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**Too Much, Not Enough - from Quantitative Fallacy to Nameless Dread**

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*Too much, not enough*; one sentence juxtaposing two contradictory adverbs, which both denote quantity. My first reaction is vexation, then alienation. What does this tetragram mean? If I were to add qualifiers like, “Too much anxiety, not enough peace of mind”, it would become more comprehensible. But our skeletal theme merely states, “Too much, not enough”. Period. My reactions inspire me to read it as a condensed description of an emotional state, which evidently already has infected me with its tone of contradiction, unpleasure, and psychic conflict. Now my vexation yields to a decision to analyse it, which I will do in a roundabout way. I will begin by dissecting an emotional attitude to that paradigm to which the adverbs “much” and “enough” adhere; that of *quantity*. I will illustrate a universal tendency of linking pleasure and happiness with quantity. I call this *the quantitative fallacy*, which consists in disregarding a *qualitative* aspect in our interactions with ourselves and other people. Our reason for this disregard, and thus of committing a quantitative fallacy is, I hypothesize, to avoid the worst feeling of all; *nameless dread*. I will conclude that our theme evokes my own dread and that this explains my visceral dislike of it.

**Young Rufus**

Let us begin with an everyday scene from family life. Rufus is two years old and recently got a little sister. The family is sitting at the dinner table and his favourite dish is served; meatballs and spaghetti. But Rufus is not satisfied. He sneaks into the kitchen and grabs a big bag of potato chips. He returns and, with a triumphant smile, munches one chip after another. I tell him: “A lot of chips you’ve got there, Rufus”. “Mmm”, he answers. “And we won’t get any”, I add. He nods in confirmation. Then he changes his mind and hands out one chip to everyone. We all thank him for his generosity after which he declares, “No more!” We will get one chip each, whereas the more chips *he* gets the greater his satisfaction. To him, there cannot be “too much”. His worst scenario is “not enough” chips, an emotional experience he probably projects into us by declaring, “No more!”

Rufus defines contentment in quantitative terms; the more chips, the better. Is he right? Is it then also true that the more things we acquire, the better we feel? Let us consult the Swedish language for an alternative position.

**“Lagom” is best**

Sweden is called “the country of *Lagom*”. The word is usually translated as “moderately”, with an undertone of “boring”, “insipid” or “measured”, as when Swedes are said to be *lagom* nice, polite, tolerant, ambitious, etc. It also relates to quantity: Rufus’s father may ask him, “How much spaghetti do you want?” By responding “*lagom*”, the boy implies that he wants not “too much” but more than “not enough”. The word also has to do with justice and fairness. We might suggest to Rufus, “Why don’t you share some chips with us. You know, *lagom* is best!” – even though he’d probably reject our sermon. This meaning is concealed in the etymology: *Lagom* is an obsolete dative form of a verb, “*laga*”, which relates to law, repair, and arrangement. Its underlying sense is of bringing something in order: “If you temper your demands and obey communal ethical principles, you’ll get your share”.

It is commonly believed that *lagom* simply means “not too much, not too little”. But as I showed, its quantitative implication actually relies on reparation and fairness, that is, on qualitative concepts. We are beginning to glimpse a possible crack in Rufus’s conviction. One day he will discover that *lagom* chips is best – not only for his stomach but also for his relationships and self-esteem. Today, he is still a victim of what I call the quantitative fallacy. Later, he will find more solace in repairing and being repaired, and in treating others fairly and being treated fairly, than in munching chips. The next example shows that as maturation proceeds, some of us do seek a way out of the quantitative fallacy (Power Point & music).

**I can’t get no satisfaction**



What satisfaction is Mick Jagger bemoaning? Already the introductory guitar riff speaks of tension. It ascends and descends, like a rubber band or a muscle that is being tightened and released, over and over again. Jagger then realizes that more and more “useless information” will neither fire his imagination nor satisfy him. “Much” will remain “not enough”, because he is searching for another kind of satisfaction. He smokes the right cigarette brand and makes love to many women knowing it will not bring him happiness. Were we to suggest that he smoke *lagom* many cigarettes or make love to *lagom* many women, this would be meaningless; he is searching for another state of mind but can’t get it.

