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Chapter # 19

DRIVE FOR RESEARCH IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Freud distinguished between the drive for self-preservation and the drive for the preservation of the species, and later between the life and the death drive. Between 1908 and 1915, he wrote about *Wissbegierde* (the greed to know), but left the question of the instinctive longing for knowledge unresolved for two reasons: (a) what kind of satisfaction is connected with *Wissbegierde*; (b) how to reconcile passion and impartiality in the search for truth. Our aim is to determine whether there are arguments for accepting the hypothesis of a drive for research. If we have a theory of the development of libido (oral, anal, urethral, phallic), then what could constitute the development of the drive for research? We propose Winnicott's theories of development from the subjective object, through the transitional object, to the objective object. We could say that the prototype of the K (Bion's term) relationship is the mother–child relationship, while the exemplar is the analyst–analysand relationship in the psychoanalytic situation. Thus, the drive for research can be understood as a key personal motive in psychoanalysis, which strives to achieve a mature object relationship through object permanence, just as love is an expression of the development of the libido.

Keywords: drive, epistemophilia, K, object permanence, emotional relationship.

1. INTRODUCTION

Christopher Bollas described the arrival of psychoanalysis as the “Freudian Moment” (Bollas, 2007). He said that “there has been some failure on all of our parts to fully recognize this extraordinary moment” (Bollas, 2007, p. 2). The essence lies in the research method, the psychoanalytic method, which is based on the analyst–analysand pair and the analytic situation as a research situation that includes the free associations of the analysand and the free-floating attention of the analyst, where the analyst “must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the transmitting microphone. Just as the receiver converts back into sound waves the electric oscillations in the telephone line which were set up by sound waves, so the doctor's unconscious is able, from the derivatives of the unconscious which are communicated to him, to reconstruct that unconscious, which has determined the patient's free associations” (Freud, 1912/1958a, pp. 115–116).

There is an element of passion in Freud's desire for knowledge, referred to by him as his “overpowering need to understand something of the riddles of the world in which we live and perhaps even to contribute something to their solution” (Freud, 1926/1959, p. 253).

It was through the study of Leonardo da Vinci that Freud tried to understand the passion for research. Freud first expressed his interest in Leonardo in a letter to Fliess dated 9 October 1898, and after gathering a great deal of information about Leonardo, he began to develop the subject further in November 1909, and published his book in May 1910

(Quinodoz, 2005). The instinct for research as a concept in Freud's writings was short-lived, appearing primarily between 1908 and 1915 (Blass, 2006). Freud used two terms: *Wissbegierde*, which is translated as “greed to know,” “passion to know,” or “instinctual longing to know,” and *Neugierde*, which is translated as “greed to know” (or “greed for the new”). The English translation of *Wissbegierde* as curiosity blurred the difference between these terms. Freud wrote that in certain cases “the libido evades the fate of repression by being sublimated from the very beginning into curiosity and by becoming attached to the powerful instinct of research [German: *Wissbegierde*] as a reinforcement” (Freud, 1910/1957, p. 80). The drive for research is clearly stated here by Freud, but he did not find enough evidence to convince himself of its fundamental nature.

The aim of the chapter is to find out, by studying the psychoanalytic literature, how Freud's initial idea developed and whether there are arguments for accepting the hypothesis of a drive for research in psychoanalysis.

2. THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Fisher (2006, p. 1222) took “Bion’s schema of L, H, and K to be a version of Freud’s account of human experience in terms of instinctual impulses recast in terms of emotional experience.” L represents X loves Y, H represents X hates Y, and K represents X knows Y (Bion, 1962, p. 43). Fisher starts “from the assumption ... in terms of instinctive impulses” (Fisher, 2006, p. 1222), proposing that “K (knowing) is related to feeling curious (the impulse to curiosity), the way L (loving) is related to feeling pleasure (the pleasure impulse, the impulse of attraction), and H (hating) is related to feeling pain (the pain impulse, the impulse of aversion).”

