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# Peter and Anthony — a dialogue about society, evil, and the weight of the effects of not being acknowledged as a subject

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## Abstract

*In this dialogue, Peter and Anthony talk about the difficulties involved in treating clients with distorted personalities. It is suggested that the work of the Scottish psychoanalyst W. R. D. Fairbairn may be important in solving the problem at heart.*

*Peter:* What's up?

*Anthony:* Everything is in order. You?

*Peter:* Troubles?

*Anthony:* Nothing in particular.

*Peter:* I have something. Nothing big.

*Anthony:* Let's hear.

*Peter:* Lunch?

*Anthony:* Arms?

*Peter:* Why not?

(At lunch.)

*Peter:* Recidivism.

*Anthony:* Yes?

*Peter:* It's a problem?

*Anthony:* Why?

*Peter:* You know.

*Anthony:* Say five years. We'll look into it. There's momentum. Must keep up the pace.

*Peter:* Come on.

*Anthony:* It's difficult.

*Peter:* Said so.

*Anthony:* Booster sessions?

*Peter:* More of them?

*Anthony:* Further training?

*Peter:* Does it help?

*Anthony:* To help keep contact with the upper sides? Absolutely!

*Peter:* What can we do?

*Anthony:* I'm not giving up. It's really expanding.

*Peter:* I'm just saying. Janet.

*Anthony:* Pierre? Pity. Lovely lunch. Niçoise. What about him?

*Peter:* Forget it.

*Anthony:* You're considering starting to work with splits. Systematically. At the expense of other important stuff?

*Peter:* I think it's time.

*Anthony:* Any particular form? Going back to the sixties? Robes?

*Peter:* Give me your best shot.

*Anthony:* I'll give you what you want.

*Peter:* I don't know. But there are so many cases.

*Anthony:* The normal distribution curve. A small percentage, but a large number of clients will have their personality distorted by major splits. There are things to consider.

*Peter:* There are.

*Anthony:* Tomorrow?

*Peter:* After the workshop? Lunch?

*Anthony:* That's a date.

(At lunch.)

*Peter:* I think we should and can do more.

*Anthony:* Help more fundamentally?

*Peter:* It's about values. A moral issue.

*Anthony:* I know. I agree. There are things at stake.

*Peter:* There are.

*Anthony:* Okay.

*Peter:* Okay what?

*Anthony:* We can treat distorted personalities. What would the cost be? In regard to public opinion?

*Peter:* You're holding back.

*Anthony:* I am. What are you about?

*Peter:* About? We should take the next step. Heal people.

*Anthony:* So people are broken? You and me? The waiter? Your GP? The PM? The group we are having tomorrow?

*Peter:* Some of us. What about it?

*Anthony:* You think they want to know?

*Peter:* It's life. We should embrace it.

*Anthony:* Hello sixties!

*Peter:* I mean it. Life is not dangerous. It is.

*Anthony:* We have an obligation. To keep as many as possible alive. You know. The Hippocratic Oath.

*Peter:* You think people wouldn't cope with knowing how fragile life is?

*Anthony:* I don't know, but I consider it.

*Peter:* You're right. I'm back in the sixties. If we tell people the truth they will be harmed. If society stays the same. The culture around pregnancy, giving birth, maternal and paternal leave, and the whole school system just isn't healthy. We're not considering bonding and attachment enough.

*Anthony:* It's quite a dilemma.

*Peter: Das Unbehagen in der Kultur.* I don't buy it. It's too easy. Society has to change. Portion-wise, though. But that's perhaps a utopian idea? There have been changes. A lot of them.

*Anthony:* Easy now. I told you. This is difficult.

*Peter:* Yes.

*Anthony: Vēritās liberābit vōs.* That's an option. What is true? Life is vulnerable. Yes. What else?

*Peter:* That's it I guess. People can take advantage of the fact.

*Anthony:* Yes. Could we pause the empirical bit and look at it philosophically?

*Peter:* A walk after lunch tomorrow?

*Anthony:* Perfect. Meet you there.

(Walk in the park.)

*Anthony:* Philosophically, do you think we can be born evil? Perhaps not literary born, but do you think there could be evil in the DNA, in the genes, as it were? I hate this question! It must be stated? I don't like this.

