

The Squiggle Foundation

Responses to Anti-Social Youth: Does Donald Winnicott have Messages for us Today?

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The first part of this paper discusses my understanding of Donald Winnicott's writing about the 'anti-social tendency' (A.S.T) and, related but distinct, about delinquency. I come to all this from a particular angle and I cannot claim the expertise which many here today will have; I am not a psycho-analyst nor have I specialised in matters such as forensic psychology or criminology. In fact, even within my professional expertise, that of social work, I have given less time to the issues surrounding 'anti-social youth' than some other pressing problems of our time. There are a number of complex reasons for this but one is a deep uncertainty about, and, latterly, repugnance at the use of this term and at our social responses to this group of young people. The invitation to give a lecture on this theme helped me to face up to my profound concern about the present position in the UK.

The second personal element which affects the content of this paper is, of course, my relationship with Donald and Clare Winnicott. In 1952, Clare was my tutor at the LSE when I took the then pioneering child care course. Both were remarkable teachers. Their

home was the centre of splendid parties offering something fresh, exciting and fun in our grey post-war world. They used these events to mix students with recently qualified social workers, which enhanced a sense of camaraderie in the small group. These two people were the most influential teachers in my life, far outstripping even some excellent tutoring for my first degree in English literature. Looking back (and confirmed by what I have subsequently read about them), I see they were both essentially creative, artistic people. In some ways they offered a familiar, congenial path to my further intellectual development. Sometimes, Donald was not an 'easy read'; many of his theoretical assumptions were then totally unfamiliar to me. But, whether 'face to face' or, later, in the written word, there were always what I can only call "moments of truth", when impact is immediate, and memorable in a way which shapes one's further thinking. In this sense, of "the imaginative leap", Donald's writing is at times poetic.

At the time of my LSE studies, the work of, and training for, the Probation Service was separate from the Children's Departments in

local authorities, then emerging under the new Children Act 1948. The Probation Service at that time did much more work with children and young people. Structural linkage between services was not made, except in Scotland but the development of generic training brought the two much closer together in approach. It was, however, symptomatic of the ambivalence, which continued long after generic training included probation, that one often heard that generic courses were ‘for social workers *and* probation officers’. It infuriated me and I thought it would only be a matter of time before the distinction became irrelevant. I was quite wrong. Social work and probation were never married and the engagement was broken off in the 1990s. I read with weary amusement a recent article in the Guardian which suggested that probation work had much social work in it.

Back to Donald. He had a great interest in the matters briefly subsumed under the phrase ‘anti-social tendencies’. This was not a particular theme in our teaching at the LSE, which was focussed mainly on children in care. But the work which Clare and Donald

had done during the war with the seriously disturbed children who had been evacuated to Oxfordshire, included a fair number of delinquent children (as well as those who were psychotic) and pervaded much of their thinking. It recurred again and again, especially in the context of the residential care/management of such children.

Brett Kahn (2006), reminds us that Donald was psychiatrically responsible for 285 evacuated children in Oxfordshire, a good many of whom manifested seriously “antisocial” behaviour.

Donald and Clare, at the time I was a student, were also making links with the emerging work of John Bowlby on the concept of attachment (Bowlby 1951). For us as students, the film made by James and Joyce Robertson (1953) on young children separated from their mothers was profoundly significant.

Thus, two ideas, interacting, shaped our thinking; the importance of relationships in early years *and* its connexion with subsequent

behavioural disturbance. What I did not absorb from Donald at that time were his ideas about the connexions between the individual and social forces/trends outside the family. These, I think, are often found in allusions rather than as fully worked out themes. Sociology and criminology were still closed books to me. I shall return to this later.

The themes from his writing on which I have chose to comment raise critical questions for contemporary social policy. First is the seminal paper written in 1956, 'The Anti Social Tendency' (hereafter AST). He makes at the outset a distinction between the terms A.S.T and delinquency. He sees the latter, delinquency, as an organised anti-social defence "overloaded with secondary gain and social reactions which make it difficult ... to get to its core". By contrast, "the A.S.T can be studied as it appears in the normal or near normal child, related to the difficulties that are inherent in emotional development". (p.306). (I have not been able to keep the two separate in this paper_.