Let us try out another option and suggest, “You know, Mick, less is more.” This minimalist credo by the architect Mies van der Rohe plays with the quantitative fallacy to suggest – not that less is better – but that there exists another way of defining satisfaction, one that relies on *quality*. This quality awaits our exploration. Here, I will merely exemplify with Rufus: If he were to share his chips with the family he might feel generous, appreciated, and proud. However, were I to tell him, “You know, Rufus, less chips is more” this would be dismissed. And if I told Jagger, “Less women is more”, he would intuit that I’m right but not know what to do with it.

**Wotan’s dilemma**

Let us turn to an ageing deity to see if he has reached deeper into this topic. In “Die Walküre” of Richard Wagner’s Ring Cycle, the almighty Wotan discerns the demise of his lifework. Through deceit and manipulations, he has gained fortunes and powers to control the human world – but he cannot control his fellow gods or his consort Fricka. As he realizes his entrapment he sings to his daughter Brünnhilde (Power Point & music).



The background to the dirge is that the Nibelung dwarf Alberich has stolen the Rhine daughters’ gold after having cursed love itself. Wotan tricks the gold from him to pay for his castle Valhalla. The rest is a sad story of murder, treachery, and vain efforts at controlling the pawns in his divine chess play. The monologue is a moment of self-reflection, a temporary visit to the depressive position. Wotan realizes, “Was ich liebe, muss ich verlassen, morden, wen je ich minne“, or, “I must forsake what I love, murder the man I cherish”. That man is Sigmund, the hero who “of his own accord” was to realize Wotan’s projects.

Like Jagger, Wotan has it all but can’t get no satisfaction. Sigmund should secure his gold and world domination while Wotan retained his divine liberties; power, wealth, and sex. Now he is asking why he, pining for love, actually forfeited it. His unstoppable greed, impetuous lust, desire to control the object, and confinement in his own truces point to his entanglement in the quantitative fallacy. He believed that the more power and women he acquired, and the more warlords and gods he subjugated, the more satisfaction he would get. Now he realizes that his machinations have crushed the most precious thing of all; love – yet, his vision of love is quite hazy.

Let me sum up our smorgasbord of examples. Rufus is trapped in the quantitative fallacy; more chips mean more happiness. I then brought in the adage, “less is more”, but what does that mean in the context of human relationships? Mick Jagger feels sick in the quantitative maze but finds no way out. Wotan discerns a connection between satisfaction and love but cannot bring about a change. The word *lagom* brought in a notion of fairness and order to satisfaction yet gave but a bleak rendition of such an experience. I still do not understand why our theme “don’t give me no sense and no satisfaction”. Let us ask if *our* Wotan can help us.

**Freud – from zero to lagom and beyond**

Freud’s theories of the relation between the quantitative principle and the experience of satisfaction are divided. One version holds that the psychic apparatus seeks to reach a zero level of excitation. Another holds that for impulses originating “in the cells of the body and [which] give rise to the major needs: hunger, respiration, sexuality” (Freud, 1894, p. 296), the pleasure principle comes into action. Whereas the *principle of constancy* radicalizes the motto, “less is more”, into “nothing is best”, the *pleasure principle* is more abstruse. Lina Balestriere (2003) reiterates that the former pushes the psychic apparatus towards a zero level, while the latter aims for an optimal level of excitation. How do these seemingly contradictory theories account for the notion of satisfaction? Does nothing, *lagom*, or everything lead to maximal contentment – or should the question be rephrased in different terms?

Balestriere suggests the mind harbours “an antagonism between a state of psychic rest equivalent to a total discharge of external stimuli [the principle of constancy], and forces represented by endogenous stimuli that will disturb this rest and provoke a process of complexification [the pleasure principle]” (p. 42). Had the baby only to handle external stimuli, he would just need to fend them off to reach zero level and satisfaction. But, his strivings for satisfaction also come from inside, from the drives. Freud’s implicit notion is that they also emanate from interactions with the parents. We needed to wait for Jean Laplanche (1999) to explicitly bring the parents into the Freudian account of drive and discharge. To him, the drive springs both from the child’s interior and the mother’s unconscious sexuality. Her interactions are “compromised” (2007, p. 100) by her infantile sexuality. Such “messages” are transferred to her child and precipitate as “source-objects” (1999, p. 129), forming the nuclei of the child’s universe of drives.

