

being an analyst

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I would like to begin by thanking Justin Clemens, Talia Morag and Oliver Feltham for their reflective responses to my work. What makes their contributions particularly precious to me is that all three are making impressive and important philosophical contributions. I have valued my association with them all over many years and the many conversations we have had. But also, as I take my leave from academic philosophy it is heartening to think that through them the voice of psychoanalysis will still gain a hearing.

All three papers lead me to reflect upon this difficult question concerning the relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis. There is a lot to be said on this issue, of course, and much ink has already been spilt by philosophers—including some by the above contributors—and psychoanalysts writing about it. I don't intend to buy into these discussions here. I would just like to treat this as an occasion to say something in a more personal note as one who has spent most of his life passing between the two.

Can this moment of passage between the two be defined? Perhaps we can think about it this way. The series of paeans to love that comprises the first part of the *Symposium* is brought to an abrupt end when an uninvited Alcibiades disrupts the party. This is well known and indeed constitutes the most dramatic moment in this dialogue—and yet it has not been until recently that philosophers have given

it particular attention and seriously wondered about the place that it occupies in the dialogue overall.

Having been invited to contribute a speech in praise of Eros, as the speakers have done before him, Alcibiades declines the invitation on the grounds of drunkenness and passes instead to speak not of love as such but of this particular love he has for Socrates. This gesture, this “I won’t praise love; I’ll praise Socrates, whom I love” can be described as the analytic moment in the dialogue for being the moment where Alcibiades passes from philosopher to analyst. This is analysis *avant la lettre*, perhaps, but it is nevertheless a key moment in the dialogue where it pivots from philosophy to something like analysis—proto-analysis, if you like, where what makes it analytic is the singularity of the address, the singular account that Alcibiades gives of his experience of his love for another.

This is not enough to make it “an analysis”, to be sure, but it is already on the side of analysis rather than philosophy insofar as the former is the “science of the particular”, whose empirical basis is the individual case study where each and every subject is taken on a one-by-one basis. Moreover, given that each individual case is a dialogue, albeit a one-sided one, each “case” is also the case of the psychoanalyst.

“Che vuoi?” “What do you want?” is no more a question for philosophy than it is for the academy. At least, it is one that is rarely asked of philosophers or by philosophers. And yet, it is not only the most vital question of all, but also the first; “What do you want of me?” is the child’s question to its mother whose desire (signified by the phallus) is the question in which his entire being is at stake and in terms of which his own desire is formed. This question lies at the heart of psychoanalysis, and it returns again and again to be asked of the analyst, in the form of the transference, and asked also by the analyst, in the form of his desire. It is present in every analytic experience, and what psychoanalysis discovered was that there are only ever individual responses to the question.

Desire is not always about love, since we also hate. In some ways, it comes more naturally; we might say it’s a skill acquired at an early age and one that, like riding a bicycle, we never lose. The word “hate” is both too broad and too specific; it is both part of a broader vocabulary and also an umbrella term for a category of so-called negative emotions: contempt, derision, indifference, resentment, jealousy, envy, aversion, revulsion, disgust, loathing, and so on. And then there is the hatred that turns back in upon itself: guilt and self-loathing, depression and melancholia.

The issue is this. How, beneath the pious homilies that people make about their desires to live well with others and work harmoniously with them for a better society, are we to live with the “dark side”, in both senses of the term, of being human? On the whole and for the most part we reject violence, because we are the benevolent ones; and yet we see violence all around us: *homo homini lupus*. Freud saw that for us who reject violence and hatred the repudiation comes at a price. When he wrote that “the normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows”, it was in reference to the fact that the price of our morality is the turn towards neurosis, so that we become what Nietzsche called the sick animal.¹

How do we measure the stance a person takes towards this goodness and this evil? What attitude takes rightful cognizance both of our morality without idealising it and of our wickedness without being seduced or corrupted by discovering it in the corner of the heart of every man and woman? Freud’s discovery of the unconscious was made possible by his discovery of the method of free association, for sure; but it also required a man called Freud to adopt an ethical stance, within the transference, that enabled him to analyse the hidden desires of those who lay on his couch and spoke openly in a way no one had ever spoken before. I love W. H. Auden’s words on this (they come from his poem “In Memory of Sigmund Freud”):

he went his way
down among the lost people like Dante, down
to the stinking fosse where the injured
lead the ugly life of the rejected,

and showed us what evil is, not, as we thought,
deeds that must be punished, but our lack of faith,
our dishonest mood of denial,
the concupiscence of the oppressor.²