In that one paragraph, we have a crucial but complex theme for policy development. Manifestations of the A.S.T are indications, though not definitive prognoses, of “trouble ahead”. They need to be heeded and attended to. If not, they move into delinquency, and harden into patterns which bring gratifications, dangerous to the individual and society. This assumption lies behind many initiatives in recent years, notably that of Sure Start.

Donald makes two key points about A.S.T. First, he says that “it is characterised by an element in it which compels the environment to be important” (p.309). He sees the anti-social person’s behaviour as unconsciously intended to force someone to attend to management, ie, it is a provocation, not simply behaviour which leaves other peoples’ feelings/needs out of account. The second key point about A.S.T. is that it implies hope.

The idea of ‘hope’ as critical is developed in the following: ‘It (hope) is vital in the treatment of children who show the anti-social tendency. Over and over again, one sees the moment of hope wasted

or withered because of mismanagement or intolerance’...

Treatment... is ‘management , a going to meet and match the moment of hope’. (p.309).

The assertion that antisocial behaviours may be seen as hopeful is related to the idea of deprivation, to be distinguished from privation.

That is, something has been lost, which has been good; privation means it has never been. Deprivation means that “things went well enough and then they did not go well enough”. Stealing or destructiveness are the two of the ‘trends’, (he does not say ‘symptoms’) one would expect to find in such children. He stresses that the ‘nuisance’ value of the symptoms may be ‘a favourable feature’ because it is a demand for attention. ‘It is exploited by the child and is not a chance affair’ (p.311).

Donald, therefore, links the manifestation of anti-social behaviours to deprivation. We need first to clear the ground regarding the word ‘deprivation’. The term over the subsequent years has had different and confused connotations. It has been used often to describe

children and families in material and environmental poverty, although the word ‘disadvantage’ is now often substituted. Certainly, it has associations that go well beyond the issues of parental attachment which Bowlby developed. The context in which the Winnicott’s used it, closely related to Bowlby’s work, was mostly about separation of mother/caretaker and child, with resultant loss. This was bound up with wartime and evacuation experiences. However, this led to consideration of more subtle forms of breakdown and loss in the individual relationships between parent and child, even when the home is not ‘broken’ in the obvious sense. The idea of ‘emotional deprivation’ certainly does not carry with it physical separation as an inevitable component.

Much of the evidence and subsequent debate about the effects of privation and/or deprivation was based on studies of grossly inadequate orphanages or residential nurseries. For some of the children there, the emptiness of emotional experience had been so total that it seemed there could not be the ‘hope’, which leads to

‘anti-social acts’. (Donald would have seen such children as unintegrated /psychotic).

Michael Rutter and colleagues have carried out important longitudinal studies on the impact and outcomes for children from Romanian orphanages who were adopted . The latest (Rutter et al 2009) raises 45 questions for policy and practice arising from the research.

Most recently, in my own reflections (Stevenson 2007) on children seriously neglected in their own homes, especially where there is gross substance abuse by parents, I have been wondering whether *some* of these children may also be in fact ‘prived’ rather than ‘deprived’. That is to say, the parent simply does not have emotional space or time to empathise with the child and to have essential interactions. If such is the case, then the ‘bad’ behaviour which they exhibit is not, in Winnicottian terms, anti-social behaviour indicating hope. Rather it is part of a battle for survival starting in infancy. This, of course, has very serious implications for policy and practice; just as we have come to understand the crucial importance

of removing young children from orphanages to families before irreparable damage is done, so we may have to review our care plans in respect of a significant number of seriously neglected children in their own homes. There are, in fact, some signs of such a shift in thinking.

In any case, returning to the issue of emotional *deprivation*, the evidence is now overwhelming that it can adversely affect all aspects of a young child's development, bodily, cognitively and socially. Donald would have had no difficulty in integrating modern evidence into his theoretical position. But perhaps one can demonstrate more clearly now that such deprivation may impair the very capacities which are usually employed by the child to develop into a healthy adult. Thus, the *emotional* stimuli of early mother-child interaction sparks *cognitive* development; the parents who 'contain' and 'manage' a young child's behaviour begin a child's socialisation into one might call 'the rules of the game'. This is a crucial point in seeking to understand the link between attachment

and the wild, uncontrolled behaviour of certain children from seriously neglectful families.

