Anxieties and Defences: Normal and Abnormal*

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This paper reflects on some issues that have emerged since *Social Defences against Anxiety—Explorations in a Paradigm* (Armstrong and Rustin, 2014) was published in 2014, and is a contribution to a continuing debate on these issues. Its starting point is an implicit contrast in the perspective taken by different contributors to the volume, in regard to the nature, significance, and function of anxiety as a social state of mind. This difference has both cultural and ideological dimensions. One perspective is broadly shaped by concerns for "social protection", embodied in the health, education, and welfare systems of the UK. Anxieties are believed to arise, in the context of responses to physical or mental ill-health, social deprivation, deviancy, or sexual disturbance, and also of breakdowns of relationships and organisations. It is the task of certain social institutions, networks, and professions to manage these. They are often found to do this badly, as in Isobel Menzies Lyth's original study, by means of unconscious social defences that have harmful unintended consequences. The sources of the anxieties in question are seen as natural and unavoidable elements of human lives, but as nevertheless constituting threats to well-being. The underlying goal is to find ways of coping with the anxieties that lessen their impact, and that enable them to be borne in constructive ways. Common issues are those faced by welfare systems whose tasks are those of social reparation. For many years an anxiety has been widely felt throughout the relevant professions and services in Britain that their entire function has been placed under threat through demands for their marketisation and through an increasing scarcity of resources. This has been as a crisis of a "dependency culture", (Khaleelee, 2003; Khaleelee & Miller, 1985), even though an important aspect of this crisis is intolerance and disparagement of the condition of dependency itself (Dartington, 2010).

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An alternative perspective is to be found in particular in the paper by Larry Hirschhorn and Sharon Horowitz (2014), "Extreme work environments: beyond anxiety and social defence" whose topic is the work of speculative financial traders—hedge fund managers—and by analogy, practitioners of extreme life-risking sports. Here "anxiety" is described in more positive terms, as a natural concomitant of risk-taking, and as in itself a potential stimulus to individual and social development. (These are risks consciously espoused, and are distinct from unconscious anxieties, either paranoid–schizoid or depressive.) The epigraph at the head of their paper quotes Nietzsche "The secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and greatest enjoyment is—to live dangerously". And in their own words ". . . Any work worth its salt—which means it entails significant risk—stimulates anxiety". Enhanced conditions of risk are understood in this and some other papers in the volume as the product of a more turbulent "globalised" environment, and the issue is to find ways of managing the ensuing anxieties, through what Hirschhorn and Horowitz term "protective frames" that can support risk and innovation. The cultural context of this perspective is that of entrepreneurial capitalism rather than of public welfare. It does not seem coincidental that the strongest formulations of these contrasting perspectives are from the US and Britain respectively.

This paper aims to explore these differences of perspective. In particular, it will suggest that there is a risk within the "social welfare" perspective that anxieties themselves, rather than dysfunctional social defences against them, come to be seen as a problem. It will suggest that the value of anxieties as both unavoidable and positive elements in change and development should also be recognised.

The paper will look first at the origins of the concept of anxiety in psychoanalytic theory, second at the "social defences against anxiety" thesis, and third at the idea of normal anxiety as a stimulus to growth and development.

PSYCHOANALYTIC ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPT OF ANXIETY

The origins of the concept of anxiety lie in the beginnings of psychoanalysis, with Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein in particular. It is Klein's ideas that led directly to Elliot Jaques' and Isobel Menzies Lyth's seminal applications of the concept of anxiety to social institutions.

Freud believed that anxiety "arose originally as a reaction to a state of danger, and it is reproduced whenever a state of that kind recurs". But his account of what such states of danger might be is a complex one. Soon after birth, Freud holds that the danger cannot be

of separation from mother, since Freud holds the infant to be wholly narcissistic and unaware of mother's existence as a separate person. But with young children, matters change. Being alone, in the dark, or with an unknown person, amount to "the single condition of missing someone who is loved and longed for" (Freud, 1926d, p. 136). But there are also the anxieties caused by the power of instinctual impulses, libido in particular, and the retribution that might follow from their expression in the challenge to the father for possession of the mother, or to the mother for possession of the father, in the oedipal situation. The persecutory superego was essentially a defence against the anxiety brought about by overpowering instinctual impulses and the damage they might cause to the self. The Oedipus complex is the key to Freud's theory of the superego. Freud differentiated between anxieties caused by external dangers, and anxiety that has an unconscious origin, which he termed neurotic anxiety.

