



Education Section

The death drive: Phenomenological perspectives in contemporary Kleinian theory

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In Goethe's epic masterpiece of modernity, *Faust*, the protagonist, a seeker after knowledge, laments his frustrations with the fruits of his labour, rails against their limited nature, the obstructions that stand in his way. He says:

No new strength wells up within me
I am not a hairsbreadth taller
I am still no nearer the infinite

Faust craves the infinite and so the meagre gains of his endless toiling for knowledge pale into insignificance when compared to the new object of his longing – omniscience. Faust is hidebound by 'considerations of reality' and this state of mind provides fertile soil for the devil's work; Mephistopheles offers a world of no obstruction, where all desire can be realized.

Mephistopheles introduces himself as the spirit "that negates all", he continues:

all that is deserves to perish
better if nothing had ever been born

He personifies the negative principle, the antithesis of thought and creativity. We learn that Faust has no independent existence of his own but is called into being by the presence of good. Some regard evil/human hatred only as the *absence of* but Freud, like Goethe, did not see human destructiveness in such passive terms; it is not only the negative of good, it is the *negation* of good.

Mr A, a patient in his early 30s, manifested an air of utter detachment and suppression of feeling. He related his life as a series of meaningless facts devoid of significance. Important events which have taken place in his life, all suggesting some real growth and development in the analysis have, apparently, no connection with it. Characteristically, a certain deadliness invades the consulting room. Early on he brought the following dream: *There had been a nuclear explosion. The dust, fall-out, fell all over me. It was pleasant and peaceful.* This dream seems to bring very clearly the workings of a destructive activity. But how one understands it is not self-evident.

Within contemporary Kleinian thinking the death drive is conceptualised according to a number of different models. Most tend to unhook the

concept from the biological theorising that formed part of Freud's initial presentation and conceptualise its functioning in purely psychological terms.

There appear to be *three* models which, although to some extent overlapping, can be distinguished.

Model 1 focuses on a drive that aims at destroying life, all that is identified with living, most particularly thought, and the capacity to perceive, upon which thought depends. We use such terms as 'annihilating a part of the self (or a psychic function)'. It is provoked into action by such factors as the presence of goodness that is separate from the self, awareness of limitation or obstruction. The pleasure it brings is an instantaneous pure pleasure in destruction, often thought to be an expression of a deep envy. This is quite close to Mephistopheles' description of 'the spirit that negates all'. The phenomenology of this activity tends to be violent and noisy, its activity its activity intermittent, and thus it is more manifest.

This model is in contrast to two others which emphasize an *activity* rather than an *act* or *event* and which function in a more silent way.

Model 2 also gives emphasis to annihilation of self and object but it has a different phenomenology. It operates as a continuous tendency or disposition, which becomes manifest as a seductive lure into mindlessness. One might say it is active in pursuit of a deadening passivity.

Model 3 is similarly quiet and aims at deadening/ preventing of development *but* it aims not at annihilation but more at maintaining a particular kind of paralysis, needing the object to stay alive in order that it can continue to be treated in this way. The pleasure derived has a sadistic character. Like Model 2, it is of a more continuous nature; its phenomenology gives it a character of something quite subtle and often difficult to see.

Returning to the dream:

- If one concentrates on the explosion then one would think along the lines of Model 1.
- If we think of the continuous fall-out that deadens objects, silently pulling the self into a pleasant mindlessness, a quiet wiping out of psychic function, then this is captured by Model 2.
- Alternatively, if one thinks of the fall-out as representation of a *continuous* activity, an irradiation of the self and its objects maintaining them in a peculiar half-alive state, associated with a cruel pleasure, then this would be Model 3.

An ambiguity as regards the phenomenology of the death drive has been there since its first introduction by Freud. He uses the concept to elucidate phenomena which, at least at a manifest level, appear to be very different. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, what is described is a silent pull, ever present as a tendency, towards a state of mind that approximates to absence of tension, inertia, mindlessness, the 'nirvana principle',¹ an idea originating in the *Project*, as the mind's tendency to divest itself of energy. However,

¹Freud borrowed this term from Barbara Low but is a misnomer. 'Nirvana' refers to the capacity to empty the mind in order to access deeper aspects of consciousness and thus is, quite distinct from the kind of annihilation of thought referred to by Freud.

particularly in the Outline (Freud 1938) Freud describes something which, like Model 1, is noisy in its destructiveness, aimed outwards and also towards the self, “[whose] final aim is to undo connections and so destroy things“ (Freud, 1938, p. 147).

