

The Perpetrator of the Unconscious in Davanloo's New Metapsychology. Part I: Review of Classic Psychoanalytic Concepts

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Beginning in the 1960s, Dr. Habib Davanloo began working to develop a highly effective and efficient technique of dynamic psychotherapy. Through the use of audio-visual recording of actual diagnostic interviews and full courses of psychotherapy, he has, over the decades of his work, elucidated unconscious processes and developed a 'New Metapsychology of the Unconscious'. His more recent work has focused on the refinement of his technique of Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy (ISTDP) as well as the development of a method of psychoanalysis 'which has the power to bring multidimensional structural character changes in the extremely resistant patient with the most complex pathogenic unconscious' (Davanloo, 1995a). He has extensively presented his metapsychology to professional audiences in the form of symposia, courses and training programs and many of his actual cases have been published in the form of case reports.

By virtue of his discovery of the powerful technique of 'Unlocking the Unconscious' (Davanloo, 1986c, 1988b) he has afforded a unique opportunity to view the core neurotic structure that is central to a wide range of symptom neurotic and character neurotic disturbances (Davanloo, 1995a). Central to his technique of unlocking the unconscious is a thorough understanding of the metapsychology of the unconscious. He has elucidated fundamental principles in the operation of unconscious processes, such as the twin factors of Transference and Resistance (Davanloo, 1986a,b), the 'Unconscious Therapeutic Alliance' (Davanloo, 1987a), the role of character defenses (Davanloo, 1995a–c) and tactical defenses (Davanloo, 1996a,b) and the role of projective identification in symptom formation (Davanloo, 1995c). He has also discovered and described aspects of the technique of psychotherapy that are crucial to this most powerful method of

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unlocking of the unconscious. Such concepts as 'challenge and pressure', 'central dynamic sequence', 'head-on collision', 'complex transference feeling', 'regressive defense', 'tactical defense', 'major, partial and extended unlocking', 'resistance against emotional closeness', 'unconscious therapeutic alliance', and other technical concepts have been presented extensively elsewhere, in Davanloo's published and unpublished work (Davanloo, 1977, 1990, 1993).

This paper will focus on one aspect of Davanloo's New Metapsychology of the Unconscious, namely the 'Perpetrator of the Unconscious' (Davanloo, 1977, 1993). Throughout his pioneering work Davanloo discovered and described the multifocal core neurotic structure underlying the entire range of symptom neurotic and character neurotic disturbances. Based on his clinical research data, Davanloo described a spectrum of psychoneurotic disorders from the most highly responsive patients on the left side of the spectrum, to the most extremely resistant patients on the far right of the spectrum (Davanloo, 1995a). In his article on the spectrum of psychoneurotic disorders, he stated that patients on the 'Mid-right on the spectrum' demonstrate the 'presence of an unconscious primitive murderous rage, guilt- and grief-laden feelings toward both parent and others in their early life orbit—"the Perpetrator of the Unconscious"' (Davanloo, 1995a). He went on to say that these patients on the right side of the spectrum evidence the presence of early trauma; painful feeling in relationship to the trauma; unconscious murderous, primitive murderous or primitive torturous murderous rage in relation to the genetic figures; intense guilt- and grief-laden feelings; a high degree of resistance; presence of resistance against emotional closeness; and the presence of a masochistic component of their character. Based on this data, Davanloo introduced a concept which he called 'The Perpetrator of the Unconscious' (Davanloo, 1977, 1995a).

In his paper on Superego Pathology (Davanloo, 1987b, 1988a) Davanloo noted that Freud considered the resistances deriving from the superego to be most powerful and tenacious. Freud was pessimistic that one could effectively work through these resistances and that one must 'bow' to their superior forces. It is here that Davanloo made one of his most significant contributions to the field of psychotherapy—namely devising a technique of intensive psychotherapy that not only was highly effective in dealing with so-called superego resistances but was *rapidly* effective in doing so.

The first part of this paper will concern itself with a brief review of some of the concepts in psychoanalytic theory that are germane to this discussion, specifically the concepts of 'superego', 'repetition compulsion', 'negative therapeutic reaction', 'masochism' and Fairbairn's concept of 'the internal saboteur'. Part II will focus on the comparison of the Perpetrator of the Unconscious to these classic psychoanalytic concepts. Part III will review the development of specific aspects of Davanloo's technique of Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy as it relates to the Perpetrator, with particular reference to Davanloo's published cases.

