

NEVILLE paper: Growth of Mind: person-to-person and the mystical
26 November, Sydney
Michael Brearley

1.PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AS AGENT OF CHANGE

One of Neville's gifts and capacities was to convey much in a vignette. I will start with one from his last book, (*The Growth of Mind*, pp 99-100): *'A man on business came once in six weeks to the city where my patient, a woman of 34, was living. He and she had sex together. She was single and wanted to marry and have children; he was married with two children aged twelve and fourteen. He said to her that when his two children were grown up he would divorce his wife and marry her. I had a somewhat cynical attitude towards this man. I thought, to begin with, that he might be promising this but in eight years' time when his children had become adults who knows what he would do...I also thought that, by holding the patient in this controlled embrace, he was prejudicing her chance of meeting another ... I want to emphasize that I did not say this to her, but I thought it, and I am sure that this inner thinking of mine conditioned the way I spoke with her. Then a surprising thing happened. I woke one morning and had this startling thought: 'She is quite free to live like this. It does not sound to me very satisfactory but after all, why do I think my life is so wonderfully satisfactory?' I did not rush into the consulting room and say to her 'I have had the most surprising thought: that you are quite free to carry on with this ...sexual affair.' But I am sure this striking thought conditioned the way I related to her, both the content and the tone. I doubt if an observer would have noticed anything different in the way that I engaged with her, but that there was a subtle difference, I am sure. The next time her lover came to town she had the most furious row with him and told him that she never wanted to see him again, and she didn't. Some months later, she met a man, they became lovers, they married, she had two children and lived happily ever after! Now the point I want to emphasise is this: that when I had that surprising thought it was not something produced by me, by me alone, by me in isolation. It was generated by her and me in a unified embrace, in orgasmic unity. And this inner force drove a new pathway in her outer relationships. It changed me also.'*

This example conveys much of Neville's belief about what psychoanalysis is and how it generates change.

The most obvious implication is that psychic change, including transformation of desire, emerges through an unspoken shift in the analyst. The shift in this case is away from an inner disapproval of the relationship, which he did not

explicitly state, but believes the patient must have sensed. Neville implies that this inner attitude of his had an authoritarian quality. Her reaction to it (assuming she did pick it up) could well have been to resist it.

The therapeutic shift in the patient started with his subsequent thought: ‘She is quite free to live like this’, an idea that surfaced in him out of the blue, echoing what his own analyst, John Klauber, had said to him decades before, about a patient of Neville’s - ‘It’s his life, not yours’ (*Becoming a Person through Psychoanalysis* p 16).

Neville is sure the patient also registered this move within him, again without his having to voice it in so many words. He takes it that she unconsciously recognised in him an act of freedom; he was ‘giving up his possessiveness of her’ (Joan Symington and Neville Symington, 1996, *Clinical work of Wilfred Bion*, p 169). This was an act of his own, but also as it were on her behalf. Neville’s conclusion is that it was through this unconscious communication that she was enabled to break out of her self-destructive affair.

This conviction about how psychological change occurs conflicts with the views of analysts who think of interpretation as *the* agent of change. According to Neville, these analysts underestimate the capacity of many patients, especially perhaps those we consider most disturbed, to get the drift of our underlying attitudes. (Cf *Person* p 31, 38)

2. ‘CREATIVE FASHIONING OF THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT’

One might say, as an Australian friend who has nothing to do with analysis wrote to me recently, that emotions are like perfumes. They don’t stay in the self. There are subtle and not-so-subtle expressions of them that others may sniff out and/or be influenced by. Neville would add, as indeed would I, that emotions are not cut off from thoughts, they are permeated with them, so that what is conveyed includes thoughts, orientations, dispositions. ‘The psychic acts of one individual cross the boundaries of his own personal space to that of another...Phantasy has its roots deep in the personality but for that very reason is pervasive on the surface’ (*Person* p74).