The mindlessness Freud describes brings a peculiar kind of pleasure and this immediately brings us up against one of the central contradictions of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. For what starts off life as a principle used to explain the repetition of un-pleasure, something that is ‘beyond’ pleasure, mysteriously transforms itself via its capacity to pull towards an earlier state of things, disburdening the psyche of tension, into a drive which aims towards a pleasure, but pleasure of a peculiar and ultimate kind. What is beyond the pleasure principle, then, is not beyond it in that it is not to do with pleasure, but *is* beyond it in the sense that it is not to do with any particular pleasure. It is not the pleasure derived from the satisfaction of any particular desire, but a pleasure that derives from the *negation of all desire*. Thinking places a demand upon the mind for work whereas the pleasure aimed at through this ‘Nirvana-like’ principle is a pleasure that arises from the absence of work, mindlessness.

In his paper ‘Negation’ Freud (1925) contrasts a more benign negation,² with something *qualitatively quite different*, “the negativism which is displayed by some psychotics”, which he links to the “instinct of destruction” (p. 238).

In the Schreber case (Freud, 1911) this psychotic negation is described in quite passive terms, as the withdrawal of libido, but in order to grasp its nature Freud quotes these lines from Faust:

Wo! Wo! though hast destroyed the beautiful world
With a powerful fist
In ruins ‘tis hurled
By the blow of a demi-god shattered

(p. 69)

showing here his intuition that the processes he was describing were manifestations of extreme violence.

Klein, in her account of the death drive, describes states of mind that are both violent and sadistic. She describes how, in order to manage the earliest anxieties, destruction arising from within (the death drive) is deflected outwards, so creating a persecutory world; the hating baby creates a hateful breast which he then internalizes and this becomes the psychological foundation of violent attacks upon self and object. The internalized anti-life breast is also the prototype of an envious internal relationship (heir to the death drive within). Although Klein talks of annihilation of objects, they are of course never actually destroyed; it is more an infinite dialectic of destruction that can never end, as every object that is attacked re-emerges as a persecutor.

²The more benign negation is a kind of half-way house to knowledge of the self, as in the following illustration: A patient described a dream in which *he saw a very attractive woman who was dressed seductively and was beckoning to him*. He was very aroused. After a silence of some minutes he said: “Well, it wasn’t my mother”. So the idea that it *was* his mother had entered his conscious mind, had been de-repressed but the continuance of repression is indicated by the negation sign.

Bion makes explicit what is, I believe, implicit in Freud's account of psychotic negation. He centres his attention on mental *functions* (rather than objects), particularly that function he calls 'thinking'. Thinking involves the bringing together of objects in the mind, linking ideas with emotion, and so giving them significance.³

Thinking, then, in Bion's sense, is an expression of the epistemophilic drive of Freud and Klein. He described a Mephistophelian principle that opposes thought – it separates thought from feeling, strips ideas of significance, and attacks all meaning. He called this principle *-K* and it is this which underlies the more malignant type of negation referred to in Freud's paper. For Freud, Klein and Bion this process is a manifestation of the most destructive mental processes. Negation under the aegis of this principle is *not* a first step toward judgement but a 'taking out' of the function that makes judgement possible at all.

Where the mind is confronted with the awareness of need or of desire unfulfilled there are a number of possible outcomes. One is to seek satisfaction, another is to annihilate the experience of need, as well as the experiencing/perceiving self that brings awareness of need (see Segal, 1993). There is a further possibility: to misrepresent the world in such a manner as to create the illusion that the need is already fulfilled. This occurs overtly in hallucinations and, more subtly, in various forms of illusion.

Thinking, in the Klein/Bion model represents, symbolically, the work of an internal creative couple; its fruits new thoughts, equivalent to babies. For Bion, one of the most important characteristics of his principle, *-K*, is "its hatred of any new development, as if the new development were a rival to be destroyed" (Bion, 1962, p. 82) – echoing here Goethe's account of Mephistopheles.