This leads me back to the difference between Donald's interpretation of the meaning of "anti-social tendency" as an attempt to regain what has been lost and the way it is used today to describe a failure to conform to the norms and values of a given society. Both carry a sense of protest, but whereas it is implicit in Donald's analysis and case illustrations that this protest is directed at the adults within his/her family, the latter protest seems to be directed at the wider society, which the children and young people feel has failed them. How often do we hear young people 'loitering in groups' say on television "there isn't enough to do round here".

I am not expert enough to do what is required – to make a bridge between the essence of Donald's psycho-analytic understanding with the analysis of the sociologists and criminologists who now dominate the literature on this topic in the UK. To aid my fast waning confidence about this lecture, I bought a very large book

(2nd hand), The Oxford Handbook of Criminology (4th Ed.), which has 1139 pages and 32 chapters. (It may have been a mistake; it is very heavy). I was struck by how little, in an excellent and scholarly book, dealt with what we might call the psychological (let alone the psychoanalytical) view of this subject. There is one chapter (2) on Criminological Psychology whose sections run as follows:

- Early accord
- Psychology and Criminology: The parting of the ways
- Little common ground
- Not on speaking terms
- Return to cordiality?

[MacQuire et al (Eds) 2007 Hollis pp.43-47]

In conclusion, the author, Hollis, suggests that psychology of particular kinds (no reference to psychoanalytic) has a significant contribution to make to criminological theory. But that's as far as it goes. It is noticeable that of the 32 chapters, only 3 or 4 can be said to attend to intra-familial factors in criminal behaviour. This

theoretical gulf is a serious barrier to our understanding of juveniles, specially as they enter adolescence.

The dictionary tells me that ‘schism’ implies ‘factions’. While psychoanalysis itself is well used to schisms, the gap between it and sociological perspectives in relation to anti-social behaviour and crime suggests that, rather than a schism, there is a serious lack of engagement with each other. This is a huge pity.

I find the notion of ‘social ecology’ some help in bridging the divide, as I have in my work on neglected children. (Stevenson 2007).

I have suggested that we may be more receptive to ideas of social ecology because of our growing awareness of ecological factors, these subtle and extensive interactions, in the worlds of biology and zoology. When we apply these ideas to society and to what we know about the progress of a child from the womb to adulthood, it becomes easier to track the interactions over the years between the

family and wider societal factors. The balance of dependence shifts between the two but no-one at a Squiggle meeting would underestimate the continuing effects of earlier familial experiences and deficits. The trick is to avoid psychic determinism. The very fact that there is a wider environment may offer hope for remedial experiences – as Donald well knew.

But there is also a powerful sociological analysis of the contemporary ‘woes of youth’, in relation to the most worrying aspects contemporary youth culture.

Such a picture of British youth today is powerfully drawn by John Pitts’ book: ‘Reluctant gangsters. The changing face of youth crime’. (2008). Using research in British cities, he constructs a typology of gangs. . He is emphatic that there are grounds for great concern about this in the UK. It is not, in his view, simply importing anxiety from the US. He is dismissive of what he describes as ‘crime-averse criminologies.’ He describes with stinging detail the ‘concentration of disadvantage’ in which certain urban young people

live and their affiliation with specific gangs. Young people may be 'reluctant affiliates' (p.101) but membership also serves a number of powerful needs. Affiliation to a gang serves certain purposes:

- i) Affiliation because of the risks to oneself and ones family
- ii) Affiliation because of the risk from other gangs
- iii) Affiliation to gain access to educational/recreational resources in gang territory
- iv) Affiliation because of lack of access to legitimate opportunity
- v) Continued affiliation because of danger inherent in leaving the gang
- vi) Psychological dependence

Pitts argues, in my view convincingly, that most of the different theoretical analyses of 'gang affiliation' 'fail to recognise the power of the machinery of intimidation and coercion at work in gang-affected neighbourhoods and the choices it necessitates for the young people confined there' (p106).

Pitt attacks what he describes as the ‘individualising imperative’ in criminal youth justice. (p.35). Having listed a formidable array of major risk factors associated with gang involvement, all the way from the individual to community, he concludes: “in practice, it is usually only the individual and familial risk factors to which criminal justice agencies have the capacity to respond and so they come to occupy the foreground” (p.34) neglecting the wider social factors. So he suggests that the theoretical framework used by those who seek to help neglects the ‘world outside’ and the damage it is doing to the young person. Yet those of us who look at such practice find little to confirm this preoccupation.