Neville gives examples of how some exceptional people create benign effects through their personality. He quotes Graham Greene (*Narcissism: a New Theory*, pp 33-34) writing about his meeting with art critic Herbert Read. ‘He was the most gentle man I have ever known, but it was a gentleness that had been tested in the worst experiences of his generation (sc: in action on the Western Front) ... It was the same man who could come into a room full of

people and you wouldn't notice his coming – you noticed only that the whole atmosphere of a discussion had quietly altered, that even the relations of one guest to another had changed. No one would any longer be talking for effect, and when you looked around for an explanation there he was – complete honesty born of complete experience had entered the room and unobtrusively taken a chair' (*Narcissim*, p 39).

Neville calls this quality a 'creative fashioning of the social environment', adding that 'it is crucial in a psychotherapist'. 'Complete honesty born of complete experience' facilitates, he's saying, the patient's openness and, eventually, the development and expression of her own better self.

Alongside this, Neville also writes (*Person* p 62): 'At the beginning of the analysis (and often for a long time) the patient and analyst are held in thrall by the power of personal-cultural illusion... They are joined by superego [as opposed to ego] parts of their personalities'.

A good example of this 'corporate personality' (*Person* p 59-60) occurs in his account of the psychotic patient who got him to (*Person* Ch 2) weave together into narratives her scattered, isolated, single-word interjections. After three months of this, Neville suddenly thought: 'was it because she believed she could not do it herself that she required him to become the 'agent of her consciousness'? (*Person* p 32). Was his 'hard, strange work' something she had pulled him into? She had often told him that she could not move until he did (p 37).

When – having thus moved in his mind - he voiced this, she was full of hatred. I find her reaction convincing as evidence for the correctness of his intuition; a psychotic patient would not be aware of her ambivalence, so the jump into hatred could well have been initiated by this kind of shift in her analyst's orientation.

In relation to the patient who gave up the affair, Neville goes on to make a surprising comment, that what generated his thought ('their' thought?) and the dramatic change in her response to the once-every-six-weeks man, was 'a unified embrace, in orgasmic unity' – surprising in the suggestion of an erotic quality, as if he, Neville, was the one having the affair. I imagine there was also some interpretative working through of this 'embrace'.

Neville quotes Freud's remark: (*SE vol 12*, p 62, 1913) 'Everyone possesses in his own unconscious an instrument with which he can interpret the utterances of the unconscious in other people'. The analyst's 'unconscious' is, then, both a source of ordinary vulnerability to 'thrall', to being lassoed, and, at times, an

‘instrument’ that paves the way for the growing recognition of, and exploration of, such patterns. Neville is here reclaiming a central point of Freud’s paper of 1915: ‘Observations on Transference-Love’, *S.E. 12*, pp 159 ff, that we analysts can’t escape our own unconscious in our work, but nor should we dismiss it. We have to allow it space, and monitor it repeatedly. As with other intuitions, we need to keep checking. We need to recognise that this openness to what floats into our minds may lead to over-valued ideas rather than the selected fact (Britton and Steiner *IJPA vol 75*, ‘Interpretation: Selected Fact or Over-valued Idea?’ 1994).

I think that in the case I started with, as in some others, Neville asks us to take for granted his intuitions and convictions. He doesn’t offer much evidence for us to make up our minds about them.

3. BROAD GAZE, UNFOCUSSED ATTENTION, BECOMING THE OTHER

A related element appears in the use Neville makes of the notion of two forms of attention, concentration, thinking. It was Marion Milner who most systematically explored this contrast (Eg, *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men*, 1987). He takes up her concepts. (*Growth of Mind*, especially ch 6).

She first developed her notion through her efforts to draw from nature. In the first mode, the artist works in a ‘carefully painstaking’ way; ‘with her eyes hopping to and fro from object to pencil so as to be sure to get it right, with the model and her drawing as two quite separate things, and probably a growing despair about the width of the gap between them. The second way involves ‘keeping one’s eyes on the subject, while drawing quickly, excitedly, only looking down at the pencil and the drawing when you have finished one line and have to start again somewhere else, but still having your mind totally concentrated on the excitement about the object, not split into two.’ (*Suppressed Madness* p 80).