So, it would seem that Klein, Segal and Bion emphasize more the overt violent attack, the destruction of good objects, objects closely linked to the capacity for thinking. However, they clearly also recognise a form of destructiveness that has a more continuous quality; Bion writes: "[It asserts] its superiority by finding fault with everything" (1962, p.96) and, one might add, asserts the superiority of ignorance over knowledge.

The perspective, particularly developed by Betty Joseph and Michael Feldman (see Feldman, 2000), gives more emphasis to the sadistic control of the internal couple preventing their intercourse.

If now we return to my patient's dream: '*There had been a nuclear explosion. The dust, fall-out, fell all over me. It was pleasant and peaceful*', there is a further feature which I think is typical of such situations: the dream *refers* to something that is very violent but this, however, is not witnessed; it is communicated in the passive voice 'there *had been* a nuclear explosion'

Some time later after a useful piece of work in which my patient had become more aware of the reality of my presence as a human being (rather than as a kind of interpreting machine), he suddenly fell silent. On being asked what he was thinking he said, dully: "Nothing". He went on to

³The development of the capacity to think requires that 'objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction' (Freud) which compares easily with Bion's 'the no-breast becomes a thought'.

explain that he could see the colours blue, yellow and white, an experience that was both meaningless and pleasant. When I drew his attention to the fact that the cover of the couch was constituted by exactly these colours, he confirmed he had been quite unaware of this.

At the time I thought of this along the following lines: the reality of the analytic contact represented by the cover of the couch has been negated and evacuated through his eyes as clouds of 'fall-out' that are both meaningless and pleasant.⁴ As in the dream the violent attack on his capacity to think is not witnessed; the patient does not *experience* the explosion but only the aftermath, the pleasant fall-out which serves to paralyse all thought.

One may think here of the pleasure derived from the annihilation of contact (the nuclear explosion). Alternatively, one might emphasise the pull into a kind of agreeable anaesthetized state, nothing except clouds of pleasant colour, removing him from awareness of desire, separation and frustration. There is here a double negation: the violent negation of aspects of reality, and the negation of the fact that this has occurred. Lastly, one might consider the pleasant state of satisfaction as derived from the feeling of having controlled/paralysed me, maintaining me as alive but in a 'severely reduced and undermined' state (Feldman, 2000). Here, the radioactive fall-out gives representation to the minute destructive attacks on contact that continue after the explosion.

Common to all three models is the importance attached to attacks on thinking. But a question naturally arises as to whether hatred of thought is a kind of irreducible datum or a manifestation of a deeper process. Freud described the ego's primordial repudiation of the external world, of anything which is not itself (Britton (2003, p. 127) has called this a 'xenocidal' impulse); this omnipotent force hates anything felt as an obstruction. External reality, of course, acts as just such an obstruction to omnipotence but this only becomes a truly psychological problem when there is *awareness* of this, an awareness which would include the acknowledgement of the loss of the object and the ineluctable unfulfillability of desire.

Thinking at some level presents itself to the mind as an obstruction, and is for this reason hated, both because it is only thought (and not action) and also because such thinking brings to the mind the awareness that reality imposes limitation/obstruction. In a sense it is a case of shooting the messenger (awareness of reality) because the message (the limitations and obstructions imposed by the world) cannot be borne.

Thinking, in the way I am using the term here, depends on the capacity to differentiate beginnings, endings, boundaries between spaces, that is accepting them as limitations rather than viewing them as obstructions to be destroyed.

Marietta, a psychotic adolescent negates all such differentiation in a state of continuous agitated excitement. After three years of analysis Marietta still claims not to know what time her sessions begin or end. Her world is

⁴Bion describes a similar phenomenon in 'Attacks on Linking'.

‘uni-dimensional’– what is good is true, and what is true is good and is inside me. What is bad is outside me.

Characteristically, Marietta arrives for her sessions singing in a kind of empty mindless way. She sings as she comes out of the lift, as she comes through the door of my flat, continues singing in the hall, sings as she comes in and out of the consulting room and moves in and out of the toilet. I thought of the song as a kind of concrete thing, like a string joining all the spaces together so that all differentiation is negated. The door of the consulting room had, she insisted, to be kept open.

