

ILLNESS AND HEALING (II)

FREEDOM - ITS MEANING AND IMPORTANCE

INTRODUCTION

For the ill person is the experience of freedom of paramount interest. It is the freedom to shape, within the objectively given boundaries, his or her own life. So health can be recovered or, if that does not seem to happen, freedom can give the possibility to live with the illness and, eventually, to die in peace. Living in freedom means that boundaries, which seemingly are objectively given, are moving further away, giving more space, to recover, to live with the illness, to die.

Illness is always unfreedom. The Other, which means all the negative influences in the life of the ill person, which penetrated him or her, making him or her in the end ill, got the better hand over the ill person. She, he could not cope longer and fell, in one manner or another, ill. Life became disheveled and in the end, eventually, it will be destroyed.

The penetration of the Other in the life of a single person (or of a group) in a dysfunctional manner expresses itself in social, psychical and physical phenomena. These always intermingle in a very complicated manner, most of which it is not (and probably will never be) possible to trace. The many investigations show some of the relationships between social, psychical and physical phenomena, which together form the actual illness. They all form together many very complicated gubernetic circles, in which cause and effects findings only have preliminary significance.

When freedom becomes a reality in the life of the ill person, the power of the Other in the life of the ill person diminishes. The Other loses its possibility to attach itself in the life of the ill person. It is possible that this has consequences on the psychical and the physical "level", provoking the "tilting" of the immunological equilibrium, by which the healing sets in or the process of the illness is retarded. In any case, when freedom becomes a reality in the life of the ill person, he/she becomes free, too in the relationship with her/his illness and free, if the time is there, to die.

This paper is written for a project which is aimed at women, suffering from breast cancer and everybody, medical and other staff, relatives and friends, who have to do with these women. The paper, however is, *mutatis mutandis*, relevant for every ill person and everybody who surrounds her or him.

The context of this paper is given by the anthropological hypotheses of Rene Girard, in his books *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, *Violence and the Sacred* and *Of Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, the first two published by Johns Hopkins University Press, the last by Athlon Press, London.

1. WHICH FREEDOM?

The project is about the significance of freedom in the healing process. Which freedom makes it possible that the immunological equilibrium changes (a little bit), by which the healing process begins or the suffering diminishes, life lasts longer?

It is not the freedom, in which I can do everything I wish to do, not encumbered by anybody or anything else. The freedom of the “winners”, who have their way. The freedom of our Western civilization, which makes the others, who are hindering our freedom, unfree. Western freedom is the result of a powerfight, exactly as illness is the result of a powerfight, lost by the ill person.

It is the freedom of the person who is out of desire, who is not rivaling. Who is happy in his place, doing there what he/she has to do. In this freedom we are really there, present, for the other as a person. No other reality as this person, with his, her needs, is “in” us. This gives us the possibility to do, in freedom, what is possible and necessary and, more important than anything else, to give this freedom to the other.

Being ill means: To be rivalry with the Other, in a losing position. Being ill in a seemingly fatal position means: To fight in a model-obstacle relationship. As long as the fighting is going on, the only possibility is to loses. Healing means to go away, out of this relationship of rivalry or with the model-obstacle. Freedom is the way to go out of that relationship.

There is only one possibility to become free: by meeting a free person. Freedom is contagious. So it is of paramount interest for every ill person to meet free people, who make them free and so liberate them out of the vicious circles of the fight with the Other. Because of the importance of the members of the medical staff for the ill person, they are of paramount interest for the ill person, not only for the medical treatment as such, but above all to get (glimpses of) freedom.

2. FREEDOM AND MEDICAL TREATMENT

Freedom does not replace medical treatment. On the contrary: Freedom is extremely important for the medical treatment. In the context of freedom are the optimal possibilities for the treatment.

Only when the ill person refuses (further) treatment, the treatment has to be finished, the decision has to be respected. Hopefully this is a decision, taken in freedom. It can be a task to help the ill person to find this freedom.

3. THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF MEDICAL STAFF

For the ill person are all who come in touch with her/him, during and because of her/his illness, very, if not decisively important. If the illness is serious, if the ill person is in hospital or not, medical staff is central. Medical staff has, in the view, eventually the conviction of the ill person, the possibility to live in its hands. Everything what is further done for and to the ill person concentrates around what is done by and the opinions of the medical staff. If the medical staff working in freedom, everybody comes in the mimesis with them. Because the staff is so important in the given situation, its “mass” is enormous, and so its mimetic influence.