Milner came to generalise these ideas across a wide range of perception and thinking. There are two kinds of attention: first, narrow-focussed, which is best suited to objectivity, where self and object are clearly separate: second, broad-focussed, perhaps unfocussed, which is needed for expression of the self and for inter-personal connectedness. She notes how great an achievement the child’s capacity to distinguish between self and object is, and that there is a resistance to risking regression to the earlier state of attention, with its merging with the object. The fear may be that if we ‘go off with the fairies’, we might never regain the ordinary, sane separateness of self from other. One might remain stuck in a delusion, like the Hindoo acolyte who ‘became a bull’ and

was therefore convinced that he could not get out of the cave in which his spiritual retreat had been experienced because his ‘horns were too wide for the entrance’. This second way arouses fears of madness and of irresponsibility; *becoming* the object may become an irreversible delusion.

Neville accepts this second way as the central requirement of what one might call a truly psychoanalytic attention, insisting at the same time that formal psychoanalysis is only one locus for it. He maintains that the most fundamental way of human relating is of this kind; not a matter of external facts, nor of inference from physiognomy, but a broad gaze that makes a more direct contact, through identification, with the other.

This kind of gaze requires negative capability. Premature interpretations, and those made ‘from the book’, represent a covering up of our not-knowing. Falling back on old ideas blocks the potential emergence of new insight, and provides a flawed model for the patient. Wilfred Bion quotes Maurice Blanchot: ‘The answer is the disease, or misfortune, of the question’. (‘Tavistock Seminar 3’, 1977 in *Collected Works of Bion*, ix p 33)).

This kind of apparently naïve, broad attention is highlighted in Freud’s recommendations that as analysts we need to adopt ‘free-floating’ attention, involving setting aside ‘expectations and inclinations’, later restated by Bion, and by Neville, in terms of giving up memory and desire. As well as other specific hopes and assumptions, we are to eschew in our stance towards patients our psychoanalytic theories, (‘Recommendations on Analytic Technique’, *SE* vol 12 p 112).

Neville suggests that it is not memory as such that is to be repudiated, but rather attachment to memory. He links this, aptly, with the Buddhist notion of dukkha, the craving, the ‘something rather positively *covetous*’ (Bion, CWB VI p 8), that we have to let go, (*Clinical work of Wilfred Bion*, p 169). We may make a shibboleth of memory, dutifully, consciously, relying on it in our work.

We do indeed have to open ourselves to the uniqueness of the present moment, and there is a risk in speaking too readily about a larger and wider sweep of tendencies. But I would add that another important part of working through with patients is that we consolidate moments of realisation of patterns of thought and action by referring to past examples and extra-transference events. Neville too believed that he was helped by Klauber’s ‘linking psychoanalysis and the interpretations he made into the web of life’, which enabled ‘life and psychoanalysis to be interpenetrated’ (*Person*, p 10).

Neville also emphasises the need for certain kinds of activity in the analyst as in the mother (*Growth* p 47-8). Reflection, reverie might be taken to mean something purely passive. He suggests that analysts like mothers have to 'go out to meet the other/ baby, not just contain it'. He reminds me of Milner's term 'in-giving' ('The Role of Illusion in Symbol Formation' (1952), *Suppressed Madness*, pp 83ff) in relation to her eleven-year-old patient Simon. This too is a delicate topic, one that needs a context for us to know what it might mean.

