to project. Because he feels less threatened by objects made bad by his projections, he feels less aggressive towards them and in turn he feels stronger and more whole because less impoverished by what in himself he had split off and lodged in those around him. He has less need to keep either himself or his object split. He is more able to recognize that the mother who was the idealized source of all life and goodness is also the mother who was previously experienced as the attacked and attacking frustrator from whom it was not safe to receive succour. She becomes an integrated figure with positive and negative features, towards whom the child feels ambivalence, both love and hatred.

As the child withdraws his projections, he becomes increasingly aware of his own mixed nature and of the tension that exists within him between his loving and destructive impulses. Since it is no longer a bad 'other' who is felt to be responsible for the aggression he has projected into the world around, the child begins to recognize his own responsibility and to experience guilt. This capacity to recognize and bear guilt is one of the reasons for Klein's choosing the term 'depressive' for this position.

The reduced use of projection and the greater integration of both the ego and the object leads to a more pronounced sense of separateness and of the infant's dependence on a separate other person. In the paranoid-schizoid position, Bion has remarked that there is no sense of an absent good object – the infant is either in the presence of a good object or, if the mother is unavailable, it is in the presence of a bad object. With the depressive position the child becomes aware that it does not control or possess the good object but needs it and can miss and pine for it in its absence. The child feels loss and mourning for a good object, rather than denial or betrayal by what is felt to be a bad object. Because of this new sense of its dependence on the object and of the dangers to the object from the child's own destructiveness, this stage is characterized by concern for the object. It is also marked by the development of the desire to repair and restore the object which the child fears it has damaged by its attacks. The capacity for reparation is one of the most powerful manifestations of the life instinct.

One of the earliest and most celebrated pieces of infant observation was Freud's account (1920a) of his little grandson's game with the cotton reel, throwing it into his crib and then retrieving it. Freud recognized that the child was trying to come to terms with his feelings of losing his mother (when she went out), missing her and then joyfully recovering her.

Freud had earlier, in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1915b), described how this process of negotiating loss can miscarry with dire consequences for the subject's inner life. Where the feelings towards the disappointing figure are predominantly hateful she is not missed and pined for but unconsciously attacked and then set up within the internal world as a bad object. The self-torment so characteristic of melancholia is in a Kleinian perspective the continuing relationship within the self of the subject's failure to negotiate the depressive position, to do what Freud's little grandson was doing, to find a way to recover loving feelings towards someone who had hurt or left him. What Abraham and Klein added to Freud's momentous understanding of melancholia was that in mourning too there is an internalization of a relationship. The mourner, originally the child who is capable of sustaining or recovering his sense of loving and therefore missing his absent mother, installs within himself a valued and sustaining figure who gives him inner strength. In Klein's words the child who was originally inside the mother now feels he has the mother within him.

The recognition of separateness and dependence and of vulnerability to loss involves negotiating the object's relationship with others, with siblings and especially the parents' relationship to each other. Klein maintained that the working through of the depressive position and of the Oedipus Complex were facets of the same process.

A similar relinquishment of control and recognition of separateness and difference is needed in the creative use of symbols. Segal (1957) has elucidated how the symbol, the symbolizer and the symbolized need their autonomous qualities freed from the projective identification which causes psychotics to confuse the symbol with what is symbolized. The ability to use symbols is an achievement of the depressive position and liberates the user from the concreteness of psychotic thinking (see Chapter 10).

These processes in relation to the external object are accompanied by and in constant interaction with the state of the subject's internal objects. Positive experiences with the external objects are introjected and modify bad internal objects and these more benign internal objects are in turn projected on to the external world which is perceived in a more positive light. This in turn may elicit a warmer response, resulting in a benign self-reinforcing cycle. A malignant self-reinforcing cycle may also develop.

The primary anxiety of the depressive position is for the state of the good internal object on which the subject's well-being is felt to depend in the same

way as in the external world the child depends on the parents. A particular instance of this dependence on, and concern with, the state of an internal object is the relationship to the superego (see Chapter 8). Where the object that has been introjected is felt to be severe or injured and reproachful the subject's mental state is dominated by guilt and a sense of inadequacy. He seeks to satisfy or repair the internal object and if he is not successful his state is that of melancholia.