Of course all the persons around the ill person, working with them in the medical context, are very important. Because of the central importance of the medical staff, when at least it is working in freedom, so giving freedom to all the others who are working with and for the ill person, only the medical staff is further on mentioned. That does not mean that in real life the medical staff always has this position. There are many wards where there is no freedom at all. And countless ill persons are saved by the freedom of a nurse, a relative, or whosoever.

The relatives, the friends, are part of the life of the ill person. Without them he does not have a life. They can, partly, be a part of the Other, that provoked the illness. Anyway, part of the responsibility for every ill person is the responsibility for the people around her/him. For their freedom.

4. THE FREEDOM OF THE DOCTOR

The big question is: How does the doctor get freedom? How does she/he become free? In fact freedom, in the end cannot be acquired. It is not possible to fight for freedom. Fighting always makes unfree.

We become free by meeting free persons, who make us free just by being free. Ultimately freedom is given because we live in and belong to a reality, which is bigger than we are, to which we belong and so gives us our freedom. A sense of duty, which is without any stress, which simply belongs to us, is part of us, in which we move and work. A relationship with transcendence, with something or someone bigger than us, Jesus, God, a religious reality.

It is not possible to acquire freedom. There are however warning signs that we are not free and that we, as an inescapable consequence, are giving our unfreedom to the ill person. There are conditions, which must be fulfilled to make freedom possible, it being in the same time clear, that only freedom can fulfil these conditions. I enlist some of these conditions.

4.1 The doctor must be able to meet people without inner resistances, to admit them to his/her life and feelings. He, she must be able to let drop the white coat and all the defences which so often are used by helping people. The word "patient" is omitted from this paper, just because the use of this word of often is part of this defence.

4.2 This means that he/she must accept the ill person as a fellow man - woman, with her own responsibility and her own future. He (she) must see the ill woman as a complete person, having difficulties with, because of this illness. He always has to see the illness in the context of the ill person, not the ill person as a, eventually even not important, appendix of the illness.

4.3 The doctor has to be free together with women, not adoring them or hating them. Being fascinated by women, in which way ever, destroys freedom.

4.4 The doctor respects the ill person as a person and he respects her decisions. He accepts, of course doing what he is able to, now the ill person with her illness goes her way. He does not force up on her his expectations and deceptions.

4.5 When the doctor is with the ill woman, talking with her, doing his work, when he is thinking about her and her situation, he forgets that cancer too is a scientific theme, in which he eventually wishes to build up a career.

4.6 Working with and for the ill women the doctor must forget this colleagues, his boss(es), his former successes and mistakes, faults. This means, he is not in the rivalry with anybody or anything.

4.7 The doctor is not afraid of cancer as such. If he/she finds fears about cancer as such, she/he has to work through them to find the causes and to free her, himself from them.

4.8 The doctor must have hope and confidence in his own life, in the future on the whole, in his profession especially.

5. ILLNESS AS TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL MIMESIS AND THE HEALING BY FREEDOM

Every illness is the result of a, in most cases long, history. It began very often already in former generations. Every human being repeats, in all its aspects, everything it learnt, from past generations and in its own life. In this learning process participate all his psychical and physical possibilities. This learning process can, in some or most aspects, be dysfunctional, ending up in illness. The learning process as such, looking back, is a process of temporal mimesis, repeating in the time what once was learnt.

Every moment the “line” of temporal mimesis is “crossed” by new experiences, coming from outside of the person, interfering with the ongoing processes and changing them. This is spatial mimesis, impinging on the being of the person. If this spatial mimesis is dysfunctional, reinforcing already existing dysfunctional temporal mimesis, the person falls ill or becomes more ill. Falling ill probably always is a very complicated happening, with a long history and a complicated “bundle” of spatial mimesis, interfering in the existing positive or negative possibilities of the person concerned.

The doctor is together with, gets along with the ill woman. Between him and her spatial mimesis goes along, from both sides, the results of which again repeat itself as temporal mimesis. In the given situation the doctor is extremely important for the ill woman, so his “mimetic mass” is extremely big. So he has necessarily and inevitably a very big influence on the ill woman, on her life. So he too has a very big influence on the course of her illness and on her fate.

This influence is a negative one, when the doctor is unfree. Many possibilities to be unfree are mentioned under 4. When the doctor is unfree he necessarily is, in some manner or another, in rivalry with the ill women or, which does not change the situation, with her illness, her symptoms. The Other, with whom the ill woman is struggling, trying to get rid of it, to be healed, is in fact reinforced by the doctor. The rivaling doctor is in fact an ally of the illness. Because we have such forceful means to fight against symptoms, even then healing is possible. The rivalry however certainly is a (small or big) obstacle for the healing.

