

HANS W. LOEWALD MEMORIAL ADDRESS

**Eighth Annual Interdisciplinary Conference of the
International Federation for Psychoanalytic Education,
Ann Arbor, MI, November 1997**

Psychoanalysis as Askesis¹

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This paper was presented to the meeting of the International Federation for Psychoanalytic Education on October 4, 1997, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, at which the writer received the Hans W. Loewald Award.

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I have introduced *askesis*, a Greek word, into my title because, in the first place, it implies that I have in mind an unfamiliar approach to my subject. It is also a word derived from classical Greek philosophical use, and in this article I shall situate psychoanalysis within the long classical and humanistic tradition that had its beginnings in ancient Greece and that, together with traditions derived from ancient Israel, forms the foundation of our spiritual, cultural, and moral life. *Askesis* is variously translated as "exercise," "practice," "discipline," or "training." None of those words is innocent of applications foreign to my purpose, but all of them taken together will, I hope, enlighten my remarks. I need to caution against the risk that our only English derivative of *askesis*, namely "asceticism," be given precedence here, although, like the translations I have given, it too is pertinent when we reflect on the technical rule of abstinence.

The word *askesis* appears in many classical authors, but Plato uses it in a variety of pertinent contexts: the training of athletes (*Laws*, 840 a4; *Republic*, 404 a9), the comforting of fearful infants (*Laws*, 791, b7), the training of soldiers in manoeuvres (*Laws*, 625 d4), and in learning right action (*Gorgias*, 509 e2). In the *Republic* (518 e1) he says of the "virtues of the soul" that "where they do not pre-exist, they are afterward created by habit and practice [*askesis*]," an idea taken up in different words by Aristotle in the second book of his *Nichomachean Ethics*. I shall use the word *askesis* frequently, but with neither the hope nor the fear that I shall have added a neologism to our already overloaded jargon. Perhaps I find the word most useful to turn our minds away from our more usual aversions to "science," "theory," or "therapy," none of which it excludes, of course.

While I shall draw on my own experience as clinician and teacher, and to a modest degree theoretician, what I have to say is not primarily clinical or technical or theoretical, but, in a free sense of the word, philosophical. I want to continue here the quest begun early in my career to understand what it is we do when we psychoanalyze - to reason about it, to place it within the human condition, to analyze psychoanalysis, so to speak, from the position in which I stand. To begin, what do we presuppose as the conditions of human life in which psychoanalysis takes place? When we speak of the human mind as the reality that we attempt to understand, what sort of being do we contemplate? Naturally, I have to select a narrow theater of operations and a philosophical position of limited horizons, but I shall try to describe what I have come to regard as the fundamentals of psychoanalysis as an *askesis*, that is, what underlies the discipline, the practice, the exercise of psychoanalysis. In using these terms, and the corresponding word "training," I have in mind both partners in the process, who submit jointly to the conditions making psychoanalysis possible. What is being done to, and what is being done by the analyst and the analysand in this partnership? What are they after? What are they trying to do?

If what I have to say sounds like familiar thoughts expressed in a somewhat strange way, that will not be far from my purpose. Many psychoanalytic ideas are more in need of newer and revised editions, so to speak, than they are of new creation. My listeners will easily recognize other voices than mine within the words that follow, voices that I hope I have not distorted by assimilating them.

What then is the purpose of the askesis of psychoanalysis? We provide a treatment, to be sure, aiming at the betterment of life and the relief of suffering, but there are many remedial procedures other than ours that have those goals. In anticipation, and in brief, let me propose that the distinctive intention of our method is the disclosure of the self to a greater extent than such disclosure has been attained before. The practice, the discipline, the exercise, the training - which I sum up as *askesis*-for the disclosure of the self in psychoanalysis is achieved or attempted through free association. I shall examine these propositions as closely as I can, starting with the self that is to be disclosed.

