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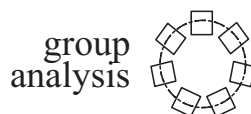
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Response



Response to ‘Glover, Bowlby, psychiatry, Bion and the War Office Selection Boards’ by Christine Vickers

Tom Harrison 

History too often is seen as a pleasant dessert to the hard work of the main course of daily practice. Something to be read in one’s spare time. Unfortunately, this leaves the tree without roots. The continuing debate between the group analytic approach and that of the Tavistock is an obvious example of a controversy deeply embedded in the past. Attempts to overcome the division have to recognize the different traditions or they are likely to fail. Exploring the history of group therapies both offers new perspectives and an understanding of the social trajectory in which we are embedded, as well as an opportunity to review preconceptions about the actors. In responding to Christine Vickers’ glimpse into our controversial past (Vickers, 2023) I will take up two issues, the neglected role of Edward Glover at the British Psycho-Analytical Society and the uncertainties around the development of group practice in the British Army.

At the heart of the conflict at the British Psycho-Analytical Society was the concern to preserve an untainted theory against heresy. As Eric Rayner has observed practitioners who use psychoanalysis in the service of others can be accused of watering it down, or ‘obscuring, analytic essentials, whilst those who maintain a “pure” position may be accused of “sterile self-absorption” (Rayner, 1996: 259–60)’. Those who worked in the British Army found themselves facing practical issues that enforced solutions that were psychoanalytically informed, but employed techniques derived from other schools of thought. Thomas Kuhn has ably demonstrated how we cling on to received wisdom in the face of overwhelming evidence, until a

revolution occurs and another set of theories become embedded (Kuhn, 1996). In some ways these debates counter his argument in that the range of alternative theories continue to increase, without one achieving predominance.

Edward Glover has received little attention by historians and biographers although he was a stalwart of the early British psychoanalytic scene (Roazen, 2000). To him and Ernest Jones we owe the establishment of the British Psycho-Analytic Society and yet that organization's web page fails to mention him. His relationship to Jones was problematic. In public he rarely disagreed with his president, but the latter's reputation for self-advancement and tendency to slaughter 'anyone who came across his path', would have been difficult to work with (Glover quoted in Roazen, 2000: 30). Glover has been described as having a 'remarkable, independently thinking mind', who promoted the central importance of the emotions, particularly transference and counter-transference, in the psycho-analytic relationship (Kubie, 1973: 89–90; Rayner, 1996: 20). His central aim in life came to be to find 'a common ground of essential theory of psychoanalysis' and to 'correct extravagance' (Glover quoted in Kubie, 1973: 88). Along with Jones, he defended Freud's theories against persistent attacks. In particular, the recognition of childhood sexuality provoked outrage. The first paper given on psycho-analysis in the UK by David Eder, in 1911, had an audience of eight, all of whom left the room when he brought up the subject (Jones, 1964: 365). Many British psychotherapists who espoused psychoanalytic ideas practised a 'watered down' version (Hearnshaw, 1964: 167).

Glover was a very successful promoter of the psychoanalytical movement in Britain. He published articles in the *Listener*, *Lancet*, *Spectator*, *Times*, *New York Times* and elsewhere (Roazen, 2000: xxxii). The *Cavalcade* magazine referred to by Vickers has to be distinguished from the popular men's magazine after the war that ran after the war. It ran from 1936 to 1950 and aimed to be a British version of the American *Time* magazine with a circulation of around 50,000 (Knowles and Vossen, 2018: 219–20).

As we know, from its beginnings psychoanalysis has been riven with splits. In Britain the 1930s and 1940s heralded profound changes in how it was understood, of which the discoveries about group processes were a small but significant part. Glover himself believed that up until 1930 Freud's ideas were predominant, but after that everything was all 'at sixes and sevens' (Glover quoted in Roazen, 2000: 48; See also 2000: 72). The predominance of instinctual theory came