For Klein, the working through of the depressive position and the establishment of a good internal object were crucial for mental health. The frustrations and losses of life and the constant threat from destructive sources within the personality make the depressive position an achievement that is repeatedly lost and in need of re-establishing. She described the work of mourning which is required with every major loss and disappointment as 'rebuilding with anguish the inner world'. This is particularly difficult where the depressive position has been precariously established in the first place and leaves the personality in danger of regression to the defences of the paranoid-schizoid position or to undue mobilization of a defence more specific to the depressive position, mania.

Klein described how the process of mourning, whether for an actual death or for other losses and disappointments, involves a loss of the sense of having an internal good object. The mourner may for a time feel triumphantly oblivious towards an internal object whose importance is denied (as in mania) or at the mercy of vengeful, or dead and dying objects within him. Gradually he may recover his good objects and this process of repeatedly re-negotiating the depressive position can lead to a strengthening and deepening of it that is recognizable in the emotional maturity and depth achieved by some older people. Elliot Jacques (1965) traced this re-working of the depressive position in the lives and work of great creative artists. In 'Death and the mid-life crisis' he suggests that in mid-life illusions of immortality need to be relinquished and a painful journey of self-exploration undertaken which can produce a more profound creativity.

The need to have a good object within one, to introject and indeed to incorporate it, as the baby originally incorporated what it received from the mother's breast, can be followed in the beliefs underlying the Christian service of Holy Communion. The Christian believes that in this ceremony he installs in his inner being a loved and loving protector (indeed an omnipotent one) who will sustain him in his struggles with the Devil, the representative of his own destructiveness and of the evil he may encounter in others. Loss of this divine object's good will is attributed to the believer's neglect of, and attacks upon, it and this loss results in guilt and intense fears of retaliation and Hell - an equivalent to the persecutory states suffered by severe melancholics. Though the ideal and omnipotent nature of the internal object that

the Christian seeks to introject corresponds to the ideal and omnipotent figures of the paranoid-schizoid position, the yearning for a good internal object and the sense of responsibility, guilt and concern towards it belong to the depressive position. The central anxiety of the depressive position is about sustaining or recovering a good internal object.

A major defence against this anxiety is mania, a condition that often alternates with melancholia in a manner that has always interested clinicians. Klein, building upon Freud's and Abrahams' observations, saw that implicit in the excited omnipotence of manic states is a disparagement of the object. In the manic state the patient is no longer, as in the melancholic state, subject to the reproaches of a severe internal object. In phantasy he reduces his good internal objects to replaceable trivia that he can omnipotently control and simultaneously he rids himself of the more tormenting figures of the paranoid-schizoid phase. He is excitedly superior and condescending towards his object, triumphing over him and controlling him. In his racy grandeur he feels he has an abundance of everything and values nothing. There is a tremendous attack upon the psychic reality of his actual dependence on his internal and external objects. Their goodwill is wasted and destroyed with the result that once the mania has abated the internal objects are felt to be empty and damaged and melancholia reasserts itself. There is no real sense of guilt or recognition of the value of the object. Reparation where it is attempted has a magical, condescending quality that does not acknowledge what has been damaged and shows no real concern for the object.

Movement between the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive positions is illustrated in the behaviour of an adolescent girl at war with her parents and her teachers. Although intellectually able, she could not concentrate; she attacked and repulsed her parents when they attempted to help her and she insisted that the only solution was for her to change schools. Although the rows with her parents and the under-achievement continued at the new school she did get an A in one of her exams. The following scene occurred some weeks later. She and her mother were returning home by car. Her mother remarked that there was to be a meeting at the school for the girl and her parents to discuss her work. The girl reacted angrily, abused her mother and walked away from her as they left the car. She shouted at her mother that all her parents wanted was a model pupil. The mother noticed, when she entered the house, that the girl was sitting on the floor attempting to glue back on to her shoe the sole which had come apart. (Previously when this shoe needed repair she had tossed it to her father to get it mended.) The mother sat down beside her and said that she didn't want a model pupil but that they both knew her schooling was important and that she could do justice to her ability. The daughter then told her mother how bad she felt about herself, especially in relation to other pupils who had worked hard and

well. The mother felt relieved, less injured and angry herself, and more aware of her love and concern to help. After they had sat together talking while the girl continued to repair her shoe, the mother, so used to being repulsed, enquired if the girl now wanted to be on her own. 'No,' was the reply, 'you can stay.'