THE SELF

The idea of the self is probably indefinable conceptually -- unlike our traditional psychoanalytic abstractions, such as "ego"-- but in real life it is indispensable. Speaking about the self always reminds me of Augustine's lament about the meaning of time: "I know what it is until you ask me." We use the word "self" constantly with reference to ourselves and those whom we address, so familiarly and inevitably that it defies the boundaries of definition. The best referent I know for the word is the constant yet intermittently variable consciousness we have of our being there through time. Self is the being we know best, and the only being we know in an immediate sense, that is, without the necessary mediation of language. In some ultimate way, we know that we exist apart from the words "I" and "me," the words that signify our being; we know the boundless, nameless range of our selfhood that is linguistically confined to those words. As soon as we utter our selfhood, "I" and "me" stand for the present and conscious crest of the wave of our historical being. In a way, we never quite escape the solipsistic condition: We can never be as certain of the existence of any other self as we can be of our own. Of course, no other self can have the quality of belonging to us that our own has. The self is personal property as nothing else is. The word "property" is derived from *proprius*, meaning "one's own," and it is by extension that we include in "property" in addition to ourselves the belongings with which we are surrounded or otherwise furnished.

On the other hand, because we engage in conversation with others, we accept the being of other selves. We have our common language to support our conviction that other selves also exist and are fundamentally comparable to our own. If "I" exist, then "you" exist, too, or the sound of my words would be as futile as the sound of a tree falling in the uninhabited forest. In speaking we include our listener as an aspect of our own experience, the words we utter being heard by us as if we were ourselves also the listener. We accept without dispute the infinite regress implicit here - my hearing you hear me hearing you, ad infinitum - but if we did not attribute selves to the others whom we address and who address us, we would deny our own existence, too. We exist in a community of selves, beginning with the initial community of the family. Children, who catch on quickly to the commonality of selfhood, are all too willing to attribute selfhood to material, nonsensate others, provided that they can detect in them cues referable to selfhood: the doll that walks, talks, and says "mama," for a happy example.

Language guarantees to us the being of others in other ways, too. We learned to speak our

language through the imitation of others, and in addressing and replying to them we acknowledge them as other selves. In complementary fashion, we confirmed our own being when we were addressed and replied to. We grew to selfhood immersed in a "sea of language," which is also a sea of others. Selfhood is autogenous only in that we come into the world with unique neural structures and basic circuits. The development of selfhood follows interaction with other selves through time, the other selves that speak to us, or, just as significantly, keep silent. At the same, human interaction is not limited to speech; our awareness of other selves proceeds from evidence of emotion-of love and desire and anger and fear and humor, through wordless touch, sight, and sound. The disposition to emotion is inborn, but we resonate to the emotions of others, and their words are instrumental both in arousing and defining our emotions and their expression. We also have objective evidence that the existence, if not the autonomy, of others is recognized in preverbal childhood development, through various experiences of gratification and deprivation at the hands of others.

Existence in a world of others opens to the individual self the range of experience, but also circumscribes it and shapes it. Selfhood is always a potential as well as an actual being. Limitations on its expression, as well as on its assimilation of the world in which it finds itself, are imposed necessarily by the structures of family, society, and language. No self ever becomes all that its inherent nature offers; as a matter of fact, the need for, as well as the possibility of, psychoanalysis rests right there: in the hope for change in the self through its disclosure in greater amplitude. That there are limits of change is all too evident: Inherent neural and other biological structures provide them, but so does the self itself, so to speak. Constancy of self ensures the persistence of our self-world through time, so that we do not wake up from sleep with another history than that of yesterday's living, but constancy of self also ensures that we enact ourselves according to repeated, often maladaptive, self-structures and self-evaluations, developed during our past for the purpose of gaining love and pleasure or avoiding punishment or suffering. The inertia of our history, as well as our biology, governs us.

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

It is an axiom of psychoanalysis that self-disclosure is not automatic, nor inevitable, nor conclusive. We remain a mystery to ourselves. In part this is because of the limitations already mentioned, but also because we cannot know in advance what future circumstances will prompt us to think and do. A bold man in speech, I may discover that I am thoroughly timid when some sort of vigorous and unprecedented action is called for-when the chips are down, that is. New experience tests the self, evoking the possibility of new self-awareness. Conversely, new events-as well as what we make of them-create changes in the bank of memories at our command for anticipating new crises. "This has happened before" is a thought not limited to the experience of *déjà vu*.

