

Incommunicado core and boundless supporting unknown

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Abstract

This paper explores links between Winnicott's incommunicado core and unknown boundless support. Winnicott posits a primary aloneness that enjoys this aloneness only because it receives support it is not aware of. Primary aloneness arises in a boundless horizon of unknown support. Variations of Winnicott's aloneness are taken up and implicit relationships to unknown background support are explored. The author uses his own life and clinical experience as well as reflective possibilities to draw the discussion forward. A special center of peace in Winnicott's work is brought out in face of his own emphasis on primitive agony and M. Klein's war psychology. A center of peace that keeps evolving.

Keywords: *Winnicott, incommunicado core, boundless unknown support, psychopathy, primary aloneness, M. Klein*

A woman patient learned I was seriously ill and one afternoon said, 'I want to have sex with you. I want to know you. I want our incommunicado cores, our unknowns to know each other.'

It is hard to convey the full feeling and I don't remember everything exactly. It had to do with experiencing *everything*, nothing held back, all giving. A full 'interpenetrating harmonious mixup', but more. For a profound cognition – a deep, total knowing – was part of the mix. As if all would be involved, given, known. The unknown would be known, a known unknown. Somehow knowing was an essential, implicit part of this unknown, the incommunicado core. Unknown to unknown, core to core. Swept up into and as everything. Everything itself.

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Of course she knew this couldn't happen. We wouldn't do this, we wouldn't hurt those close to us this way. She told me how she would 'act out' sexually when she was young. Sex a way of asserting self, tasting life, not missing anything. She had come a long way to be able to have and express her longing with me and for us to have the feel of it, to have the spirit of it.

She feared criticism. Someone would misunderstand and push her back on herself; rejection. Always the residue of being bad, that feelings that want life and are life are bad and that she is bad for having them. Perhaps, too, she wanted to heal me. We would have this wonderful life experience and it would make a difference to both of us. It would be a moment of fulfillment, a trueness. That this would heal me was a hope, a wish, a fantasy, a caring, a feeling inside. Now, shared feeling.

I was not exactly the someone she feared a critical response from. The negative someone is a kind of eternal negative someone installed in all of us – part of who we are; part of our equipment. It does many good things.

I smiled, perhaps my voice smiled, and said something like, 'You're beautiful. What a beautiful feeling. I'd love it.' She turned on the couch and looked at me. She was radiant. At that moment we loved each other. Somewhere along the line I said 'I can picture it.' That is, sex together. She felt a profound release.

The ax didn't fall. The feeling was redeemed, validated. We could live this feeling reality as part of our birth process.

What I want to emphasize is that the known unknown remains unknown. When she said our being together would be so total that our unknowns would make contact and know each other, it was a knowing in which the unknown remains unknown. The unknown deepens, grows richer. The unknown gives birth to a fuller unknown, is part of the ever growing unknown, an unknown that is the background, horizon, support of experience.

Winnicott speaks of an unknown core and also an unknown background. One of Winnicott's special contributions to the meaning of unknown background is that the emerging individual lacks awareness of the environment that supports it. Winnicott posits or describes or gives expression to a primary state of aloneness, 'an essential aloneness', 'a fundamental unalterable and inherent aloneness,' an aloneness that depends on the support of others it is unaware of. Aloneness that depends on the willingness and ability of others to adapt as fully as possible to its needs.

A statement of this condition must involve a paradox. At the start is an essential aloneness. At the same time this aloneness can only take place under maximum conditions of dependence. Here at the beginning the continuity of being of the new individual is without any awareness of the environment and of the love in the environment which is the name we give (at this stage) to active adaptation of such a kind and degree that continuity of being is not disturbed by reaction to impingement... a fundamental unalterable and inherent aloneness, along with which goes unawareness of the conditions that are essential to the state of aloneness. (Winnicott, 1988, p. 132)

Winnicott calls this state 'a primary state of being', a 'pre-primitive' stage of development. Pre-primitive partly to differentiate it from the wealth of 'primitive' states developed by Melanie Klein and her followers.

While Kleinian positions depend on a lot of self-other permeability, there is emphasis on the early self's defensive use of these states, where permeability readily becomes persecutory, and a me must defend itself against not-me. As I've written elsewhere (Eigen, 1996, 2006b), Kleinian psychology begins as a war psychology, psyche at war with itself and other psyches. Winnicott includes splitting (this against that) as the psyche develops, but begins as a peace psychology. There is a certain moment, central or primary, that is blessedly un-agonistic, possibly touched by the language of mysticism, the peace that passeth understanding.