Like her shoe, this girl is at first unable to function because of the splitting that she has used - partly in order to cope with the new challenges accompanying her adolescence. Troubled by her own sense of badness she had split this bad self off and projected it into her parents and the school. They were then experienced as tormentors and she felt that she must fight them off and protect herself. She also attributed to her parents the idealized expectations characteristic of a flight from extremely bad objects to the supposed protection of ideal objects - who then in their turn demand an ideal response - a model pupil. Along with these tormenting aspects of herself the girl also projected on to the parents more positive aspects of herself - her capacity to recognize the reality of her situation at school and to work on this. In throwing her broken shoe at her father she gave concrete expression to how she was violently projecting on to him her own capacity to work at her problems.

The transition came when she sat down and attempted to repair the shoe herself, indicating that she was beginning to repair the split within herself and with it the rift between herself and her parents. She was able to withdraw the 'badness' from her picture of her mother and to acknowledge it in herself. The mother, freed from the projection of her daughter's 'badness', was then experienced by both of them as a helpful figure, a good object, to whom the daughter could turn for strength in facing her difficulties. The girl no longer felt so extremely 'bad' that she could not face her regret and guilt at what she had done to her chances at school. She could, with her parents' help, begin to mend what she had damaged in her school work and in her relation to them. She became capable of reparation. Like her shoe she felt more whole and better able to cope with reality. Somewhat grudgingly, in this new state, she could acknowledge her dependence on her mother as a separate person - 'No, you can stay.'

Having established this more depressive position, this more integrated sense of herself and her object, she would doubtless lose it again, become once again split and paranoid, but she would be strengthened to recover herself and her access to good aspects of herself and of her objects (see Chapter 5).

In this vignette an important part was played by the girl's unconscious use of symbols. She worked upon her need to heal the split within her, via the medium of her broken shoe. It is a mark of the depressive position that the subject has sufficiently withdrawn projections of himself from his objects,

human and material, to be able to make use of their actual characteristics for creative and communicative purposes. Someone more deeply in the paranoid-schizoid position might have felt his soul (his psyche) was so projectively identified with the sole of the shoe that he could not use it symbolically to communicate within himself and to the mother his wish to put things right.

The incident also illustrates the constant interaction between internal and external objects. In her split, paranoid state of mind the girl's projection of her bad self on to the school and her parents did at times engender in them the anger and retaliation she feared. Their angry state was then introjected, confirming and augmenting her inner sense of persecution. A self-reinforcing malignant cycle between figures in the inner world and those in external reality then occurred. Through the shoe mending exchange, however, the girl was able to restore a more integrated sense of herself and her objects. She then found confirmation of this inner change in her actual mother's reaction, thereby installing within herself a renewed sense of a good helpful internal object capable of seeing both her strengths and weaknesses.

This girl was intensely dependent on her parents but, until the shoe incident, unable to acknowledge this and so to use their help. Prior to that exchange she controlled her parents and the school, keeping them as bad and useless. Interaction between her parents and the school she found threatening and she wanted to prohibit and attack it. Her dependence on her parents, though fiercely repudiated at a conscious level, was expressed through her ferocious watchful control of them as bad figures, carrying feared aspects of herself. This dependence differs from that which she begins to show when she turns to her mother and shares with her her distress about her self-destructiveness. The mother feels herself released from her daughter's hostility and freed as a separate person to be helpful. The girl's depressive dependence is consciously acknowledged and acts as a spur to reconciliation and repair.

In the shoe conversation she relinquished her attacking control of her parents and could let them have an intercourse with the school which she could allow to be benign. Movement from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position is simultaneously a relinquishment of control of the parental couple (here the parents and the school), a recognition of their separateness and intercourse and a realization that in this shift a new freedom may be gained. Negotiation of the depressive position is intimately related to the working through of the Oedipus Complex (see Chapter 6). They are as parts of the same process.

