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FALSE GODS AND HOW TO ELIMINATE THEM

Introduction

Who We Are

We are a group of therapists working as a team within the Geneva Association of Ethno-Psychiatry to treat victims of undue influence.

Our first consultation service, for patients from the migrant community whose therapists had been unable to help them using conventional methods, has been running since 1990.

In 2006, AGE launched a second consultation service for victims of undue influence, applying the same theory and clinical practice as with ethno-psychiatry.

We are an independent group, co-therapists who work on a voluntary basis. We are not affiliated with any religious, political, or other type of group, party, movement, or institution.

Ethno-psychiatry and undue influence

People who are caught up by undue influence are hooked through a specific form of exchange that enables the guru to get inside their mind. The theory on this type of mind control resembles what traditional societies consider as possession. Confronted with a victim who has been possessed, traditional healers seek to identify the intruder entity and to understand what it wants so as to make it leave. When we practice ethno-psychiatry and we receive a patient who is a migrant, we base our approach on such "traditional schools" to help him recover.

Mind control or possession, as a theory, has much in common with the tenets of Western trauma psychology. Accordingly, ethno-psychiatry methodology is ideally suited to handling people whose minds have suffered manipulation as a result of joining a cult.

False Gods: A Synopsis

Doubts.

Typically, people who have come out of a cult and who consult us will say in the first session: "*I don't know what I believe*"; "*I don't know what I can trust anymore*"; "*I don't know what I think anymore*"; "*I don't know what is true anymore*."

None of them trust their ability to relate to reality at all, which often means they are diagnosed as psychotic.

Their very capacity to think or to act has been undermined at its very core.

How can spending time in a cult have had that effect?/

Note

Let us note at the outset: one cannot not trust anything.

Belief is the primal act of the human psyche that makes thought possible.

Before there can be Descartes' "I think, therefore I am", there has to have been a mental process of: "I believe, therefore I can think".

Normally, the sequence is so tangled as to be indistinct to the individual mind. Only too naturally do we assume our ability to think, forgetting it presupposes belief.

Belief

What sort of belief?

At the very start of life, the newborn has to know before anything else that he can trust an existing reality : his own, his mother's.

The certainty conditions the whole way the mind functions. Yet the process of exchange between the baby and the mother will already be based on what came first: the sensations related to bodily functions.

The infant becomes convinced of his reality through those bodily sensations when they are validated by his mother's words as she empathises: "Oh, you're cold", "You're hungry", or "Something frightened you"....

At the very outset of life we thus find ourselves wholly dependent on that guiding support: it is that other, the mother, who validates what I am feeling by ascribing a name to it. The mother thus enables me to emerge from turmoil.

From that point on I can believe a reality exists and I can begin to think.

The Guru as Mother, Not Father!

To our amazement then, and contrary to popular notion, we discovered that a guru's power is not that of an idealised or overbearing father constraining the devotee to adopt his philosophy.

One does not subscribe to the thinking of a guru for having renounced one's own, which is why there is precious little point in attempting to convince the devotee how inane or crude the thinking is.

The guru has operated far more subtly by penetrating the very source of thought, gaining an inordinate control over the working of the victim's mind. From then on he can impose his teaching and program the devotee no longer capable of independent thought.

How has he gone about that?

Infiltration

In point of fact, the guru has infiltrated the interface between belief and thought that conditions the individual's ability to think.

The mother enabled the infant to escape the turmoil of his earliest sensations by validating them with her own words. She also acted to soothe the child, appeasing his hunger, changing him, and comforting him.

By contrast, the guru will recreate the turmoil and insinuate himself into the position of he who knows what the other person is going through.

The turmoil is recreated by perverse and brutal means that bewilder and paralyse thought. Physical pain, disorientation through an induced state of permanent confusion over right and wrong, day and night, propriety and counterclaim, the forfeit of former support systems through the forced break with other attachments, and the alternation of humiliation and ego gratification are all ways to deprive someone of their frame of reference.

