

## André Green, Donald Winnicott and The Work of the Negative

Evelyn Pye, Ph.D.

January 5, 12, 19, 26; February 2, 16, 2019 (6 meetings x 2 hours = 12)

12:00 – 2:00

LOCATION: TBA

Class limit: 10

In his paper on negation. Freud (1925) looks at the infant's action of taking in and spitting out as the precursor to thought. In the interplay of 'I should like to eat that' and 'I should like to spit it out' the infant is establishing not only the differentiation between liking and not liking, but also the earliest demarcation of internal vs. external, hence creating the structure for the differentiation between what is thought, imagined or remembered as distinct from what is perceived. Negation creates the space that makes thought possible.

André Green bases his concept of the work of the negative on this understanding of Freud's on the role of negation in developing the capacity to think. Green also links his work closely to Winnicott's (1971) work on transitional objects and the space between the other as subjective and the other as objective. The transitional object is the first not-me possession. As Green points out, it is the 'not' that makes the beginning of object usage possible.

André Green sees that both Freud and Winnicott are linking the development of the mind with the use of the negative and with the capacity to mourn, whether that be the breast that has not yet arrived or the cotton reel/mother that /who is gone but will return. As Freud (1925) writes: "[I]t is evident that an essential pre-condition for the institution of the function for testing reality is that objects shall have been lost which have formerly afforded real satisfaction."

Thinking develops from the capacity to mourn and from the capacity to separate with a 'No'. The two are intimately intertwined.

In this course we will look at Green's thinking on the work of the negative as well as Freud's and Winnicott's papers related to this question. We will also think about how the work of the negative plays out in the hours with our patients and in our own thinking during sessions. Much of the creativity of being a psychoanalyst has to do with our own use of the negative: hearing the gaps, silences, reversals in what transpires in the hour, listening for what is not there and for who might be the patient's invisible interlocutor.

We will consider the clinical situation where the patient because of trauma has not been able to develop tolerance for mourning or separation. In these situations the separation necessary for the work of the negative has been foreclosed and what has developed instead is a refusal of the fact of separateness.

And we will look at clinical examples of our own and from the literature that show both the work of the negative and failure (or refusal) of the work of the negative.

**Meeting 1: Introduction to the work of the negative.** Exploration of André Green's concept of the work of the negative and its basis in Freud's paper on negation. Discussion of clinical examples of the work of the negative. There are examples provided by Green and we can also discuss examples from our own practices.

André Green, 'Negation and Contradiction'

Sigmund Freud, 'Negation'

**Meeting 2: The relationship between the work of the negative and transitional objects.** Looking at the close relationship between developing the capacity to tolerate separateness and the capacity to imagine, to mourn and to think. Considering the role of the negative in negotiating the space between the other as subjective and objective object (i.e., transitional space). Thinking about our own use of the negative as we listen to our patients.

Green, 'Potential space in psychoanalysis: The object in the setting', section on Winnicott, bottom of p. 283 ff.

Winnicott, 'Transitional objects and transitional phenomena'. Not including the coda of the two examples (child and adult) of failed object usage. (Different paginations in different editions of the book.)

**Meeting 3: Failure in the use of the negative.** The effects of trauma on the ability to tolerate separation and imagination. Addressing the negative therapeutic reaction where the analyst's thoughts 'to the side' are intolerable. This is where Green's concept comes most into play in working with traumatized (and traumatizing) patients.

Green, 'The intuition of the negative in *Playing and Reality*'. Winnicott, 'Transitional objects and transitional phenomena', final section on failure of transitional objects.

**Meeting 4: The Analytic Third.** We will talk about Green's idea of the third and the relation of the third to potential space and the work of the negative. Green is integrating Lacan's idea of the third and Winnicott's idea of potential space. The third makes metaphor and the symbolic possible. Green connects the third with the father (as does Lacan) but also with the analytic setting (following Winnicott) and with the analyst's analyst. With borderline and psychotic patients the third is not tolerable and must be foreclosed.

"The Analyst, Symbolization and Absence in the Analytic Setting" in *On Private Madness*, Chapter 2, p. 40 bottom to end.

