

Interview of Martin Bergmann by Jane Hall

Martin Bergmann has been the favorite teacher of hundreds of students, including myself, over the past 55 years. He has conducted daily seminars for psychoanalytic clinicians and thinkers and some of his groups have been going for 20 years with only occasional new members when space is available. My experience with Martin has deeply affected my own style of thinking and teaching. Martin has said that whatever book or article you read you will find something useful, even if you disagree with the premise. He has inspired so many in the field and it is my real pleasure to present an interview he did on February 10, 2008 in his beautiful office with its view of Central Park, and the Hudson River.

Hall: It has been frequently said that in the tripartite structure of the Eitington model of psychoanalytic education the analysis and the supervision are far more important than the classes. In my mind teaching is an art, and can be inspiring in a way that supervision and analysis cannot. Martin, I would like this interview to focus on your teaching experience over the years, the fact that you have had full seminars, every week day, for over how many years?

Bergmann: I starting teaching in 1953. It is over fifty years. Not quite sixty years.

Hall: A long time! You have taught more people in the field of psychoanalytic therapy or psychoanalysis than any single teacher or institute. Will you tell me how this came about, and what your inspirations were and are today?

Bergmann: Maybe the many questions that you are asking me I will try to free associate to them. First of all, I think that the teaching of psychoanalysis basically consists of two types of teaching. The first one I would compare to cutting the stones for a mason to build a house. The second one is more architectural, similar to building the house out of the raw materials that have been assembled. Now, the raw materials consist out of knowing such things as psychosexual phases, the transformation of the various psychosexual phases into character traits, the variation on the oedipus complex, the positive oedipus, the negative oedipus, and the combining of the two into the total oedipus complex, those are the basic stones that every student has to know about. Those are on the whole, though they evoke some resistances, teachable. What is less easy to teach is the art of interpretation. Or as Freud preferred to call it sometimes, reconstruction. Because even if you know all the basic ingredients of psychoanalysis, how to make the interpretation, particularly a creative interpretation and not just a translation of what you learn in school, is very difficult. The tripartite division. . . I assume that the most likely place to learn how to interpret other people is in your own analysis. In your analysis you can learn to interpret someone who happens to be similar to you. But what if you encounter somebody built fundamentally different? Then how to reconstruct is an art, which is essentially transmitted by the supervising therapists, however, no guidelines to these supervisors have ever been given in a meaningful sense. In other words, we don't really know how to help somebody to make a coherent interpretation which is based on the uniqueness of the patient.

This brings up another point that I would like to emphasize. Freud was interested in creating a science. A science is based on repetitive phenomena. Science does not prepare us for

the unique and special, at least not in an obvious way. So that, to some extent Freud's eagerness to have psychoanalysis recognized as a science tended to work against the recognition of the uniqueness of the analyst and the uniqueness of the patient. For example, when we say this person has been analyzed well, how much does it tell us? This depends on him and her as a patient and on the analyst. One analysis is not basically similar to the next. So that this is why on the whole how to teach the art of interpretation has become difficult.

Hall: Do you feel though, that the classes that you teach are of equal value as supervision, in a different way, and how? Because I have studied with you, as many other have, and we keep coming back. Something happens in your classes that is different from working with a supervisor, and certainly different from analysis. It is exciting and stimulating and I wondered what is your thought on how exciting class work can be?

Bergmann: Well you know when I first started in 1953, my aim was really to replicate the work of the institute that excluded non-medical analysts. That was the aim and that kept me for quite a time. But after the changes and institutes were willing to accept non-medical members and also some medical members that were not accepted the whole tenor of my teaching substantially changed. It used to be modeled after the institute, but once the institutes were created they took on a different character depending on the people who are there. I, usually at the end of each semester, ask each group what they would like to do. And then if I am not ready to teach what they ask me to teach, I read during the summer and prepare for it. But I usually try to follow what the classes have suggested. As a result of that, particularly if the group develops a social cohesion, the classes just go on and I continue to learn.

Hall: Yes, I was in a seminar with you for 5 years or so. It was a large group of about 15 to 20 and I learned so much. You always told us to get something positive from an article even if we did not like the reading. There was some turn over in members but not much.