If the doctor is free, lives in freedom, when he gets along with the ill woman, then he, she brings freedom in her life. This freedom pushes the illness, the Other, back. Freedom always changes the immunological equilibrium in the good direction. The ill woman heals. Of the course of the illness changes.

Illness always is the result of lost rivalry. The key answer to illness is, to stop the rivalry and so to dismiss the rival, the Other. Absolute freedom would heal without condition. This freedom is the secret of the stories of healings in the gospels. As such they have nothing to do with miracles. The only miracle, phenomenologically, is threat freedom of Jesus, with which he meets people.

We are not that free, anyway, mostly not. Every illness, even when it looks simple, is a very complicated result of temporal and spatial mimesis. Freedom heals, but that does not mean that it always heals immediately and totally. It does now and then. We know about that. We know about women with breast cancer, about people with cancer generally who, coming into freedom, recover. Not all. There are variables, which we don't yet know and probably never will know clearly. That does not diminish the healing reality of freedom. Freedom is "meta" to all the other means we have to cope with illness. It is not the answer on a specific illness or symptom. It is the answer on illness as such.

The doctor very often is only a short time and/or intermittently together with the ill woman. During the preliminary investigations, during the (clinical) treatment, during the after care and controls. So it looks like as if doctors don't have many possibilities. This is a misunderstanding. Freedom, which is given and received by people being together, gets very quickly its own movement. Freedom does not make dependent, as emotional sustenance, how important that sustenance eventually might be, does. Freedom just makes free. The change in the immunological balance can happen because of one meeting, one gesture or movement during that meeting, changing the life of the ill woman and so the illness. The first meeting can be immediately and forever deciding.

Furthermore, it is very important that the doctor is not alone. He/she is together with the whole staff, with everybody who work with and for the ill woman. Every bit of freedom of everybody in the neighbourhood of the ill woman changes her life, in which manner ever, always for the good.

6. THE RELATIONSHIP DOCTOR – ILL WOMAN

The relationship between the doctor and the ill woman, the woman suffering from breast cancer, is so extremely important, that is useful to insist on some aspects of that relationship.

The relationship between the doctor and the ill person is first of all one between two human beings, between two persons. The doctor must be able to cope with this relationship, to be free in it, to be free of all the defence mechanisms of the procession. With his defence mechanisms we create a relationship of mutual dependency, the doctor being the one-up, the ill woman the one-down, in the structure a relationship of master and slave. This means powerfight a reduplication of the powerfight in which the ill person already is engaged.

Although it is time and again for a very short time, a very small part of his life, the doctor lives, in freedom, with the whole of his being with the ill woman. This woman herself too

is in the first place a human being. She has difficulties. She has the Other in her. The doctor however does not direct his attention to the Other in the ill woman, but to the ill woman, with the Other, the illness in herself. If he does otherwise, he turns the ill woman into an object, into a battlefield, on which he fights with the other, the illness. The most important person concerned is put aside. Her possibilities to recover are used negatively in her fight against the doctor, in her trying to get his attention, to prevent that she is forgotten altogether, that she is used, for which reason ever. This battle against the doctor can have the character of rebellion against him and against what he is doing. It is as well possible that the woman surrenders, that she resigns. In both cases energy, possibilities, the most important in the whole struggle, are wasted.

A mutual relationship of human beings means mutual dependency. In fact this mutual dependency is very clear: The doctor cannot live without ill people. Ill people are badly in need of (good) doctors. In the relationship between an ill person and a doctor however the relationship is a deeper one. It is, if everything goes well, a relationship in freedom, in which mutual trust is given and accepted. It makes it possible for the doctor, if he makes (small or big) faults, not to do them away with rationalizations, but to ask for forgiveness. It gives the ill person the freedom to give it. Without this possibility to doctor disappears in guilt feelings and/or hypocrisy, both expressions of unfreedom. The ill person disappears in depression, rancour, anger, hate, again all expressions of unfreedom. And so the claims for damages threaten the life and the quality of their work of the doctors, as the unfreedom threatens the health and the life of the ill person.

To act medically, as a doctor, means always, that the illness is treated, working together with the ill person. The doctor, who has his special knowledge and experience, has his attention, in the context of the whole person, directed on the illness, the other. The attention of the ill person is, although being ill, more directed to him, herself, her life, her hopes and expectations. In her freedom she can be free of cares, leaving the care for the Other with the doctor, whom she trusts.

This being together with the ill woman in the treatment of the illness means that the doctor is open towards her about the diagnosis, the treatment and the immediate prognosis, as the ill woman really can be open about everything concerning her illness and, as far as it could be important, her life.