It has been suggested that psychoanalysis encourages immorality—the accusation dates from the time of Freud’s early discoveries—out of concern that one is opening up a Pandora’s box of powerful libidinal and destructive thoughts and desires. It is a fear motivated by the thought that repression is a necessary condition for any social order. But it can also be an excessive fear, similar to the fear of one’s own unconscious and fear about what it might reveal to one and about one, and it has a similar origin—namely, the repudiation of what does not

fit with one's (ego) ideals. The problem is not with the potential unleashing of the forces of immorality but rather with the excessive and cruel demands of morality itself which, and Freud is demonstrably correct on this, demand more and more punishment for an ego that fails to live up to its demands.

Philosophy views the pursuit of the good life in terms of the pursuit of ideals, only disputing the ideals (and even then, within a narrow range) and how to describe them. What is radically new about the ethics of psychoanalysis as a praxis, is that, to help a person's life go better, it turns away from ethical guidance and instruction, rejecting looking to what a person is capable of at his or her best. It advocates neither inducing ideals that will lift a person out of his or her sources of unhappiness, nor encouraging a person to devote him- or herself to practices by which he or she will learn to follow the path to happiness or steer him or her away from sources of unhappiness. Look instead behind the idealisations to what repulses this or that person—always in the singular—for the origins of his or her disgust; look to what frightens and horrifies him or her, buried beneath layers of dissimulating rationalisation. What Ricoeur famously referred to as the hermeneutics of suspicion grasps in its way this point: be suspicious of the acceptable and decent, the happy and contented. It's a point that Lacan puts in these terms:

It is not by accident, because it couldn't be otherwise, that by a bizarre stroke of luck we go through life without meeting anyone but the unhappy. One says to oneself that there must be happy people somewhere. Well then! Unless you get that out of your head, you have understood nothing about psychoanalysis.³

Thus, Lacan says that psychoanalysis seeks salvation through human waste, through what has been discarded and rejected—both literally and figuratively.

There's a gag in a Lubitsch film that goes like this:

PSYCHIATRIST: Well, Mrs Smith, how are you feeling today?

MRS SMITH: Perfectly well, thank you Doctor.

PSYCHIATRIST: Oh, well! We'll soon fix that.

Not only does psychoanalysis refrain from seeking our "salvation" through adopting and pursuing the ideals of our culture, it is also suspicious of well-meaning intentions to do what is good for one on the grounds that doing what is

good for one is itself part of the master's discourse to which we are all subjected. Doing what is good for one is integral to the discourse of governments, bureaucrats and public officials. It is the indefatigable discourse of public policy: to do what's best, to do what's good for you and for everyone else; to have your interests at heart. This "I only want what's good for you" should not be taken at face value, and, because it is essential to public discourse, psychoanalysis must maintain its distance and remain in a marginal relationship to it.

It is important for psychoanalysis not to allow itself to become inscribed in and incorporated into any of the above social functions of the state, for to do so would place it on the side of the "good will" of the Other and to mask the fact that the underlying "I only want what's good for you" is never to be taken at face value. There is constant pressure on psychoanalysis both from within itself and from outside in the form of Government intervention and regulation to be recognised by the government and to be inscribed within the social register. But the effect of this would be for psychoanalysis to participate in and thus become an instrument of the master's discourse. Psychoanalysis needs to continue to advocate and adopt another line, partly inside, partly outside.

Therefore, when an analyst asks whether one got any benefit from one's therapy, it is not an analytic question; the analyst hasn't asked the question qua analyst, but as a friend or acquaintance—and even when your friend and the analyst are the same person, the two roles are not to be confused. The roles are easily confused, however, even by the analyst himself. One of the most common issues that come up in supervision—where one discusses one's cases with another and usually more experienced analyst—is the need to keep the focus of the discussion on the dynamics and direction of the treatment rather than on how the patient is doing. On the one hand, there is the natural desire to want one's patients to do well. But the motivation for this "natural desire" is not free of self-interest; one's narcissism, professional standing and reputation and self-esteem come into play. In Freud's foundational dream of Irma's injection we see a desire to shift the blame for Irma's continued ill health onto external causes rather than to question the efficacy of his newly discovered technique. Freud's unconscious desire here, which he became aware of through the analysis of his dream, was to blame his patient for not getting well. It is more difficult to present to one's peers a case in which things have not progressed than a case where things have improved. And there is not only one's individual standing within the profession but also the standing of the profession itself.