Part I: Review of Classic Psychoanalytic Concepts

Freud's Concept of the Super-ego

In 'the Ego and the Id' Freud described a component of the psyche which he said was 'a differentiation within the ego, which may be called the "ego ideal" or

"superego" ...' (Freud, 1923). Freud emphasized the role of the Oedipus complex in the formation of this psychic structure. The broad general outcome of the sexual phase dominated by the Oedipus complex may, therefore, be taken to be the forming a precipitate in the ego, consisting of these two identifications in some way united with each other. This modification of the ego retains its special position: it confronts the other contents of the ego as an ego ideal or superego' (Freud, 1923). 'As heir to the Oedipus complex' (Freud, 1923) the superego has several functions. As an 'ego-ideal' it functions to prescribe what one ought to be and as the image of the self to which one aspires. It is based on the internalization of, and identification with, early figures in life, most prominently, one's parents. In addition, the superego functions to proscribe (Gabbard, 1990). In this sense it serves a critical and punitive function, often invoking the sense of guilt. To quote Fenichel, 'the ego behaves toward the superego as it once behaved toward a threatening parent whose affection and forgiveness it needed. It develops a need for absolution. The need for punishment is a special form of the need for absolution: the pain of punishment is accepted or even provoked in the hope that after the punishment the greater pain of guilt feelings will cease'. He went on to say that 'the superego is the heir of the parents not only as a source of threats but also as a source of protection and as a provider of reassuring love. Being on good or bad terms with one's superego becomes as important as being on good or bad terms with one's parents previously was' (Fenichel, 1945).

Hartmann and Lowenstein (1962) described the beginning introjections, identifications and incorporations of the developing infant as the archaic, primitive, forerunners of the superego, which like Freud, they viewed as deriving from the Oedipal conflict. Jacobson (1964) noted the defensive organization of the superego which consisted primarily of pregenital reaction formations by means of which aggression turned from the object (parent) to the self and the object (external) world. She went on to observe that in addition to deriving from parental prohibitions, the superego resulted not only from fear of father but from *identification* first with the mother and then with the father. She further pointed out that father, in reality, may be benign and loving and may not threaten his son with castration. It is the boy's own aggressive urges towards father that cause him the fear of retaliation. She too agreed with Freud that the superego as a functional entity was established with the resolution of the Oedipus complex, but that this resolution results from the affectionate feelings for rather than fear of the parent of the same sex, leading to abandonment of incestuous, matricidal, and patricidal wishes (Jacobsen, 1964). Klein's (1932) view was that it was the fusion of sexuality and aggression that formed the basis of sadism in the infantile personality, that it is subjected to repression and leads to guilt and anxiety. She also believed that 'the Oedipus conflict sets in as early as the second half of the first year of life ... at the same time the child begins to modify it and it builds up its superego'. Guntrip (1961) noted that Klein's 'superego had become a blanket-term covering the complexity of the endopsychic world' in which the ego seeks the side of good internalized objects in its struggle with its persecuting bad internalized objects. He elaborated the notion of 'superego' further to include 'the whole complex process whereby the primitive ego undergoes the beginnings of structural differentiation under pressure from the external environment'. He went on to say that 'an internal environment is created in which the ego feels to be living under the

shadow of powerful parental figures who are cruel persecutors at the deepest mental levels but steadily take on the aspect of ruthless punishers and guilt-inducers in later stages of development'. In addition, he noted that their complex differentiation includes a function of self persecution and self-punishment. 'One may say that the bad objects who arouse our rage in outer reality then become necessary to us to enforce control on our impulses; we can then forestall their punishment—cum-persecution by taking over their repressive function ourselves' (Guntrip, 1961).

For a more complete discussion of contemporary object relations theory on this subject see Kernberg's (1966) 'Structural derivatives of object relations'. Briefly, introjected prohibitive parental images fuse with guilt-determined ideal objects (images of parents and others) which are partly repressed and constitute the primitive forerunners of the superego. Fusion of the ideal images of the self with the ideal images of others forms the ego-ideal, part of which is integrated into the ego and part is repressed. Intense guilt feelings are projected and reintroduced which reinforces the earlier prohibitive parental images into the superego. These superego nuclei are further fused and integrated into the organized superego which becomes further abstracted and 'depersonalized' forming a mature superego.

