

FIRST THOUGHTS

A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Beginnings

Jayne Hankinson



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A tribute to Chris Mawson

This space, normally occupied by a foreword, has become a tribute to Chris Mawson who died in November 2020. He had very generously agreed to write the foreword for this book, and had just started before he very suddenly died. He had written in the notes section of his phone the following:

Foreword to First Thoughts

A famous student of ancient forms of the art of unarmed combat once advised that we should try to take in what is useful, discard what is not and to add what is uniquely your own—wise and challenging advice in learning any art. I found this book to be expressing in a language that is very much her own, Jayne Hankinson's ...

I am intrigued to think about what else he might have written, but his note certainly fits with my hope that readers see this book as an attempt to discover my own thoughts and realisations through combining my experience with the learning of others. He had been deeply acquainted with my ideas and had constantly encouraged me to “write a book”, and as such, there would have been no better person for me to ask to write its foreword. I think it is very apt to include here, instead, a tribute to him.

I first came across Chris when he was giving some seminars on Bion almost nine years ago. I had looked forward to these seminars as I was keen to learn more about a Bion that had become enigmatic in my mind. Chris's enthusiasm for Bion and his manner of leading the seminar stood out from a growing awareness of the enormity of Bion's legacy. These seminars took place before *The Complete Works of W. R. Bion* had been published, and Chris was generous in sharing with us some of Bion's original writing, and also the details of how he had laboured

alone over the editing for more than a decade. I remember feeling awe, not so much about Bion's writing, but for the application and dedication Chris had demonstrated in completing such a mammoth task. These were qualities that impressed me about Chris over and over again in the years since that first meeting. It was also during these seminars that I learned he lived and worked very close to where I lived.

My contributions during these seminars had been positively taken up by Chris and, to my mind, I felt that, perhaps, he had overestimated my capacity and understanding. This feeling pervaded my experience of Chris to the extent that when I was looking for a supervisor I decided that I would not approach him—I felt I could not live up to what I felt his expectations to be. However, finding a supervisor that would work logistically (these were pre-Zoom times!), as I lived outside London, and who would fit in with my psychoanalytic thinking, proved to be harder than I imagined. I was eventually left with little choice but to approach Chris, and he graciously accepted.

During the first year or so of meeting weekly for supervision, any thought that Chris might have had an overinflated view of me dissipated. I was left with a feeling that my work did in fact constantly disappoint him, and I struggled with my confidence. What began to emerge, though, was the awareness that Chris was very fair. He could equally both praise and criticise with sincerity and passion, and I also began to appreciate his capacity and excitement in just “following a thought”.

This coincided with my growing personal interest in beginnings and belonging. I had already written, for myself, Chapters Nine and Ten in Part II, and had begun to develop further thoughts about Adam and Eve. I was beginning to think in terms of an Adam psychology and an Eve psychology and this came into a supervision one day. Chris encouraged me to talk more about it and we were soon immersed within a shared space of thinking and fascination. We began to meet twice a week, once for supervision and another just to talk about life, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the universe—and this continued right up until his death.

These meetings were at one and the same time microscopic, macroscopic, and megascopic in that they followed wherever our thoughts took us, one moment looking within atoms and the next moment the whole universe; one moment looking at psychoanalytic theory, the next looking at *Doctor Who*. He took every thought seriously and was able to call upon a huge encyclopaedic knowledge of Bion, Klein, Freud, philosophy, literature, and more in his associations wherever our discussions took us. He constantly amazed me by even being able to know the pages within a text from where his quote had come from.

I greatly enjoyed these meetings, and he both challenged and encouraged me to take my thinking even further; and often, I think, I challenged him to take his thinking further too. I feel very privileged to have had this opportunity to “just talk” with someone who had an obvious excitement and passion for thinking, and who took my thinking seriously.