I will now illustrate from two works of literature the effects upon the mental state of the relationship to internal objects. The books considered are William Styron's *Darkness Visible* and Jiri Weil's *Life with a Star*. Styron's book is an account of his own depressive breakdown, written in the hope of

helping others struggling with suicidal melancholia. Weil's book is not overtly autobiographical but he shares with his hero the experience of being a Jew in Nazi Prague and finding a way to survive. Both books are accounts by men who survived sustained torment and a threat of annihilation and were helped to escape and recover. For Styron the torment and the threat of death were within himself. For Weil's narrator the threat and the persecution come from the external world, from the Nazi occupation. Both narrators have lost parents in childhood, Styron his mother, Weil's narrator both his parents.

Both narrators experience states of mind, in Weil's case hope, in Styron's case despair, which are intensely at variance with their external circumstances and with the attitudes of those around them. The manner in which Weil's narrator retains his sanity and his capacity to love indicates a securely established good internal object. Styron's narrative is of how failure to mourn his mother's death when he was a child left him prey, as he approached old age, to a melancholia which threatened him with suicide. In the course of his book he describes recovering his awareness of what his mother and her loss meant to him and how in that realization he began to recover some peace of mind. He regains her as a loved and missed internal object and in doing so rediscovers his wish to live. The determining factor in both narratives is the subjects' engagement with figures in their internal world that undermine or sustain them; whom they ignore or whom they acknowledge and miss. The crucial issue is the degree to which they have been able to establish and work through the depressive position.

Weil's narrator Roubicek is alone, afraid, hungry and cold, awaiting daily his summons to join a transportation to 'the East', to a death camp. He hates and fears the Nazis but sustains himself by imaginary dialogues with his absent lover Ruzena and by recalling happiness with her. Ruzena had urged him to flee Prague with her and he now regrets he did not heed her advice. At times he withdraws from the horrors of his actual experience into something akin to hallucinating her presence. This is not, however, just a withdrawal from reality to an idealized memory - insofar as she is a good internal object he remains capable of re-finding good objects where they exist in the world around him. He develops a friendship with a stray cat whom he calls Tomas. He sees in him a fellow sufferer, hungry, fearful, hunted, lonely. He feeds the cat what little he can spare - Jews are not allowed to keep pets - and eventually the animal comes to trust him, to greet him when he returns home and to share his sleeping bag. Tomas recovers his strength and his sleek healthy fur. Roubicek sees himself in Tomas and in his care of Tomas draws unconsciously on his own introjection of Ruzena (based on earlier introjections of good figures in his childhood) and identification

with her. Addressing Tomas in the beginning of their friendship he says,

'You see, Tomas, I mean you no harm. You are beginning to believe me a little. But only a little. Wait, how can I explain what happiness is? Large bowls of milk for you, Tomas, with lots of cream floating on top and a roll spread with butter, raw liver and then to lie down in the sun and be warm and safe. All that exists. You must believe me.'

The imagery is evocative of the experience of being in the presence of a good feeding mother. Roubicek tells Tomas, and himself, that though such a good feeding mother is spectacularly absent in the world they share, she does exist as a reality in his mind. The good internal mother is refound in his love for his cat. Roubicek identifies Tomas with his doubting infantile self whom he comforts as his own mother or Ruzena (his internal mother) are felt to comfort him. As the soprano in Brahms' German Requiem sings, 'I who have known a mother's love will comfort you.' In the experience of parenting or offering care to someone else the carer often finds himself strengthened and more secure in an internal recovery of closeness with what was best in his own parents. He recovers and strengthens his sense of having helpful figures within him and of being capable himself of goodness.

Roubicek, in his concern for Tomas, is also seeking to put right what he has come to regret in relation to Ruzena. He did not heed her warnings about the Nazis - he underestimated their destructiveness and this reflected an underestimation of his own passive tendency to surrender to destructiveness in others. The damage he did to Ruzena and to himself was in failing to take active steps to counter both the deathliness of the Nazis and of his own near-fatal passivity toward them. The book is an account of how he did eventually counter this passive surrender in himself. He was able belatedly to make that much amends to her even though his passive resignation to the forces of evil had lost him the life he and Ruzena might have had together. In this particular sense Roubicek is not merely the victim of a persecuting environment but of a passivity within himself which has severely damaged his relationship with the person he loves most.