Repetition Compulsion, Masochism and the Negative Therapeutic Reaction

Closely linked to the punitive superego are the concepts of repetition compulsion, masochism and negative therapeutic reaction. The *Glossary of Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts* (Moore and Fine, 1968) defines repetition compulsion as representing 'a general tendency in all human behavior to repeat painful experiences'. Specifically, there are some individuals who experience recurring series of traumatic experiences or tragedies, seemingly unrelated, though remarkably similar in terms of the type of stress or trauma, the so-called 'fate neuroses'. Similarly, repetitive childhood play that serves to master loss, recurrent nightmares after a traumatic event, acting out of childhood trauma during psychoanalytic treatment and certain types of character pathology with self-defeating and self-damaging traits also may be considered manifestations of repetition compulsion. For a more complete discussion of this concept see 'Repetition compulsion revisited: implications for technique' by Inderbitzin and Levy (1998). Inderbitzin and Levy pointed out that Freud viewed repetition compulsion as deriving from the 'death instinct' and that it was an explanatory but not a dynamic concept in that sense. They further observed that clinical and empirical evidence regarding post-traumatic stress disorder indicated that repetition in these patients served to increase suffering rather than lead to mastery. The concept of 'revictimization' was a frequent finding (Van der Kolk, 1989). They also pointed out the role that aggression plays in the repetition of trauma. They observed that re-experiencing trauma often contains 'hidden aggressive aims', punishment of perpetrators, and purposeful self-defeat. Early trauma such as child abuse is often linked with self-destructive behaviors including self-mutilation and suicide in the victim. Lastly, they observed the role that repetition compulsion plays as a major resistance in psychoanalysis. This is linked to the

concept of the 'negative therapeutic reaction' often seen in masochistic patients who, it is said, have a flare-up of symptoms after some gains in psychoanalysis, thereby sabotaging and prolonging therapy. Indeed, the whole concept of 'masochistic character' rests on the idea that these people have 'strong unconscious needs to suffer and endure punishment'.

Fairbairn's Concept of 'Internal Saboteur'

Guntrip (1961) described the development of the theory of endopsychic structure which originated with Freud's id-ego-superego. He noted that Jones (1957) realized that 'the origins of the superego ... has proved more complex than at first expected'. Freud wrote to Jones that 'All the obscurities and difficulties you describe really exist. But they are not improved even with the points of view you emphasize. They need completely fresh investigations, accumulated impressions and experiences, and I know how hard it is to obtain these. Your essay is a dark beginning in a complicated matter'.

Summarizing Fairbairn's (1952) contribution in this regard, 'what are repressed are neither intolerably guilty impulses nor intolerably unpleasant memories, but intolerably bad internalized objects', the internal representation of others. Using the infant's relationship to its mother as an example, the maternal 'object' by virtue of its unsatisfying aspects is internalized and split into two images, related to its exciting and rejecting components. The child's aggression against the mother who excites but does not gratify becomes the dynamic of the child's inner struggle to reject the 'bad object' whom he feels rejected him. His aggression then is the dynamic behind his repression of the 'Exciting' and 'Rejecting Object'. The remainder of the original object becomes idealized as the 'Ideal Object'. Corresponding to this tripartite split of the maternal image is a split in the ego. The part which remains attached to the 'Exciting Object' becomes the 'Libidinal Ego' which is the basis of infantile dependency. The part of the ego that is 'cathected' to the 'Ideal Object', Fairbairn calls the 'Central Ego'. The relationship of that part of the ego that is still 'cathected' to the 'Rejecting Object' maintains its connection primarily through identification. 'In real life it manifests itself as the tendency to reproduce all the undesirable characteristics of the cold, harsh, domineering, aggressive, neglectful or otherwise "bad object" aspect of the unsatisfactory parent. Thus, when it predominates in the personality it crushes out all manifestations of libidinal desire and affectionate feeling and sabotages the love-life of an aggressive character'. Fairbairn initially called this part of the ego the 'Internal Saboteur' and later the 'Anti-libidinal Ego'. Guntrip stated that the 'Internal Saboteur' was the sadistic component of Klein's and Freud's superego, while the total superego phenomenon may be regarded as a complex grouping of the 'Rejecting Object', the 'Internal Saboteur or Anti-Libidinal Ego' and the 'Ideal Object' or ego-ideal (Guntrip, 1961).

Davanloo's work picks up where traditional psychoanalysis has left off. From his earliest clinical observations Davanloo noted this aspect of the unconscious that was a dynamic force to be reckoned with. Freud had observed that what were needed were 'fresh investigations, accumulated impressions and experiences' (Jones, 1957). In 'Analysis terminable and interminable' he wrote that 'For the

moment we must bow to the superiority of the forces against which we see our efforts come to nothing' (Freud, 1937). In 'An outline of psychoanalysis' Freud (1940) wrote, regarding superego resistance, that 'In warding off this resistance we are obliged to restrict ourselves to making it conscious and attempting to bring about the slow demolition of the hostile superego'. Davanloo set out to shed light on this heretofore 'dark beginning in a complicated matter' while not merely 'bowing' to the superego (Davanloo, 1987b, 1988a). Part II of this paper will review Davanloo's major contribution to our understanding of these concepts.

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