For myself, I find reading Neville (and indeed Bion) particularly enabling in reminding me of this orientation – to let go of the quick recourse to memory and desire. And as Neville says, it is not something to be switched on (or off) just before each session (*Clinical Work of Bion*, p 169)

4. SUFFERING PSYCHIC PAIN

Allied to the repudiation of memory and desire is the issue of how much we are able to tolerate being open to 'suffering one's own experience'. We often over-rule such a capacity. We have butterfly minds. Decades ago, I had a dream of 'skating on the surface of the water, as if on motorised skis'. Quickness of mind is a wonderful thing, but, combined with a sort of mechanical processing, it may preclude giving adequate house-room to one's experience.

Experience includes, of course, psychic pain. The substitution of apparent knowledge in place of uncertainty and anxiety is a way of evading or expelling pain, terror and other anxiety; but it results in shallowness of experience and understanding. The question here is whether we have the capacity (and indeed the support) to bear the discomfort and disruption of traumatic impingements, often from outside, but also from inside ourselves. 'Unless we are shaken up by intense emotional experiences, we never reach the deepest levels of our being' (*Person*, p xvi). The collapse of the old quasi-secure self can be an opportunity for breakthrough as well as a recipe for breakdown.

I would add - some patients have a resistance to allowing themselves to be happy. A patient of mine felt her only role in the family was to be a servant to her mother and siblings; for her, to allow her own needs and wants, and the satisfaction of them, was felt to be wrong, not allowed, anxiety-provoking.

Another patient of mine seemed to feel that his only way of being allowed to stay as his mother's child was to make no demands of her or of her later representatives, but to withdraw. He reminded me of Bartleby in Hermann Melville's story, the copyist in a New York lawyer's office, who retreated into the inner room of the office, spent his time staring at the 'dead wall' close outside the window, and responded to requests from his employer with his

stubborn negativity: 'I would prefer not'. My patient did just this in his analysis. He also managed thereby to occupy my mind, just as Bartleby occupied the mind and office of his employer, getting under his skin through his passive intrusion. I was to be the one who suffered desire and frustration. Lacking affirmative internal objects, he allowed himself no life.

But as Neville repeatedly reminds us, it is not only the patient who evades experience. We analysts are liable, for example, to reassure in a banal and clichéd way, and it's not only the patient we are reassuring. He speaks (eg *Person* p 33) of the analyst's tendency merely to mirror the patient, saying back to them what they have just said. And when, in order to protect the patient from experiencing us as making superego judgements, we move to analyst-centred interpretations, we may become patronising. If I say to the patient 'You seem to feel that I am a cruel judge', there may be an implication that of course I'm not like that, so you, poor thing, had better think again! Such interventions may also, Neville says, be made to defend the timid mouse (himself)' (*Person* p 46-7)

Trying to help a patient by speaking too soon may not only be a false reassurance. It may block the patient's creativity and initiative. Neville asks (*Growth*, ch 9) what it is that is unconscious. His answer is that it is the inner creativity of the self that we do not and cannot know (though we can, he says, see its working). When a patient starts to admit to and name something pathological, this is a creative step towards being able to own that uncomfortable truth about himself, and this detachment is a first step in modifying it. We pre-empt this if we rush in to be the one who knows, thus attempting to reassure both parties.

Any such new realisation by the patient needs to be recognised and acknowledged by the analyst, so that it becomes more rather than less available to him. Reassurance of this kind is truthful and helpful, (*Person* p 9). Neville says of his own analysis: 'If I had come out of a passageway to a new emotional sense of things, [Klauber] would invariably be affirming and I believe this was therapeutic'. I agree. And such comments did not prevent either of them from 'saying terrible things' (*Person*, p 15).

The analyst's neutrality, also referred to by Neville as 'anonymity', may be a cover for unconscious hostility or more generally for (*Person* p 348) disowning one's own pathology. He believed it vitally important for us to acknowledge, to ourselves and sometimes to the patient, our own first-hand struggles with what the patient is fearing and going through. Acknowledging this in oneself, the analyst will be less prone to speak or act down from a 'moral high ground'.