Bergmann: Individual members leave and others come, but the classes go on, sometimes as long as twenty years.

Hall: That is really impressive.

Bergmann: As the classes continue they become more exploration. My advanced classes are much more exploratory than teaching what institutes usually give and many of my students are teachers themselves, so that gives it a whole different connotation.

Hall: Has there been a shift in the interest of the seminars, are students more eclectic today since the advent of self psychology and relational theory, or did some of the groups chose just one theory of mind and keep reading about that?

Bergmann: Now you are asking a very important question. I will take some time to answer it. In the past, people would agree or disagree with Freud. What is happening today is that as we move further and further away from Freud, is neither agreement or disagreement. The students today, or many students today, no longer understand Freud. So that I have to reiterate it in a language

which is a little closer to them. This is particularly true with certain difficult books like *The Ego and the Id*. One has to read it almost line by line because the book is no longer accessible. So the teacher has a fundamentally different task, and that is to act as a bridge between the students and what Freud said.

Then the teacher has another task. In my opinion Freud did not understand himself very well. Or at least, didn't understand himself in the way in which I understand him. And I now have to convey to the students my understanding. So what is an example? It seems that to me that it is important to convey this to the students from the very beginning. Freud was a man who changed his mind twice. And twice in his life he built up a completely, or at least reasonably, different theory. Now most models don't do that. Most models are satisfied with one theory that meets their needs. The first transformation took place between 1895 and 1900 from the cathartic model to the topographic model. Because we have the Fliess letters available, this transformation can be taught and is documented. But to my great surprise, when you give the Fliess letters to a student today, they shock the student. The students do not know how to deal with them. There Freud explains to Fliess, who is like a reluctant follower, what psychoanalysis is all about and he tries to convince Fliess. But the student who is reading it without guidance fails to understand the atmosphere and the whole connection. We have to explain to our students the difference between the cathartic model and the topographic model. Then after twenty years, the same thing happens all over again and Freud makes a major transition from the topographic to the structural. Here we are less well informed as to why Freud did this. And the transition is much more difficult so that you have to explain to the student the difference between topographic and the structural. Those are general introductory notes or understanding that a student must get in terms of an overall picture before one gets into the details and the nitty-gritty of psychoanalysis. Then to teach the art of interpretation, such as Freud suggested in the 1937 paper *On Construction* that is again a different endeavor and requires a completely different approach.

Hall: What do you say though that some of us, anyway, still think using the topographical model?

We talk about the unconscious more than we talk about the superego sometimes.

Bergmann: Well you see, that is an important point to know. Freud never thought in *The Ego and Id*, or in any other place, that the structural should replace the topographic. He always saw the structural as adding complexity to the topographic, but he didn't see this as two distinct methods. Arlow's and Brenner's success was to demonstrate how different they are and why in their view the structural is superior to the topographic. This influenced American psychoanalysis in a certain way. I think that this is diminishing somewhat now but it has given a cast to American psychoanalysis for a whole generation.

Hall: What do you prefer to teach? Do you like to teach the theory that we have just been talking about or do you like to teach clinical material?

Bergmann: I think if I have any preference it is to teach the combination of the two, because that is what makes psychoanalysis. Excessive theorizing is kind of Talmudic.

Hall: If you were a student today, just starting out, where would you find the best education in psychoanalysis? Would you find it in the institute or would you find it in private seminars where the students could select different teachers for long periods of time?

Bergmann: I would hate to answer that question.

Hall: (laugh)

Bergmann: It seems the institutes are necessary for teaching all of the fundamentals. The other part can be done with a teacher or even in peer groups. Those are different tasks. One task is to train a student to become a therapist, the other task helps him to continue to grow and be productive.

Hall: Do you think that Arlow was right when he once said that Freud's cases should not be taught, in the beginning anyway, because they would confuse the students?

Bergmann: That is a problem. Because the cases used to be taught as examples of what one should do. The teacher can show how brilliant Freud was in many ways, but also how mistaken he was. If he teaches the case, not as something to follow, but as something to understand how psychoanalysis developed, it can lead to a very good historical understanding.

Hall: Which of Freud's papers do you think a student, a beginning student, should read first?