Especially when it is about bad prognosis the doctor has to be very careful, because the illness can change very quickly and unexpectedly, especially too for the good. In a sense the responsibility for a bad prognosis (with all its consequences) never can be carried. This is especially the case when the ill person does not wish to know it, either in freedom, to keep the future and its possibilities open, either out of fear.

An aspect of the relationship of the doctor with the ill person is, that he has to take care that the ill woman does not disappear into isolation. That the ill person knows, that there are people around her, who care. That, being in hospital, there is a relationship with the world, for the eyes, the ears.

7. THE RELATIONSHIP OF FREEDOM AND PSYCHE

Freedom gives the possibility to enter into and to have relationships, which are not threatening for anybody involved. In relationships in freedom there are feelings, but they have another character than more “normal” feelings. They are more in the bowels or in the person as a whole and not in the chest. These feelings cannot be reduced to projections, transferences and counter-transferences, neither to fascinations of any sort. They shape the relationship without any fighting about who is in charge, who is in power, about anything about which fighting is possible.

Our common feelings don't originate from freedom, but from rivalry and model-obstacle relationships. They always have the character of fascinations, nice ones or ugly ones, but anyway. Of course it is possible that such feelings are a big comfort for the ill person. The doctor shows his sympathy, his warmth. With this he becomes an ally of the ill person, against the illness. But, in the same time the ill person subordinates herself under the doctor. Usually she becomes again child, who entrusts herself to the father, the mother. This too can be an advantage, but it needs not to be one. If the doctor is unfree and to initiate feelings, emotions means, usually unfreedom) the child who trusts herself to the doctor is and becomes unfree as well, in any case the gain is bigger if the doctor, in his freedom gives, by his being free, freedom to the ill person.

Moreover it is very well possible that the feelings of the doctor provoke resistances or even fear, aggression, panic. All feelings are in fact transferences and bring in the transference situation. If the feelings become all too clearly fascinations, of which sort ever, then they can become very threatening. It is very well possible that the ill woman herself does not understand her reaction at all, but that does not make the situation any better. In fact the Other, the illness, becomes more powerful, the ill woman is weakened.

All these problems disappear when an ill person dies in freedom. He cannot be reached any longer by the mimesis of desired, he is out of all rivalry. She has become invulnerable for feelings which have their origin in unfreedom, in fascination.

As is the case with the whole of this paper it certainly is worthwhile to elaborate this theme. It is possible to analyse all the feelings, sympathy, pity, rejection, fear, antipathy, disgust, guilt feelings and so on, to show that they are all aspects of fascinations and that they always bring into power games.

8. THE ILL PERSON AND HER ILLNESS

The ill person has a relationship with his illness, the ill woman one with her breast cancer. It is the old relationship with the Other, but now turned into the body. How can she, in this situation, serve her life in freedom? In a sense the freedom is lost. The Other came into her body, she fell ill. As far as she gives into the intruder, she loses. She becomes more unfree. All the investigations which show that depression, the position of the loser, diminishes the changes on recovery, makes this the more clear. In a sense the change from illness to health is the change from unfreedom to freedom.

To mention some possibilities of expressions of freedom, which can change the immunological balance:

8.1 It is not only useless, it is harmful to try to negate the reality. By negating compulsively the illness, all force issued by it. It is a form of fighting against the illness. This is fighting in a lost case: The illness, the Other, is already in the “town”, the body. Thus the unequal fight goes on the old conditions.

8.2 It is equally unproductive, in fact counter-productive to fight against the illness. The fighting against the enemy, the other, is, in his manner, more straightaway, without the misuse of the power of the ill person, as mentioned above, The end result however is the same.

8.3 The ill woman keeps, in her freedom, always a direct relationship with her own body, the good friend, which is threatened by the illness, the Other. To give up the body because it is ill, or even to hate it, destroys the foundation of life and makes the only real ally against the other powerless.

8.4 The ill woman does not fight against the cancer, as such a lost case, but, in her freedom for her life. If this really happens, the cancer, the illness, is forgotten. An opponent who is forgotten is not any longer an opponent. The “fun” is over and he disappears.

8.5 This forgetting happens when the ill woman knows, and learns to know, that she is part of, belongs to a bigger reality, out of which she receives her freedom. This other world can be represented by people who are with the ill woman, who give her the freedom. So they become a so important existential reality, an Other who is with and not against the ill woman, that the other who provoked the illness can't stand it and disappears. It can be a belief, a faith, a trust, in Jesus, in God, in a transcendental reality.

