

As I was thinking about Bolognini's paper and Meir Vinikott's comments, I had a clinical hour in which a patient described his contradictory feelings about something and then said, "You don't understand - ambivalence is one of the worst feelings in the world." Silently I agreed. Holding onto contradictory feelings, thoughts, and ideas is uncomfortable for all of us as both psychoanalysts and human beings. To some extent we all need splitting and projection to navigate this discomfort.

Now note that my Kleinian formulation is different from Bolognini who cites early idealizing transferences "(Thou shalt have no other gods but me!)," as interfering with our ability to appreciate and enjoy contradictory viewpoints. Furthermore, I can imagine another psychoanalyst pointing to my patient's lack a Third which leaves him locked in an either-or dilemma. I could go on but this is exactly Bolognini's point – plurality means that, like blind men describing an elephant, we can explain the same phenomenon in many different, contradictory ways.

Bolognini points out that we tend to idealize our psychoanalytic ancestors and that this idealization makes it difficult for us accept viewpoints that contradict our own beliefs. I would add that the tendency to idealize our own viewpoint and disparage other points of view extends far beyond psychoanalysis into politics, religion, nationalism, gender, and race. While I agree with Bolognini's formulation, I think that this phenomenon is not fully explained by the concept of idealizing transferences but rather the result of a number of different factors, some of which I've mentioned above. Again, this seems to me consistent with the point that Bolognini is making. Plurality implies that differing theoretical viewpoints can be complementary and not necessarily contradictory.

Having said this, I wonder about the limits of plurality. Does considering differing theoretical viewpoints mean that anything goes? For instance, is a theory that denies the existence of the unconscious still psychoanalysis? For me the answer is no but I can conceive of other points of view. To me intellectual flexibility does not mean acceptance of every theoretical stance but rather that the emotional ability to consider alternate points of view without automatically rejecting them. What I found interesting in Bolognini's paper was his exploration of unconscious factors that cause us to defend our ideas/ideals and block off alternate ways of thinking about our theories and our patients.

These are some of the thoughts that I had as a result of reading Bolognini's paper. I thank Meir for bringing it to my attention.

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