(Jane Milton, 'Psychoanalysis and the Moral High Ground', 2000. *IJPA*, vol 81). From a more self-aware place, we enable the patient to feel that her fears are shared, she is not the only one to have them. Neville diagnoses many impasses or blockages between patient and analyst as being produced partly at least by the analyst's unconscious attitudes. There is a call for psychic change in the analyst before the patient can risk it for herself. This is a main message in Neville's paper 'The Analyst's Act of Freedom as Agent of Therapeutic Change' (*International Review of Psychoanalysis*, vol 10, 1983; *Person*, ch 3).

Another example is to be found in Neville's chapter on treating a mentally handicapped man (*Person*, p 153 ff). In this work, and in the seminar that he set up with other therapists, he realised that there is an often-unrecognised contempt for handicap, especially of the mental kind. He suggests that this arises from the fear we all have of our own disabilities, actual and potential, resulting from primitive terror of being killed off by the tribe (as happens with some animals when one of their group becomes unable to look after itself). Neville writes about 'a mentally handicapped enclave in each one of us that is unbearable'. Attempting to deny our fearful contempt, we nevertheless express it in subtle ways, perhaps through pity rather than empathy. (*Person*, p 153)

In stressing the importance of integrating unwelcome, often unconscious, aspects of ourselves, (cf *Person* p 91 and p 148-9), Neville has much in common with American analyst, Donald Moss, (eg 'On Having Whiteness', *JAPA* 2021), who emphasises the crucial and often agonising need for him to own his own racism, homophobia and so on. This Symington/ Moss kind of stance elicits opposition to both these analysts from within the analytic community. We feel threatened by this infringement of a conception of analytic neutrality as something we analysts are easily capable of.

Further, Neville would at times tell his patient plainly what his own feelings were (*Person*. p 10). For example, when he was about to emigrate to Australia, and had given an ending date, one of his patients decided to leave sooner. It became clear that he was in a panic that his analyst must be depressed; that he needed cheering up. He was offering his analyst a holiday. Neville said to him: 'But in fact I *don't* need your support'. Had he adopted the more 'stylised' form of interpretation, saying that the patient '*felt* I needed his support', this would have come across as 'analytic talk', not as concern for him. Neville felt that 'only by countering the phantasy with a definite "No" did it become available to reach consciousness'. (*Person* p 8).

Neville quotes (*Person* p6) his analyst: 'The so-called neutral setting... fails to give adequate credit to human intelligence and the human unconscious'. Neville describes in favourable terms some of Klauber's more conversational exchanges

with him as a ‘kind of dual free-associational interplay’ (cf p 10). Both he and Klauber were convinced that the emergence of the transference is inevitable, and is not impeded by (some) ordinary interactions with, and admissions by, the analyst (*Person* p 9).

This is a strong claim, perhaps over-stated; as with other situations in our work, we have to make fine judgements according to the individual case and moment. We often can’t be sure about the outcome.

5. FRIENDSHIP

I first met Neville in 1985, when I asked him if he would supervise me. Supervisions continued for a year or so, until he and his family emigrated. From then on, we were friends. My wife and I were also very fond of Joan, and their sons. Neville had a wonderful chuckle. I found him consistently original and enlarging. This continues, as what I have already said in this talk indicates.

One of Neville’s qualities was constant dissatisfaction and a drive to go further, deeper; to reach an authentic, integrated and synoptic basis. He had been drawn towards taking up philosophy as a career and vocation.

These tendencies also led him to conclusions that I had, and have, misgivings about. In particular, a trait that runs through Neville’s work, perhaps more explicitly asserted towards the end, is the mystical. This involves an account of ‘Reality’ with a capital R, and of the epistemology related to it, that goes beyond the ordinarily empirical. It goes too beyond what I am able to accept and at times to understand. It’s relevant that he and I came from very different starting-points in philosophy: he from a Catholic tradition, me from a more sceptical orientation that ran from Descartes via Hume to Russell and Wittgenstein.