It is suggested by those outside that those inside who seek to intervene are blinkered in their understanding, yet those of us also ‘on the inside’ all too frequently criticise the lack of skills in establishing therapeutic relationships based on theories of family and interactions and dynamics. Talk about ‘can’t win’!

Pitts' book says very little about the family background or individual psychology of the young people involved. We are still left with the questions – which one becomes a reluctant affiliate? What factors play a part in joining the gang?

Pitts is an angry man and in his concluding paragraph he movingly argues that we have separated ourselves from this small but significant part of our youth culture; we look on; they are not us... “we must decide whether they are ‘our’ young people or not. And if we recognise that they are, we must turn the question of the social, economic and cultural conditions that propel them towards involvement in violent youth gangs into a burning issue’ . (p.162)

There, in a nutshell, is my dilemma: how to frame policy and intervention to reflect the range of factors which turn hope into despair, desperation and full blown criminality. I am sure that if Donald had read Pitts book, he would not have been dismissive of what is, essentially, a sociological perspective. He was much too

wise for that and his writing contains fascinating references to the world outside the family and its effects on young people.

But there is a dimension of antisocial behaviour often discussed in relation to social class, which raises key questions about equality and inequality of opportunity within our society on which (I think) Donald has little to say. In the period in which he wrote most, when I was beginning my career as a social work teacher, the split between psychoanalytic and sociological theory in the UK was clear. At the LSE (1952-54), I learnt little or nothing of sociology even within the framework of basic social science. (An attempt to teach me economics failed dismally; I remember being underwhelmed by the overarching presumption that ‘Rational Man’ controlled the economy). In the early 1960s, I found myself at Oxford surrounded by eminent and able sociologists. My attempt to get my boss AH Halsey to give me some sociology tutorials was rejected.

An illustration of one of the lasting effects of this division may be found in the gulf which appeared between Child Guidance Clinics (now C.A.M.S.) and local authority childrens' services. A not-talked-about distinction was evident in the direction of referrals. 'Posher' children, whose parents were (say) emotionally neglectful but whose material care was satisfactory headed for the (then) Child Guidance Clinics, whilst the grubby children in generally neglectful conditions might find themselves the 'cases' of social services'.

Yet it is obvious that both Clare and Donald through their evacuation work were well acquainted with a range of children from all social backgrounds; they were also of the generation who saw a raft of 'welfare' legislation designed to reduce inequality and there is no suggestion of a social pecking order for intervention in Donald's writing. But they were, of course, children of their times and the clientele of psychoanalysts were overwhelmingly middle class.

When I first read ‘Adolescence: Struggling Through the Doldrums’, (1961), it made a lasting impression, which began with that wonderful title! This paper is awash with Memorable Moments (too many to cite here) including by the way “A good motto for any investigator of the subject of sex would be this: whoever asks questions must expect to be told lies”. (p.81). He shows, in references to venereal disease; contraception, the atomic bomb, to name but three, an intense awareness of the impact on the adolescent of external trends and forces. His description of adolescents ‘going through a sort of doldrums area’ in the ‘struggle to feel real’, and as ‘mixture of defiance and dependence’ is timeless. He points out that they have a need to: ‘prod society repeatedly so that societies antagonism is made manifest *and can be met with antagonism* (p.85, my italics). That last observation is crucial to any analysis between the young person and the grown up. If antagonism is generalised and abstract, we are in serious social trouble. Donald is talking about personal, individualised antagonism in which a young person sees an adult (or a particular group) as standing up to them, as preserving their own

more secure identity, in the face of protest. His use of the word “antagonism” is interesting. The dictionary defines the noun antagonist as ‘an opponent or adversary’, and antagonism as ‘active opposition’; antagonise, the verb, however, carries slightly more ambiguous definitions, first, ‘to counteract/neutralise’ but also to ‘evoke hostility in, make into an enemy’. Thus, these words carry an idea of adult response which is in part considered (judicious?), arising from established behaviours, views and values, and in part angry, arising from the threat that the young person poses to those very behaviours, views and values. I am sure Donald saw both. He knew that “the big challenge from the adolescent is to the bit of ourselves that has not really had its adolescence” (1961. chap 10. p. 87).

