

Interview with Maxine Anderson, MD FIPA

The following interview was conducted in December 2015 by EBOR Committee member Barbara Sewell, MA FIPA in advance of the eleventh International EBOR Conference in Seattle, Washington (USA) on October 28-30, 2016.

Barb: In preparation for EBOR 2016, the conference planning committee wished to publish some information about our two plenary speakers, yourself and Mark Solms. I have the privilege of interviewing you. I'd like to start with some information about your background. How did you come to be interested in psychoanalysis? Did you know when you went to medical school that you were going to go into the psychoanalytic field?

Maxine: I believe I became interested in psychoanalysis as an outgrowth of my ongoing curiosity about the nature of things, what makes them tick, what is below the surface. Medical training introduced me to the mind and how it so influences the body. But I was more directly inspired during my psychiatry residency, part of which was in Cincinnati. Maurice Levine and his department at the University of Cincinnati, all psychoanalysts, demonstrated that openness to depth that was very appealing. When I then came to Seattle a couple of years later, I soon applied for training at the forerunner of the Seattle Psychoanalytic Society and Institute where I graduated in 1978.

Barb: You've been interested in the field for a long time. Can you say a little bit about your decision to orient yourself to the Kleinian school? How did you decide to study in London? How long did you live there?

Maxine: It seemed that my quest for deeper understandings was not quenched by my psychoanalytic training in Seattle in the 70s. In the early 80s, the opportunity arose to pursue further work in London. Austin Case, my husband at that time, had trained at the British Psychoanalytic Society in the Kleinian track and he suggested we spend a year or two there, a refresher for him, a deeper exposure for me. I am ever grateful to him for that opportunity to have lived in London for eight years and to have had exposure to the Kleinian view.

Barb: You must have met a lot of the London pioneers in Kleinian thinking. Who were some of the people who most influenced you?

Maxine: I was privileged to have analytic experience with Herbert Rosenfeld during his final years. I also had supervision or study group experience with Betty Joseph, Edna O'Shaughnessy, Irma Pick, Elizabeth Spillius, Ruth Malcolm, Anne-Marie Sandler and Dinora Pines. I learned a great deal from these senior clinicians. Peers in the Membership Course for Full Membership in the British Society included Peter Fonagy, Bob Hinshelwood, Michael Parsons, Roger Kennedy, Juliet Mitchell and Sara Flanders. They have all enriched the field with significant contributions. It was a pleasure to have studied with them and the many other stimulating students at the British Society at that time.

Barb: An impressive list. And you have enriched the field here in Seattle. I'm wondering how your personal and professional experiences both distant and recent have influenced your current perspective on psychoanalysis.

Maxine: This is an intriguing question, one that I can probably only partially answer. The distant experiences of ongoing curiosity have been a factor, and this includes the sense of always questing toward the unknown. I have found that this requires openness to the new, alternating with closedness for digestion – a dialectic I feel characterizes how I am working, thinking, and being psychoanalytically right now. Medical training brought both rigor in terms of learning, but also ‘the need to know...and get it right, now’, which obscures the openness and spaciousness needed for explorations in the unknown.

The intellectual traditions in medicine and psychoanalysis are necessary up to a point, but the need for theory as scaffolding and standards for training can easily lead to constricting concretizations and absolutes, rigidities rather than openness. I know firsthand how institutional needs, so necessary in one way, can also constrict the mind and the psychoanalytic spirit. I think we need to be ever vigilant here to retain the value of the scaffolding yet encouraging of personal explorations and discoveries. Admittedly it may be a tall order.

I suppose that my current psychoanalytic view privileges tracing affect and its mediation, the nuts and bolts of coming alive, while appreciating the defenses against openness and uncertainty. I keep in mind how we seek security in theory, which aids us up to a point, but then serves to shield us from our own intuitive processes. Quite succinctly, I suppose this view echoes the perspectives Bion arrived at in his late work.