under sustained attack as relationships took precedence (Fairbairn, 1952). The entrance of women into the profession brought with it direct observations of how children actually developed psychologically, rather than relying on the recall of adults in analysis. No longer was the infant a passive recipient driven by instincts, but an active participant provoking responses from the very beginning. Mothers supplanted fathers in becoming the most significant influences on their psychodynamic development (Roazen, 2000: 46; Zaretsky, 2005: 193–216). A number of people have commented on Glover's defensiveness against intellectual women (e.g. Sylvia Payne quoted in Roazen, 2000: 51). He believed that the turmoil in the Society was caused by 'dragons' and it was 'a pseudo-scientific manifestation of the battle of the sexes' (Glover quoted in Roazen, 2000: 56; Glover quoted in Kubie, 1973: 92). As an aside, the British Psycho-Analytic Society was probably one of the few contemporary mixed arenas where the views of women gained such pre-eminence, a fact perhaps worthy of further study.

In the light of these attacks on Freud's ideas Glover clearly was defensive and belligerent. Paul Roazen considers that he was a fallible human being, 'caught in the middle of forces which were beyond his capacity to control' (Roazen, 2000: 169). He goes on to say that the passions aroused during this period were due to the hatred, by both sides, of anyone seen to be guilty of 'betraying the cause' (Roazen, 2000: 47). Much of the criticism levelled at Glover, during this period from his colleagues in the Society, refer to his aloof and arrogant attitude (King and Steiner, 1992: 27; Rayner, 1996: 19). Even the normally placid John Rickman was moved to anger, for which he later apologised (King and Steiner, 1992: 34). Pearl King comments that part of the difficulty was that those who had been officers in the Army had become used to being in authority themselves (King, 1989: 17). His criticisms of the involvement of the Tavistock psychiatrists in military psychiatry were minor in comparison to his concerns about the work of Melanie Klein and other 'deviants' from the true faith of Freudianism, but the fact that he took to public media to disparage their work is significant. This is particularly true in the light of his continued promotion of 'Social Psychiatry'. In the *Lancet* in 1940 he believed that the war had 'established conclusively the case for a new social psychiatry' and in the later preface to his book *The Roots of Crime* he observed that 'psychology and sociology were bound sooner or later to join forces' (Glover, 1940, 1960: xii). In the latter he made it clear that psychoanalytical thought

was fundamental and even criticized his erstwhile colleagues in stating that they 'have so far produced only the broadest generalizations regarding group psychology' and have ignored a 'detailed social approach'.

It is difficult to understand his attitude to the activities of the military psychiatrists who would appear to have been carrying out exactly his recommendations. Their attachment to the Tavistock Clinic perhaps lay at the heart of the matter. He may well have also been smarting from his rejection by the Ministry of Information in proffering his social-psychological insights in 1940, as well as the refusal by the War Office that Vickers refers to. The minister concerned reported privately that he was 'entangled in difficulties with Edward Glover' who did not seem quite as mad as another psychologist (quoted in Thomson, 2006: 229). His objection to 'surface psychology' and in particular selection tests have some legitimacy. There is a superficial validity to his concerns about 'a Nazi-type of social psychiatry' in that the War Office Selection Boards had some origins in German military officer selection procedures and leaderless groups (*rundgesprach*) in which the soldiers were encouraged to share their ideas (Murray, 1990: 47; Rees, 1945: 67; Shephard, 2000: 191–92). However, the outcome in the British Army was entirely different as the aim was to promote commanders who were aware of the holistic needs of their men. On a more serious level, in the 1960s the application of 'objective test procedures' were whole-heartedly endorsed as the only scientific method of selection in civilian life by Hans Eysenck, a notoriously anti-psychoanalysis psychologist, who considered that personal interviews just confused the objectivity of the scientific approach (Eysenck, 1964: 103). Indeed, he specifically condemns Glover for his reliance on 'emotional bias' (Eysenck, 1964: 230).

Bowlby's assertion that he was attacking all psychoanalysts working in the British Army is unlikely to be true. Dennis Carroll was seen as Glover's likely successor in the Society and shared with Foulkes a stance orientated towards Anna Freud, and Elizabeth Rosenberg worked as a clinical psychiatrist at Mill Hill where she clearly endorsed traditional Freudian ideas (Main, 1984; Harrison, 2000: 201; Rosenberg, 1943). All three were more involved in clinical matters. It is possible that Foulkes may have been a target in that he was exploring group therapy and, as stated earlier, Glover was clearly of the opinion that group theory had made no significant advances even by 1960. It was those who were associated with the Tavistock Clinic that were in his line of fire. They were tackling broad social issues.