Peace ('shalom') plays a central part in ritual prayer and I've sometimes wryly remarked it does so because there's so little of it. The sabbath point of the soul – the peace point; sabbath, when even God can be at peace. Winnicott develops his special version of the peace point – dare I call it an area of peace? – as an important state on the way towards a larger human development, in which war plays no little part. There is so much conflict, torment and nightmare in life that a certain peace gets drowned out, down-rated. Winnicott tries to include it as a basic part of development, which may well culminate in growth of capacity to sustain the most agonistic conflicts, paradoxes and extremes. But it is not merely defensive, not a second-class citizen. Winnicott speaks of it as *a* primary state, not *the* primary state, although there is a certain bias towards its importance for the fate of warrior components later.

Perhaps earlier and later is not the best way to speak of these things. I tend to envision a host of states succeeding and merging with each other (Eigen, 1986, chap. 4). Perhaps for some individuals certain groupings are emphasized more than others and gradually stabilize out of the flow or mix as dominant and sub-dominant identities. At the least, Winnicott's 'descriptions' are attempts to develop an expressive language for intuitions that beckon to him; that he finds important; that aspects of his being are based on and that he feels are important for others. When I read Rilke, I often feel experience is born as he speaks. I would not go that far with Winnicott, (or would I?) but it sometimes is something like that.

One hears echoes of Plotinus, the alone to the alone, as if Winnicott implicitly touches mystical states in psychoanalytic developmental terms. He touches what might be called a non-dualistic or pre-dualistic state wherein a being is supported in life with a sense of continuity in time, not yet arriving at a me/not-me position. Of course, in Plotinus the goal is rootedness in God, everything else cut away. In my adaptation of Winnicott's variant, originary, emergent being is supported by invisible, unknown God given over to adaptive care of the newborn.

Winnicott has a number of ways of referring to 'the fundamental state', 'the original state.' (1988, p. 131). One of the most familiar to Winnicott readers is 'unintegration', which he calls 'unpatterned and unplanned' but not chaotic. We cannot take up a full discussion of what unpatterned but not chaotic means in this context, but wish to note that a meaning of un-integration here is a kind of experiencing prior to me/not-me duality. This is not a defensive, chaotic, disintegration effort to remain integrated and

maintain identity. It is, rather, a primordial 'continuity of experience of being.' A sense of continuity of being in time is a primary state for Winnicott, and for its emergence and evolution it requires devoted helpers; whose help remains unacknowledged as such. One might say taken for granted, except there is not yet enough sense of discrete identities to take something for granted. Rather, the support goes on in a dedicated manner so that it can maintain the infant's continuity of experience of being without being noted as such.

Thus Winnicott speaks of an 'environment-individual set-up', in which the one cared for has no discrete notion of this care and 'adaptation to need is almost complete'.

The latter is indeed a forerunner, template or as old psychoanalysis used to say, *anlage*, of an unknown god – a god who cares; who helps. As a psalm says, 'You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living being.'

It is easy to criticize Winnicott as painting an idealized picture of care but I fear throwing the baby out with the bath water. There is something Winnicott is circling round that I dare not miss, something important to me and – I believe – to humanity. In trying to delineate aspects of the experiential nexus of concern, I am neglecting and taking for granted much else that goes on. We are not speaking about cognitive inter-activeness, usual notions of relational inter-subjectivity, ordeals, successes and failures of mutual adaptiveness. I am assuming all this. What is at stake rather – in honing in on Winnicott's primary state – is an experiential matrix that, however described, has momentous consequences in human life. I will take some poetic liberties, but I feel that the experiential state we are touching is real.

I am positing a boundless aspect to the support that isn't known, the unknown support of experience of being. Associated with Winnicott's use of the word being is living, aliveness, continuity in time and basic aloneness – supported and not ruptured. Possibly also a boundless aspect to the core supported, boundless incommunicado core of ongoing being supported by boundless unknown God. One could point to interpenetrating harmonious mix-up (Balint, 1968) or the interactive nature of existence and say this devoted adaptation to the alone one is pathological. It may be, but it is also – Winnicott insists – essentially life giving.

It provides a model of care and devotion to need that is a thread of ethical sensitivity and forms a basis for the feeling of being loved in one's core (God loves me, love without bounds). We are not speaking of realistic love, which comes later (if it comes at all), but of a real love that remains alive in one's core and is challenged to undergo development as long as one lives (Eigen, 2004).

Terms that might be associated with this state, primary narcissism or autism, are often maligned, devalued or pathologized. There is good reason for this. Acting as if one is not aware of others or not caring for the reality of others often is associated with destructive tendencies. To live in a world of one's own is a commonplace way of depicting madness, psychopathy, selfishness, lack of contact, isolation or merely dreaminess. But there are

variant uses of this language, creative autism, such as Balint (1968) touches in his one-person relationship, an area of creativity.