Roubicek has every reason to be paranoid - he is actively persecuted, thrown off buses, debarred from most public places, made to wear a yellow star. His sense of being persecuted is based on reality. His aunt and uncle by contrast have reacted to the loss of their material possessions and the threat of transportation and death by desperate projective mechanisms which lead them to distort the reality around them. When Roubicek visits them they see him as the greedy agent of their misfortunes. They accuse him of endangering their lives by having a cat. When they are summoned for transportation they refuse Roubicek's advice that they take warm clothes and food and choose instead to leave them in the supposed safe keeping of predatory neighbours. They reproach and accuse Roubicek. Because of their frightened and

desperate resort to splitting and projection they are unable to recognize the reality of Roubicek's helpfulness or of their neighbours' greed. Roubicek has become a bad figure for them and the neighbours good ones. Splitting and projection have radically and tragically distorted their perceptions of reality.

Roubicek survives because he can sustain a good internal object and strengthen it by what he introjects of his loving relation to Tomas. He does not distort reality by massive projection and this enables him to recognize a quality in a chance encounter that leads him to get to know and trust Joseph Materna. Materna, whose name has obvious associations with motherliness, belongs to a working-class resistance movement. Roubicek becomes an occasional visitor to Materna's house where Materna's mother feeds him and where Materna and his friends hold discussions. Materna suggests that Roubicek choose not to accept his transportation summons but go into hiding, which his group will arrange. Weil describes how difficult it is for Roubicek to accept the struggle and the danger that Materna's offer will involve. His cat has been shot and he has news that Ruzena too has been shot. To resist the Nazis - the death instinct - seems too difficult. His fellow Jews deplore those among them who complicate their relations with the Nazis by attempting escape, even by suicide. He is troubled by guilt. Some other Jew would have to take his place on the transport and he feels himself responsible. He is also afraid for his rescuers - realistically because of the reprisals they would risk. Some of this guilt has the hallmark of melancholia - he doubts his worthiness to be saved. He has to some extent introjected the Nazi view of his worthlessness and badness. Some of his fellow Jews have done this to such an extent that they accuse Jews who thwart the Nazis of giving Jews a bad name. This attitude now introjected has become a deadly superego with which he has to struggle. His reservations on behalf of his would-be rescuers do have in addition an appropriate concern for them that is characteristic of the depressive position.

Roubicek's misgivings about availing himself of Materna's offer indicate that he had to struggle with the omnipotence characteristic of severe depressive states. In these states the superego attributes blame and guilt of an omnipotent kind to the sufferer. Roubicek was not completely at the mercy of such an internal object. He was evidently able to appreciate that guilt and responsibility for what his rescuers might suffer lay primarily with the Nazis and that his rescuers were free agents. Where there is concern for the object but it still has some of the uncompromising qualities of ideal or persecuting objects of the paranoid-schizoid position, guilt too has omnipotent qualities. Children of divorcing parents, for instance, may hold themselves, consciously or unconsciously, responsible and only later and with help modify their guilt so that they can recognize that, though they regret their own part in what happened, they can realistically apportion responsibility to their parents. The

severe internal objects to which the ego is subject in the early stages of the depressive position become modified, gentler and more realistic.

This book is an account of a terrible experience in the real world, of the persecution and horrors associated with wearing a stigmatizing badge, of life with a star. At another level it is an account of how Roubicek drew on an extraordinary capacity within him to sustain a star, the light of a good object he had known and knew how to recover and which enabled him to choose life.

One night he is on duty at the Jewish community headquarters and looks down from a balcony on the Jewish quarters of the city:

Below me I saw the district as if it were in a deep black chasm and called in vain to the Lord. Now it seemed even smaller and more huddled in the dark poverty of its junkyard. It no longer belonged to the world. It was simply suffered to exist ... I looked at the rooftops so as not to look into an even deeper chasm but they too seemed to writhe with pain. I turned away from the black chasm and looked at the stars. They were shining brightly in the summer night. They were cold, indifferent but they shone over the whole city including this district, crouched under blows. 'I must look only at them,' I told myself. 'It's a pity I didn't see them earlier. I won't be alone any more when I think of them. They belong to me and have always belonged to me. Nobody can take them away from me.'