Present day official rhetoric does not use the word ‘antagonism’ in relation to our social responses to antisocial youth. The word is much too human. We use lofty moral terms which slightly miss the point, such as ‘unacceptable behaviour’ (bad) and ‘punishment’ (sadly necessary). Note also the phrase ‘challenging

behaviour’, a silly attempt to describe young people who get up our noses without admitting to our personal feelings of antagonism.

This kind of language takes us away from the essence of Donald’s argument, which seems to me to be that antisocial behaviour requires adults to contain and manage it until the young persons find ways forward which are real and meaningful to them and, (and this is tough) which do not place them in self destructive opposition to the society in which they live.

A second critical element in this approach is that it is about change through relationship. It is essentially personal. When ‘hopeful’ opportunities arise for the child or young person to develop, it is usually the case that someone, not some establishment or organisation, has been instrumental in helping a child or young person grasp the baton of hope as it is handed to them. Literacy, sport, the right job, music may be the batons of hope which are offered to them, but a person who cares hands them the baton.

It is with a heavy heart that I hear and read the news today; punitive attitudes seem to prevail, whipped up by an unsavoury dialogue between some media and some leading politicians. I hope and believe that behind the rhetoric, there lie constructive and hopeful interactions between the young people and those who work with them. For example, when those on Community Service orders have to wear luminous jackets so that the general public can see the bad guys are doing ‘a kind of time’, there will be some working with them who will notice what they are good at or what makes them engage and respond to that in some way. I suppose I am longing for “goodness by stealth” at least. But the inescapable fact is that present policies and practices offer few constructive opportunities to many who are locked (literally and figuratively) into the system and all too many opportunities, through negative peer group experiences, to reinforce the behaviours which got them into trouble in the first place. There is less and less room for ‘personal encounters’ when numbers rise and control and containment are the overriding objectives.

This is all a far cry from the provision which Donald and Clare had envisaged for children and young people in a paper on ‘Residential Management for Treatment of Difficult Children’ (1947).

A good many of the children described, who had proved unfosterable when evacuated, would have fallen into the ‘anti-social’ group which Clare and Donald described. Using the terminology of the war, of ‘hostels’, Donald argued that ‘success in providing accommodation of this kind demanded residential management. It emerged, moreover, that such management in itself constituted a therapy. Further, it was important that proper management, as a therapy, should be practical; for it had to be given by relatively unskilled persons’ (p.101). (i.e. not psychotherapists but supported by such experts).

In the early days of my career, I saw for myself the remarkable work which could be done by two such persons in a local authority “hostel”, with outside school, for ‘maladjusted’ children, as we called them. These people were Guy and Peggy Willatts – neither

with any 'relevant' experience. Various episodes stand out; Guy totally safe in presence of sexually provocative girls. 'Put it away dear, I've seen it all before'. Having a good laugh, over gin and tonic, at the latest outrages perpetrated by the children. And Peggy, much later, widowed, old, retired and with dementia, being looked after by a rota of some of the very same girls, now women with children, still living in the neighbourhood. I had a glimpse of 'therapeutic management'; of secure adults confronting adolescents; of a response to their hopeful protests; and of being "unfazed or unfrightened" by the children, as Kahn described Winnicott in relation to his more disturbed and vulnerable patients'. (Kahn 2006. p.43).

Many people of the older generations will call to mind similar people with exceptional gifts in working with children and young people in residential contexts. I am shocked when I realise how little we now refer to their work and their writing. They have vanished off the academic and professional map.

In the last part of this paper, I want to discuss a problematic and contentious issue in youth justice policy and practice; it is often summarised as the ‘welfare or justice model’ but I prefer to reframe it and ask the question ‘what kind of justice do anti-social young people need?’ The word welfare has been debased. It is a fine word, meaning ‘satisfactory state’ or ‘well being’. In my ethical book, justice is not being done if it has no regard to that person’s wellbeing or ‘welfare’.

