

XENOS

(Theme of 9th Delphi Psychoanalytic Symposium)

The word *Xenos* in ancient Greek means the outsider, the other or visitor. The meaning of the term has always been ambiguous, depending on the various contexts in which it has been used. Thus, it could imply either hostility and threat, or friendship and hospitality towards a guest or outsider.

Concerning the concept of *Xenos* in the psychoanalytical literature, a few examples might suffice to show the multiplicity of its meanings.

The concept of the *Xenos* was of fundamental importance in Freud's thought from the beginning. When for example, he talks of the narcissistic injury that psychoanalysis had brought upon man he writes "...the ego is not even master in its own house but must content itself with the merest scraps of information of what is going on unconsciously in his own mind". In this way, man remains a stranger or *Xenos* unto himself.

When he turns again to the concept of *Xenos* in his paper on the 'Uncanny' (das Unheimlich Freud 1919), the uncanny is seen as "frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar". But since what is unknown is not necessarily frightening, Freud concludes that something must have been added in order to create the sense of fear. Might this be the return of the repressed? The return of archaic animistic thoughts? Castration anxiety? Or the fear of envy of others and the 'evil eye'? Interestingly, we note that when Freud turns to other languages to approach the meaning of Unheimlich, he relies on T. Reik's translations where the term among others is translated from the Greek as *Xenos*.

One of Freud's major contributions was the notion that the mentally ill were not so *foreign* in relation to us the so called 'normal', but that we share the same mental mechanisms, even though to a different degree. Here, repression exiles the *Xenos*, the foreign uncanny thoughts to the realm of the unconscious. Thus their return represents the return of the *Xenos*, the split off and inadequately represented parts of the self.

For Klein, the concept of splitting created mental content that was subject to exclusion through projection to the outside world and onto an object, and that this mental content would then be transformed into something alien or *Xenos*. Later, she would link her concept of envy with the wish to annihilate *otherness*, which she connects to the breast and to the maternal body.

Bion would encourage psychoanalysts to direct their attention towards the still unknown and foreign thought in order to approach absolute "O", renouncing "memory and desire", defining in this way the "K link" and drive for knowledge. Britton would later talk of a "xenocidal impulse" and the dislike of anything recognized as different, an "allergy towards the products of another mind".

For Winnicott the infant starts to explore the outer world and foreign landscape through its “first not-me object”, discovering in this way the world of transitional phenomenon, thus placing the *other* outside the infant’s area of omnipotence from where it can contribute to its psychic development (Winnicott). One must also refer here to the classic papers of Spitz and Mahler et al from their infant observation studies concerning “stranger anxiety” at eight months during the separation-individuation phase.

For Lacan, as for Freud in the ‘Uncanny’ (1919) , the *other* is the ego itself and the basic alienation of man from himself: «car Je est un autre» (Rimbaud). That is how Lacan explains the third narcissistic blow that was brought about by the discovery of the unconscious and the vain pursuit of man for absolute unity and completeness. Therefore, man’s wish for self-discovery will always collide with his basic ambivalence towards the *other* within himself.

One could continue citing such examples, but what is important here is to note that the concept of *Xenos* is omnipresent in psychoanalysis. What these approaches have in common is that they underscore man’s basic ambivalence towards himself, the *Xenos* within and without and towards that which is *not I*. This ambivalence can be seen embodied within the ambiguity of the ancient term itself *Xenos*, towards which man responds either with animosity and suspicion, or with a benign attitude of friendly hospitality.

What is important for psychoanalysis is that it not fall back and rely on what is already known. It is necessary to return and to review at times our basic concepts such as that of otherness or *Xenos*. And this, not only because yesterday’s knowledge can become tomorrow’s dogma (of a static science), but also because certain social trends or currents bring to the fore of our individual and collective consciousness the importance of certain concepts such as that of *Xenos* or the *other*. And it is here where external traumata and specific environmental conditions can have an impact on the psyche.

Thus, *Xenos* will be the theme of the 9th. Delphi Psychoanalytic Symposium, with presentations and discussions from renowned psychoanalysts from the International and Greek psychoanalytic communities, addressing and contributing in this way to the furthering of our understanding of this important and timely issue.

Dimitris J. Jackson.