In upholding free association as the verbal medium of our practice, I do not have any illusions about its availability. Nobody free associates in a literal sense - that we have to take for granted, and likewise to accept that it is a nonsense phrase taken literally. All utterances are unfree, being structured, with the rare exception of expostulations and

ejaculations, and it is, in fact, the functioning structures of utterance that we search for, the desires and intentions that govern it. But so much admitted, the phrase still has its traditional value to indicate an attitude toward utterance. In calling for free association, we offer a kind of invocation- not just an invitation-to candor, and so make a tacit ethical appeal. It is remarkable how radical, even revolutionary, that appeal can be, running against the grain of convention, or even of "common decency."

By way of paradox, another observation about free association so understood has to do with its universality. That is, the most deliberately designed address to another may "leak," as it were. I do not mean here primarily slips of the tongue or other unconscious errors, but rather unplanned sequences of thought that on reflection can be inferred from even the tightest discourse. As we all know, when we are dealing with selves armed against disclosure (who usually also complain of the emotional confinement in which they live), it may take a very long time to discover the leak, or, to use another metaphor, to see the "purloined letter" lying out there before our eyes. Usually we are able to put together significations that are plain enough to the prepared listener. At best we cannot hold exaggerated expectations of the freedom of free association; some of the same constraints that have kept the self in ignorance hitherto persist when we lie on the analyst's couch, despite our sincerest effort to set aside censorship. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid hearing ourselves speak, and if we do avoid it, our listener reminds us of what we have spoken, undoing our spontaneous efforts to forget our utterances. The effective-ness of the process shows that the self is a creature of change as well as of lag, of novelty as well as of repetition. (For a thorough discussion of free association in psychoanalysis, see Kris, 1982.)

I introduce here one of the essential concepts of psychoanalytic theory, repetition, as a limiting function in the development of the self as well as in modifying free association. Like the other elements of theory I use, it is a modest one, almost embarrassingly close to the commonplace: It did not take Freud, after all, to tell us that human character is repetitive. When I describe repetition as 'often maladaptive,' I imply another essential concept, namely conflict, which arises both in and out of consciousness. That is, the self's recourse to the actions, opinions, and evasions it has learned in the past may run counter to present intentions, and that recourse may be repetitive and even inevitable. The self feels helpless in its repetitions of both conscious and unconscious conflict. That is a main reason for the quest for help that may lead to psychoanalysis. In turn, conflict is unconsciously both avoided and maintained by those actions, opinions, and evasions, to which we have given the name "defense," and it is defense that repetitiously shields the self from the awareness of its conflicts. Any appearance of circularity in this argument is justified. The living self grows in the self-world as best it can, but never with full awareness of its own intentions; the wealth of potential but also the array of restrictions must defeat any hope for full awareness. The concepts of repetition, unconscious conflict, and defense-close as I consider them to be to immediate experience - are abstractions from the inextricable network of psychic reality. Our lasting indebtedness to Freud is this, that he first selected them with adequate recognition of their importance.

A fourth essential concept reflects, like the preceding three, the implication of the self

with others. Unlike them, it is a concept induced from the practice of analysis, and it is therefore part of the *askesis* of psychoanalysis, rather than a theoretical postulate. This is transference. We may justly question whether transference is radically different from other interpersonal experiences. It is not. Whenever we address anyone, as I have already noted, we do so with a preformed image, or idea, of the other to whom we speak; this image or idea and its accompanying feelings and desires proceed from our past experiences with that person, or from the memory of other persons of our past. That is the basis of transference, and it is universal in human interaction, conceptually adapted by psychoanalysts to be part of our *askesis*. From the beginnings of the use of the idea of transference, it has been seen as a misrecognition, a private, literally anachronistic interpretation of the nature of the other person. But misrecognition is intrinsically inevitable, because we cannot ever know other persons as they know themselves to be. We value empathy and plain mutual understanding so highly because they are far from our ordinary asymmetry in appreciating one another. Our views and expectations of others become pertinent to psychoanalysis when they have a bearing on the particular other who is the analyst, and when that other is prepared to gather and to focus those views and expectations into a persuasive structure. It is a particular misrecognition that we attempt to grasp and project, as it were, on the screen of the psychoanalytic interaction. In the quest for a wider and deeper appreciation of oneself the intention is implicit, if not always explicit, of reaching a more satisfactory grasp of other selves in addition to our own. This follows from, or, more correctly, is included in the reality that our selves have always existed in the company of selves. The transference relation is a deliberately constructed model of the human company. Transference does not have to be induced as a kind of artifice, but we lie in wait for it, knowing that the self is revealed in action in it.