Freud was more cautious in describing the parents’ role in the baby’s experience of satisfaction, *Befriedigungserlebnis.* To deal with the impingement from internal demands and reach satisfaction, the baby needs “extraneous help” from an “experienced person” whose attention is brought about by his “discharge along the path of internal change” (1895/1950, p. 318). The distressed child is crying, his mother hears it, comes to his aid, and he feels better. Only in 1911 did Freud speak explicitly of maternal care (*Mutterpflege*) (1911, p. 219), and later he linked the anxieties of the new-born and “the infant in arms” (1925-26, p. 138) to separation from the mother.

Balestriere suggests that “satisfaction” is an oblique translation of Freud’s term *Befriedung*. We need both terms to cover the two components of an experience of contentment; the quantitative and the qualitative. “Satisfaction” contains the Latin “*satis*” or “enough”. In this trajectory, a certain amount is needed to achieve contentment. An infant is breast-fed, turns away his head, and looks drowsy. His mother says, “He’s had enough, he wants to sleep” – and she may be right. The other trajectory is indicated by *Befriedigung.* This word contains *Friede* or peace, which adds an emotional quality of detention and contentment stemming from a relationship. In this reading, the baby found *Friede* at mother’s breast because he felt she was good-enough (Winnicott, 1971) in providing an “active adaption” to his needs and granting him an “easy and unresented preoccupation” (p. 10).

We can now conclude that the quantitative fallacy consists in neglecting the *qualitative* aspect of the *Befriedigungserlebnis*. Young Rufus thinks he only needs *satis* chips to feel good, whereas Jagger and Wotan need something beyond *satis*. They look for *Befriedigung* but cannot find it. They suffer from too much *satis* (possessions and activities) but not enough *Befriedigung* (love and contentment).

To better understand the *Befriedigungserlebnis*, we now turn to the world of children. Freud suggests that a child’s fear of the dark is due to his “absence of someone he loved” (1905, p. 224). In quantitative terms, his anxiety is due to having zero mother. Similarly, in the Strange Situation Inventory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), the child panics when mother leaves the room: ‘No mother = panic’. Such equations rely solely on the quantitative principle, but already in 1895 Freud added a qualitative explanation of the *Befriedigungserlebnis*. The mother is “simultaneously the [child's] first satisfying object and further his first hostile object, as well as his sole helping power” (p. 331). The formula is: ‘Mother, you were once good and helped me, but now I am screaming helplessly. The quality of my scream characterizes *you*. In my mind you’ll remain hostile as long as my discontent lasts!’ In this writing, the child’s separation distress goes beyond that of not having *satis* of mother. In addition, a hostile internal object has left him ravaged by helplessness. This is captured by Bion’s term “ghost”, a representation that replaces a lost breast whose absence is felt to be intolerable. Instead of an “idea of a breast missing”, the child experiences “a bad breast present” (1962a, p. 34). Let us look at an anonymous baby from You Tube. (Video)

How can we verbalize this baby’s experience? Bion (1962a) coins the term “nameless dread” (p. 96), when “all source of meaning has been annihilated” (1965, p. 101) and “a fear of dying stripped of its meaning” (Bion, 1962b , p. 309) emerges. Various terms denote this experience characterised by *abstruse signification and deficient containment*. Grotstein describes it as “neither mental nor truly somatic” (1990, p. 272), an “organismic panic” which has not “been transformed into signal, anticipatory, specific anxiety” (1984, p. 305). Green (1977) describes affects which overflow “from the unconscious [signifying] chain, like a river which leaves its bed and disorganizes communications, destroying the sense-making structures” (p. 149). Britton suggests that “the uncomprehended has become the incomprehensible” (2000, p. 62). And I recall the blues, “There’s a man goin’ round, takin’ names”. He is, of course, Death, ruler of “the undiscover'd country” that frightens us so much that we “rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of”, to quote Hamlet. The dread even goes beyond mere death since then, to cite Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, beauty is slain, “and, beauty dead, black chaos comes again”.