However, as a result of a little progress, it seemed that it might be possible to attempt to shut the door of the consulting room. When I informed Marietta of this she replied, characteristically: “I can do what I want, when I want”. But I closed the door. On her way across the consulting room I heard Joan whisper to herself: “The door is open”. Following Freud (1924) we may say that she negated (disavowed) reality and instead “applied a delusion like a patch where originally a rent had appeared in the ego’s relation to reality” (p. 150).

In the following session Marietta showed that there had now been sufficient time for her to recover from this emergency procedure. On coming into the room she left the door open, turned towards me and, timing herself precisely to the moment as I stiffened myself to raise myself from my chair to go and shut the door, she shouted: “Go and shut the door, shit-head”.

In this case she accepts the reality of the closed door but she negates its significance and, *apparently*, brings it under her own control. She thus destroys her capacity to perceive, retains her omnipotence, evades thought, and therefore knowledge.

There are some further features of this interaction that I wish to discuss. It might seem that the immediate response, the ‘delusion’, was the more malignant process, and I had thought this to be so but I no longer do. Firstly, I do not think, strictly, that it was a delusion. She knew the door was shut and the whisper, “the door is open”, was, I thought, more a desperate attempt to deal with some terrible inner situation. In that sense she was well in touch with reality.

However, the material from the following day brings a completely different type of difficulty. What had existed in her mind as a real awareness of the world outside her control was now radically altered. She no longer needs to pretend the door is open. She accepts it is shut but the significance of this has been brought into line with her omnipotence. It is *she* who has demanded that the door be closed. The return of her omnipotent control was associated with great excitement in her, and a feeling of bewilderment and utter hopelessness in me.

It is this *movement* which I wish to consider for a moment as it seems to me to offer a way through the horns of a not uncommon dilemma that arises when we attempt to discuss destructive mental processes. I am thinking, for example, of situations where a particularly perverse scenario, understood as manifestation of deadly psychic processes, is re-interpreted as a necessary defensive procedure which is keeping the individual alive.

A recent example from the literature will serve as an illustration. Feldman (*op. cit.*) describes a patient who seemed to obtain a particular pleasure and gratification from deadening his objects. Alexander (2000), in discussing the material views the patient as in despair and defending himself against unbearable pain, an activity that cannot be destructive, indeed would be more in the service of life, a completely opposite interpretation.

However, if we focus on the manner in which the destructive activity *functions*, we can often observe a transformation. For many such mental processes *originate* as defensive against something that is felt to be unbearable, and in this sense are protective (like Marietta pretending the door is open). However, what starts life as a defence can subtly alter so that it acquires a certain idealized life of its own, detached from its defensive origins and often evincing a kind of manic quality. One can think of patients who dread contact with other human beings but who view their capacity for utter detachment as evidence of superiority.

Freud (1937) describes how individuals seek to re-create situations in life that serve to rationalize their defences, this functioning as a powerful force against any change, “a resistance against the uncovering of resistances” (p. 238) – a ‘meta-resistance’ (my term) against any movement at all, and thus utterly opposed to all development whether it be in life or in the analysis; Freud regarded this as a manifestation of the death drive. Another way of putting this (see Feldman, 1997) is to see the mind as endeavouring to recreate externally its internal picture of the world, to make phantasy into reality. The paradigm of this state is hallucinatory wish-fulfilment which Freud likened to the ‘perceptual identity’ obtained in dreams. Enactment, through its attempt to secure this identity between inner and outer, seeks to re-create this ‘perceptual identity’. The illusion, and it is always an illusion, as complete identity cannot of course ever be achieved, removes that foundation (perception of difference) on which thought depends; and the extent to which this is achieved is the extent to which thinking (or to use Freud’s term ‘judging’) become impossible. The creation of this kind of identity between inner and outer can be associated with a pleasant state of absence of conflict, of absence of tension; this pull towards mindlessness therefore reveals itself as heir to the ‘nirvana-like’ state referred to by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

“This effort to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli” is, according to Freud, “one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of the death instinct” (Freud, 1920, pp. 55–6).