Here he contemplates despair, equating the district that no longer belongs to the world and is simply suffered to exist with his own tormented, rubbished state. He is close to the chasm of melancholia where no Lord, not even an idealized internal object, will hear him. He turns away and recovers his lasting good objects, felt to be cold and indifferent at this moment, but a presence that protects him from loneliness and inner persecution. When he recovers his awareness of the stars he regains a relationship within himself that strengthens him to cope with the external 'blows' under which perhaps he doesn't have to 'crouch'.

Styron's book is an account of a severe melancholia where his mental state was such a 'district as if it were in a deep black chasm and called in vain on the Lord'. 'Darkness visible' is Milton's description of Hell.

Styron, when he became ill, was a very successful writer with a staunch wife and no external cause for depression. He suspects, however, that the alcohol to which he had recently become allergic may have been protecting him for years from knowledge of his true state. The melancholia struck when he had just turned 60, a late mid-life crisis that marks the passage from the prime of life towards old age and the inevitability of death.

He begins the book with an extended account of an event that occurred as the melancholia was establishing its hold on him. He had been awarded a prestigious and lucrative French literary prize and, despite his depressed

state, was in Paris to receive it. The widow of the distinguished man who established the award had arranged a luncheon in his honour to follow the prize-giving. Styron with difficulty coped with receiving the award but then greatly offended his hostess by announcing that he had made another lunch appointment. He then did accept her invitation but later in the day managed to drop the cheque on the floor and barely retrieve it.

This incident, given in much more detail than any other social exchange in the book, has evidently a significance for his account. Indeed, in an Author's Note, he regrets its omission from the text originally published by *Vanity Fair*. It was 'a trip which had special significance for me in terms of the depressive illness from which I had suffered'. He is in a mental state where he finds himself aggressively rejecting what a feeding and appreciative older woman is offering him. His behaviour transforms her from a benign figure into one who is injured and reproachful. The incident deserves its place in his account because it describes how Styron's inner world has become so bankrupt and tormented by reproach.

At this stage he makes no reference at all to the fact that his mother died when he was still a child. Indeed his researches into the meaning of melancholia, though far-reaching, make minimal reference to the extensive literature linking it to loss and especially to maternal loss in childhood. Freud famously remarked that the melancholic, unlike the mourner, does not know what it is that he has lost. Styron for much of his account seems to have overlooked his childhood bereavement as he overlooked his French hostess's lunch invitation and cheque. He also overlooks Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, while eagerly re-instating the term melancholia as more apt than 'depression'. This capacity to dismiss what is highly relevant in his life and reading may also have operated at the time of his mother's death. Did he, like many a bereft child, feel that his mother had dropped and lost interest in him and then, in his pain, identify with her, dropping her and withdrawing interest and meaning from her and her loss? His near rejection of his patroness's meal and his dropping of her cheque would then be an enactment of his identification with the dead mother who, he felt, discarded and dropped him. Symbolically he reverses his childhood experience. It is now he who punishes and dismisses the woman who fed and appreciated him.

What he has introjected is a mother of no significance, offering nothing of value, fit only to die. He has then unconsciously identified with this internal mother, fit only for suicide. There is no sense, as with Roubicek, of an internal dialogue with someone missed and valued. Instead the dialogue seems to be one of reproach, the deserted child robbing the feeding mother of significance and she in turn reproaching him.

Styron's failure to realize until on the verge of suicide that his mother's unmourned death was a central feature of his melancholia suggests that this

denial of her importance was a feature too of his superego. The reader is at first invited to judge him harshly for his treatment of his patroness – at this point neither she nor the reader knows about, or can make allowance for, the childhood loss that underlies his behaviour. The patroness and the reader 'actualize' the harsh superego that doesn't know or yet recognize the loss that caused his churlishness. Once the mother's loss and meaning are re-instated, the reader, representing the superego, need judge him neither as mad (biochemically disturbed) nor bad (morally reprehensible). A superego that dismissed the importance of his mother's death may also have rendered Styron unable properly to register what the psychiatric literature told him about maternal loss. Dr Gold, his psychiatrist, would have been an exceptionally poor psychotherapist not to have paid attention to how his depressed patient had handled his mother's death. Styron's superego could not until later allow her loss to matter and thus to render his behaviour intelligible and forgivable to himself.

