

## **An hungarian precursor of attachment theory: Ferenczi's successor Imre Hermann**

Horst Kächele (Ulm)

*Sandor Ferenczi Conference Milscolz Nov. 2008-11-29*

André Haynal was supposed to speak about traces of the work of Ferenczi in psychoanalysis from Freud to self-psychology. As you must realize I am not André Haynal and therefore cannot replace neither him, yet his topic about traces of ungarian analysts in the development of psychoanalysis is intruiging. The history of science or scientific thinking is full of examples where creative thinkers conceived of ideas that at the outset often are quite far-fetched, remote, melting diverse discourses, but only much later can be shown to have contributed to the development of a scientific field.

One of the fascinating scientific movements of present day psychoanalysis has been the ‚raprochement‘ of the developmental observations that John Bowlby spelled out in his trilogy on ‚attachment and loss‘ (1969, 1973, 1980) with the clinical field (Fonagy 2001; Strauß et al. 2002).

Bowlby turned away from traditional psychoanalytic view of fantasy life during childhood and focused on the implication of actual real events such as separation and loss on the emotional development of a child. Hence Bowlby's theory has long been the topic of heated debates among psychoanalysts. Now the independent motivational aspect of attachment has been widely accepted, which independent of hunger and

sexuality safe-guards the establishment of social relationships. Freud's view that social relationships are primarily formed because of the need for nourishment was not supported by the researchers working in the field of attachment.

Attachment theory sees the desire for close emotional relationships no longer as specifically human, but it seems to be a common feature of all primates. This desire, it is already present in the newborn, will remain until old age and is a basic element with a function for survival. In infancy and childhood attachment to the parents assures shelter and care. Analogously, the task of the parents is the sensitive care of their child. These two systems are in delicate balance and develop in a specific sequence.

By now you might be asking yourself what has attachment theory to do with hungarian psychoanalytic world shaped by Sandor Ferenczi and his followers. As a bridge I will mention recent book I came across via the internet; searching with google I was directed to a recent book with the inspiring title „From death instinct to attachment theory; the primacy of the child in Freud, Klein and Hermann“ by Geyskens and van Haute (2007). Writing about people that had gone through traumatizing experiences during World War one they point out:

„They were children when they came into the trenches and became the wounded, watching their comrades die in agony and filth. When they left the trenches and came to Dr. Freud they were decidedly no longer children. They no longer fit neatly into his pleasure principal, engendering his controversial ideas about the death instinct“.

These two authors delve deep into the resulting tensions between such prime components of psychoanalysis as attachment and infantile trauma, analyzing the work of Melanie Klein, John Bowlby, *Imre Hermann and the largely overlooked Hungarian School of Psychoanalysis*.

Obviously the largely forgotten contributions of Imre Hermann illustrate his astonishing role as a precursor of attachment theory. Long before John Bowlby was in the fire of critical discussions in the late fifties (A. Freud 1960) we encounter an interest in ethological questions among hungarian psychoanalysts.

Imre Hermann, born 1889 in Budapest displayed an extraordinary interest for mathematical problems already as pupil at the gynmasium. As student of medicine in the second year he worked in the experimental laboratory of Révész studying child psychology and the psychology of sensory perception.

Hermann opened his 1936 contribution with the following words:

„In the past twelve years I often took the opportunity to point out the significant role of the wish to cling to mother's body plays in the mental organization of the human being. By now there is sufficient material to summarize the various findings, to supplement it and to demonstrate the position of these facts in the theoretical structure of psychoanalysis“ (1936, p. 349).

He then discusses two body of facts: there were clinical observations on the erogeneity of the hand and ethological observations of the relation of mother and baby among chimpanzees.

The first „body of clinical facts“ comprises the baby's tendency to use its fingers for clinging and sucking; the second consists of anthropological findings of the social life of monkeys and apes that the British zoologist Solly Zuckermann<sup>1</sup> had summarized in 1932 and 1933. Hermann particularly made use of the phenomenon of grooming as an important mechanism for he development of social life which Hermann wrote about

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<sup>1</sup> To his achiements we may count that he was a pioneer in the ethological reserach on monkeys. His work „The Social Life of Monkeys and Apes (1932)“ has been called a standard reference book (Wikipedia).

in his 1933 paper on the instinctual life of primates ("Zum Triebleben der Primaten").

Both sets of findings – clinical and ethological – led him to the conclusion that the human baby in relation to his instinctual tendency is prematurely disconnected from mother's body. (His conjecture that this also could be due to an intervention of the archaic father ‚Urvater‘ might be read as an necessary tribute to Freud's position). Therefore a drive for clinging remains throughout life, which demands for the restauration of the original situation ('Urzustand'), in which mother and child are joined in a preformed dual unity. The gratification of this drive however is continuously frustrated by a series of traumata (see Hermann 1924).

The creation of a new drive during the lifetime of Freud certainly was a risky enterprise; no wonder that one finds scarce reference to it in the non-hungarian psychoanalytic world. However in his book on the debate on technique Haynal (1989) mentions that Hermann's descriptions of the tendency to cling (Sich-Anklammern) and the tendency to search-around (auf-die-Suche-gehen) without doubt have influenced Balint's conception of ocnophilia and philobatism (Haynal 1988, p. 46).