Bergmann: Now that is a very interesting question, and I would say as we are getting further and further from Freud that the International actually ought to appoint a committee that will do just what you are asking me to do. That must be a collective decision based on more collective wisdom.

If I were asked, I probably would begin with the 1909 Freud Clark Lectures. And then I would go to the Introductory Lectures, again covering the same material in a kind of concise way. I would see then how my class is doing, and from there one would have to branch out to whatever the class is weakest at.

Hall: Okay, this brings me to the classes. When you teach, which is almost all the time, how do you manage to connect so powerfully with the students? Is it your love of teaching, love of psychoanalysis, your love for those who wish to learn?

Bergmann: All the three together.

Hall: Because you do have that gift that many people don't have.

Bergmann: Well you see, I have a certain advantage. My father was a professor of a university and when I was an adolescent in Jerusalem he took me every week to a workers' seminar where he taught philosophy and I saw him teach and then when he left some students would follow him and ask questions and I would listen. At some point my Father would say to his students: "From now on I want to talk to my son." The students would be sent away and my father would ask me

what I thought. So that was a kind of precious preparation that not everybody has.

Hall: Absolutely. That's where the love comes from.

Bergmann: Maybe.

Hall: I think so. That's really exciting. Martin, do you often hear people say, "That's an interesting idea, let me think about it." Or "Maybe you have a point, I think perhaps I have overlooked that." I am particularly interested if people can change their minds.

Bergmann: Andre Green once said that he never heard an analyst change his or her mind.

Hall: Do you believe that analysts are flexible, and since we are talking about you, are you flexible and open to different ways of listening to patients and students? In other words, do you have an open mind or are you pretty definite?

Bergmann: I don't think an analyst exists that considers his mind closed. His mind may be closed but he thinks he is open. But let me try to answer it in a somewhat different way.

Hall: Okay.

Bergmann: It is really amazing that now I will be 95 in a week, so the fact is that even now I encounter patients such as I have never seen. So that I always learn something new. And so, that for me, to repeat what I know, and I may like to repeat it once or twice, the third time it is kind of boring. What is really interesting is that my students teach me something new or teach me to explain the old in a different way so that ours is really an ever interesting, growing profession. And that's why I thank my audiences for having saved me from the swimming pools of Florida.

Hall: (laughs) But there is a school now that calls themselves the relationalists, and there is another school of self psychology. And if you get a more Freudian group, or a more classical or whatever you want to call it, Bionian, do you see those people cling to their theories? Those are the people I wonder about closed mindedness. They hear a different theory and they refuse to say, "Well, maybe this is a different way of looking at it."

Bergmann: Well, very often the work of analysis itself becomes a kind of quasi-religion. You can be orthodox, then you are like your analyst, or you can be mad at your analyst and then you become a protestant and you acquire a different attitude. But in either way you are as dogmatic as you could be.

Hall: But don't you think there is something in between? In other words, shouldn't an analyst find his or her own voice, not his or her analysts's voice, not the supervisor's voice, but a combination of those voices and other voices and their own voice, how they metabolize what they have heard?

Bergmann: There is absolutely no doubt that any creative analyst must do that. But I think that history can be helpful here. You ought to know the stages that Freud himself went through and then you ought to know this is a matter of disagreement but in my opinion one is a better analyst if one also knows a little bit what Kleinians do or what Kohutians do, not necessarily to be a Kleinian but to say to yourself “Oh, this patient would have been ideal for Melanie Klein and that patient would have done very well with Kohut.” And then you can try to see what you can borrow from those others that is useful. Because in a way, every dissenter has to some extent had grounds for dissent. And here if you will allow me I am going to tell you another favorite idea of mine. And this is: under the topographic model, where what is repressed was relatively small and the repression could be undone in a couple of months, analyses ended and it was a pleasure to be an analyst. Under the structural model it is a much more complicated issue, victory is much less certain, and the whole thing is a much more difficult endeavor. So that in a way, today, we don’t think that anybody has been completely analyzed. We only say that the analysis, if it was successful, prepared the road for self-analysis. So that analysis does not end, it is converted into self-analysis at a certain point. But if you watch self-analysis, you see two types. Sometimes the former analysand remains grateful to his analyst. But if the self-analysis goes far, or goes significantly beyond the analysis, what I call by the Greek word hubris, pride, sets in.