Barb: How do you envision your current thinking will impact your clinical practice?

Maxine: I'd like to keep as a beacon the innate expectation of care. When that evolutionarily installed anticipation of care is met, psychic development seems to proceed fairly well. However, when that anticipation is *not* met, then it may lead to the panoply of negative experience, including the spectrum of neglect, abandonment to trauma and abuse, and the hatred of facing the pains of reality. My current sense is that the ‘death instinct’ may usefully be thought of as surrendering to the entropic forces that are otherwise mediated by care. It takes energy, courage, tolerance of pain and frustration – all functions of care – to stay alive and to bind these negating forces that may overwhelm the vulnerable psyche. Staying oriented, therefore, to how that pre-conception of care is realized (or not) in the analytic dyad is very important.

In practice this means staying as aware and open as possible, while also remaining clear that the unconscious forces toward entropy that would defensively obscure emerging clarity are always hovering. This seems to require the need for a permeable boundary, open to receive and metabolize, but sturdy enough to protect the quietly emerging thought from the ever-hovering doubts about the new. The clamor of the forces for stasis can be wearying work, suggesting that we need to stay close to our appreciation of nature and beauty in the world for nurture in our work. Being able to do so may foster not only our deepening respect for the complexity of reality but also faith in these processes of coming alive.

Barb: You have taught psychoanalysis to many of us. How do you imagine your current thinking might alter the teaching and practice of psychoanalysis in the near and more distant future?

Maxine: Of course we cannot know the future, and I cannot say how my own thinking might impact the teaching of psychoanalysis at NPSI or beyond. But it is evident that affect and its mediation are important in my work. Part of the mediation, of course, is language-based understanding, but undervalued until recently I think has been the intuitive aspect of experience.

I will be valuing this more in my future teaching as the source for one's own creativity and for the new idea.

What I would hope for in psychoanalytic training is that early on clear structure and scaffolding be offered, including valued mentors and readings in order to offer a basic point of view; but then, in the latter portions of training, there be encouragement for each student to get to know his/her own nature – not only in the personal analysis but in terms of his/her own ways of learning and growing. For advanced learning efforts, the authority-based study group would be companioned, if not supplanted, by a non-authoritarian study group structure. In my recent experience, intuitive processes are fostered in an atmosphere of mutuality and openness, which can be easily shut down in the presence of explicit authority. We all need to continue to learn from others whom we value and admire; but in my view, making more space for one's own intuitive evolutions deserves more attentive regard.

Barb: I imagine these thoughts are represented in the book you are writing. Can you say a little bit about what the book is about and how it has been writing it?

Maxine: My book, *The Wisdom of Lived Experience: Views from Psychoanalysis, Neuroscience, Philosophy and Metaphysics*, emerges out of a deep curiosity about the innate processes of coming alive. I was initially inspired by Bion's notions of 'Becoming and Being' but also by Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (Yale University Press, 2009). Soon thereafter, I encountered Mark Solms' article "The Conscious Id" (*Neuropsychanalysis*, 2013, 15 (1)), which addresses the primacy of affect over cognition. These significant authors also inspired further sojourns into philosophy, poetry and metaphysics, which added the realization that intuition (from brainstem sources), not cognition (from cerebral cortex sources), is the source of our deepest wisdom, our deepest coming alive.

Barb: Can you say more about what you mean by *coming alive*?

Maxine: Coming alive here means daring to embrace emotional experience rather than sequester it in distancing theoretical formulations. This shift requires recognition of the value of cognition, but also appreciation of its limitations. Greater trust and faith in quieter intuitive capacities, when engaged, offer a portal for the emergence of the 'new idea' or newly accessible aspects of reality.

Barb: Thinking ahead to the EBOR conference, when we will have presentations by both a professor in neuropsychology and a psychoanalyst, I find myself wondering about the relationship between the brain and the mind. I'm curious whether you have any thoughts about this.