Michael Balint wrote about Hermann's contribution already at length in his paper on „Early stages of development of the Ego“ which appeared in the German journal IMAGO in 1937. He presented the controversial discussions that existed between the London and Viennese analysts about early love quoting Freud's description:

„Childhood love is boundless; it demands exclusive possession, it is not content with less than all. But it has a second characteristic: it has, in point of fact, no aim, and is incapable of obtaining complete satisfaction; and principally for that reason it is doomed to end in disappointment and to give place to a hostile attitude “ (Freud 1931b,

p. 231)

The position of the hungarian analysts – and Balint mentions Alice Balint, Imre Herman and himself - is influenced by Ferenczi's works; the core features are summarized in that these early wishes are object-directed and they never surpass the level of forepleasure. This position now is heavily endorsed by the work of Hermann whom Balint now cites in great detail. Again we learn that first the baby spends a lot of time in the first months of his extra-uterine life clinging to the body of his or her mother; and second the human infant prematurely is separated from the maternal body.

The underlying assumption of this position for later stages of life is that clinging (Anklammerung) represents the shared precursor of a whole series of object relations.

Michael Balint endorsed his arguments by quoting the studies of Alice Balint „on the love towards mother and the maternal love“ (1939). He quotes that the mother is - with respect to her libidinal needs - as well receiver as giver like her child, they both share the same kind of primitive-egostistic form of love. The mother knows no difference between her own interests and the interests of the object. This statement from today's point of view certainly would have to be qualified.

Returning to the main argument of my paper I would say that here the role of the mother as an attachment figure has not been adequately conceptualized. Although it would be fair to say in the light of modern attachment theory that there is a strong biological basis for primary object relations these relations are qualitatively different. Unconditional love is not the same as maternal preoccupation; it might be true that in pathological situations mothers childishly love their children, but from an

attachment point of view this is certainly not desirable (see Stern et al. 2000).

John Bowlby sharing the emotional and intellectual analytic environment in London reviewed the psychoanalytic literature on „the child's tie to his mother“ in his 1958 paper. Sifting through Freud's works he pinpointed to some quite hidden remarks on this topic and concluded: „Freud's neglect in his earlier work to give due weight to this early tie has had far-reaching effects on psychoanalytic theorizing“ (Bowlby 1958; quoted from Bowlby 1969, p. 361).

It is only in Freud's final synthesis that Freud provides a pregnant but highly condensed paragraph in the „Outline of Psychoanalysis“ (1940a, p. 188) on the relationship to the mother. He describes it as „unique, without parallel, established unalterably for a whole life time as the first and strongest love-object and as the prototype of all later love relation“ (quoted from Bowlby 1969, p. 363).

In this essay Bowlby values the contribution of the Budapest school. He refers to Hermann papers: „As a result of these observations, and resuscitating the early and virtually discarded idea from Freud's Three Essays, he postulated as a primary component instinct in human beings an instinct to cling.

Bowlby then relocates the perspective: „It appears, however, that Hermann was reluctant to regard this as an object relationship, so that it would probably be incorrect to say that he subscribed to the theory of primary object clinging“ (Bowlby 1969, p. 371).

Bowlby returned to the role of Hermann as a precursor again in the second volume of his trilogy (Bowlby 1973). Again mildly criticising the attempts of his analytic colleagues to answer the basic question „Why should a child be distressed in his mother's absence“ he mentions that

„only occasionally has a student of the problem accepted the data {of observation} at their face value and presented a theory....that regards the distress and subsequent anxiety as primary responses not reducible to other terms and due simply to the nature of a child's attachment to his mother. Among those who have advanced this view are Suttie (1935), Hermann (1936), and with some qualification, Fairbairn (1943; 1963) and Winnicott (e.g. 1952)“ (Bowlby 1973, p.31).

I think it is an honour to be mentioned on a list of forerunners, precursors to a theory that has changed the intellectual and clinical world. It marks the creativity of psychoanalytic clinicians to collect various experiences and melt them into new theoretical structures. Certainly Imre Hermann's work belonged that type.

## Coda

There is another topic where Hermann was clearly ahead his time. Let me tell you my little story. I was a student of medicine eager to collect all kind of books about psychoanalysis. Endowed with a small stipend for buying books only, I often strolled through the second hand books shops for suitable items.

One day in october 1967 in Munich I picked a book from the shelf with the title:

Hermann, I. (1963). Die Psychoanalyse als Methode. Köln.

Skipping through I realized that this book was a special item as it was a reprint of the original version published in 1934 as supplement to the Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse (Hermann 1934).

Much later I learned that the hungarian psychoanalytic thinker, David Rapaport, some ten years later had also tackled the topic of methodology in a series of lectures at the Menninger Foundation (1944).

There he pointed out that „in the whole psychoanalytic literature there are only three or four papers about methodology“ (Rapaport 1967, p. 181); he quotes Hermann's statement that a specific prerequisite of the psychoanalytic constellation is a ‚mood of confidence‘ (p. 201).

When we – Thomä & Kächele in 1985 – analyzed the present situation of psychoanalytic research we reminded our readers to Hermann's early effort:

„Increasingly, the analytic situation, which is the basis of the knowledge, practical scope, and empirical significance of the psychoanalytic method, is being subjected to scientific study (Hermann 1963)“ (Thomä & Kächele 1985, p. 25<sup>2</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup> Besides this quotation I could not find any other reference to it in the German critical dictionaries of psychoanalysis (f.e. Mertens & Waldvogel 2000)



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