“Mind” in Group Analysis.

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Introduction

There is a lengthy tradition of inquiry into the understanding of mind in philosophy, religion, psychology and cognitive science.

In this paper the concept of mind will be presented from the point of view of Group Analysis.

S. H. Foulkes (1973, 2003) tried to give a definition of mind in the spirit of his theory and practice in Group Analysis. He claimed that mind is a shared property of human beings. In his view, innate potential is put into operation by experiences in relation to things and people and becomes structured by such experiences. So,” all which is mental is a matter of more than one individual person and brain from the beginning” (Foulkes, 2003:320).

“Mind” in Group Analysis.

The Oxford American Dictionary defines Mind as the ability to be aware of things and to think and reason, originating in the brain, and as a person’s thoughts and attention; also as remembrance or opinion.

Another definition of Mind: in the Western Tradition, the complex of faculties involved in perceiving, considering, remembering, evaluating and deciding.

Mind is in some sense reflected in such occurrences as sensations, perceptions, emotions, memory, desires, various types of reasoning, motives, choices, traits of personality, and the unconscious (Britannica).

In his book “Introduction to Group Analytic Psychotherapy”, Foulkes (1948: 15-16) claimed “that the social aspect of human behaviour is basic and central, and not of a peripheral, comparatively superficial nature, not a later coming, additional, conditioning “outside” influence. Indeed the family Group and its influence is precipitated in the innermost core of the human mind, incorporated into the child’s growing ego and superego, forming their very nucleus”.

Foulkes further claimed that the “mind consists of interacting processes between a number of closely linked persons commonly called a group”. In this view, when a group of people come into intimate relations, they create a field of mental happenings between them all. These are ‘transpersonal processes’, that is mental processes which like X-rays in the bodily sphere, go right through the individuals composing such a ‘network’. This totally new phenomenon which they create (he) usually refers to as the ‘context of the group’. He used this term instead of ‘group mind’ which is an unsatisfactory substantivation. So” the mind is not a thing which exists but a series of events, moving and proceeding all the time”. He claimed that the interactional processes play in a unified field of which the individuals composing it are a part. (Foulkes 1973: 224).

In a later paper Foulkes (1974: 278) thought that “the real nature of mind lies in each individual’s need for communication and reception”. He related this need to language, which is indispensable if complete communication on the human level is to proceed. He acknowledged that we are born with this capacity to acquire language in our brains. But he claimed that even when the human being thinks by himself in his own mind, “it is at the same time a shared property of the group, and the individual is forced into it from the beginning by the surrounding culture”. “Language is one of the main and most significant mental phenomena and can only be maintained and be meaningful as a group phenomenon”. .

Foulkes also related to the dilemma between mind and brain, agreeing with Freud’s idea that there is a brain and there “are our acts of consciousness which are immediate data and cannot be further explained by any sort of description”. He added: “our knowledge of the complete dependence of mental processes on bodily sources, and in particular on processes going on in the human brain in no way explains the phenomenon of mind” (Foulkes, 2003:317).

When linking mind and body, Foulkes accepted “that one of the sources of our mental life rests, no doubt in our total inherited admixture; we feel either fundamentally better or not-so-good in our skins, according to the genes we have inherited. Equally, somatic disturbances, oscillations and phases of all sorts continuously influence the basic tone of how we feel in ourselves and in the world. This, our ‘nature’, forms the nucleus of our real ‘self’, of that which is quite unique in
any of us, never repeated in the same way. When we live in harmony with this self and live up to its full potential we feel ‘this is really me’” (2003: 318).

Foulkes made a distinction between religious beliefs of what is mind and a scientific approach which does not “question that mind is identical with life, with living, and that its energies are completely dependent on the body, or that bodily processes are inseparable from them; so that what by abstraction we call mind ends with the individual’s death” (Foulkes, 2003: 317).

From a therapeutic point of view, Foulkes disputed the idea of an individual mind on the grounds that he pathology of a patient usually is been sustained by a network. When the patient begins to change, the whole network equilibrium is threatened. Accepting this position requires an acceptance of greater responsibility from the community where the patients comes from. So, in his eyes, there is a defensive interest in keeping the mind individual (Foulkes, 1973: 225).