Returning to my patient Marietta, the attack on reality could seem violent and sudden, as she in a wildly manic way destroyed her own capacity to think, ending up in a pitiful state. What might have been thoughts had become “shit” (therefore conforming to Model 1). However, in other situations, the achievement of the illusion of identity is experienced as a kind of numbing mindlessness associated with pleasure (Models 2 and 3).

These processes are easy to see in the patient who is overt and noisy in his endeavours to immobilize the analysis. However, in other patients, similar forces can be mobilized but in a more subtle manner. Mr C endeavoured to create a quiet state of agreeableness accompanied by no movement, and

I struggled with how to think about this. At times it seemed to me that the immobilization served to protect him against unbearable despair, whilst at other times I wondered if the re-creation in his life of the familiar scenario of being neglected was associated with pleasure of a hidden kind.

Mr C

Mr C, a schoolteacher of German origin who moved to London about 10 years ago, works in a job well below his capacity. In the first years of his analysis he seemed to occupy an apparently agreeable position; overtly dedicated to analysis with me, which he claimed as a privileged position, he made huge sacrifices to support it. For example, he agreed to pay a fee which I only very much later realized he could not afford. However, I sometimes glimpsed another version of himself who kept a record of my failures.

He tended to end sessions by remaining on the couch for a few moments as if going over my last interpretation carefully, then would get up, turn to me and say: "Thank you" before leaving. I never knew what he was thanking me for as his life remained as persecuted and unhappy as when we first met, dominated by propitiation of objects whom he distrusted but on whom he depended. Unlike some patients who use analysis to pursue a grievance against various people in their lives, Mr C appeared to use it (at least overtly) to exonerate his bad objects. His view of analysis might be put in the following way: 'Through analysis I can learn how I distort my objects by projecting into them aspects of myself, which analysis will make me own, then I will become able to see my objects as good, instead of bad'. This energetic exposure of himself, in order to alter the reality of his objects, takes place in an atmosphere highly charged with 'moralism'. This patient sought a Kleinian analysis partly because he thought of it as supporting this procedure.

Yet it is also clear that, despite his claims as to the goodness of his objects, there was a deep suspicion of them, largely not owned. Existing in projective identification with a version of me called 'Dave' protects him from being the object of scrutiny of a frightening figure called 'Dr Bell'.

Typically, he will describe a situation that seems outrageous such as his girlfriend promising to meet him for some event of extreme importance, such as an important dinner connected with his work, and then "not turning up", or his catching her making dates with prospective new partners. However, before I have recovered from the latest account, I find my patient has already put it all behind him and is now helping her furnish her house.

Echoing Freud one might say that his life was structured in such a way as to rationalize his defences, to resist the uncovering of his resistances

On one occasion he discovered his girlfriend, B, was having a relationship with another man, but when he confronted her she reassured him that she is going to "sort it out" in a way that my patient appeared to quickly accept, but which I found very unconvincing. Subsequently he tried to phone her and, typically, the line was engaged. He went round to her flat

and, looking through the window, saw her inside having dinner with her lover. He then telephoned her, on his mobile, and asked her what she was doing. She replied that she was “tired and having an early night”. He said: “That is not what it looks like from where I am standing”.

In the subsequent session he described making it up with B; they now understood each other; it was a special sort of relationship. That is, he had dissociated himself from all awareness of the significance of what had happened, his knowledge of the history of his relation to B all now, through projection, located in me. I found myself outside looking in on ‘the romantic lovers’ who have got over their differences and find myself wanting to say: ‘That is not what it looks like from where I am standing’.

Now, although it is clear to me that this way of managing his life functioned to defend Mr C from situations that he could not manage, situations which brought considerable despair, over and above this I began to wonder if there was sometimes a certain excitement associated with his demonstrating again and again to me the inadequacy of his objects. Whenever an object failed him, an inner voice would seem to say, with some satisfaction, ‘typical’. This served to effect, at times, a paralysis of the analysis and it, was never clear to me to what extent this was a necessary defence against intolerable pain and to what extent it was associated with some pleasure.

I will now bring a dream from a recent session which shows a more overt menacing quality, which had *perhaps* always been present, but now brought in a more available form.