Black chaos; perhaps the colicky girl is there and, it dawns on me, I am frightened of being there. Only now do I realize that my uneasiness with “too much, not enough” is an offshoot of my own, nameless dread. Our tetragram utilises quantitative, everyday terms to describe a qualitative, spooky experience. By juxtaposing two quantitative expressions while ignoring their incompatibility, it actually speaks of an as-if-containment. “Too much” and “not enough” evoke associations to a vessel or a container that is either replete or not yet brimful, as when there is “too much” or “not enough” milk in the bottle. Each of the two adverbs might be felt as emotionally charged per se. The tetragram takes one more step and creates a logically impossible combination and thus succeeds in signifying a ghastly emotional experience. It is a transformation (Bion, 1965) of the worst suffering of all; uncontained, black chaos or nameless dread – and thence my negative gut feeling towards it.

**Clinical implications**

Let me bring in an everyday event in analytic work; a cancelled session. The patient arrives the next hour feeling gloomy, hostile, or annoyed. Many of us have made the mistake of hastily suggesting that he has felt deprived of the previous session. The interpretation relies on the *satis* concept – “You didn’t get enough of me”. The patient is unimpressed, however. Later we understand that he has felt haunted by evil ghosts caricaturing him, the analyst, and our joint work. Perhaps he was moaning “This is too much, not enough. Help me out of the Incomprehensible, give me *Befriedigung*”! The first interpretation reflected a quantitative fallacy, “The more analyst the better”. Here, the analyst overlooked Bion’s (1990) advice that he “can do nothing about the patient wanting ’more’ – he needs to know what it is that the patient is lacking” (p. 58).

At the Child Health Centre where I work as a consultant, I meet mothers who assume that “the more mother the better for the baby”. They learn about attachment and conclude that they must constantly be with the child. Otherwise, s/he will not develop harmoniously. To counter this dogma, they institute a “quality hour” with the child when they are “just being together” with the child. No wonder, this endeavour often acquires a constrained and spurious quality. These parents seem bewildered as to what defines a *Befriedigungserlebnis* and a *Befriedigungsbeziehung*, a satisfying relationship.

I will give a case example. Nathalie is a mother of three children who consults with me because her three-month-old daughter is screaming terribly and she cannot decide on her girl’s name. During our interviews I learn about her background, her mother’s self-preoccupation, her father’s demanding character, and an anorexia in her late teens. We agree to start a mother-baby therapy twice weekly.

During the fifth session Nathalie tells me that the girl was finally christened last Sunday: “Christina Jennifer Martine! Christina comes from my father’s grandmother, Martine from my husband’s family, and Jennifer from myself. I wanted her name to contain the letters n and a, like in Nathalie. I even fantasized she’d carry my name, but Christina is OK since it carries two of my letters. At home, we just call her Tina.” The girl wakes up, Nathalie picks her up with a smile and puts her in her lap. Tina and I have eye contact for a minute. She is sleepy and smiles briefly but then starts yelling. The piercing sound makes me feel as if someone is drilling my head and my brain is swishing about in my skull. It is a horrendous experience, similar to the screaming baby on the video.

Analyst to Tina: You are screaming terribly and we don’t know why. This must be very hard on you. How are things for you, Mum?

M: I feel sorry for her. I don’t understand why she’s screaming. In these situations, only the breast will do. But breastfeeding her all the time just can’t be right!

A: Tina, you don’t look Mum in the eyes. You were looking at some paintings but when your eyes returned to Mum you closed them. Well, sometimes you peer at Mum but I wonder why you don’t look straight into her eyes… Maybe you’ve got *two* Mums? One when you smile at Mum and look into her eyes, another whom you don’t look at. Maybe you’re scared of that one.

M: When you mention two Mums, I’m thinking it’s as if she has two names; Christina and Tina. Tina sounds nice and cosy while Christina is stern and old-fashioned. But it also contains “Stina”, which has a gentle ring to it. I have made her confused by swapping between the two names! I’ve been joking that she’ll become schizophrenic one day.

Tina is  still screaming. Mum can’t stand it any longer and offers the breast. Tina takes it immediately and calms down.

A: Perhaps there is a third Mum? I got this idea now that you, Tina, are looking drowsy. Maybe “Drowsy-Mum” would be the third Mum.

M: It’s all my fault! After birth she always looked into my eyes during breast-feeding. But I was checking my cell-phone! I was so preoccupied. That’s why she doesn’t look into my eyes!