So, in brief, goes my outline of the essentials of psychoanalysis. We encourage free association, and we look for spoken or enacted evidence of conflict, repetition, defense, and transference. This is, of course, familiar stuff. My point is that they are essentials, and therefore that any theoretical system of psychoanalysis owing its origins to Freud must be based on them, however far its development may have led from that source. Being conceptualized, they are theoretical, and they are derived unashamedly from Freud's theories, but they are concepts so close to direct demonstration via the interchange of words that they should be acceptable to any but the most rigorous phenomenologist, who would reject the existence of any unconscious mental life. On the other hand, many, or at least several, theoretical systems, all of which rest on these principles, can claim equal validity. My reason for this degree of tolerance is simply this: What emerges in the course of a psychoanalysis is amenable to more than one theoretical explanation.

These essentials, left in that form, as if we could know no more about the workings of the mind than can be immediately fitted into them, would provide only a narrow discipline. However, I am not offering here a comprehensive review of psychoanalysis; omitted topics include the theories of development that support the concept of repetition, intuitions underlying the concept of unconscious fantasy, psychopathology, linguistic formulas that account for the process of establishing unconscious meanings, and our

basic knowledge of dreams and dreaming (which often offers perspicuous access to conflicts hidden by the self from the self). These are elaborations of important insights that have arisen in the practice of psychoanalysis, but they cannot be discussed in the scope of this paper. All I wish to provide is an outline of our askeis, of the practice, the discipline, that we are creating for purpose of the exposition of the self, recognizing that we need to call on what others have learned about the process and have made available to us.

SELF-DECEPTION AND TRUTH SEEKING

To return to the concept of self, I must acknowledge my reluctance to use the term "self" so objectively, let alone the word "subject," because either noun is itself reductive. It is clearer simply to address the other person, saying "you" or "I" The "self" I put in the center of discourse is always a person, is one-of-us. The self is a historical being, living in time and streaming comet-like with its long past. When I as analyst speak to another self, I speak as one being to another pressing into the future, with both the impetus and the burden of the past. The impetus is initially given, as I have noted, by biological forces with determining power; some psychiatrists may exaggerate the determining influence of biological forces, but to ignore them is to court futility by imagining a future not possible for this being. The impetus that we seek to enlist in the service of self-disclosure is also derived from experience, from the history enduring in memory, conscious and unconscious. Having undergone these experiences in my past, the future that I contemplate, toward which I strive, is different from any other and particularly mine.

An implicit plan or design indicates the direction the self expects, or desires. Its directedness is also its constriction, and, as we say, I may not be able to see beyond the end of my nose, bounded as I am by the limits imposed by my past. It is more than inertia that I need to overcome; the self passively and actively opposes change. Self-deception is an intrinsic and universal disorder to which even psychoanalysis can hope to make only limited change. It does not suffice to call it "miscognition," because it is purposeful, emotionally laden. It takes another self to lend a hand, or to supply a lens to see a bit further. The summons of the other self is not to accept another view of life-the analyst's-but to explore both the intentions and the restrictions of one's own being in the world. It means going beyond the known self-world, over what may feel like a precipitous edge. It might be imagined as rather like a Himalayan adventure with the guidance of Sherpa, who has undertaken the climb many times before, but it may feel riskier, because no two internal mountain ranges are the same. The self clings to what the self already knows; the summons to see more is a challenge, or a temptation, or a threat. You might call it the courage 'to change the subject,' in a strangely literal way. That is what we attempt to do in and through the process of analysis, in assisting the self to become what it is capable of being.

The difficulty of the procedure cannot be exaggerated. An ethical commonplace holds that we unhesitatingly look outside the self for accountability when we are in conflict. To the contrary, when George Meredith (1897), the Victorian poet and novelist, found himself in a momentous crisis of conscience, he put the issue rather finely:

... In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot;
We are betrayed by what is false within.

To come to that insight, Meredith had to become aware that recourse to self-deception is as natural as it is blinding. Not that villains do not exist, and acts of villainy against the innocent, but asserting selfhood requires acceptance of responsibility, not necessarily for the past, but for what is in one's power to enact from this moment on.