Klein added to Freud's view her idea that anxieties arose also, and especially strongly, from destructive impulses within the self, which she held were present from the very earliest days of life. She took up Abraham's idea of the infant's phantasies of cannibalistic attacks on mother's breast, and developed this in her account of infantile greed and aggression towards the mother. She also held that the infant's phantasied oedipal attacks on the parents (and indeed siblings) occurred much earlier than Freud believed.

Klein developed these ideas into her concepts of paranoid–schizoid anxiety and depressive anxiety. She held that infantile aggressive and destructive impulses were projected by the infant into its love objects, as a form of defence, but could then lead to both intense positive and negative feelings—love and hate—directed towards its objects or part-objects, and often split between them, in what she termed paranoid–schizoid anxiety. These impulses could give rise also to anxiety about the well-being of the other, through realisation that the self's destructiveness may damage the loved object—this is the state of depressive anxiety. Anxiety is thus, in Klein's view, a state of fear arising from the self's relations with its objects. It is thus essentially an other-related state of mind, although under the pressure of anxiety awareness of the other's actual reality may be distorted or lost. The degree and disturbing force of anxieties are related, in Klein's view, to the strength of the aggressive and destructive impulses, in relation to those of love. That is, to the balance between the life and death instincts, in the terms used by Klein and Freud. This balance was determined both by innate dispositions, but also and in particular by the quality of loving care provided to infants, and in the emotional environment thereafter (Klein, 1948).

Bion explored these states of mind in their more extreme forms. In his view, a mind capable of processing emotions can only develop if infantile projections into the mother are sufficiently contained, so that the infant can internalise the idea of a mind capable of thinking (Bion, 1962, 1965). Where satisfactory containment does not take place, the infant is liable to receive back its own destructive impulses in the form of a "nameless dread", at worst leading to a failure of mental integration and states of psychotic fragmentation, such as Bion observed and inferred from clinical work with his psychotic patients (Bion, 1967). This theory of the origin of mind, and its relation to experiences of emotional containment, is connected with Klein's view, further developed by Hanna Segal (1957), that the integration of the mind and its capacity for symbol-formation is related to the attainment of the depressive position: that is, to the recognition that both the self and its objects contain elements of both love and hate. Only where there is a tolerable balance between these dispositions can this mental integration occur.

Bion (1962, 1965, 1967) proposed that there were three fundamental "instincts", not two as Freud and Klein had proposed. He added to the earlier dyad of love and hate a third instinct or disposition, the desire for understanding or knowledge—K, added to L and H in his notation. This idea was developed both from Freud's "Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning" (Freud, 1911b), and from Klein's idea of an "epistemophilic instinct" (Klein, 1928, 1930, 1931) but it is given much greater weight in Bion's work, where it acquires parity with the dispositions to love and to hate, and is seen as a primary function of the mind. The epistemophilic instinct finds expression in conjunction with both libidinal and destructive emotions—one can wish to know for reasons dominated by emotions of either love or hate. However, K, the desire to know, was held to be Bion to be a distinct function of the mind, and O'Shaughnessy (1981) shows how valuable it can be to select the K dimension as, in Bion's terms, the "vertex" or key to understanding what is happening in a clinical session.

The forms of anxiety arising from the fear of loss and abandonment (from real or phantasied deficits in love) or from excessive hate and destructiveness, whether external or internal in origin, have been given substantial attention in psychoanalytic theory. Klein's theories of paranoid–schizoid and depressive anxieties were substantial developments of this kind. The later theory of borderline or narcissistic personality organisations further developed these ideas, since these were conceived as defences against the anxieties evoked by intense contact with loved objects, kept at a distance in these defensive organisations for fear of the intensity of libidinal and destructive emotions and of

the paranoid–schizoid and depressive anxieties that they were liable to evoke.

What is, however, less explicitly theorised in the literature are those unconscious anxieties that might be deemed to arise from the functioning or non-functioning of K, the reflective operations of the mind itself. Yet one might suppose that perceived or phantasied deficits or failures of the mind itself—failures of K—would be just as potent sources of anxiety as fears of overpowering libidinal or destructive feelings. The fear of madness itself, sometimes explored implicitly or explicitly in literature (e.g., in the plays of Strindberg, Beckett, and Pinter) is surely an anxiety that focuses particularly on the mind's own malfunctioning.

