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MINDING THE GAP: FREUDIAN AND RELATIONAL/INTERPERSONAL PSYCHOANALYSTS IN DIALOGUE

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

Abstract: An introduction to the ensemble of papers generated by “Minding the Gap: Freudian and Relational/Interpersonal Psychoanalysts in Dialogue,” the first in a series of annual scientific meetings held at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute devoted to controversial topics in contemporary psychoanalysis.

Keywords: Freudian psychoanalysis, relational/interpersonal psychoanalysis, psychotherapy

FRIEDERICH NIETZSCHE IS PURPORTED TO HAVE SAID that big problems are like cold baths; you need to get out as fast as you got in (Latour, 1993, p. 12). The gap between classical and interpersonal/relational psychoanalysis certainly qualifies as a “big problem,” but I am not entirely convinced that this bath is really as cold as one might suspect. Indeed, as the title of the conference that led to the ensemble of papers published here would indicate, the matter at hand for psychoanalysis today is to look not so much at how dissimilar various perspectives are from one another as at what kinds of bridges might be built between them.

“Minding the Gap: Freudian and Relational/Interpersonal Psychoanalysts in Dialogue” was held at New York Psychoanalytic Institute on February 28, 2009. With Edgar Levenson at the helm, a theoretical panel reviewed a number of defining issues and explored possibilities for the resolution of differences. The contributions of the panelists—Jessica Benjamin, Harold Blum, Darlene Ehrenberg, and Edward Nersessian—are all included here. A clinical presentation followed, with a discussion of the case by Philip Bromberg, Peter Dunn, Eslee Samberg, Donnel Stern, and Richard Gottlieb as moderator. For reasons of confidentiality, the case

does not appear in this publication and thus the papers of Samberg and Dunn, devoted entirely to the case material, are not to be found here either. Gottlieb, however, offers an in-depth review of that session, while respecting the patient's anonymity, and an astute evaluation of the embeddedness in clinical practice of the psychoanalytic differences constituting the "gap." Two other preeminent analysts, Henry Friedman and John Foehl, were invited to contribute to this issue. The eloquence with which they have previously articulated disparities and correspondences between the classical and Relational perspectives made them obvious choices for further enrichment of the discussion.

As this issue is not a publication of the conference proceedings per se, the primary objective—dialogue—is less obvious in print than it was in actuality. Yet the exchange is no less present or fruitful than it was in vivo, for the decision to reproduce the majority of papers (with the addition of two new ones) without the discussion that followed was based on the recognition that what come through, above all, are the ways these analysts work and that the deepest kind of interchange is to be found therein. Some differences in what some call "process" and others "technique" are expected, as when Blum or Nersessian, for instance, demonstrates the need for the analyst to maintain an analytic attitude that is neutral and objective while attuned. Or when one or the other turns to the unconscious fantasies at the root of development, both normal and pathological, and laments the increasing frequency with which, to cite Blum, "interpretation and insight into the patient's unconscious conflicts, unconscious fantasy, and unconscious transference reactions are largely ignored." So, too, one is not surprised by Donnel Stern's seeming incredulity that the presenter of the case material "told us almost nothing about *his* experience while in the room with his patient." Nor will those familiar with the work of these preeminent writers, well-known as they all are to the psychoanalytic community, be surprised by Darlene Ehrenberg's delimiting of the intersubjective "canvas on which problems in engagement and process . . . are manifested" or Jessica Benjamin's description of the measure and means by which the analytic relationship is cocreated. But it is *how* perspective and practice are rendered unique that is articulated here and of greatest importance, for subtleties come to the fore in each of these presentations that provide the basis for dialogue among them and with the reader as well.

This brings me to the order in which the papers appear. As at the conference, the theoretical contributions are introduced here by an elegant, if brief, historical overview by Levenson; and, as mentioned, the clinical panel of the conference, whose makeup here differs somewhat from what

it was there, is comprehensively summarized by Gottlieb. But the determination of theoretical or clinical has not necessarily been maintained as much as it was at the conference. (And, to be sure, such classification is somewhat gratuitous to begin with, however much it facilitates the reading of an ensemble of papers as diverse as these!) The papers of Benjamin and Ehrenberg have morphed into more distinctly clinical presentations, illustrating the many differences between relational analysts themselves, and have thus been regrouped, while that of Bromberg has joined the theoretical grouping. John Foehl's paper, emphasizing the primacy of process over dogma, provides an easy transition from the theoretical to the clinical, as from the classical to the relational contexts. The paper by Henry Friedman wraps up the whole with an exceedingly important, and no doubt controversial, thesis that we need to maintain, rather than bridge, the "gap." Whether or not one agrees with Friedman's position, his paper provides a highly intelligent and provocative conclusion to the issue. In fact, it is certain to stimulate a great deal of further reflection on the matter over time.