Here we have a kind of confusion in trying to differentiate between emotional experience, feelings, and instinctive impulses. Bion’s contribution cannot be understood without Freud’s two principles of mental functioning. Fisher (2006, p. 1222) compares “the tensions between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, as the dichotomy of tensions between the emotional experience of L/H and the emotional experience of K”. For Bion, the importance lay in the function of comprehension (Bion, 1962, p. 4), which Freud (1911/1958b, p. 220) attached to “consciousness [which] now learned to comprehend sensory qualities in addition to the qualities of pleasure and unpleasure.”

Bion goes on to resolve the contradiction that arises from attributing comprehension to consciousness, and he found support in “Freud’s later conceptualization” (1962, p. 4): “But what part is there left to be played in our scheme by consciousness, which was once so omnipotent and hid all else from view? Only that of a sense-organ for the perception of psychical qualities” (Freud, 1900/1953, p. 615). Freud went on to say: “A special function was instituted which had periodically to search the external world, in order that its data might be familiar already if an urgent internal need should arise—the function of attention” (1911/1958b, p. 220).

For Freud, when we are in a position of “the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction ... that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination,” then “the psychical apparatus had to decide to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavor to make a real alteration in them” (1911/1958b, p. 119). For Fisher, there is a conceptual gap here, and for him the decision to form a conception of the real world presupposes the existence of an impulse of curiosity (2006, pp. 1224–1225).

It is advisable here to remind oneself of Tolman's experiments (Tolman & Honzik, 1930) with rats, which led to the concept of latent learning. Even though there is no external reinforcement, the rat actively learns while exploring the maze. When food is later placed in the maze, the rat learns based on only one reinforcement. The explanation offered by researchers is that the satisfaction of natural curiosity represents internal reinforcement (Wang & Hayden, 2021).

3. THE DRIVE FOR RESEARCH

We propose the term drive, following the argument given by André Green (1991) in *Instinct in the Late Works of Freud*. Freud used the term *Trieb*, which is translated into French as *pulsion*. The English translation was *instinct*, although the word *drive* is closer to the meaning of *Trieb*. Green stated that the concept of instinct has its operational value "because, on a simple descriptive level, the hypothesis of instinct accounts better for the clinical facts than the alternative theses of object relations, meaning, adaptive function, and so on. All these alternatives leave hardly any place in their explanatory development for the impression that a part of psychic life has succeeded in seizing control of the direction of all of this life, either by dragging it along an undesired path or by paralyzing its course, against the wishes and interests of the individual concerned" (Green, 1991, p. 136). We use the term research because it is observable in the behavior of children that they explore the environment around them, without assuming what the motive behind it is be it curiosity, activity, or something else.

3.1. The Significance of the Drive for Research for Psychoanalysis

We already mentioned the Freudian moment at the beginning, as well as the importance of the discovery of the psychoanalytic method. What is the *differentia specifica* of psychoanalysis? The central tool of the psychoanalyst is interpretation, and thus psychoanalysis is a research method (and a method of cure) by insight. Bion (1963, p. 69) expressed it in his own manner: "The peculiarity of a psychoanalytic session, that aspect of it which establishes that it is a psychoanalysis and could be nothing else, lies in the use by the analyst of all material to illuminate a K relationship." As Blass stated (2006, p. 1273), it is part of the "psychoanalytic legacy that there is intrinsic value to this search for truth."

3.2. Paradox Passionate – Impartial

Through analyzing the inherent tensions in Freud's text on Leonardo, Blass (2006) came to the conclusion that Freud left the question of the instinctive longing for research unresolved for two reasons: (a) what kind of satisfaction is connected with *Wissbegierde*—what is the object of the drive, and could truth be seen as an object that brings satisfaction, and (b) how to reconcile passion and impartiality in the search for truth. Blass (2006, p. 1272) found a resolution in the workings of Eros: "We can desire truth passionately without it serving some need or wish and without it distorting our perception of reality because Eros is a striving towards unity that is universal and does not necessarily seek personal gratification".

