THE GROUP MEMBER'S VIEW OF INNER AND OUTER REALITY: THE JANUS PHENOMENON APPLIED TO THE GROUP

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This paper surveys some theoretical aspects of psychodynamic group treatment from the vantage point of the "Janus phenomenon." This focus may provide some clarification in understanding how group therapy facilitates growth, especially in the relationships between "inner" realities and the realities of the external world. The paper explores and seeks bridges and connections between the dynamics of the group and intrapsychic dynamics. The "inner" view may be understood as intimately connected with intrapsychic concerns, whereas the issues for patients in groups do, to a degree, concern interpersonal processes in and projections onto the "external" world. The paper concludes that, thus far, we must accept less than perfect integration of theory and settle for "limited domain reasoning" (Scheidlinger, 1982).

This paper concerns the interacting psychological realms of "inner reality," "outer reality," and the group treatment milieu. This theme developed in my mind as a result of Dr. Fenchel's suggestion that we present something about the Janus phenomenon and group psychotherapy. As a result I began to reconsider the myths about the Roman god Janus and their implications for group therapists.

First of all, generally, a wonderful thing about myths is that they convey in imagery and symbolism profound truths. Though the stories are specific, they always contain ambiguous and alloplastic qualities allowing for multiple alternative interpretations (Frazer, 1959).

It is my impression that each person's psyche perceives a sense of phenomenological reality when he or she glances "within." "Facing" the inner stirrings provides a highly subjective existential view of one's own experience* and of one's own being. Janus possesses a second countenance which faces the "op-

*Erlebnis is the term coined by Paul Federn (1952) to refer to subjective experience of the "self."

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posite or outer direction. This gaze is directed toward the external world and provides an impression of the world of objects and interpersonal and social reality. These dual dimensions provide sources of awareness, which help us to “register” and process information and seek balance in our views of ourselves, others, and the world. In a way, this is a sort of “double business” that every human being somehow negotiates. Perhaps one means of “measuring” mental health could be to study the integrative and evaluative capacities of any individual to deal with processing such information.

I (Tuttman, 1988) proposed a relationship between the Janus-faced predicament of man, as described by Modell (1968), and Freud’s formulations about das ich (1895):

This word [das ich], in nontechnical German, translates as “I,” the first-person singular, “the self,” which expressed the person’s subjective state. There were many occasions in his writing when Freud used ich in a manner clearly synonymous with selbst (German for “self”) the experiencing self; and yet at other times, he used ich to refer to a particular “agency” of self-hood, namely the organizing, administrating part of the individual’s mental apparatus. Metapsychologically inclined psychoanalysts call this regulating psychic institution the ego. In fact, Strachey, the editor of the Standard Edition of Freud’s writing (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973; Kernberg, 1982) translated Freud’s word ich to ego. As a consequence, the English translation of Freud’s papers is misleading: namely, a “playing down” of the personal sense of self—the subjective, phenomenological state, which had been implicit often in Freud’s German use of ich. Instead, a more “objective” mechanistic tone prevails. (Tuttman, 1988, p. 210)

I (Tuttman, 1988) further proposed: “It is probable that Freud chose the ambiguous broader term ich to reflect his view that the ego-I-self aspects of the human psyche are multifaceted and related to the uniquely human Janus-faced predicament” (p. 210). That is, Man/Woman has both a mechanistic organ of perception which strives toward pragmatic adaptation and compromise; but he/she also has an intuitive experientially based sensing capacity.* Each person’s experience and knowledge of “being” continually oscillates between subjective and objective, between experiencing and observing (p. 210).

What does the group treatment situation have to do with the inner-oriented and outer-oriented dual view predicament? Clearly, the psychoanalytic concept of ego and self deals with both the “inner” (intrapsychic) and the outer (interpersonal). Does the group situation and/or group interaction in some way enhance or facilitate both feeling and experiencing, on one hand, and perceiving and conceptualizing, on the other? My answer is Yes! I offer two examples from personal life:

The situation involved one of my sons, when he was learning to speak and was preoccupied with his dependency needs to the extent that the presence or absence of caretakers was still very important. At that time, he came to a family party among friends and relatives he cared about. He said “Dad, let’s all play hide and seek.” He placed himself in the center of the room and covered his eyes while excitedly telling everybody, “I am hiding. Can you find me?”

*Another means of conceptualizing the Janus phenomenon discussed here is to be found in the neurophysiological studies of Bogen (1969) and Hoppe (1989) on cerebral-cortical specialization and split-brain phenomena.