This dream came after a period in which there was considerable movement forward, conveying in a quite moving way a fuller contact with me as someone who struggled to achieve things that were worthwhile. He had been discussing, with some feeling, the fact that he had observed that the block of flats (where my consulting room is) had been undergoing some renovation. He noticed that it was painstaking and arduous work. This seemed to bring into view a picture of me as having worked very hard to achieve things (rather than, so to speak, having been fed with a golden spoon):

He visits Wilhelm [his only intimate friend]. In the dream Wilhelm owns an enormous country estate. The patient walks out into the gardens, which are on different levels [he didn't use the word but it sounded like terraces]. He looks around, seems to be impressed but then sees that there is a gorilla moving around in the bushes. He doesn't think this is right – he contrasted the domesticity of the scene with the wild animal skulking about in the bushes. In the dream he thinks: ‘They [the wild animals] should be separated, not intermingling like this’.

He also conveys that he is the only one who seems to be worrying about this danger. There is a dais [a kind of platform]. The gorilla comes out and stands on it. It also moves about on all fours. He associated the dais to going to a local motorbike exhibition show and seeing a new BMW displayed on a platform (the patient is a keen motorcyclist.)]

Then there are people going over the lawns and they are spreading table cloths – they don't seem to be bothered about the gorilla and he conveys again that it doesn't seem right to him.

He is going indoors with Wilhelm and a hairy cat appears. The cat attacks Wilhelm – fastens on his ankle with its jaws. Wilhelm can't do anything and he [my patient] feels helpless to get the animal off him.

During the session we understood the following features:

- He was drawing my attention to something dangerous skulking in the bushes – namely thinking of me as being very pleased with my work (perhaps standing on a platform) and so not recognizing that something wild and menacing has been stimulated in him, not seeing how dangerous the whole situation has become.
- In his associations to the dream, the patient told me of an error that I had made in a bill, that he had noticed. He said he noted it with a “friendly” smile, the *apparent* friendly domesticity. But I thought the smile was also one of triumph in that part of himself skulking about watching me, that can fasten onto something and use it to say to himself, ‘typical’, and so I am thus revealed as no different from all other objects.
- He carefully notes my weakness, my ‘Achilles heel’ and then fastens onto it like the cat, whilst another part of himself watches helplessly in horror.

I have suggested that a certain mindlessness was characteristic of my patient and I saw this as manifesting itself in different ways. At times it seemed to derive from a hidden violent attack upon his objects. From this perspective the dream is very helpful for it makes this activity more available.

However, the attack upon thinking had a more continuous quality as Mr C was pulled over and over again into re-enacting the same central scenario, here the mindlessness was achieved through constant attacks upon his own ego, as he re-creates in the external world the familiar object relation, creating a continuous subtle paralysis of the work- this is more like Model 2. Again, although this might have originated as a defence, it seemed to me to acquire an excited life of its own, in the manner I have described above. One is reminded here of the evidential support that Freud derived for his concept of the death drive, from the very fact of repetition compulsion.⁵

The dream could also be thought of as showing a continuous activity where the patient gets hold of any weakness he sees in me. In this way he maintains his narrow view of himself and his object. The cruel *pleasure* in fastening on to what he thought of as my weak point and, in this way, paralysing the work, is thus suggestive of Model 3.

I was interested in the way that that the previous good session which had a kind of ordinariness about it (the image of the hard and painstaking

⁵This situation recalled to me that group of patients who appear to understand and agree with the analyst's interpretations but, as we come to recognize, silently alter them and thus perceive them in a quite different way. They do not introduce new questions and possibilities but only confirm the patient's picture of the world, show him what he already 'knows'. It 'shows', for example, that the analyst is irritated, or seductive. If the analyst is sometimes a bit irritated, then this is all the patient recognizes, and any other aspects are wiped out, thus confirming an inner picture of the analytic situation which the patient believes in, in his guts, a belief he thinks the analyst shares but will not acknowledge.

work) had been transformed into a version of me on my vast estate, fabulously wealthy and thus as having achieved my wealth effortlessly, with no struggle. This might be thought of as stimulating envy but this view of me I think of more as an effect of envy – there is no need to be envious of an object that has no real capacities of its own and just acquires them as an inheritance.