We will approach the paradox of passionate–impartial from a different angle. If the drive and the object of the drive are in a relationship, we could ask: in what kind of relationship are they? If the object comes from the outside and the drive is satisfied, we have a perfect match and no need for development. If the object does not come, the psyche is able to hallucinate the object and thus satisfy the psychic wish—but not for long if we are

talking about nourishment for the organism. There is a need for a mediator between the drive and the object, between internal and external reality, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. This mediating role is assigned to the Ego in Freud's structural model of the mind. The Ego develops through the struggle between the pleasure and reality principles. When the pleasure principle is dominant, the Ego will hallucinate, be prone to bias and subjectivity. When the reality principle is dominant, the Ego will observe, be prone to impartiality and objectivity.

But how does the Ego develop? What is the ideal of Ego development? Is it impartiality and the conception of reality that provides the best solution for satisfying the drives? It is not easy to give a straightforward answer to these questions. Libido development has been convincingly documented, and libido reaches its maturity with genital love. But libido is not the only ingredient of genital love. There is a complex relationship between two persons in a mature love relationship. The Ego also has a part in it—which is not surprising, because part of the libido is present in Ego development, according to Freud. But does that give us the right to ask whether the drive for research also participates in a similar way in the development of the Ego? Let us try to find out what a development of the drive for research would look like.

3.3. The Development of the Drive for Research

We propose to use Winnicott's theory of the use of the object (Winnicott, 1969), which describes the developmental progression from the subjective object, through the transitional object, to the objectively perceived object. The subjective object is one that has not yet been repudiated as a not-me phenomenon and is therefore under omnipotent control. The transitional object is a 'not-me' possession—something simultaneously created by the infant and provided by the environment. The objectively perceived object is recognized as an entity existing independently, with a clear sense of otherness. In this way, the reality principle is inherently involved in the development of the object from the subjective object to the objectively perceived object.

When Freud discovered infantile sexuality, it was relatively easy to differentiate the developmental stages of libido, or the drive for the preservation of the species. Freud faced difficulties in gaining public acceptance of his theory, because until then, sexuality was associated exclusively with adults. What makes the drive for the preservation of the species evident is the prototype embodied in sexual intercourse. Now we can ask: what is the prototype of the drive for research? We propose that the prototype for the drive for research is the mother-child relationship, and, because this relationship is embedded in the psychoanalytic setting, we propose taking the psychoanalytic process, which develops in the psychoanalytic setting, as an exemplar of the drive for research.

During that process, participants (analyst and analysand) could recognize three main relationships, or emotional experiences: L (love, appetitive experience, positive transference), H (hate, aversive experience, negative transference), and K (experience of knowing, reverie). Reverie is the mother's function of containing the experience of the baby, digesting and detoxifying it so that it can become mental and find a form. The same is done in psychoanalysis by the analyst, who contains and digests what is put into him/her by the analysand.

During the psychoanalytic process, we can observe changes from the subjective object toward the object objectively perceived, from omnipotence to independence, from part-objects to whole-objects, and so on. In this way, the K experience is connected with strivings toward object constancy or object permanence. The psychoanalytic setting has elements of permanence, stability, regularity, fixity, and durability, which enable

experiences of reverie, holding, and containment to help foster development in the analysand. Interpretation is a verbal upgrade of the experience of knowing. In this way, psychoanalysis is truly an exemplar of the drive for research, and there is an intimate connection between psychoanalysis, K, and growth.