If one isolates a nuclear sense that others exist for oneself (if there are 'others'), to support ones life and link this with deep unconscious boundlessness (here especially a boundless supporting other that one is unaware of), one touches a thread that characterizes all pathology. Something goes awfully wrong with the point where I am loved or ought to be loved or supported by a boundless unknown other. An other who exists to support me, to fulfill my needs, or with a certain twist, give me everything I want. Something gets stuck in the inner core, deep in the incommunicado core that is supported by the unknown, boundless other. In extremis, the incommunicado core itself begins to alter, turn malignant, not without memory of radiant innocence. A surviving background or trace of sweet goodness/innocence informs some of the most malignant, twisted cores.

In psychopathy the other exists for me. Not simply to support me, feed me, but as an object to rip off, to get from what I can in this dog-eat-dog world. I have a right to kill, steal, lie and cheat in order to stay alive. It's part of the predator-prey chain. The unknown boundless giving other becomes fused with a boundless taker. Ego boundlessness preempts the place of the giver. An existential war: one takes or gets nothing. It's up to me and me alone. Endless taking, unconscious boundlessness fused with taking. Always boundlessness somewhere, degraded, grandiose, preemptive.

Look at the rhetoric of our leaders: 'shock and awe'; 'preemptive strike'; display of boundless glory (the American flag is called 'old glory'), obscuring the cost in lives and actual misery. A tiny bit of sanity recently prevailed as a federal court 'indefinitely postponed' an offbeat display of grandiose chest pounding called Divine Strake. The government scheduled an underground explosion of the biggest non-nuclear bomb in history on Native American land in the Nevada desert. It was scheduled for early June, 2006. Its professed aim was to see what would be needed in a nuclear weapon to mimic such a blast or, perhaps, the other way around, what would be needed in 'conventional' explosives to mimic a comparable nuclear device.

The blast was to be underground near a site that once housed nuclear tests, some eighty miles north of Las Vegas and a mushroom cloud was proudly advertised (google Divine Strake). They even named the underground tunnels, divine this and divine that. Hellish, ghoulish, self-celebrating, apocalyptic imagery. Was the blast meant to intimidate Iran, to show what we will do if they don't disarm their nuclear program? Or was it merely an imaginary (all too real) display of might to thrill and scare the populace to vote Republican in the coming, mid-term election? Nothing like a show of omnipotent strength to rally the political base (a correct word, base indeed).

Native Americans, on whose soil the blast was scheduled, joined with other citizen groups to bring suit against the federal government to stop this insanity. A pocket of sanity momentarily prevailed.

To win any way one can is corrupt enough. But add a sprinkle of boundless entitlement to the mix, an inversion of primordial boundless support that embraces personality, and you have bottomless grandiosity.

In psychopathy a certain unconscious self-nursing function turns toxic, perversely boundless self-nursing bound to fail (is part of Bush's 'charm' charged with something of a grandiose self-nursing quality?). One unconsciously apes a supporting boundless other by becoming a boundless injuring other, a perverse boundlessness. One mimics not the support, but holes in the support, breaches, the trauma. One becomes a trauma creator, insofar as one's power allows, a mock master of injury. Injury escapes – has life of its own – and boomerangs, so that destructiveness and self-destructiveness merge (Eigen, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006a,b, 2007).

People all over the globe are feeling the pain of breakdown of our unconscious supportive shield. The boundlessly good background support gets usurped by foreground menace. People are feeling the pain of injustice all over the globe, the pain power elites push past to do what they imagine they want, uncaring. You have to think psychically to think socially. Unconscious layers of psychic support are being corrupted, eroded by maniacal poisons. In Winnicott's vision, much goes on in the psychic substratum prior to formation of an ego that fights everything. Under pressure of great wrongs, an ego geared to fight (to correct or avenge or transmute them) prematurely seizes too much personality, preempts boundless space and becomes a boundless fighter. The move towards duality gets mired in this versus that, always a contest. So much so that the boundless God worshipped by so many throughout the world today is a toxic, destructive God, expressing warps in the psychic substratum, supporting cruelty in its many guises.

As a child, the body cannot match fantasy. I should say, following Freud, as a child or as a dreamer. Almost a sweet innocence of Freud's time, to think as sleeping dreamers it is safe to expose (fulfill/explode) wishes. Sleepwalking hallucinations have become bloodcurdling. We have developed tools that tend towards the possibility of a greater match between urges and fantasies of boundless destruction and the deed itself (Eigen, 2002). The boundless supporting other has been wounded and repair is not in sight. Deformations of the self and society spiral.

And my patient? Her love for me, her need? Her incommunicado core and boundless background other? Shall I peek at her bad motives? She is driven by a generative boundlessness. Not only a need to repair and to make good, but a need to create a great thing; a great moment; a thing of beauty; a joy forever. A poignant, wrenching, redeeming moment. A moment of suffering so huge that it transports (in the sense of transportation) existence from one place to another. It opens existence.