A note on pleasure in destruction

Segal suggests that the pleasure in destruction partly derives from ‘libidini- zation and sexualization’ of the death drive, but also recognizes there is a kind of pleasure which arises as a natural concomitant of the satisfaction of the death drive. Some authors have tended to equate pleasure with Eros, accounting for the pleasure derived from destructiveness only through the concept of fusion of instincts. This however becomes tautologous (that is, any pleasure comes from Eros, and this is so by definition). However, if we unhook pleasure from Eros, we can then allow a place for *pleasure in destructiveness*.

Laplanche (1976) pointed out that we cannot escape the problem of masochism by locating the pleasure *elsewhere*, for example, through suggesting that the masochist gets pleasure through identification with the sadist who attacks the object, in other words the pain is suffered in order to obtain pleasure *elsewhere*. If that were so, Laplanche maintains, there would be no ‘economic problem of masochism’. The pleasure he points out must be *where the pain is*.

I think a similar argument can be made as regards pleasure in destruction, that is the pleasure is not elsewhere, it is *where the destruction is*. Here again we may distinguish pleasure of two kinds: that derives from destruction itself and that which derives from the continuous pull towards a pleasurable mindlessness.

Conclusion

It is sometimes suggested that Freud’s discovery of the death drive derives from extraneous factors such as the biographical fact of his cancer and the depressing historical fact of World War I. However, this kind of argument starts from the premise it wishes to prove, namely that the concept makes no sense and then justifies what is viewed as Freud’s bizarre deviation with a piece of ‘wild analysis’. Even if it were true that these external facts played their part in sensitizing Freud to the importance of destructive activities, this would not provide an argument against the concept. One could easily argue that Freud’s family constellation was related in some way to his discovery of the Oedipus complex but this would not be considered as an argument against the veracity of concept. For the provenance of an idea has no transparent relation to its truth content; even very good ideas can come from very strange places. A concept such as the death drive has to be shown to provide a better explanation for clinical phenomena not adequately accounted for by already existent theories; and it must also do necessary theoretical work. Wollheim (1971), in his magisterial short book

on Freud, has argued cogently that the concept of the death drive dealt with a theoretical strain existent since the narcissism paper, a strain which threatened the dualism necessary to Freud's theory; the theory of the life and death drives, he argues, restored a deep duality to mental life. Interestingly, Norman O. Brown (1959) makes a very similar argument. The use of the concept of the death drive in contemporary Kleinian theory covers, I have suggested, three different processes whose phenomenology is distinct:

- Violent acts of destruction/annihilation including *internal* phenomena such as the annihilation of thought (Model 1)
- The seductive lure into a world of non-thinking, Freud's pleasant 'Nirvana-like' state (Model 2)
- The sadistic control of objects preventing any movement, this associated with a peculiar pleasure (Model 3)

These destructive activities can be thought of as *events* (as in Model 1) or *processes* (such as the lure towards not nothingness, or continuous sadistic activity), Models 2 and 3. Further *the target of destruction* can be an object or a function. Freud, here drawing on Faust, Faust makes this latter point:

The Devil himself names as his adversary, not what is holy and good, but *Nature's power to create*, to multiply life—that is Eros.

(1930, p. 121, italics mine)⁶

A further differentiation is to be found in those processes that are, so to speak, 'noisy', manifestly destructive, seeking to annihilate all boundaries, and those other processes that work away more quietly.

The concept of the death drive still attracts much opposition, but although we may be less certain now as to whether it is helpful to conceive of it in biological terms, the existence of a psychic force that opposes life and development, and in particular opposes thought, seems to me to have very substantial grounds empirically and has provided a compelling theoretical framework for understanding a profound duality that governs psychic life. The life and death drives may be thought of as powerful ever-present tential forces in the mind.

At the core of Freud is his tragic vision of humanity; the inescapable struggle between the life and hatred of life, between thinking and hatred of thought. I suggest the concept of the death drive expresses that tragic vision in its mature form.

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⁶The former (what is holy and good), I would understand as an object, the latter (the power to create) a function.

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