Hall: (Sighs)

Bergmann: And at that point the temptation to start a new school gets overwhelming. So, either you discovered something beyond your analysis that in your opinion nobody has ever discovered, what is to prevent you from becoming like Freud, heading a new movement? The identification with Freud leads to imitation. Then you start a new school. So there is something inherent in the analytic process itself which in my opinion is conducive to different schools and will be conducive to it in the future.

Hall: So, why do you think that the schools can’t somehow integrate more, instead of being so split off, with so called different schools. Why can’t eventually we embrace different ways of thinking and experiencing without splitting into different schools? Why can’t the past be used in conjunction with the here and now, for instance?

Bergmann: Because of the aggressive drive.

Hall: Really. Can you tell me about that?

Bergmann: This is a lovely picture that you portrayed. But no board of any analytic school will be willing to stop teaching their way and be willing to send their best students to a general psychoanalytic school. That is asking for more than ordinary human beings are capable of sacrificing.

Hall: Okay, but that is my interest. Why have we become so comfortable with the aggressiveness that we all have, even when you talk politics or anything, why do we not let more libido out? Why can we not respect each other and hear each other out? Like today there are

debates on the presidency where they speak against each other instead of speaking for their own ideas.

Why can't people be more respectful? Why do they have to do things like tear each other down instead of come up with ideas, and incorporate somebody's idea and see if that could work? Why is the aggression so easy? And the libido so difficult to express?

Bergmann: What you are saying makes you a lovely woman. You would like libido to rule the world.

Hall: But do you think that is naive?

Bergmann: In Freud's dual instinct theory, yes. Aggression is here, the question is what we do with it. And maybe to transform it into schools that fight each other is better than throwing stones at each other.

Hall: Well, I am still confused about that.

Bergmann: No, you are not confused, you are utopian.

Hall: Well, or maybe it is a reaction formation, I don't know.

Bergmann: No, a reaction formation sounds different.

Hall: Okay .

Bergmann: No, this is, I think, lovely only it is unrealizable. From where would you get the energy to spend so much time in committee meetings if it were not also satisfaction of some derivatives of the aggressive drive.

Hall: Well, there are always derivatives of the aggressive drive, but I don't see as many libidinal derivatives in discussions.

Bergmann: That's what Freud was afraid of in *The Ego and the Id*, that is why he wrote *Civilization and its Discontents*, and that's why he worried, and rightly so, about the future of mankind. The aggressive drive is a serious obstacle, and once the aggressive in the structural phase when the role of the death instinct and aggression was recognized psychoanalysis was no longer allied with the progressive, messianic groups of the twentieth century, of which I hear you would like to be a member.

Hall: (Laughs) Well, I'm not sure. For instance, Trudy Blank used to say when we would talk about aggression and libido, "the aggressive drive helps you walk out the door". or helps you move. But why isn't it the libidinal drive? You know, you want to go greet somebody, that's libido, that's not aggression.

Bergmann: No, but libido aims at union, not separation.

Hall: Yes.

Bergmann: She was right. The aggressive drive separates us. The libido drive makes us embrace each other.

Hall: Well, I would like to see a little more of that. (Laughs)

Bergmann: You would like to see that. . . Okay.

Hall: I guess it starts, though in the cradle. Or do you think it is genetic?

Bergmann: We know that the cradle has a lot to do with how strongly libido will be vis-a-vis aggression. But no cradle is loving enough to raise a child without aggression.

Hall: I understand that aggression is necessary.

Bergmann: Well, but we have a little bit more than absolutely necessary. We could do with a great deal less and the world still would go wrong.

Hall: (Laughs) Okay, one question I didn't write down. What do you think that people like about Bion, and I can't think of anybody else right now but Bion seems to be popular these days. There are study groups that are going on, Bionian, which I don't understand, but I feel I probably should know more about this.

Bergmann: Why should you?

Hall: Well, because, you know, if it helps understand people. Is it just a different language?

Bergmann: Well, this is another issue. You see, sometimes the same terms are given another name. Therefore, what Freud held against Adler was that Adler took Freud's concepts and gave them different names. That is a part of the aggressive drive, now allied with narcissism. If I give something known a different name, I get famous.