From the 1960s onwards, our attempts to develop satisfactory policies for the treatment and management of youth offending, show continuing and unresolved tensions surrounding notions of justice. It is vividly illustrated by the ideals of, and subsequent disillusionment with, the 1969 Child and Young Persons Act in Great Britain. This Act sought to elide the distinction between deprived and (put crudely) ‘depraved’ children. It was in part based on the growing awareness of the negative effects of the bad experiences many such children had in their formative years. One practical effect of this was to be the development of interventions called “intermediate treatment” for offenders in the community. There were also to be

changes in the structure of residential care. Childrens' homes in the local authority would be able also to admit children coming through the courts as offenders. 'Approved schools' and comparable establishments were to be renamed as Community Homes with Education and might admit children who were not formally labelled as delinquent.

In the event, it all came off the rails. This was partly because there was seriously inadequate preparation and planning and staff education. Not for the first time, or the last, our legislators grossly underestimated the scale and complexity of the implementations of such a policy shift. It may have been, in fact, an impossible road to travel at that time; subsequent public reactions show the depth of hostility towards seriously anti-social youth. Those committed to these ideals ran into conflict with wider public attitudes: that phrase 'bleeding heart liberals' became a shorthand for people who were 'soft' on the young villains, as people who "explained it *away*", rather than sought to understand it. Furthermore, we did not know how to provide therapeutic but authoritative residential care for the

diverse and highly problematic children and young people who were coming into care at an older age. Residential care in the 70s and 80s simply could not cope with the challenge and in some places fell into serious disrepute. The grosser aspects of this decline were found later in the scandals about sexual abuse of these young people in such institutions.

In the same years, sociological evidence and theory was suggesting that a great deal of youth 'crime' was simply a phase in development and best dealt with by minimum intervention.

(Bottoms 2007). 'Leave them alone and they'll come home'. This was an attractive proposition but, even then, it seemed to me to underestimate the size and the problems of a fair number of young people. young people who would not pass through their 'anti-social' phase without significant damage.

For some years now, the relentless focus of the media, taken up by politicians, is on the extremes of dysfunction within the youth culture. It focuses on a deeply troubling segment of that culture but

it seems likely that this is similarly overplayed, as was the case for 'leaving them alone'.

The way in which public and professional attitudes have shifted over the past 15 years is of profound concern. Morgan and Newburn describe this as "the rebirth of populist punitiveness". (Morgan and Newburn 2007. p.1029)

Of particular concern is the situation regarding custodial sentences. In a devastating critique of the current position, they make clear that, since 1998, despite the increase in non-custodial sentences, and therefore " a relative proportionate decline in custodial sentences, the number of children and young people sentenced to custody is still 35% higher" than in 1998. They point out that despite reductions in reconviction rates in lower tier penalties, reconvicting from "higher tier penalties, including custody, have deteriorated from an already low base-line". (p.1047). In short, the more severe interventions are not succeeding.

Over the years, and in many different contexts, I have found it helpful to unpack the idea of justice, using ideas from the moral philosopher Rawls and the theologian Paul Tillich (1960). Although they use different terms, they are both suggesting that there are two kinds of justice. Tillich uses the words ‘creative’ and ‘proportional’ to describe this. Creative justice is what the individual needs to be affirmed as an unique person; proportional justice, implied by the word ‘fairness’, is a recognition that we are social beings and that, to maintain social order, there have to be understandings about proportionality in respect of particular activities, good or bad.

This is well illustrated within the ‘good enough’ family. Good parents recognise that each child has particular likes, dislikes, needs and capacities which require particular responses if they are to feel accepted and valued as human beings, i.e. creative justice. But good parents also recognise that there are issues of ‘fairness’ in how the family resources are shared, whether they be parental time, pocket money or food. We know, of course, that notions of ‘fairness’ peak

in the latency years; in early years, the emphasis is on the need to be recognised as a unique person.

In the world of criminology and the courts, there is much talk of ‘the tariff’, i.e. of the sliding scale of punishments according to the nature of the offence, without specific regard to the nature of the individual. This inevitably limits ‘creative justice’ but, even within the tariff, discretion is exercised. A crude example would be of a group of children caught shoplifting. Who leads? Does the bigger, brighter boy require a different disposal from the one who is in a special class at school? And what kind of special factors do we take into account?