However, I will try to take on board a version of Klauber’s point, - so close to Neville’s heart - ‘It’s Neville’s life I’m wanting to convey, not mine’. In offering my critique of this strand, I aim to ‘tread softly on his dreams’. (W. B. Yeats ‘He Wishes for his Cloths of Heaven’, *The Wind among the Reeds*, 1899).

6. NEVILLE’S ‘ROCK’

In *The Growth of Mind*, (ch 7, ‘The knowledge of Being’), he discloses his ‘two most certain beliefs’: one that he himself exists contingently; was born, is subject to chance, and will die. The second is that there is another form of existence, to be ‘cogitated solely through the pure understanding’. Neville

speaks of this as 'Being' with a capital B. 'Being' 'cannot not exist; there is an existence which is permanent'. There was a moment when he 'saw the being of the universe in the mirror of [his] own soul'. This experience occurred when 'the inner constituents of the mind [had] rearranged themselves according to the template of universal being', (*Person*, p 88).

There are, he continues, two forms of knowledge, 'one through the senses that impresses particular aspects of the environment on our mind'. The other is through 'the mind in action which grasps reality itself'.

In support of this idea, he quotes Freud speaking of the 'setting up of the reality principle' as opposed to 'what is agreeable'; he then alludes to the remarkable moment in the life of Helen Keller, when, blind and deaf, she came to understand that the scratching on her hand by her teacher, Mary-Ann Sullivan, of the letters W-A-T-E-R *represented* the liquid pouring onto that hand. Neville seems to be suggesting that there is a jump from sensation to 'pure understanding'. 'There are two pathways to knowledge: one grasps the real but no change or variety and the other gives me change and variety; and then this mysterious something joins the two up' (*Growth*, p 89).

Neville goes on to say that having this kind of conviction in the core of our being is the 'root of sanity' and the essence of psychotherapy. We partake of eternity, and tie it in with the sensory. This belief, which he first came to through a series of lectures at his theological college, has been, he says, the 'rock that has withstood the tidal waves that have blown him this way and that, but never been able to shatter that rock'.

I hope you get the something of the gist of these views of Neville's.

My own view is that they are attempts to give some grounding for what is a real, crucial difference: that between a perception that allows for objective knowledge and manipulation of the world, and the sort of attention that recognises and values the subjectivity of both the other and the self.

7. MY MISGIVINGS

Whatever the noumenon and the 'grasping' of it might be, I think that Freud's use of the 'reality principle', and Keller's grasp of symbolisation and the possibility of language, are not relevant to it. Freud is talking about the way we (partly) grow out of wishful thinking. And though Keller's learning of language is indeed remarkable - she had so much less to go on than children with sight and hearing - her sudden realisation of the scratching on her hand being a *representation* that can be repeated, is continuous with how we all come to be

capable of language-use and of thinking through symbolisation. The idea of ‘Being itself’, and how we grasp it, seems to me to be a different and more questionable supposition.

My view is that to assert that there is a separate form of thinking that is at work when we grasp more of reality is not to say we grasp a different reality, but that we enlarge our already existing capacity to generalise, and to differentiate between kinds of situation. It’s true that, like Meno’s slave (Plato, *Meno*) we gain new knowledge of the world without learning new facts through the senses. It is possible to realise *by thinking alone* that if you double the length of the sides of a square field, you need not twice but four times as much seed for your crop. Our accountant shows us by pure reason that our finances are in deficit. But neither example requires the notion of a new level of reality.

So, to imply as Neville does, that there is a jump from the sensory to the intellectual (as if the latter is the source of deep understanding while the former – the sensory- is often delusional) seems to me to ignore how ‘understanding’ enters into the most basic forms of perception. Perception is always more than merely sensory. And we can be beguiled by ideas (as Wittgenstein said), as much as by our sensory shortcomings.