Anxieties that arise from the anguish feared to be threatened by knowledge and understanding itself are important themes in the clinical writing of post-Kleinian and post-Bionian analysts, such as O'Shaughnessy (1981, 2005), Joseph (1989), and Britton (1998). The "turning a blind eye" avoidance of understanding described by John Steiner (1993), with the story of King Oedipus as an instance, and Michael Feldman's (2009) account of how analysands sometimes prefer to convey their experiences as historical narratives of what they had been thinking, rather than as direct communications of their thoughts in the present, are examples of these defences. One can say that much contemporary psychoanalytic writing in this tradition, for example in Betty Joseph's work, involves exploration of clinical struggles to enable patients to face psychic realities, in the face of their defensive attempts to keep such knowledge at bay. A psychoanalytic text that has retained great significance as a discussion of such dilemmas of interpretative practice is James Strachey's 1934 paper, "The nature of the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis", which developed the concept of "mutative interpretation". The fundamental idea here was that anxieties, including those derived from failures of thought or understanding, are lessened by the understanding brought about by such "mutative interpretation", in their strength and in the terrors they bring about. This view of the therapeutic consequences of self-understanding has links with the philosophy of Spinoza (Hampshire, 1962).

Anxiety aroused by a fear of knowledge ("epistemophobic anxiety") is liable to be particularly intractable to psychoanalytic treatment, since the understandings offered by interpretations may be experienced as threatening to the coherence of the mind itself. Bion conceived of the feeding of the infant both as a physical and a mental process, in which what the infant took in from its mother were elements that contributed to the development of its mind as well as of its

body. Gianna Williams' idea of the "omega function" (the negative equivalent of Bion's "alpha function" or activity of thinking) described a toxified version of this feeding process, in which hostile maternal projections give rise to rejection by the infant (and later by the "infant in the adult") of both physical and mental "food", as in the pathology of some kinds of anorexia (Williams, 1997). Perhaps all "resistance" to understanding in psychoanalysis can now, following Bion's contribution, be understood to have this aspect. That is, what is resisted is not only the recognition of some particular object of interpretation (e.g., a patient's jealousy or envy) but also the idea that a new understanding of any kind is possible without causing intolerable anxiety. Ronald Britton has proposed, in the context of his work with narcissistic patients, that a questioning of the self depends on its being able to tolerate the idea of a "third position", which he relates to the oedipal triangle. This enables a distinction to be made between beliefs and knowledge, the latter depending on the idea that a subject's point of view and reality are not identical with one another. He describes a state of "epistemic narcissism" as the equating of beliefs and reality, citing Blake's writing as exemplifying this state of mind (Britton, 1998).

The more complicated view that is taken in contemporary psychoanalysis of the role of interpretation recognises this situation. The idea that analysts or psychotherapists may need to create a setting that contains anxiety before much insight can be conveyed through interpretation is one aspect of it. Another is the concept developed by Steiner of "analyst centred" interpretations, which invite patients to take note of the state of mind of their analyst, as less overwhelming to patients than those that ask patients to take in interpretations of their own feelings, while still allowing something disturbing to be "in the room". Modifications of technique of these kinds have been evolved in work with patients whose mental states are especially fragile. The idea that there is an "epistemological" dimension to unconscious anxiety is also relevant to work in institutional settings, and may explain the persistence of social defences.

SOCIAL APPLICATIONS OF THE PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY OF ANXIETY

Psychoanalysis and its clinical practice was the original source of the theory of unconscious social defences against anxiety, and the theories of psychoanalysis and those of unconscious defences against anxiety have continued to evolve in parallel: for example, in the theory of narcissistic or borderline states of mind (Cooper & Leeds, 2014) and of projective identification in both clinical and social settings (Finch & Schaub,

2014). But one continuing limitation of this paradigm lies in the relatively weak articulation that exists between the clinical use of concepts of unconscious anxiety and their role in psycho-social kinds of explanation. One reason for this lack of articulation may be that most psychoanalysts do not engage actively in social investigation, and most of those who do investigate institutional phenomena, for example as organisational consultants, are not practising psychoanalysts.