Over time, Chris moved out of the realm of being my supervisor, or mentor, to being my friend. He was supportive through some personal difficulties, as was I to him when difficulties came his way. I met Donna, his partner, and he talked about her and his children and grandson

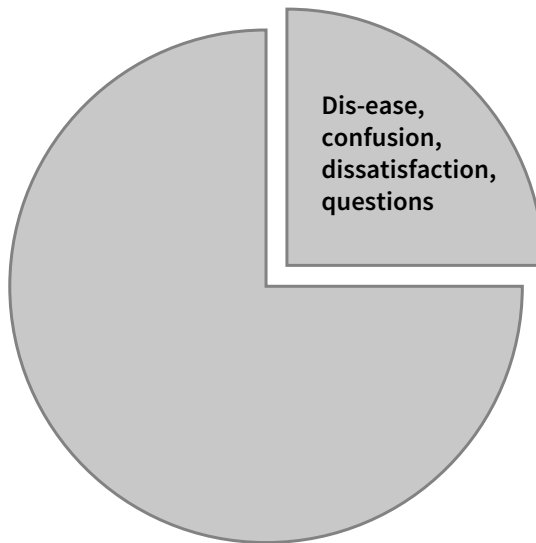
with enormous love and pride. It was evident that he was entering a very creative and happy phase of his life, and it is a great sadness to me that this future was only partially realised.

My last conversation with him was a phone call at the beginning of a half-term break that he was taking. He'd had an urge to call me as he had been reading the draft that I'd sent him of my book. He said that he had to let me know that he was really enjoying it and had had to number the pages as he had been taking notes as he was reading. True to form, my immediate reaction was to think about all the things I felt were wrong about the book, and I started to tell him the list of problems with it. This had been a repeated experience with him over the years, but, this time, when I started to do this, I stopped and simply said, "Thank you," and accepted what he was telling me. I was greatly moved and appreciative that he had taken the time to call me. We had a few email exchanges in the following days, one of which was about the foreword, but he died before we were able to meet again.

Chris' death has left a big hole in my life, and I am aware of the even greater loss for Donna and his family. He was thoughtful, caring, sensitive, full of excitement and passion for thinking, challenging, encouraging, and much more—and this book would not have been written without him.

Part I

Dissatisfaction



Setting the scene, or the first quarter of my hermeneutic loop

Wisdom is to discern the true rhythm of things; joy is to move, to dance to that rhythm.

—Old Russian proverb

CHAPTER 1

My beginning

This book has come about from my long-standing struggle to find my own path and identity, both within my professional life as a psychoanalyst, and my personal life. As such, the starting point from which this struggle has taken place is important to consider.

The ignition that started the process was my experience during training, and, in particular, a confusion about belonging. It resulted in an attempt, more than eight years ago, to “discover” a beginning that sufficiently satisfied several aspects of myself—my “hats” of psychoanalysis, science, childhood, and, above all, being female. This attempt is included in Part II. As, at this time, I had already developed an interest in creation myths, beginnings, and forms of belonging, my attempt cannot be said to be uninfluenced by this interest, but I can say that I approached it with a freedom of discovery and that I let it take its own path. The place I arrived at in the course of my experiment was the story of Adam and Eve. The impact of this exercise has been fermenting ever since, and I found myself starting to think of Adam and Eve not as separate mythological beings, but as modes of being that exist in dynamic tension within *all* minds, male and female. Initially it was a useful way of understanding certain personal difficulties, but it soon spread to be a useful way of thinking about my patients. Over the next few years, this thinking developed and deepened and has resulted in this book.

This is a deeply personal book. The concepts and discoveries I arrive at come from something within, and, as such, they “belong” to me. They are, mostly, not new; but what might be considered different is the frame I am attempting to set them in. I cannot treat each concept I arrive at during this personal struggle with a literary search and citations; I would get lost and the book would become something else entirely. I have obviously done so with themes I’ve arrived at through research, but I haven’t done so with themes I’ve gained insight into as a result of my own endeavours and struggles. These I feel I have “ownership” of, even though many have

owned them before me. If you like, these parts come from what I have begun to consider as an “Eve” aspect of me, and thoughts, concepts, or words that come from Eve are different from those that come from Adam. They have been smelt, tasted, seen, heard, and felt—discovered at a visceral level, not learnt by a sophisticated Adam aspect of mind.

Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939a) talks about “a victory of intellectuality over sensuality” (p. 114). Here, I am advocating a “right to be” for sensuality (in that it is based upon the perceptual and feeling-aware realm) and the status of everything that emanates from this part of the mind to be “owned” by the discoverer. As W. R. Bion (1967) says in *Second Thoughts*:

[A]ny psychoanalyst must find his own way and come upon well-known and well-established theories through experiences of his own realizations. It is clear that the realization which approximates to a theory he has learned will be unique, and may therefore appear to be so different from the theoretical formulation that he cannot recognise the bearing of the one upon the other. By contrast he will force a theory to fit a realization because it is difficult for an inexperienced analyst to tolerate doubt . . . There can be no harm in errors of this kind: “original discoveries” of the already well-known, and “confirmation” where none would be found if clinical flair were mature. It becomes fatal to good analysis if premature application of a theory becomes a habit which places a screen between the psychoanalyst and the exercise of his intuition on fresh and therefore unknown material. (p. 169)

Bion recognised the difference between discovery through intuition and realisation, on the one hand, and the learning of a theory on the other; I am advocating for the status of “original discovery” to be valid. It is “original” to the particular thinker—it has been “thought” from experience—and therefore has a right to be “own[ed]” by that thinker, even if countless others have owned it before. Bion also states how important it is for this type of thinking to be available to the psychoanalyst—it is this thinking that changes a treatment into an authentic relational experience from which the patient can benefit.

When I stumbled into psychotherapy and analysis in my early thirties, I devoured everything I came across. I read books and papers from the first word to the last and then reached for the next one. I have understood this as being a very strong epistemophilic drive, but also a quest for meaning that felt urgent to me. From the realisations I come to in this book, I could say that my Adam mind was acting, and trying to take in something, which would give meaning to Eve.

The influences, occupations, and preoccupations in my preceding years had been an upbringing in a broken, working class family in South Wales, being a secondary school science teacher, and being a mother to my three very individual children. I mention this as this book is concerned with beginnings, and my starting point has been important in setting the scene for what I am now writing.

How I have perceived the world and myself, and the corresponding struggles with belonging, can all be traced in my thinking and searching for something that felt like the “truth”. While recognising that one person’s truth is not necessarily the same as another’s, I was searching for something that could help me make sense of “me”, as well as resonate with what I knew about the natural world. I needed it to correspond with both my sense of something inside and my perceptions of the world outside.

A memory from my childhood that had puzzled me for many reasons has also helped me understand that perhaps I was always going to be a psychoanalyst. This memory has been fundamental in how I have formulated the concepts in this book. When I was about eight years old, I had been taken by a friend and her father to a derelict house in a countryside setting. This ruinous and collapsed house had a big impact on me, and I vividly remember feeling that one day I would return to this site and build a house for myself to live in. I can understand this experience in many ways, but what confused me for many years was both why I had remembered it so vividly, and my inability, due to feeling overcome by shame, to talk about how I had felt. This memory, together with other aspects of my “beginning”, began to have a life of its own in the sense of a need to find a structure from which I could orientate myself.

This personal quest was a big factor in my epistemophilic stage, and it persisted until probably halfway through my analytic training. This coincided with being established in my analysis too. I began to feel that while some aspects of theory resonated, others simply felt wrong. My quest still felt alive and kicking, but I was not so easily satisfied. In particular I was at first disturbed, but later fascinated by, the vehemence demonstrated by some of the adherents of any particular theory, and the oppositional nature of the various “clubs”. How could this be and how could this fit with my initial view of psychoanalysis as a bastion of truth and tolerance? Surely to be an analyst was to be able to tolerate all truths, to continue growing and asking “why?” It occurred to me that the vehemence was due to the fact that each adherent was working from a position of *believing* their particular theory to be *the* truth, and considering the *other* theory to be either not upholding this truth, or a destabilising influence on it—that is, a threat to the “structure” of the belief.

This phenomenon was to become fundamentally intriguing and important to me. There seemed to be something overarching going on, something that perhaps was being enacted or having an influence in ways that were obscure and unconscious. Again, how could this be, when the actors in this enactment or drama were the analysts themselves? How can several theories and positions be accounted for, which arouse vehemence and outright denial between each other, and still all be thought of under the umbrella of the quest for the truth? There seemed to be something bigger, some frame which had yet to be named, something influencing those who were supposedly the freest of minds.

My thoughts during this time started to become preoccupied with beginnings. It began to feel very important what the particular beginning each individual structure of mind emanated