The analysand's desire to improve is no less complicated. As Freud recognized, the analysand derives satisfaction—*jouissance*, as Lacan called it—from the very thing of which she or he complains and is reluctant to abandon it for that reason. This led him to conclude that the motor of analysis has to be the transference relationship between analyst and analysand. The analyst's desire is absolutely crucial here and it is important for this desire not to take the form of the desire for the analysand's good. According to whose lights? And, anyway, what does it mean to be well meaning in the context of analysis?

For one thing, a person's ability to grasp how well intentioned his or her own actions are is always to be viewed with caution. I give an example: a single woman is having an affair with a married man who tells her, she says, that he will leave his partner once the children are older. Her analyst cannot avoid thinking that she is wasting the best years of her life with this man, that she is an attractive and charming woman and that as long as she remains in the relationship with him she is denying herself opportunities for a more satisfactory and fulfilling relationship with someone she does not have to share. She would, he cannot help thinking, be better off without him. Wouldn't it be in her best interests for her to recognize this? This might seem obvious, but notice something that should give pause for thought. Aren't these the very words that the lover would say when he wants to break off the relationship? You would be better off with someone else, I am holding you back, preventing you from a happy relationship with another man, and so on and so on. It's all too familiar. One might say that since what the analyst thinks sounds rather like what the lover might say in ending the relationship, he is *identifying* with the boyfriend. To be more precise, though, the identification is with a man *insofar as* he is about to break off the relationship—there is, we can imagine, no indication of the analyst's identifying with him in any other respect. What, then, does this mean? We don't have enough information to know what that might be, but this little illustration shows that the analyst's desire is highly relevant to the unfolding of an analysis. This is why undertaking an analysis is a prerequisite and supervision is an ongoing requirement for an analyst.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, there is one more comment to make about what the analyst wants for his or her analysands. The difficulty that the philosopher is caught in, in trying to articulate what it is about the good life, or what sort of good life, anyone, psychoanalysts included, should see as the aim of analysis, is the wish to find a formulation that fits all sizes and all circumstances. This is my reaction to Talia Morag's talk of the aim of analysis being "an openness to unpredictable change" and living "with those contradictions that are irreconcilable in [the

analysand's] emotions, desires and values". I think "openness" here depends both on the person and also on the nature of the unpredictable change. An individual may at the end of an analysis no longer be the victim of their neurosis as before, but it would be unreasonable to expect such a person to be henceforth protected against renewed difficulties come what may. And as for living with irreconcilable contradictions—well, doesn't everybody do this anyway? The trick is to find the right way to do it, or a better way, one that works for you. And there is no possible generic formulation that fits this.

It might seem that there are stronger grounds for wanting to find a generic formulation for the aim of analysis, since the conducting of an analysis is a technique that while not rigid has some general parameters. The rule of free association is one. The assumption of the unconscious is another. And one might note Freud's sensibly modest observation that analysis gives a person the opportunity to re-examine and eventually alter their relationship to their symptoms. It is important to give this modesty its full weight here, because one doesn't always require analysis to achieve this re-examination of how to lead one's life. While the accidental traumas that one encounters in living a life will sometimes lead a person to analysis, the trauma itself can lead one to carry out some sort of a realignment of one's values and ideals. Consider the person who, having survived a life-threatening illness, rethinks how to live his or her life. Their priorities change. And just as this is a deeply personal matter in which that person alone can make these decisions, no analyst can—or should—place himself or herself in the position of moral guide for those who seek analysis.

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NOTES

1. Sigmund Freud (1923), *The Ego and the Id*, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1961.
2. See <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/memory-sigmund-freud>
3. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III, The Psychoses, 1955-1956*. Ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg. New York: Norton, 1993.