It can also be said that the strength of Isobel Menzies Lyth's seminal papers lay in their grasp of institutional processes and interactions, rather than in a precise discrimination between the forms of unconscious anxiety that were explored in the clinical psychoanalytic literature. Elliott Jaques was more attentive than Menzies Lyth to oscillations between paranoid–schizoid and depressive anxieties in the workplace situations he studied, but even so there remains scope for wider investigation of how these anxieties are experienced in organisational settings.

A paper that is valuably specific about the psychoanalytic theory that underpins Menzies Lyth's analysis is William Halton's "Obsessional punitive defences in care systems: Menzies Lyth revisited" (2014). Halton sees the obsessional anxiety in the hospital system, which he interprets as the main form of defence theorised by Menzies Lyth, as essentially a defence by nurses against their unconscious hatred of the patients for the pain and distress they arouse in them. This argument reminds us of the great significance in Klein's theory of anxiety of unconscious hatred and destructiveness, an aspect that is perhaps understated in Menzies Lyth's own report on the nursing system. (She seems to have been more aware of repressed libidinal impulses and thwarted reparative desires and emotions than of their transmutation into unconscious hatred.) Klein had described how depressive and persecutory anxiety could rapidly alternate with paranoid–schizoid states becoming adopted as defences against the pain of depressive anxiety. It seems to be recognition of the obsessional aspects of the defence system that enables Halton (himself trained as a psychoanalytic child, and later adult, psychotherapist) to make this perceptive connection with the Kleinian idea of unconscious hatred. There are other obsessional systems (e.g., those embodied in some contemporary method of institutional inspection) that may be understood in similar terms.

"NORMAL ANXIETIES"

The problem identified by the "social defences against anxiety" thesis concerned states of mind that were believed to arise unavoidably in

certain social situations. Menzies Lyth recognised in her investigations of nursing that distress and pain would inevitably be caused by contact with patients' suffering. The anxiety that the nurses experienced, in part projected into them by their patients, was a normal human emotion in those situations. The issue was how it was to be managed in ways that were least harmful to the nurses, and to their patients too. There is, however, a risk in this discussion of some slippage in the focus of inquiry. Is it anxieties themselves that are to be regarded as the problem, as states of mind to be avoided if possible? Or is the problem rather the dysfunctional unconscious defences that can emerge to hold them at bay? Indeed, a latent belief that anxieties are as such intolerable can itself support organisational defences against anxiety, as in the many instances of "turning a blind eye" that have recently come to light.

William Halton, in a personal communication, has drawn to my attention the tendency in psychoanalytic theory to see risk itself as a threat, and anxiety as the signal to avoid the risk if possible. Thus, castration anxiety, phobic anxiety, obsessional anxiety, maternal separation anxiety, birth trauma, infantile "fear of falling to pieces", etc. Anxiety is therefore itself taken to signal internal or external destructiveness. This connection with psychoanalytic theory may explain why the "social defences against anxiety" literature has also tended to code anxiety in negative terms. This perspective also arises from the clinical context of most psychoanalytic work. Analysts are usually treating people who have come to them for help with disorders, and it is therefore understandable that their unconscious anxieties are understood as sources of pain and difficulty for them.

Larry Hirschhorn's and Sharon Horowitz's 2014 paper argues that anxiety should be viewed in much more appreciative terms, and the object of concern should not be anxiety as such, but rather the better and worse ways in which it can be lived with and put to positive use. They describe what to some might seem rather extreme examples of anxiety, the excitements and pleasures of extreme sports on the one hand, and the experiences of hedge-fund managers, trading in financial markets, on the other. They argue that high-risk activities such as financial trading are increasingly salient elements of a modern turbulent environment (a globalised and financialised economy) and that the popularity of extreme sports represents a creative adaptation to the psychological requirements of that situation. They hold that for some individuals, the experience of taking risks of these kinds can be both pleasurable and creative. Such anxieties are for many a stress worth bearing. They can be stimulus to thought, emotion, and work, and are by no means states of mind to be avoided at all costs. Halton suggests

that in Hirschhorn and Horowitz's framework, anxiety is seen as under the sway of the life rather than the death instincts, stimulating desires to take risks and to survive. He recalled from his experience in student health how some students were stimulated by the anxiety of an examination, and saw it as a challenge to display their ability. Whereas others were paralysed by this anxiety, and prevented by it from eating, sleeping, or working for weeks beforehand. No doubt deep personal insecurities have a part in such adverse reactions.