I think Neville misrepresents the capacity to join in a language-activity, and to grasp new examples of things that can be clustered in general ways, and named, as a sign of the mystical, as a jump towards an ontological ‘thing-in-itself’. I would say by contrast that language-learning is achieved by copying and by joining in the language activities that surround us. (When we were getting our little granddaughter to put on her shoes one morning, she suddenly pointed at one and said ‘foot-hat’. This was not a grasp of the noumenon. It was a joining up with the word-activities that we had been using with her, and with each other in her presence. It was creative, as it would have been had she called a hat a head-shoe.)

Neville also writes of our being able to ‘intuit emotional motivation directly through the I-Thou confrontation’ (*Person*, p 230). I agree – we do sometimes apprehend the emotions of others without conscious inference. Melanie Klein speaks of observing the light fade in the eyes of a child as seeing the child’s sadness. Often the shortcoming is that we see the obvious anger or contempt but not the anxiety that informs it. Or as in an example of Neville’s, we are struck by a patient’s narcissism (he punitively killed his wife’s beloved cat), but we may fail to intuit the trauma that this act was an expression of.

Indeed, one of Neville’s strengths was his being open to seeing the pain or the deficit in a person’s angry or envious behaviour. One example among many

(*Person*, p 43): on being told that he had failed to hear the crying child' within his patient's destructiveness and sadism, he was suddenly – and movingly – able to embrace it in this more thorough way.

Similarly, we may learn to catch ourselves in a moment of resistance; I might be able to note my quick overriding of a misgiving. If I am then able to see how I'm inclined to agree too shallowly with someone, I can give space and credit to my doubts. Sometimes we have to slow ourselves down to listen to these (often only incipient) moves of our minds.

We are even able, often unconsciously, to recognise our own lack of mind, our lack of alpha function (Bion's term: 'On Arrogance. *IJPA* vol 39, 1958). A borderline patient whom I heard about from a supervisee dreamed of *looking in the toilet and seeing to her horror not only the contents of her bowel but her whole bowel and intestine*. Her analyst and I came to understand this as her ability to realise that part of her digestive system – her mind - had been excreted along with its contents. A friend suffering from early dementia said to me, after painful struggle to find the words, 'I can't get hold of myself'. Such moments of insight are poignant. The damaged mind has a sense of its own damage. Both people were able to express the fact that they can't express things. Both had sufficient alpha function to recognise their deficiency of alpha function.

Neville is well aware of such moments. But he is inclined to see them as sudden influxes of the eternal that reveal the earlier misuse of the senses. I suggest that growth in perceptiveness of taste is not purely sensual; the words of the wine-taster may help us to taste more perceptively, to discriminate better. The learning is as much conceptual as perceptual. But this learning is an extension of what we already know, not the apprehension of a different kind of (mystical, underpinning) reality. (*Clinical Work of Bion*, p 167) – unless we see all learning, all symbolisation, all connections between personality and action, as including something mysterious.

Here again, I think Neville jumps from important psychoanalytic insights and reflections to the mystical, in ways that I find obscure and distracting. What he is really referring to, I think, is maturing as a clinician and as a person.

8. THE PROPHETS

To my mind, the idea of the mystical, with its special way of knowing or grasping, risks turning what is of value and truth in religious or metaphysical thinking into an esoteric capacity, an experience available to the converted alone.

Neville, like Bion, saw himself as a kind of prophet, telling colleagues that psychoanalysis has lost its way, that no school of thought has it all, that we have become prisoners to our different orthodoxies. In the penultimate paragraph of *Person* (p 348), he says that if we move to his version of what is essential in psychoanalysis, it is possible that a different name (from ‘psychoanalysis’) will have to be given to the new activity and theory. The implication is that only if his diagnosis and prescription are followed will there be a prospect of psychoanalysis ‘flourishing again’.

Inevitably such attitudes provoke ambivalence. Jesus said a prophet is ‘honoured everywhere except in his own country’. The establishment may execute the prophet for blasphemy, or less drastically (as Bion wryly put it) ‘load him with honours [until] he sinks without trace’. The innovator has to brave further risks: one that his insights will be too far ahead of the flock; another that he may, like the proverbial tall poppy, retreat from these dangerous new ideas for fear of being, or being thought to be, a megalomaniac heretic (cf Bion’s ‘fear of megalomania’, *Transformations*, 1984, p 159).