Hall: Right.

Bergmann: So from that point of view, it is worth it, but then you have to sell it.

Hall: Yes.

Bergmann: And sometimes you are successful and sometimes you are not. Now for example you are saying you should know Bion. But you are not saying why you should. What is it that you don't understand about your patients that you think Bion could help you with?

Hall: Truthfully, I think I am understanding my patients through my own ears and my own

experience. But, if my experience included something about Bion, I don't know, would I hear them better?

Bergmann: Well, give Bion a chance, read a couple of pages. And see if he is worth it.

Hall: (laughs) We had a meeting last year called The Future of Psychoanalytic Education. Arnie Richards and I were the co-chairs.

Bergmann: Okay.

Hall: We invited people from every institute, every umbrella group, from the Jungians to you name it, everybody, and we had mixed panels. We invited Jurgen Reeder to give the keynote. He wrote the book about hate and love in analytic institutes. It was the first time that I know of that we had this kind of ecumenical meeting, where everybody participated. . . and what we did was encourage people from the audience. We limited the papers to ten minutes long and the audience was really the focus. And the feeling was so wonderful. People felt so good being included. Included by whom, I don't know, because we were all people from different institutes and places. Even this group called NAAP, which is upsetting everybody because of the new licensing law, participated. So to me that is sort of fighting the aggressive stance.

Bergmann: I suspect that if you had lasted a little longer you would see these groups argue more. Of course the joy to be included is overwhelming. We all love to be loved. After a while you would have heard from the other component.

Hall: Yes, okay. So then we come to the politics of exclusion which are so rampant. It started when psychoanalysis came to this country, and the medical people claimed it as their own, and then other people excluded others, and the other people carried on the tradition of exclusion., There is always excluding.

Bergmann: But when I wish to be included and I am included there is no guarantee that I won't say, "Well, now that am I included, it is time to exclude." Because there is the wish to belong, but the wish also not to let anybody in.

Hall: So does that happen in a classroom? I have never known you to exclude an interested student if they want to learn unless you have no room in your seminars. I want to get back to the teaching and exclusion within the class. Sometimes students get annoyed at one student.

Bergmann: That happens many times. The class combines against a particular member of the class and wants the teacher to do something about it.

Hall: So what happens then?

Bergmann: You explain to the class that this is the phenomenon of aggression and if you exclude this culprit another culprit will appear.

Hall: (laughs)

Bergmann: So we might as well deal with this culprit.

Hall: There is always a culprit.

Bergmann: I remember that I realized this in the army. Every company had to have a scapegoat. But who was chosen as the scapegoat was determined by certain psychological conditions.

Hall: Masochism?

Bergmann: Masochism, intelligence, not fighting back. There are certain things.

Hall: Some classes want the teacher to intervene when someone takes too much time. And in my experience, some students appreciate an all knowing teacher and others seem ready to think on their own.

Bergmann: I suppose when you are anxious you want somebody authoritarian. So when you are not anxious, you prefer somebody who is less dogmatic, it depends on the state of anxiety.

Hall: How do you see the future of psychoanalytic education? Do you think that, for instance, this new TV program *In Treatment* will interest more people? Have you seen it?

Bergmann: I heard about it.

Hall: I wonder if that is going to interest people to liven up the field, or if you have any thoughts about that? Can we predict that analysis will flourish again?

Bergmann: The reason why I know that you can't predict is that because at no stage in analysis could one predict its future. If I would know how to predict I would write a text. But, it is impossible to know when a Melanie Klein will show up, or when the situation in the world will change as it did after World War II, so analysis usually cannot be predicted without an understanding of the future of civilization. How interested will we be in introspection? Let's assume that the medical industry will be successful in creating a pill against every conceivable mental illness. What will happen then? Will everybody choose pills, or will there be somebody who will say, "I want to understand myself rather than to just suppress all this inconvenience." It is very hard to predict because we don't know the future analysts and we don't know the next stage in the development of culture.

Hall: What do you think about the word charisma? How can you explain why one person has charisma and another person doesn't?