There is a curious complication when we think of this in relation to ‘anti-social youth’. It seems to me that as we move along a continuum from ‘light’ to ‘heavy’ misbehaviour, the balance of justice required may move from proportional to creative. Yet I have earlier suggested that in normal development very young children need ‘creative’ justice before proportional justice, the idea of ‘fair

deals', kicks in later and the balance between the two is found. It seems to me, however, that the grosser, the more violent and abusive the offences, the more likely we are to be dealing with a young person whose individual needs and feelings are so overwhelming that the notion of 'fairness' has very little meaning, though it may be used as a slogan of protest. If I am right, then the case for individually focused intervention in the lives of such young people is overwhelming. Controls and punishments when rules are broken are *necessary but insufficient* if they are not related to the deeper problems and needs reflected in the gross behaviour.

What distresses me, and many others, is that since the Children and Young People Act of 1969 (two years before Donald died), there has been little public interest in, or awareness of, the possibilities of 'creative' justice as a vital element in the treatment/management of anti-social youth. Even in the world of social work, the examples which I used in my teaching have dropped away.

In contemporary practice, we have seen the separation of childrens' services from those of the Youth Justice Board. The role of social workers in the latter is ambiguous and reflects the distorted notion of welfare versus justice. To me, it makes no sense at all to confirm in terms of a structural divide between services that the deprived and the depraved are forever to be apart. This is an opinion long held, but it has been confirmed by my work on seriously neglected children, where we see at least two different strands of service (which often do not work well together) one dealing with the gross personal deprivations of young children, another seeing the same children, a few years on, as hooligans and delinquents. This is a fundamental denial of the essentially holistic processes of development. It is nothing to do with being 'soft' or 'tough'.

Whether we are thinking about community based or residential interventions in the lives of anti-social youths, the element of creative justice must be present, based on an understanding of the individual, not simply the specific nature of the offences.

We have had indications of good things happening within residential care in such cases as that of Mary Bell and the boys in the Jamie Bulger case. There must have been opportunities for the building of relationships which combined both kinds of justice. What is so depressing is that, in both those cases, unforgiving, vengeful public attitudes, have threatened to scupper the work done for and with those children as they emerge into adulthood. Now we are embarking on a similar journey with the two Doncaster boys. In this case, however, I noted with interest the comment of one local resident. She said, of their neglectful family, that the younger brother, now aged 10, was in particular “crying out for attention from his mother and stepfather”. “All they wanted was a bit of sympathy, a bit of love from their parents. For them to get into trouble, they were getting attention from their parents.” (Guardian. Friday 4th September 2009).

Did the neighbour see the behaviours as carrying hope? The question must remain – is hope extinguished or still flickering there? The importance of the quality of care now offered cannot be

exaggerated. Just think of the consequences if they are failed by our services.

Nothing in Donald's writing invalidates the idea that both these kinds of justice are important or that the interaction of the family with the outside world is a critical factor in childrens' wellbeing. The insights from Donald's work are invaluable not least in bringing home that our responses to 'anti-social youth' go to the heart of our own fear and anger at our own so called 'anti-social' feelings. Increased awareness of this seems critical at this time when public manifestations of hate are at times out of control.

As usual, Donald had difficult words of wisdom and warning to say on this.

“Public revenge would add up to a dangerous thing were it not for the law... The magistrate gives expression to public revenge feelings and only by so doing can the foundations be laid for a humane treatment of the offender’... ‘It is one of the functions of

the law to protect the criminal against... unconscious and therefore blind, revenge.’ (Winnicott 1957 p.182). At one stroke here, Donald links the internal and the outer worlds, which is, of course, what social workers have to do.

To sum up a difficult journey:

I have tried to move between two different ways of looking at ‘anti-social’ young persons, recognising that the distinction which Winnicott draws between anti-social behaviour and delinquency is in practice blurred. This is partly because the anti-social behaviour is often not seen as such early enough and proceeds to delinquency – and partly because definitions of anti-social and illegal behaviour are altered by social trends and political responses. But his belief in the meaning of the behaviours, in particular the idea of hope, is hugely significant. The two different ways, crudely, are: a view of the young person as a unique individual, caught up in the family system and reacting inside and outside the family in relation to those experiences - (which I think leads also to an emphasis on ‘creative

justice’) and a view of the young person as caught up in complex social forces in particular those outside the family, which, at the very least, profoundly influence his/her behaviour. Many of those ‘forces’ are concerned with forms of inequality and involve consideration of ‘proportionate justice’.

I wish I could discuss all this with Donald.

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