Because of the darkness visible, the hell that his inner world has become, Styron can find no pleasure or comfort in the world about him. No good or helpful object survives within him and he clings to his wife, a good object in the external world, as if he were a four-year-old child. Where there is no good object within, there is a desperate dependence on any external good object. There is dependence but not, it seems, concern or guilt. By contrast, Roubicek, though deeply attached to Tomas, did not cling to him and did feel keen concern for his fate. Styron's inner state is so devastated that as he plans his suicide he has no thought for the effect upon his wife.

Styron repeatedly acknowledges the staunchness of his wife, but it is in terms, as he himself says, applicable to the mother of a four-and-a-half-year-old terrified of abandonment: 'not for an instant could I let out of my sight the endlessly patient soul who had become nanny, mummy, comforter, priestess and most important, confidante'. Though she is physically present there is little sense of there being a dialogue between them: Styron is outraged that Dr Gold should be so insensitive as to imagine that he has any sexual interest left. By contrast, Roubicek, even though Ruzena is no longer physically with him, maintains for most of the book a lively dialogue with her in his mind – indeed it is his chief resource. At first he recalls past conversations between them but increasingly in his dreams and his fantasies she makes independent and separate contributions which make his exchanges with her a regenerative intercourse. Because he never completely loses the depressive position and his valuation of the person he has lost, as Styron does, Roubicek remains more capable of the sexual and emotional intercourse which the child needs to allow the parents to have. It is upon the internalization of such creative intercourse that the capacity to think creatively depends. Styron, in his melancholia, loses his capacity to think creatively – instead his mind is

tyrannized and paralysed by melancholic 'demons'. Roubicek, despite his isolation and the tyranny of the Nazis, is able to sustain a constructive psychic intercourse with the woman he loves: he can think sanely about the cruel and horrific world in which he has to live.

Styron searches for help but to no avail. The psychiatrist he consults under-estimates his suicidal state and gives him inappropriate medication which makes his condition worse. Though in reality far better placed than Roubicek was to find a helpful object, he goes instead to Dr Gold, who makes these serious errors. Anger and resentment may have unconsciously contributed to Styron's choosing a psychiatrist he could later blame and dismiss as incompetent. Competent psychiatrists in New England must be more plentiful and accessible than members of the Czech resistance prepared to shelter Jews in Nazi Prague. The state of our two protagonists' internal objects, and of their relationship to them, affects their judgment and their capacity to find and use help.

He describes a state of 'anxiety, agitation and unfocussed dread'. The dread did to some extent focus on his body, producing a 'pervasive hypochondria'. He suggests that the mind prefers to re-locate its own sense of disaster into the body. A Kleinian view is that the bodily organs may represent unconsciously the phantasied state of the internal objects - deteriorating, neglected and threatening. The state of his internal objects was projected on to his external environment.

One of the unforgettable features of this stage of my disorder was the way in which my own farmhouse, my beloved home for 30 years, took on for me at that point when my spirits regularly sank to their nadir, an almost palpable quality of ominousness ... I wondered how this friendly place, teeming with such memories of ... 'Lads and Girls,' of 'Laughter and ability and Sighing/And Frocks and Curls' could almost perceptibly seem so hostile and forbidding.

In the internal world 'my beloved home' represents the good internal mother 'teeming' with life and children offering comfort and restoration. He perceives this internal home now as ominous, 'hostile and forbidding'. He feels his objects persecute him and threaten him with annihilation.

At the root of his melancholia lies this dismissal of the importance of his mother and of her loss. Like his French hostess's lunch and the money she gave him, it is dismissed, and, as the story unfolds, in danger of becoming irretrievable.