Later authors (de Mare & Schollberger, 2004) wrote “about the mind as playing a primary role in therapy” (2004: 339). They developed their position in accord with Aristotle who established the differentiation mind-body. They disagreed with Foulkes who wrote that mind consists of experience completely socially and culturally conditioned (2003, 318), since for them “the Mind thinks, and is in no way completely conditioned, which denotes a passivity of mind when in fact the mind is the essence of activity in sorting out… discrepancies” (2004, 341).

De Mare & Schollberger, suggested that “the mind starts as a response to the violent revolutionary stress of birth itself. They concluded that “mind is mind is mind explicitly central, single and elemental, not secondary” (2004:342), “the ultimate a priori” (2004: 345).

“Mind starts where matter stops, not as a linear extension or epiphenomenon but as a complete round about turn which reflects matter” (de Mare and Schöllberger, 2004: 343). “It is imperative that we differentiate between the reflected and the process of reflecting” (de Mare and Schöllberger, 2004: 344). As an example “the concrete presence of brain is in sharp contradistinction to the abstract presence of mind, which entails relating of one or more brains” (Schöllberger, 2009: 291).
They propose a triad which “consists of a first body-mind duality followed by a relationship between the dyads which is a dialectical process, and the preserve of the Mind” (2004: 345). The Mind is the third; it is the “specific processes of reflectiveness, disentanglement, choice, meaning, focusing, minding, grace and beauty. The mind is indubitably active- not simply a process of flat mirroring of reflection but a deliberate focusing by consciousness at the world (346).

“As a Rose is a Rose, a Mind is a Mind. Not proven, but indubitable! It introduces a unique mini-philosophy crucial to all philosophy for which psychotherapy is itself responsible” (346).

They stated that “it is the personal mind which is primary…the mind has no vocation, being a pure process of new or creative disentanglement, like mathematics, but far more lively” (de Mare and Schollberger, 2004: 347).

“There is in the world we live in a certain very strange quality which is that of meaning itself, which is extremely elusive and often denied as being random…It is this something or other which opens us to all sorts of imaginings with absolute freedom, from pessimism to optimism, which, since it does not oppress, relieves us from depression” (de Mare and Schollberger, 2004: 347).

“The mutual interaction between social and personal is highly significant, since it constitutes the basis for consciousness, whilst society shapes the mind without the mind being initially aware of what is happening. So the mind cultivates society in a manner that society is at first totally unaware. Consciousness only gradually develops” (de Mare and Schollberger, 2004: 348).

They stated that “groups do not think; it happens only when a single mind meets other minds, it is their reflections that are shared. The mind itself remains clear in order to function freely to disentangle, make choices and arrive at decisions. The group as such is only a passive agent, whilst the mind is active; consciousness therefore is by no means synonymous with mind, since it only reflects the ‘mirror reaction’” (2004: 348). And “the group mind, strictly speaking, is the group culture because the group does not think, it is only the single, unique mind which minds, cares, loves, has visions, and takes decisions de Mare states: there is no doubt about the singleness of every person” (Schöllberger, 2009:292).
Blackwell summarized the issue by contending “that mind is not definable, yet it would appear to be both immanent and transcendent. Most importantly it is activated through contact with another” (2008: 36).

Mind and Matrix.

“By matrix is meant a psychic network of communication which is the joint property of the group and not only interpersonal but transpersonal” (Foulkes, 1965). “The concept of a shared matrix enables one to envisage theoretically a surprising discovery: that what we were brought up to regard as quite particularly intra-psychic, inner mental reality, intradermic so to speak, is shared property of the group” (Foulkes, 1965)

Foulkes argued that even a group of total strangers, being of the same species, and more narrowly from the same culture, share a fundamental mental matrix (foundation matrix). Their closer acquaintance and intimate exchanges add consistently, so they also form a current, ever moving, ever developing dynamic matrix (1973: 228).

**References.**