Bromberg judiciously notes, "The 'gap' between interpersonal/relational and classical schools of thought does not separate the clinicians in each group into homogeneously distinct versions of the respective theory in which a given analyst was trained. Good clinicians are good clinicians no matter what their family of origin." The point is well taken, and thus three frames for consideration of the "gap" appear to me to be viable: one paradigmatic, another conceptual, and the third linguistic. The two most salient paradigms are the intrapsychic versus interpsychic modeling of the human mind that informs our theoretical thinking, and the hierarchical versus the nonhierarchical analytic relationship informing clinical technique and practice. The advances of neuroscience lead us to question whether the intrapsychic and interpsychic are mutually exclusive. Indeed, perhaps the most significant and comprehensive discovery of neuroscience is that the brain is epiphenomenal: Not just a chemical and structural machine, the brain itself has agency¹; it is both motivational and intrinsically psychological. It functions ipso facto both intrapsychically *and* psychosocially. Yet the problem of integration remains—*how to view the subjectivity of first-person experience* (whether conceived as unified around a core self or as a multiplicity of selves) *in connection with its experience of the Other*. That, in fact, was the inspiration for the conference from the start.

¹ This idea was articulated at length by Mark Solms in a commentary at the June 6, 2009, meeting held at the Arnold Pfeffer Center for Neuropsychanalysis at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute.

The opposition between an analytic relationship based on hierarchy and one that stresses a nonhierarchical partnership endures. How one understands and interprets the meaning of transference, what one makes of enactments, one's assessment of matters of self-disclosure and the like, all are part and parcel of the paradigm of the analytic dyad to which an analyst adheres.

Conceptual framing calls into question the very rudiments of psychoanalysis; the concepts most fundamental to analysis do not necessarily have a common meaning or value for all. Transference, for instance, remains drive related for some while not for others (and even within those parameters there are differing ways of conceptualizing it); countertransference is traditionally regarded by some as not useful (or worse) and by relationalists as indispensable to the cocreated enactments that reveal the patient's psychic function and interpersonal past; and the necessity of the recovery of memory to therapeutic action is certainly a focus of constant debate. The meaning of the notion of the unconscious itself has been thrown into question by those for whom it no longer retains its significance as a dynamic process by which the expression of instincts and aims encounters resistance. Indeed, for some, the unconscious is but a construct constituted by internalized relational configurations although still the stronghold on which psychoanalysis rests. Even unconscious fantasy, the *sine qua non* of interpretation for classical analysts, has been deemed of questionable value by those who locate therapeutic action elsewhere.

The linguistic frame is that by which we recognize distinctions in the vocabulary used to describe the genesis of pathology, the objectives of treatment, and the tools for attaining them. As noted, the word technique, for example, is less favored by certain analysts (generally relational) than "process." But what's the difference? What do we mean by "truth" in the analytic setting? Is it related to reconstruction or to some other form, intersubjective perhaps, of accuracy? And what of the notion of "accuracy" itself? "Transference" is tricky, meaning one thing for the analyst in a position of supposed neutrality and another for the analyst convinced of the significance of his or her "real" role in the unfolding of the analysis.² And what of "insight," "trauma," and a host of other terms whose evocations may vary from analyst to analyst?

² See Bromberg (2009) for an engaging interpersonal/relational discussion of the meaning of analytic "truth" and Blum (2003) for an interesting commentary on the importance (or its lack) of the recovery of repressed memory and on the not infrequent confusion between the transference and the new analytic relationship.

Framing in this way allows us to look globally at the classical and Relational approaches, but it has also the disadvantage of ignoring the divergences within individual perspectives. In a recent paper, Bromberg (2009) explained that

[t]he school of Relational psychoanalysis was not born of a single seminal theorist or homogeneous group of theorists from which it then evolved, diverged, or remained loyal, and it is thereby not subject to evaluation by its degree of deviation from orthodoxy. . . . The term ‘relational’ emerged by *consensus* at a meeting of a then small group of analysts led by Stephen Mitchell. . . . The name was selected for two reasons: It clearly and concisely represented the core viewpoint that united [the group]—that the human mind, its normal development, its pathology, and the process of its therapeutic growth are relationally configured and it assured that the term not be so conceptually specific that it would convey adherence to one given set of ideas [pp. 347–348].

So, too, classical psychoanalysis has its own contemporary variations. Moreover, while the taxonomy outlined emphasizes the distinctions between the perspectives, it also risks overlooking possible convergences. In “minding the gap,” we are protesting as well as taking note of the many rifts in question. What goes on in the mind of the patient is of greater import than any intent on the part of the analyst, whether or not one is given to viewing the mind inter- or intrapersonally. And the greater regard for the analyst’s own experience is a feature of any analytic setting today. Another commonality particularly worthy of note is the recognition by both classical and relational analysts that there are ways of not-knowing and ways of knowing and that, whatever we choose to call them, whatever we may think about their dynamic or their structure, it is the *movement between them* that is liberating.

The New York Psychoanalytic Institute was delighted to host this stimulating and provocative event. And I am honored that *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* has taken on its publication, thereby concretizing its historical significance. The moment is particularly ripe for considering whether the schisms underlying the classical and relational perspectives are truly unbridgeable or whether we may conceive of real and deep connections between them. Listen to Henry Friedman (in press):

Relational analysts have tended to retain many aspects of the basic drive-defense model of analysis that has been the bedrock for that approach. The

drives and the defenses against them, both residing in the unconscious, and the resultant compromise formations that constitute the be all and end all in the classical approach are easily incorporated in the Relational approach of many who classify themselves in that school.

It has been argued that psychoanalysis suffers from a tendency toward the isolation of its various perspectives from each other. Thanks to Roger Rhatz, Director of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, Richard Gottlieb, Chair of the NYPI Scientific Program Committee, and Mark Blechner, Editor of *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, the benefits of pluralism have found a venue in which to override the penchant for sectarianism.

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