*Peter:* I don't think so. I don't think there can be evil in the DNA. I think it's stupid. Sorry. I got carried away.

To claim that there can be evil in the DNA is to take advantage of the vulnerability of man. I hate it *Vēritās liberābit vōs*. That's the direction.

*Anthony:* We are vulnerable and some of us take advantage of it? That's the way?

*Peter:* Did I say that?

*Anthony:* Something like it.

*Peter:* Philosophically, we need the truth. Wait a minute. Wait.

*Anthony:* You okay?

*Peter:* I think I got it. We need the truth. We need truth.

*Anthony:* I agree. What have you got?

*Peter:* Can we sit down?

*Anthony:* Are you okay?

*Peter:* Just a bit dizzy.

*Anthony:* Over there?

(Sitting.)

*Peter:* You hesitated between “born evil” and “evil in the DNA”?

*Anthony:* I did. A lot of things happen before birth.

*Peter:* Clinically, I think we should settle for determining the effect on the fetus during pregnancy.

*Anthony:* Clinically?

*Peter:* Yes. Let's stick to what we know. Leave the philosophy to the philosophers?

*Anthony:* What a relief!

Effects during pregnancy? Can the fetus be affected during its time in the womb? Yes. Can it be affected mentally? Probably. Can it be affected morally? Probably not directly. Can it become evil because of its experiences? That's the question. Not. Does it have conscious experiences at all? Does it have a will? Can it come out and take immediate advantage of some vulnerable poor sod trying to be of some use to it?

How can we ever know?

*Peter:* Well, what is evil? What would be the seed of evil? Can anyone be evil? Why does one become evil?

*Anthony:* Relating to the womb.

*Peter:* Say that evil deeds are directed towards someone other than yourself. Then you have to have some compass helping you to navigate between yourself and others. Clinically, won't you say that is post-partum?

*Anthony:* Indeed.

*Peter:* So, what is evil and how can we trace it back to its origins?

*Anthony:* You're attaching or bonding via some cruelty. To be in an intersubjectivity is to exclude yourself from it? And then you are included by making others suffer?

*Peter:* Yes. Evil has to do with basic human conditions and is related to how you are met as a subject (with your needs).

*Anthony:* You have needs pre-birth. Are you a subject pre-birth? What is a subject? Is a subject something (or someone) that is conscious? I would say that the fetus at some stage has sensual sensations.

The fetus is born conscious. I'm sure of it.

Is that enough? Do you have to have self-consciousness to be a subject? Then it's after birth.

*Peter:* I think it's repetitive. You become “evil” only after a magnitude of repeated abuse. It becomes your reality. It doesn't

matter if it's traced back to the womb or not. There's no seed. You're fertilised with abuse over and over.

In a new milieu, you can become aware of your effect upon others but ... you have to stay in that context for a long period of time to have any chance to change?

*Anthony:* Further training.

*Peter:* That's the point. Training can help you see the situation and to try to take responsibility for it. The reason, though, isn't a lack of training or even insight.

*Anthony:* And the reason is neither the abuse?

*Peter:* The reason is the detachment from the split-off parts of yourself as a subject.

*Anthony:* Back to healing then.

*Peter:* So what is healing, then?

*Anthony:* To come in contact with split-off parts of yourself and to stay in contact with those parts.

*Peter:* Sounds doable.

*Anthony:* Except for the little snag.

*Peter:* It's extremely difficult?

*Anthony:* Yes. But why?

*Peter:* I have some experience.

*Anthony:* I'll help you. What *principle* is behind the rather extreme difficulty?

*Peter:* This is not the sixties? A divided and therefore weakened ego?

*Anthony:* I'm making this up as we speak but what do you say about this? The pleasure principle states that the person will choose the easiest way?

*Peter:* Something of that kind.

*Anthony:* Let's translate that in the *straightest* way.

*Peter:* Okay.

*Anthony:* If things take the straightest way in a multidimensional field, what is that equaled to in physics?

*Peter:* Gravity. You mean ... that ... split-off parts gravitate toward each other and become something of a whole?

*Anthony:* I think that would explain some of the difficulties to heal splits.

*Peter:* You're right. It would. I'll leave you here then. See you tomorrow.

*Anthony:* Bye. Good luck with Fairbairn.

*Peter:* Thanks.