We can all surely see that willingness to take risks can in many circumstances be a source of benefit to others. Consider, for example, individuals who choose to become fire-fighters or rescuers of other kinds, or pilots, air-traffic controllers, surgeons, or innovators who risk everything to develop a new product, set up a new organisation, or pursue some new area of discovery. Activities of these kinds, which involve a significant risk of failure as part of their essence, necessarily involve anxieties too. William Halton has drawn my attention to the concept of "career anchors" developed by Edgar Schein (1993), which identifies different primary orientations of individuals towards their work.

Hirschhorn and Horowitz are writing about the far end of this spectrum of risk—extreme sports and financial speculation are different from everyday sports and businesses. They draw a distinction between "protective frames" that can surround such high-risk activities, and the "social defences against anxiety" that signify the irrational denial of such risks. Bion's distinction between "work groups" and "basic assumption groups" seems to have application even in extreme situations. The authors describe a consultation to partners in a once-successful hedge-fund business, which worked well, with a notably high degree of work-discipline and rationality, when the partners had trust in one another, but that failed when it broke down and a state of mind of manic omnipotence in one partner came to the fore. The protective frames they identified in this context were the idea of the market as a puzzle or game, the reliance on process (statistical instruments in this case) and the partners as magical pair. They suggested that this might be a pairing not so much as a basic assumption defence against anxiety, but as "the sophisticated use of a basic assumption to do real work". But another way of looking at this is as a toleration of real inter-dependence, not as a "basic assumption" or phantasy of pairing, but as the real thing, similar to a creative marital partnership. Anxieties that could be managed within the protective frame of the partnership, could not be dealt with when it was broken.

Hirschhorn and Horowitz argue that the need for "protective frames" has become greater since the modern world is more turbulent

and prone to risk and anxiety than it used to be. Other contributors to this volume (e.g., James Krantz, 2014; Philip Boxer, 2014) also give attention to this new kind of environment. The sociologist Ulrich Beck, in *Risk Society* (1992) and in his later works, argued influentially that modern societies were characterised by situations of risk (including environmental risk) from which earlier social formations (nation states, welfare systems, powerful trade unions) no longer gave protection.[1] Examples of "protective frames" are the regulatory systems governing many risk-bearing activities (e.g., air transport) or the cultures and conventions that sports such as mountaineering evolve to keep their practitioners safe, or at least relatively safe.

A more insecure and turbulent institutional environment may be a modern form of life that has to be reckoned with, but this is not a reason for endorsing it as desirable. One can be critical of the speculative financial trading that features as Hirschhorn and Horowitz's model of creative risk-taking, when it succeeds as well as when it fails. It was the excessive power of this form of economic life (financial transactions dwarfing the real assets they purported to represent) that brought about the financial crisis of 2007–2008. A poker game is not everyone's model of the good society. A balance needs to be struck between self- and other-regarding forms of pleasure. One is not sure, in the case of this hedge fund example, whether it was the life or death instincts (the satisfactions of triumph over the competition) that really had the upper hand.

IN DEFENCE OF NORMAL ANXIETY

Although it may be the case that defences against anxiety are more prevalent in the modern "risk society", and "protective frames" thus more necessary, the implications of this argument are not limited to our own neo-liberal or post-industrial condition. The idea of a "protective frame" may be seen as the equivalent of the idea of "containment" of anxiety that has become so important in modern psychoanalytic practice, in its applications to infant and child development, to clinical practice, and to social institutions and society more generally.

It has been argued (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010) that degrees of inequality in society correlate with the strength or otherwise of a "protective frame". They argue that steeper hierarchies generate greater anxieties, which they attribute to feelings of humiliation and inadequacy. Theories of democratic leadership re-stated in Rustin and Armstrong (2012) propose that such forms create containers that are both more creative and more secure for members of organisations.

Susan Long (2014) describes forms of leadership that can build trust and can work through anxieties in constructive ways.