Jones and Glover had long been 'arrogant in their dealings' with that organization, particularly because of the latter's acceptance of Jungian and Adlerian analysts diluting the 'pure gold of psychoanalysis' (Dicks, 1970: 80; King, 1989: 17). They virtually forbade participation with the clinic and other professionals as well (Rayner, 1996: 259, 296). Despite these strictures, two women members of the Society, Susan Isaacs and Karen Stephen, had defied the ban on communicating with the clinic by giving lectures there during the 1930s, perhaps adding to Glover's concerns about women's assertiveness (Dicks, 1970: 83).

This assault, of course, was part of a wider war Glover was waging. After an initial period of support in the early 1930s, he attacked Melanie Klein. With Melitta Schmideberg, who had been in analysis with him and 'turned against her mother while in treatment', he engaged in a long-drawn out controversy (Roazen, 1979: 476; Rayner, 1996: 17). The eventual outcome was his resignation from the Society in 1944.

Psychologists and psychiatrists were not the only people in the army who were thinking about how groups operate. Vickers draws our attention to the interest of Colonel 'Boney' Fuller in group psychology. In passing, her mention of his statement that 'Leadership was the natural prerequisite for a gentleman' refers to his experience at Sandhurst in 1898 and he admitted to knowing nothing of the 'present-day democratic army' in 1959 (J.F.C. Fuller quoted in Dixon, 1988: 234). Whilst there is no evidence that Bion had knowledge of his work, it is likely that he was aware of his writing. Elsewhere the sociologist Karl Mannheim was also promoting the value of work-groups instead of the dole, William MacDougal had written on the *Group Mind* and Freud had published his seminal work on *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, and yet none of this was evident when Emmanuel Miller edited *The Neuroses of War* in 1940 (Miller, 1940). This contained essays by Bion, Ronald Hargreaves, and A.T.M. Wilson on the nature and management of mental disorder in war time. The only reference to communalism of any sort is provided by Bion who refers to the soldier being a member of a 'close unit' different from the civilian who has no such support (Bion, 1940). As Vickers reports, he advocated methods for involving civilians in teams to tackle air raids in different situations. Foulkes, of course, from September 1941 was exploring group therapy in Exeter, but his isolation would have limited his influence until his paper was published in 1944 (Foulkes and Lewis, 1944).

This draws our attention to the question raised by Vickers, but not completely answered. How did actions based on group relations become so acceptable in the military? Whilst war time ‘enables innovation and experimentation’, there is still the question of which innovations become significant (Vickers, 2023: 14). From our perspective it seems almost inevitable, but there were no signs of this at the beginning of the conflict. Bion’s comments, mentioned above, were buried in a clinical text. As Vickers points out War Office administrators were more concerned with the quantities of men rather than quality and the British Psychoanalytic Society had little to offer (Vickers, 2023: 11). Bion’s first attempts to introduce a democratic system of the men putting forward those amongst them as officers was to solve the quantity problem, albeit the solution was democratic and group based.

It is likely that Eric Trist’s awareness of the work of Kurt Lewin played a significant part. Lewin explored the nature of social forces acting within groups. Trist was the psychologist involved with the initial setting up of the Edinburgh War Office Selection Board in 1942 where he met up with Bion (Harris, 1949: 26; Trist, 1985: 6–8). He had already encountered Rickman at Wharnclyffe Hospital when advised to do so after having expressed his interest in Lewin’s work to Sir Aubrey Lewis at Mill Hill Hospital (Trist, 1985: 5). Clearly these three were in communication with each other and although he argues that Bion proposed the idea of the leaderless group that formed a significant basis of officer selection, this would have emerged from their discussions, rather than being a completely novel idea. It was a ‘method so simple and so obvious . . . that its revolutionary nature can be easily lost sight of’ (Bion, 1946: 77). This would seem to have been the seminal moment when the centrality of groups in the Army became evident to military psychiatrists, and I am not sure that this has been recognized as such hitherto.

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