Having thus re-created the original sense of turmoil and utter dependency on the mother to stay sane, the guru can exercise control over the devotee by shaping his /her thinking and beliefs.

"I will tell you what you are feeling (you are angry, you are afraid, etc.)"

"I hold the key to your inner ordeal; therefore it is only through me that you can enter the world."

Daniel was caught in a dilemma. When Daniel was 18 his father had a serious heart attack for which Daniel blamed himself, because he and his father had argued a lot, yet the guru insisted that Daniel had been abused as a child. Daniel was stunned, all thought paralysed.

That is how a mentally healthy adult can fall under another person's sway, for having drastically lost all power of independent thought.

Faced with people who come to us in a similar state, what kind of therapy do we offer?

False gods and How to Eliminate Them

Our Therapeutic Practice

Our efforts entail locating the weak points the guru exploited to deceive the devotee and penetrate his /her psyche in the capacity of pseudo-mother. We aim to identify the exact part the guru played in order to neutralise his power.

More specifically, we work with the victim initially to establish not the guru's actual vision of the world but the antecedent, the precise ploys he devised to break down the devotee's fundamental trust of reality.

Question: *"How did the massage sessions go?"*

Answer: *"It was all mixed up, the masseurs, the people getting massage, the teachers, the students...no one knew who did what. It was surreal, completely impossible to work out."*

Question: *"What sort of sensations did you experience?"*

Answer: *"I couldn't say. All I knew was I had a huge knot in my stomach. He was telling me," I know what you're feeling."*

Question: *"Where was he in relation to you?"*

Answer: *“Standing over me, fully clothed, digging his fingers into my stomach. Me lying there in my underpants, trying to keep face with all the people looking on, standing around me.” Etc.*

OurTools: Countertransference and Group Dynamics

We work as a group of co-therapists on one person (or one couple) at a time.

We are guided by our own countertransference reactions: e.g. together we feel the rage, the sense of powerlessness, the humiliation, the desperate need for acknowledgement that overwhelmed the victim.

We ourselves take on the role of mother, naming, attaching words to what we feel. We put the senseless conundrums the victim conveys to us in perspective: e.g., *“Freedom is gained through submission.”* We identify the thought the guru implanted in manipulating the victim’s mind: e.g., *“I am so ashamed/ useless/ worthless”.*

The group is there to back each victim: *“I am getting completely confused here. I don’t know what to think anymore. What about you?”*

By encouraging debate the group also checks any tendency to play the unequivocal guru ourselves: e.g., *“I disagree with what you just said!”*

We pay close attention to our own bodily sensations and inquire about the consultee’s, in order to avoid reproducing the confusion that was originally instilled: e.g., *“My legs feel paralysed. I can scarcely breathe. Etc.”*

We rely on countertransference to decipher what the patient conveys about his/her own experience where that experience was damaging.

Marc’s parents joined a cult when he was 14, after a death in the family. He came across as devoid of all emotion. After our second session, one of the co-therapists had a crisis: she was overcome by enormous doubts as to her own professional capabilities and shame before the group. We can relate her feeling to Marc’s emotionlessness the previous time. The co-therapist’s insecurity about her competence and her sense of shame actually have to do with Marc’s story.

Bit by bit we explore with the victim his/her associations with the past: e.g., *“Was there another time when you felt that paralysis?”* We re-establish the connection with the previous episodes the guru will have exploited to gain control.

The constant interchange within the group keeps us fixed on the objective of defusion. *“We believe what you are feeling. We are naming what we feel.”*

That is how we render unto Caesar what is the guru’s, which enables the consultee to recover what is his/hers.

That person is obviously our sounding board, the one who indicates whether our hunches make any sense and whether our support is any help, etc.

By recovering the ability to think for himself or herself, the victim also regains the self-

esteem that was so dreadfully eroded by the methods practised in the sect.

In the process we think we will have worked together to develop the psyche to some extent, both our patient's and our own.

We will have restored life and creativity there where a destructive will power would have taken over.

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