That her dismissed, unmourned loss is central to his melancholic condition is made clear by the manner of his recovery. As he prepares to kill himself, he chances to hear on the radio a woman singing Brahms' Alto Rhapsody, a song his mother used to sing. He is deeply moved and he recovers his wish to live. The family home revives in his mind as a loved place

in which children were reared - a maternal space for growing children that once more is alive with meaning. He recovers his absent good object within him and can then energetically mobilize his wife to save his life by getting him into hospital. He has re-found the equivalent of Roubicek's *Materna*, an object that will take him to a safe place and protect him from the annihilation that threatens him within.

Styron, as he recovered, came to recognize the part played in his illness by 'incomplete mourning' for his mother and how he had carried within himself 'an insufferable burden of which rage and guilt, and not only damned up sorrow, are a part, and become the potential seeds of self destruction'. After his illness, in considering the effect on him of hearing the Brahms Alto Rhapsody, he recalls that his mother had at that time been 'much on my mind'. Did the music complete an unconscious struggle between the anger and guilt, expressed in his behaviour towards his French hostess (a nullification of what his original maternal object had offered him) and on the other hand a capacity to recover his good objects and his concern for them?

In a flood of swift recollection [on hearing the music] I thought of all the joys the house had known: the children who had rushed through its rooms, the festivals, the love and work, the voices and the nimble commotion, the perennial tribe of cats and dogs and birds ... All this I realized was more than I could ever abandon, even as what I had set out so deliberately to do was more than I could inflict on those memories and upon those, so close to me, with whom those memories were bound.

The severe melancholic has lost his good internal object and is at the mercy of forces which threaten him with annihilation. He has regressed into the paranoid-schizoid position. While ill, Styron seems to have felt no concern for his wife and no sense that the violence of his state and of his suicidal intentions would 'inflict' suffering on her. It is with the recovery of loving, missing feelings towards his long-dead mother that his objects, internal and external, recover their value. In response he knows he wishes to save them from what, through his suicide he had planned to 'inflict' on them. He recovers himself to protect and repair them.

The recovery of his mother's significance saves Styron's sanity as Roubicek's internal communion with Ruzena saves his. The disparaging dismissal of good objects begins however to reassert itself during Styron's stay in hospital - the efforts of his various therapists are mocked. The art therapist may think she contributed to his recovery but he makes it plain he thinks this is absurd. Is the melancholic cycle resuming with a renewed attack upon external objects which will then be introjected as worthless and/or retaliatory?

Roubicek is able to sustain his sense of a loved and life-giving internal object - his knowledge that the stars belong to him - that he has indeed Life with a Star - and Styron ends his account with the same imagery, quoting Dante, 'And so we came forth and once again behold the stars.'

## CHAPTER 5

# Beyond the depressive position: $Ps(n+1)$

RONALD BRITTON

### Introduction

When Bion took Melanie Klein's concept of projective identification and extended it to produce his *theory of containment*, he introduced the idea of normal projective identification as part of development, and distinguished this from pathological projective identification. The concept of *containment* both as an important part of infantile development and as a clinical phenomenon is now a well established central tenet of post-Kleinian thinking (see Chapter 12). However, the fact that Bion did something similar in relation to Klein's theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions has not been so clearly recognized or integrated into Kleinian theory.

Initially, the depressive position was described by Melanie Klein as the underlying psychological state to be found in melancholia. Subsequently, she came to see it as a phase of normal infantile development preceded by what later she called the 'paranoid-schizoid' position. By the time Bion was involved in psychoanalytic theorizing, these two positions were regarded as recurrent throughout life as object-relational complexes or self 'positions' in relation to internal and external objects; the paranoid-schizoid position, characterized by splitting, part objects and projection; the depressive position characterized by integration, whole objects and introjection (see Chapters 3 and 4). If we look closely at Melanie Klein's writings we find that she described the paranoid-schizoid position sometimes as a defence against the depressive position, sometimes as a regression from it and sometimes as that part of development preceding it.

Bion adopted and developed the positions suggesting that they alternated in the process of psychic growth and development throughout life. He used the notation familiar in chemistry for dynamic equilibrium to represent this,  $Ps \leftrightarrow D$ . If we follow the implications of Bion's alternating  $Ps \leftrightarrow D$  and