Maxine: Brain and mind bring up the ancient question (often called 'the hard problem of consciousness'): How does the mind arise from the brain? The mind and the brain are probably best thought of as two views of the same phenomenon. Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull have written nicely about this in their book, *The Brain and the Inner World* (Other Press, 2002), and more recently in Solms' book, *The Feeling Brain* (Karnac, 2015), where he suggests that we have two modes of perceiving the mind-brain. As an *object* 'out there', the brain can be seen by our externally-oriented senses, primarily vision and greatly enhanced by current neuroimaging technology. But there is another avenue to consider, a *subjective* view, where the unconscious perception of the mind, via affects, informs us of our interior wellbeing. This gives us a kind of 'binocular' view: the material brain as an object, but also the subjective view of the mind or

‘how it feels to be me.’ Two separate but complementary views of the same phenomenon – brain as object, mind as subject – go a ways toward resolving the mind-body ‘hard problem.’

Barb: Sounds like an interesting read to prepare for the conference. Many clinicians doing psychoanalytic work shy away from neuroscience out of a belief that there is an irreducible gap between the workings of the brain and the meaning the mind makes of the brain's work. How would you address this bias to help clinicians come out of their consulting rooms to embrace the neuroscience branch of the psychoanalytic tree?

Maxine: Several thoughts come to mind. One is that different vertices or perspectives may be informing (such as the mind and the brain being two perspectives of one reality) or felt as threatening if one's perspective has not included them. Over time, as we form our psychoanalytic identities, it may become increasingly difficult to open up again, to become more or less willing to revise previously firmly held positions in order to embrace the new. I myself felt a bit resistant but also just plain ignorant about neuroscience until I became fascinated with Solms' work as it dovetailed with my own searches about ‘coming alive.’ His pivotal article, the previously mentioned “The Conscious Id,” highlighted so specifically the energy to awaken being derived from ancient brainstem sources that I began to explore other neuroscience writings. For me, understanding that the location of the neural correlates of the functions of maternal care or reverie are in the most evolved aspects of the brain, the frontal lobes, deepens my appreciation of human evolutionary development and perhaps how central ‘care’ is for our deepest wisdom and being. Indeed, the emerging notion that, in Bion's sense, the pre-conception of care as an innate registration of one of the major evolutionary tasks of the cerebral cortex over millions of years may take the concept of object relations, in terms of reverie and object seeking, into a wider dimension than has been generally considered. Finally, more spelled out in my book, reading widely in other areas (philosophy, the history of Western thought, meditational sciences) has been important to me in enhancing my explorations of ‘coming alive’.

Barb: Our conversation has reminded me of the evolving nature of psychoanalysis and the importance of openness to new ideas, both in terms of working with patients and in terms of theory. Do you anticipate that aspects of neuroscience will be included in psychoanalytic training at some point?

Maxine: I would hope so. Many of us feel aversive to neuroscience because it has felt so unfamiliar. But if we can gain acquaintance with how neuroscience may enrich our psychoanalytic perspectives, that would allow a natural opening – a kind of bottom up exploration out of curiosity – such as my own explorations about ‘coming alive’ leading to understandings about the primacy of affect and the intuitive functions.

Down the road, as these understandings become more common place, psychoanalytic training may include the importance of the dialectic between affect and cognition and the impact of innate expectations (Bion's pre-conceptions), all of which shape and inform our anxieties, our objects and our everyday experience. In the 1920s, Freud had longed for the time, ‘decades away’, when neuroscience and psychoanalysis would find common ground. If we can remain open to the deepening perspectives which neuroscience offers our psychoanalytic studies, Freud might feel that such a time has almost arrived.

Barb: A realization of a pre-conception may be in the works! Thank you, Maxine, for your thoughtful responses. I am looking forward to the conference and hearing what evolves this year.

Maxine: Thank you, Barb. It has been a pleasure to talk together and to anticipate the upcoming EBOR experience.