For this is where life is lived, in the affective basement everyone feels but no one sees. It is, partly, what led Freud and Bion to give a certain privilege to psychic reality. Bion thrillingly says that perception of external space depends on the rise and fall of affects, a sense of emptiness-fullness. Just as you think he is speaking about nursing, the breast, the emptying-filling sense of milk and nourishment, you realize he speaks about a certain affective primacy that colors our perceptual world. (Eigen, 1986, chap. 6)

Alone as a pre-primitive primary state supported by a background the aloneness doesn't know about. An implicit background in being, not a figure with conceptual clarity. Aloneness as a sense of continuity of being in time. A maximum dependence that is unknown supported by the boundless unknown, the latter nearly completely adapting to the alone core.

Chaos comes when aloneness begins to disintegrate under the impact of black winters. A traumatizing context freaks aloneness out and sets in motion a dynamic in which aloneness seeks to hide in un-aliveness. Perhaps aloneness still hopes in un-aliveness to get a taste of being, a hiding that is partly a waiting for being. To peek at being, to keep some of it alive, to protect it. There is too much anxiety for aloneness to let the experiencing of continuity of being grow, too much anxiety about what will happen.

Winnicott's picture of healing involves creating conditions for a valued sense of continuity of being to grow. The therapist triggers a taste of unconscious boundless support, a generative boundless unknown accessed through the medium of a somewhat known personality. A continuity that survives discontinuity, perhaps not immediately, but in time, replenishing, returning. For Winnicott continuity – not discontinuity – is primary. He does not, as is fashionable, idealize discontinuity. If anything he may idealize continuity. But it is within an overarching experience of the continuity of being, as core and background support, embracing disruption, that aloneness seeks the riches of life.

A certain amount of self-nursing is necessary, although for Winnicott an early split develops between a part of the personality that is nursed, and a part that nurses. Self-nursing can be part of a positive illusion that enables one to grow. It mimics boundless adaptation to the incommunicado core. A good thing is one can be alone with oneself, nourish oneself. But it is an illusion, an aloneness subject to shatter.

Illusion has a positive sense for Winnicott, connected with succor and creativeness. If development proceeds well from the alone core, the background boundless other stretches. Its elasticity grows into new places, trying to put a favorable turn on changing conditions and supporting living. It remains at least partly linked with roots of trust and surrender, residue of giving oneself up to being alone with another one doesn't know is there.

For better or worse we are self-nursers and use others in this process. How we do this runs the gamut of addictions, perversions, power lusts (or simply lusts), creativity, love, or even ordinary daily exchanges. There remains a wish to get to primordial aloneness boundlessly supported by the other one is unaware of: a moment outside the rupturing other.

But it is not only the other that ruptures this unawareness (later, illusion). One's own development does this as well. Developmental drives perforate illusions while creating others. There are disruptive anxieties inherent to oneself, another face of aloneness.

In a somewhat idealized formulation, Winnicott asks: 'What is the fundamental state to which every individual, however old and with whatever experiences, can return in order to start again.' (1988, p. 131) Wishful thinking, a credo, a faith, a conviction, a vision? A genuine and incessant

motor of regeneration? (see Eigen, 1992 for different kinds of rebirth experiences).

Not just a wish but a *need* to touch base with aloneness supported by unknown boundlessness: a need to reconnect with background boundlessness that supports life. Part of a sense of trust grows out of a time or experience when one is supported without being aware of the support. When support seems a part of just being.

Whatever 'pathology' or functions and uses one can read into my patient's urge and vision to sleep with me in my illness (or my acceptance and love of the beauty I felt in it), I suspect something Winnicott touches in his credo applies. I feel the realness of her feeling vision, of incommunicado core supporting, transmuting incommunicado core, in such a way that our incommunicado cores become boundless unknowns supporting each other.

All our knowns go into the mix, fish in water, for we do know each other somewhat, in important ways, are loyal to each other, a knowing that enriches the unknown. Not 'mature' adults working through conflicts perhaps, as in conflictual mutuality, not this instant. But a bit of the substratum of glory that lifts existence, dangerous, necessary and never outgrown. Incommunicado cores and their ripples, which now and then commingle, exchange self-substances, miraculous, thrilling. Intermingling that often goes on core-to-core in muted, less intense forms. It's not that we can undo 'pathology' or that pathology and analysis become irrelevant. But for the moment it is swept along in a larger current, the overflow. And something else happens. An abundance that does not fill or undo lack but makes lack lustrous, gives wings to lack. Not only survival, a victory for caring. A moment perhaps, a moment that counts.

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