Nathalie and I start using “Tina” and “Christina” to also denote two aspects of *her* personality. “Christina” refers to her anorectic, well-controlled, and elegant aspects, whereas “Tina” indicates her messy and spontaneous parts. She finds it harder to retrieve the latter within herself. I guess the girl starts screaming when she cannot find “Tina” in Mum’s face because mother is blocking that part. I formulate that Mum has a “Christina-armour” covering a “Tina-part” that cannot reach the girl. I turn to the girl and let my open left hand cover my right-hand fist to personify the armour and the ensconced part.

A: Mum has a little Tina inside and a big Christina outside of it, but sometimes her little Tina peeps through (one finger peeps through the fingers of my closed hand). I wonder if you, Tina, notice this in Mum. You’re following my fingers… Now you stretch out your hand as if reaching for my hand. Then you look away from Mum and that’s very hard on her.

One way of describing Tina’s panic is to utilize our tetragram, “Too much, not enough”. Mum gives her attention and devotion. Yet, Tina is screaming. When she gets the breast, she has *satis.* She suckles, drinks, falls asleep, and excitation falls to zero. But “for the child with a withdrawn mother, nursing is the first fiasco, a painful introduction to a relationship with a mother who lacks that sense of play born of a real connection” (Reiner, 2012, loc. 682). Tina keeps screaming and avoiding Mum’s eyes, which are distressed and anguished but not playful. Nathalie’s refined “Christina” part prevents the girl from accessing a more spontaneous aspect of Mum to reach *Befriedigung*. She does love her daughter, but her notion of love is swamped by ideas of conformism and external appearance. In a quantitative sense, the girl has *lagom* many letters in common with Mum and she gets *lagom* feeds of milk. But they have a *qualitative* problem. In other terms, mother’s infantile sexuality is blocked when she interacts with Tina. She caresses her but cannot covet her. Tina is the apple of her eyes but she does not devour the fruit. Mother’s face becomes restrained and exudes unresolved ambivalence. Tina looks at it, gets frightened, avoids mother’s eyes, and starts screaming. Their conflicted internal representations of themselves and of each other prevent them from finding *Friede*.

Nathalie’s ambivalence also taints the paternal principle or “le Nom du Père” (Lacan, 1998; Marks, Murphy, & Glowinski, 2001). Up till now, she has not been able to introduce her baby to the symbolic order by giving her a name. Thus, the girl’s dread is doubly nameless; mother’s face leaves her in a black chaos and no name exists which, if it were addressed in love and comfort, might have helped her out of it.

**Conclusions**

In my investigation of the congress theme, I introduced Rufus who claimed that more chips is best. Mick Jagger and Wotan saw through this quantitative fallacy and sought alternative solutions. They helped us realize that contentment implies a qualitative dimension, *Friede*, as well as a quantitative one, *satis*. Tina’s case illustrated what may happen when the two dimensions do not come together. I conclude that our theme evokes my unpleasure and discontent, but *not* because it speaks a quantitative language. Rather, by using two quantitative terms and ignoring their incompatibility it expresses a qualitative, emotional catastrophe. It confuses the important matters that we truly need – devotion and containment – with the noxious things which we should discard – striving for this or that quantity of X or Y. It obfuscates that the best and the worst things in life are free and that the essential thing is to be able to differentiate their qualities.

Nevertheless all of us resort, from time to time, to the quantitative fallacy. More money, more influence, more sex, more chips. Yet, with the more adult parts of our personalities we realize, as do Jagger and Wotan, that it will not bring genuine contentment.  So, why do we maintain this fallacy? I think it serves a compromise function; it allows some malaise to surface, one that is remotely reminiscent of a nameless dread while effectively blocking it from becoming conscious. “Too much, not enough” gives a whisper about this dread and therein lies its eerie quality. Its quantitative and contradictory denominations illustrate that the black chaos cannot be alleviated by receiving anything much, little, or *lagom.* It can only be assuaged within a containing relationship reasonably free from ambivalence. This, as we know, is what psychoanalysis aims to bring about. Once we look around, we realize how scarce such experiences are for many destitute and deprived people who, for that reason, easily slip into the quantitative fallacy. Let me end with Freddie Mercury, star of The Queen, who sang about “a young fighter screaming/with no time for doubt/with the pain and anger/can't see a way out. It ain’t much I’m asking… Gotta find me a future”, and who then insisted: “I want it all, I want it all, I want it all, and I want it now” (Power Point & music).

**Notes**

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