To sum up again: As a psychoanalyst I find Neville inspiring, innovative, sometimes quirky but always stimulating. As a philosopher I find him confusing; I think he mixes up ordinary and extraordinary psychological insights with an altogether different thing – mysticism.

There is also for me a further question: why does Neville’s mysticism bother me?

I think he asks a lot of himself and of us. Like Bion, he has a notion of the sublime, in his analytic work and in his personal quest to be fully the person he can be.

In the face of this strenuous version of the psychoanalytic task – I’m reminded of Kierkegaard’s provocative and searching question, quoted by Jonathan Lear: ‘Among all Christians is there a [real] Christian?’ (Lear: *Radical Hope*, p 66) – we foot-soldiers of the profession tend to be torn between awed admiration (a sort of following that may deny our responsibility to come to our own independent views) and on the other hand envy, fear and hostility. (I am trying to maintain a third position, of careful criticism.) It is often hard to know which party wears the Emperor’s new clothes, which of the two sides is propagating a ‘missionary tyranny’ (one of Neville’s wonderful phrases). (‘The Essence of Psychoanalysis as Opposed to what is Secondary’ *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, vol 22, 2012).

Moreover, I think Neville is right that many of our failings as analysts are down to personal lacks, to immaturity, to having retreated from going through the fire of challenge and struggle in life and work (remember Neville's facing of terrors in learning to fly). They are not merely failings in skill or craft, certainly not a matter of lack of cleverness or of factual knowledge. They are more personal. The result is that fundamental disagreement between psychoanalysts is more narcissistically wounding than in many areas of life. We are at times called on to work towards a change of heart and mind, to undo deep, long-standing defences we have built up. We risk falling into chaos if our structuring beliefs then collapse. We also risk treading on each other's dreams. I think that Neville's conception of what analysis is, and what it calls for, presses us even harder to confront our fraudulence and fears of it.

I'm aware of another reason why Neville's mysticism troubles me. His 'rock' is, as he says, a foundation-stone of the edifice of his belief and practice, in life and in psychoanalysis. It's not surprising, then, that this mysticism influences how Neville construes the self. The self 'partakes', he says, 'of eternity' and of a god-like creativity. This seems to justify the idea that freedom, creativity, is the essence or core of the self. Freedom of choice is, for him, the essence of being human.

I question his Platonist assumption that there must be a single essence in common to all human beings. I suggest that this makes freedom too crucial in offering an answer to the question: 'what is it to be human?'

I prefer Wittgenstein's notion that there are instead 'family resemblances.' Humans have many qualities besides freedom, including discipline, loyalty to our friends and those close to us, equality, kindness, following a tradition or rule, conserving good things. We also have inside us seeds of narcissism and hatred of frustrating reality. Minus-K is as much part of the essence of human beings as K (for Neville it is a mere 'shadow' of the better or truer self).

And creativity may be used in the service of many things, not only the truth. Defensive organisations are often elegant and clever attempts to resolve problems that feel insoluble.

8. CODA

It is possible for believers and non-believers – whether in more or less orthodox religions or in mysticism that crosses religions and focuses on contemplation (as with Neville) – to be able to have intense and meaningful conversations with each other. But there are inevitably risks of no-go areas. I had the impression that this difference between us led to a slight interpersonal cooling. No doubt

each of us could be both the bull in a china shop, and the china in a bull shop (cf *Person* p162f). But this gap has not excluded appreciation of what I see as his exceptionally helpful insights and exchanges. Moreover, Neville's rock, his spiritual beliefs, has played an important part in his ongoing seriousness as a psychoanalyst and a human being, and in his making so important and valuable a case for psychoanalysis being a spiritual and moral activity.

ENDS