"Normal anxieties" arise in the context of all three of the main "instinctual" or "dispositional" attributes of the psyche—those of love and libidinal desires, the self-preservative instincts that involve an element of destructiveness and hatred, and the desire to understand or know—L, H, and K in Bion's terms. Feelings of desire and emotional dependence unavoidably involve anxieties that relationships may fail. Engagement in competition or conflict entails risks that antagonisms may get out of hand, and that excessive harm will result. Furthermore, exposure to the state of "not-knowing" that any attempt at new understanding requires is inherently painful, but needs to be borne if learning is to take place. In all three of these instances, an element of anxiety seems "to go with the territory" of development, and cannot be avoided. Indeed Klein herself believed that some element of anxiety was a necessary spur to development in the infant: "A sufficient quantity of anxiety is the necessary basis for an abundance of symbol formation and phantasy; an adequate capacity on the part of the ego to tolerate anxiety if anxiety is to be satisfactorily worked over . . ." (Klein, 1930, p. 221).

Thus if we look at ordinary human activities, such as learning, forming relationships, doing something new, or competing in some activity, is there not some element of anxiety inherent in all of them? Any opening up of the existing boundaries of the self to new experiences involves some element of what Joseph Schumpeter in an economic context called "creative destruction". Some degree of certainty and stability always has to be risked or sacrificed, if new experiences and their potentialities are to be entertained. This is perhaps especially the case if we take "epistemological anxiety" seriously, and give it parity with anxieties of libidinal and destructive kinds. There can be no learning without some toleration of the anxiety of not-knowing. This is one of the facts of life that all teachers and learners have to face.

Indeed one might hold that the capacity to bear anxiety and make use of it is essential to any creative existence, whether of individuals or groups. The extent and depth of development may depend on a capacity to tolerate anxiety, and on the qualities of the "protective frame" or container which can support this. What a "protective frame" does is to make an anxiety sustainable, preserving the capacity for rational and other-regarding activity in face of it. What protective frames do is to preserve depressive capabilities, and prevent lapses into paranoid–schizoid or narcissistic states.

This is another way of formulating what Bion described as the relationship of container and contained, and the communication and

interchange between them, beginning with the development of the infant. In a fine paper, Juliet Hopkins (1996) once described the dangers of "too good mothering", in a paper about a mother whose goal was to prevent her infant ever suffering any anxiety at all. Of course this protective cocoon for her child could only be preserved for a time, at the end of which the unfortunate infant had to cope with the hurly-burly of the world in a way she had not been prepared for.

What are those kinds of relationship, and of social organisation, that enable the anxieties of change, growth, and development to be managed and indeed made use of in a positive way, is a question we should ask. This as well as trying to recognise, diagnose, and alleviate conditions in which response to anxieties inhibits or prevents creative functioning. This question is related to Klein's overriding concern regarding the balance between love and hate as the decisive determinant of human well-being, since it seems that there needs to be enough love around— concern for objects of value—for people to feel that the anxieties of change and uncertainty can be survived. In that situation, failures need not be equated with rejection and expulsion from the community on which the self depends for its continued identity and sustenance.

So while I am strongly in favour of identifying the anxieties typical of different tasks and milieus, and the unconscious defences that are set up against them, one should resist the temptation to think that it is the anxieties themselves that are the problem, and that one's aim should simply be to get rid of them.

On the contrary, it is good to be anxious that the patient may not get better, that the children will not learn, that one's own performance might be awful, that the person whom one approaches will respond with a rejection, or indeed that the planet will be destroyed by mindless greed and perhaps unconscious hatred too. The aim must be to enable ourselves to see such states of anxiety as a necessary and valuable part of things, and to support such relationships, practices, and structures as can enable us to live creatively with them.

Note

1. Beck's thesis was taken up by Anthony Giddens (1998) in his advocacy of a political "Third Way", arguing that different kinds of adaptation to global market environments were needed than socialist collectivism. "Positive welfare would replace each of Beveridge's negatives with a positive: in place of Want, autonomy; not Disease, but active health; instead of Ignorance, education, as a continuing part of life; rather than Squalor, well-being; and in place of Idleness, initiative" (p. 128).

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Editors' Note: This article is a further development of Michael Rustin's paper presented at the OPUS Scientific Meeting "Social Defences: Revisiting the Paradigm between Theory and Practice" in London, 31 January, 2015. The debate on social defences in organisations is not a new one; however, the importance of these dynamics has not faded with time, in particular given the ever more turbulent and uncertain environments of modern day organisations. Therefore, the editors of *Organisational & Social Dynamics* would like to encourage other contributions on this topic to continue an ongoing conversation in this field.