**Meeting 5: The Dead Mother.** The dead mother complex is not entirely identical with what we have been speaking of up until now. It occurs when there has been good enough mothering for some period of time and then the mother's bereavement leads to her falling away. She is distracted, depressed, otherwise occupied having previously been in a vitally alive relationship with the child. We will also consider how Green's model is triadic (when the mother leaves she goes to the father, literally or metaphorically) while Winnicott and Freud are both dyadic (the mother and infant come and go in relation to each other).

Green, "The Dead Mother".

Winnicott: "The use of the object and relating through identifications". In *Playing and Reality*.

**Meeting 6. The dangers of coming together and the dangers of staying apart.** Ron Britten has written about an Oedipal understanding of the phenomena we are discussing. He speaks of patients who experience as traumatic any sign of the analyst's 'turning to the side', i.e., to think his or her own thoughts. We will read his thinking on this question and look at his and our own clinical examples

Ronald Britten, 'Subjectivity, objectivity and triangular space'

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. At the end of this program participants will begin to be able to discuss and make use of André Green's concept of the work of the negative.
2. At the end of this program participants will begin to be able to discuss and make use of Donald Winnicott's concept of transitional space and transitional objects.
3. At the end of this program participants will begin to be able to compare the two aspects of the work of the negative as structuring (that which allows the space for the mind to form) and de-structuring (the radical negative that destroys the possibility of thinking) as proposed by André Green.
4. At the end of this program participants will begin to be able to apply the concept of the work of the negative to their own clinical work and theorizing.
5. At the end of this program participants will begin to be able to apply the concepts of foreclosure of the work of the negative and failure of transitional space as related to clinical impasses.
6. At the end of this program participants will begin to be able to recognize their own countertransference experiences of both the creative and destructive forms of use of the work of the negative.
7. At the end of this program participants will begin to be able to recognize positive and negative space in modern art.
8. At the end of this program participants will be able to consider their own responses to representations of absence and loss by specific contemporary artists.

## REFERENCES AND READING LIST

Britton, R. (1998) 'Subjectivity, objectivity and triangular space'. In *Belief and Imagination: Explorations in Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge.

Freud, S. (1925) 'Negation'. *Standard Edition* 19.

Green, A. (1973) "The Analyst, Symbolization and Absence in the Analytic Setting" in *On Private Madness*. London: Hogarth; Reprinted. London: Karnac.

(1978) 'Potential space in psychoanalysis: The object in the setting'. In *On Private Madness*.

(1980) "The Dead Mother." In *On Private Madness*. Also in *Life Narcissism Death Narcissism*. London: Free Association Books, 2001. (In French, 1983).

(1986) 'Negation and contradiction'. In *On Private Madness*.

(1997) 'The intuition of the negative in *Playing and Reality*'. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 78: 1071-1084. Also in *The Dead Mother: The Work of André Green*. Ed. G. Kohon. London: Routledge.

(1999) *The Work of the Negative*. London: Free Association Books.

(2004) "Thirdness and psychoanalytic concepts." *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, LXXIII, 2004: pp 99-135.

Winnicott, D. W. (1953) "Transitional objects and transitional phenomena." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34: 89-96.

(1971) *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock.

### Supplemental readings

- (2017) Guttieres-Green. "On death and destructiveness." In *The Greening of Psychoanalysis: André Green's New Paradigm in Contemporary Theory and Practice*. Ed. R.J. Perelberg & G. Kohon. London: Karnac.
- (2017) Kohon, G. "Some thoughts on the negative in the work of Eduardo Chillida." In *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*.
- (2017) Perelberg, R. J. "Introduction". In *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*.
- (2017a) Urribarri, F. "An interview with André Green: on a psychoanalytic journey from 1960 to 2011." In *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*.
- (2017b) Urribarri, F. "On clinical thinking: the extension to the psychoanalytic field towards a new contemporary paradigm." In *The Greening of Psychoanalysis*.

**Evelyn Pye, Ph.D.** is a psychoanalyst practicing in Northampton, Ma. She has for the past two years taught at MIP on André Green, Donald Winnicott and the Work of the Negative. She has presented papers related to these questions at the IPA, Boston, 2015 and the Frances Tustin Conference, Boston, 2014. She consulted with André Green over a number of years.

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