4. THE DRIVE FOR RESEARCH AND THIRDSNESS

The essence of the Oedipal drama is the sacrifice of sexuality (Perelberg, 2009). Oedipus, who survived filicide, darkened by the difference between the two parental couples (the one who created him and the one who raised him), committed parricide without being aware of it. While living as the king of Thebes, he is tormented by the desire to discover the truth about the king's killer. Although this truth is within reach, Oedipus and the other participants in the drama turn a blind eye (Steiner, 1985) to the fact, which can be easily concluded. After the truth was revealed to him in its full extent, Oedipus blinded himself. This symbolic act indicates the deceptiveness of appearances and the turning to the inner light that alone reveals the true path to truth. There is also another view that Oedipus blinded himself because he could not bear either to face external reality or to realize that he had previously been 'blind' (Quinodoz, 1999, p. 26).

Starting from the universality of the Oedipus myth, Freud takes us back to the beginning of history through the story told in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1912–13/1955a). It is his construction of the myth on the basis of which culture arose as a necessity to prevent the father of the primitive horde from acting as an omnipotent, narcissistic father who had possessed all the women and ruled through terror. By killing the father of the primitive horde, a narcissistic father who thinks only of himself—a symbolic father is introduced, represented through a totem, who is respected but also prohibits further killing (within the community) and incestuous relations. A myth is a symbolic representation of the psychological, and wider social, culture in which man lives today.

Freud's personal life was such that it "forced" him to face his homicidal desires. Immediately after his father's death, he conducted a self-analysis through which he laid the foundations of psychoanalysis as a method and of dreams as a medium between the past deposited in the unconscious and the future movement of the individual towards revival and self-knowledge through others. The psychoanalytic method works both through the mother–child dimension (analyst–analysand) and through the paternity dimension (the rule of abstaining from sexuality and violence). These dimensions carry a number of other symbolic functions that are present during the psychoanalytic process and cannot be reduced simply to the mother–child relationship and prohibition.

What is more important to point out is that, as we clearly see, sexuality is repressed, displaced, sublimated, denied, and similar; it is more difficult to see how research is inhibited, deformed, or obscured in its function. Bion perhaps expressed this most clearly with his thesis on attacks on linking (Bion, 1959), pointing to the mechanism of hallucination, barely perceptible during a session with a patient (Bion, 1958), and the patients' need to escape from the truth (Bion, 1970).

The murdering of the father of the original horde "inaugurates thirdsness, open time and genealogy" (Perelberg, 2009, p. 78). For Freud, the individual is by definition excluded from the primal scene. He wrote: "These scenes of observing parental intercourse, of being seduced in childhood, and of being threatened with castration are unquestionably an inherited endowment, a phylogenetic heritage, but they may just as easily be acquired by personal experience" (Freud, 1918/1955b, p. 97). The primal scene opens the enigma of femininity and masculinity, of creation, of thirdsness. With the drive for research, we are continuously looking for the hidden truth in all this. As Civitarese (2016, p. 493) said, "Truth, so to speak, coincides with being."

5. CONCLUSIONS

Freud developed the psychoanalytic method as a method for the research of the psyche and, in parallel, as a method of cure. As a method of research, it has even greater value, especially today, when we are faced with the enormous potential for the destruction of the human race. Now, more than a hundred years after Freud's discovery of the psychoanalytic method, we can also follow the history of psychoanalysis as a history of the development of psychoanalytic ideas, various schools of thought, conflicts among them, and so on. This history is not much different from history in general, because we are all human and, as such, prone to destruction, falsification, and wrong interpretation. That is exactly why we think it is important to extract the drive for research and give it a proper place in the psychoanalytic oeuvre.

Nevertheless, psychoanalysis is a method that interprets psychic processes and human behavior. It is of enormous value to cultivate in the psychoanalyst a research attitude through training in the observation of psychic phenomena during the psychoanalytic process. With the drive for research in mind, psychoanalysts engaged in the education and training of new psychoanalysts should examine the personal motives of candidates in training. Among these should be motives connected with a passion for the research of the psyche.

Psychoanalysis, through research, leads us to mature object relations, which are characterized by more love than hate (an expression of the development of libido) and more objects objectively perceived than subjective objects (an expression of the development of the drive for research). We are in constant dialogue with thirdness, extracting truth from the unknown.

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