8.6 Trying to say this again in another manner. The ill woman brings herself, trusting, in freedom, in a bigger reality, which gives again sense to her life. The fight, the war which often was conducted already since years, very often more or less unconscious, which ended mostly without knowing anything about that beforehand, in this illness, stops. The arms are let down. Instead there comes humility. A humility which has nothing to do with regression, masochism or an attitude of doing nothing, letting others cope with the situation, which only plays into the hands of the other. It is the humility, which gives the right place in life.

8.7 All this is in most cases not given automatically. There can be much aggression, against destiny, which means the Other, against everybody and everything. The doctors have to endure that. No reasoning against it, no fighting against it, no smoothing over. It is part of the way to freedom and that everybody around the ill woman should always remember. There can be much sadness and melancholy, weeping, distress. And now and then humour too. They are in fact all ritual possibilities, as old as humanity itself, to cope with a situation, rites de passage to come from a situation in the next one. If the ritual is not blocked by not understanding, in one manner or another rivaling surrenders, with as a consequence that the ill woman is stuck in the ritual, it is a way, very often the way, to come from the slavery of the illness into freedom.

8.8 Freedom means that we take our life in our own hands. Illness and being subjected to the illness means slavery. In freedom we take, although we are ill, eventually seemingly terminally ill, our life in our own hands. We take, amidst of (eventually big) threats, the responsibility for our life upon us.

Very often this means that great changes come about in the relationships with those with whom we live. Illness means slavery. The illness certainly has to do with the relationships we live in, although nearly never these existing relationships are the direct cause of the illness. Every seriously ill person, suffering a life-threatening illness, every woman with breast cancer, who is on the way of (finding) freedom, will change relationships. Changing relationships of unfreedom, inequality, subordination in relationships of freedom. Means changing the whole of life. Freedom gets form, a “Gestalt”, grows, by changing relationships in this manner. Not of course by “simply” turning around the power-structure. When it is a way of real freedom, forgetting all about the power-games, the immunological balance too changes.

8.9 The responsibility for yourself when you are ill has many aspects, some of which are:

8.9.1 If there is freedom in the relationship, you trust, in the context of the appointments which are made, the doctor wholly while doing his task for and with you. Only if he is trusted, he is trustworthy. If you can't trust him, out of which reason ever, and if you are right or wrong, you handle it out with him, her. Not doing this, out of free or whichever other reason, means being unfree, wronging yourself, the relationship and the doctor, so giving illness better chances.

8.9.2 In the same time the responsibility for one's own life, for the body as such, is never transferred to the doctor or to whoever. Regression masochism, laziness or any other reason is never good enough to become unfree.

8.9.3 In the responsibility in freedom, there are no reproaches, nor self-reproaches about what happened in the past, nor cares about the future. So there is the possibility to live in the here and now, which spreads around you and which gives the space to think and to do what is needed.

8.9.4 In this responsibility in freedom love can be given and received. So there is an insight, an inner knowledge, which all pity, ambivalence, hypocrisy, fascination and recognize and unmask, before they can become dangerous.

8.9.5 So it becomes possible to take decisions about one's own life. To go to another doctor. To take all the decisions necessary because of the illness and, eventually, because of the expected death. To withdraw from all medical care. To die in peace.

9. THE ILL WOMAN AND HER HUSBAND

The relationship of a woman with breast cancer and her husband is often very complicated and can be a big threat for her freedom and so for the course of her illness.

In fact in very many cases the relationship was already complicated before the breaking out of the illness. The power-fight of husband and wife, on both sides complicated by ancient,

unresolved binds, which are brought into the marriage, provokes many ambivalences, and thus unfreedom, in the relationship. The fears to lose forever or to be deserted, play in all these fights a big role.

The breast cancer plays from the very beginning a role in the relationship. The husband of course, wishes that his wife recovers. Or is that not his only wish: Does he have totally other ones, which he does not dare to confess himself, but which she knows, without knowing how she and what exactly she knows? The wife does not dare to be honest to her husband, because she does not know what it does to him if she tells honestly her cares, her anxieties. He might become too worried. Or he might have totally other feelings, which she fears. In very many marriages the last secrets never are told to each other, are wife and husband in the end alone. Breast cancer can make this worse, although of course, fortunately, there are many couples, with whom the opposite happens. They live, at last, together in freedom and a new life opens up.

All this is eventually made worse again, because it is about a versa or the breasts. Not a ore "irrelevant" part of the body of the woman, if that exists at all, but, for very many people the carriers of symbols with a very deep meaning. If the man is still bound up in the symbols, of life, of beauty, how can he be proud of his wife having only one breast or having none at all? And how can she be of herself in that case? Of the absent breast and the healed wound are terrifying for the husband. And so for her.

Anyway in many, if not in all cases, it is necessary, for both the ill wife and for her husband, to care for him adequately.