Bergmann: We do know something about charisma. A charismatic person has a certain inner certainty about himself, who he is, and where he stands. He has himself gone through an experience where he gained a new kind of certainty. So a charismatic person has gone through

some development that makes him feel that he has something to offer and when he believes in that he sometimes finds followers. It doesn't mean that he is great, because charisma seems to obscure the fact that there is a difference between a Hitler and a Gandhi.

Hall: Yes.

Bergmann: They both have charisma but it is a charisma of a different kind.

Hall: What do you think Gandhi was about? I mean, there was man who was not aggressive. He was passive.

Bergmann: Well, that's not quite true. In certain ways he was very aggressive. He was a complex person. What he advocated was something which the British Empire could not withstand. A Gandhi versus a Hitler would never have amounted to much. So it is always a reciprocal relationship between the person and the culture.

Hall: Okay, another question. You are a wonderful extemporaneous speaker, I never saw you read anything. Do you write that way, when you write a book or an article?

Bergmann: When I write a book?

Hall: Do you write, or do you speak into a tape recorder?

Bergmann: I never speak in that I always write it.

Hall: How do you explain that? Because you speak so beautifully on the spot. Is it a different part of your brain that you use?

Bergmann: Yes. For example, what you ask me today were not questions that I had fundamentally to think about. Here and there was a little surprise. But if I want to write something, I want to say something new and I want to make sure that I understood what already has been said about the subject.

Hall: Who would you say has been your greatest inspiration, aside from Freud?

Bergmann: Aside from Freud?

Hall: Right.

Bergman: In my life or in my analysis?

Hall: Who comes to mind first?

Bergmann: First comes Freud, then comes nothing.

Hall: Wow. (laughs) Well, your father.

Bergmann: My father, that is in a different sphere.

Hall: Because I think he inspired your teaching.

Bergmann: Well, you brought that out of me today but I didn't think about it before.

Hall: Oh.

Bergmann: Who do I value highly? I would say certainly Andre Green, certain aspects of Kris, certain aspects of Kernberg. You know it all depends. I don't worship anybody including Freud. I have learned this or that from various authors, but I wouldn't ask myself who is more influential.

Hall: And what are you reading now, for your own pleasure or your own interest, aside from what you do for your classes?

Bergmann: My wife and I are trying to write a book about the opera and that occupies me. Not so long ago I wrote, with my son, a book about Shakespeare's sonnets, so that occupied me for a while.

Hall: I'd like to go back to being authoritarian and how some institutes impose their way of thinking on the students. Does this affect the candidates approach to the patient? For instance, if we are learning about the transference neurosis or penis envy or whatever, is the student then going to impose that and affect the patient?

Bergmann: That is the trouble I saw that Freud got us into. You see, he thought that the era of discovery was already behind him. He and Abraham and Ferenczi made the great discoveries, and thought that now you could just teach analysts by letting them know what you have acquired. That was a very serious mistake.

Hall: Yes.

Bergmann: So to some extent Freud sanctioned the idea that you just tell the patient what you have learned in your school. But there is this very interesting story of Greenson's patient who dreamt that the analyst took a suit from the rack and he wanted the analyst to create an original suit for him. Our patients know very well whether we are understanding them or if we are delivering to them what we have learned. That is very important, to teach our future analysts not to always use standard interpretations.

Hall: Absolutely. Although I had a patient recently who has a two-year-old little girl, who is very precocious and very bright. Both parents adore this little girl and the mother was talking about the toilet training and how all the child's friends are toilet trained. And she says, "I don't push her, I just let her do whatever . . . whatever happens, she knows where the potty is and so on

and so on. Now, I know this patient very well, and I know about her childhood, and so I wondered with her whether she had some thoughts about this, and whether because she is rather independent and rebellious, if any of her thoughts have been picked up by her daughter. “Absolutely not, absolutely not. That is so from the book!” she said. Now, you could say I took that from what I have learned, but her dismissal of it was so vehement.

Bergmann: That is a reaction formation. What you said before was not.

Hall: Yes, exactly. Okay.

Bergmann: “Absolutely not” is a reaction formation.

Hall: Okay.

Hall: Is there a last word you would like to say.

Bergmann: I will just say I love you.

Hall: I love you too. (laughs).