Mention of courage, a virtue in any ethical system, leads to the wider ethical status of psychoanalysis, especially when I declare it to be the *askesis* of the self. When we practice, exercise, get training in, or accept discipline for many accomplishments we desire, we do so with only ultimate ethical considerations. For example, in learning to play a musical instrument or to do abdominal surgery or to march in a parade, our efforts aim toward excellence, making sacrifices and postponing satisfactions toward an ultimate purpose of social usefulness, but ethical intentions are indirect or peripheral in these processes of learning. On the other hand, the *askesis* of disclosure of the self is a struggle to reach the truth about oneself, for which courage is required. Truth seeking is what we might call the ethical fundamental rule that underlies the technical fundamental rule of free association: what I say is me, including my denials of what I say, my dreams are me, my evasions are me, my unconscious intentions and fantasies are me, my contradictory and opposing desires are me. Every psychoanalyst knows well that we resist owning up to all of what we say. It has never required psychoanalysis to know that. Euripides has Hippolytus say in self-exculpation, with classical but very modern self-deception: "It was the lips that spoke, not the heart." No analyst is virtuous in this respect from the beginning; it is an acquired virtue, and its achievement does not necessarily run parallel to the other virtues, including the other manifestations of courage. But it must be learned, not as words or doctrine, but as the other virtues are learned when they become what have been called "habits of the heart" (Bellah, 1985). Those habits cannot be taught didactically: I cannot tell you much about yourself that you do not already know or could learn from a sympathetic friend. What I can help you do is to listen to yourself, and to discover in yourself the rudiments of this kind of courage.

Ethical questions inherently extend beyond the self because the self exists in a world of other selves. We are not "windowless monads," each of us residing in the security or anxiety of our private dwellings. Neither security nor anxiety, or for that matter life, has only internal reference. At times, and not always without justice, the preoccupation of psychoanalysis with the self of the analyst has been condemned as ethically unsound, resulting in a hedonism that excludes the happiness and satisfaction of others. To take the most obvious example, we think of analyses that end with the breakup of marriages, not always to the satisfaction of both partners. The analyzed partner, let us say, has come to the decision to leave, after years of conscientious self-examination. The other partner feels abandoned, maybe embittered, and surely not grateful to the analyst, who may be accused of having instigated or at least condoned an unethical action. Here, and in most situations where love and friendship are at stake, it is not always possible for analysts

to make decisions that are unequivocally ethical, that is, decisions governed by the principle of primary concern for others. But the guiding principles of truthfulness and courage may still preside: Having allowed myself to know myself as well as I can, with full consideration of my conscience, I may conclude that the only right action is this one, remaining aware of the pain inflicted on another, or others. The *askesis* of psychoanalysis, unlike that of, say, military service, is not directed toward obedience.

What is it directed to? And can it be made any plainer how we effect our intention as analysts to promote self-disclosure? The habitual structures of our practice are plain enough, and are in their way as rigorous as those of any other kind of training. By regularity and punctuality of meeting, we establish a dependable setting for self-disclosure to be resumed. I know that there are exponents of irregularity and surprise in the analytic continuity; perhaps in some hands the intention of self-disclosure is supported in that way, but it seems to me that surprises excite newer and less tractable forms of defense. We normally hope to help wear away "the cake of custom" by the therapeutic repetition we deliberately set up to confront unconscious repetition. The analytic inner domain shifts constantly, under the stress of emotion, the impact of events, the assimilation of fresh awareness. The external domain ought to provide a steady background, not a changing scene. That is one of the ways in which our *askesis* might be called "ascetic," although a less exacting way than in our resolve to do nothing exploitative of our analysands - not even exploitation through the imposition of our way of life on them.

On the side of the analyst, all interpretations of the analysand's discourse are tentative and exploratory, not definitive. That is because the truths reached in psychoanalysis are verbal approximations of the conditions of selfhood that transcend language. The most painful trauma, the sharpest memory, exist differently in the privacy of the self from any expression of them in words. The analyst's *askesis* is a mirror image of the analysand's: The listener remains open to fresh disclosure by tolerating ambiguities, as the analysand must learn to do, too. The listener's selfhood undergoes constant engagement with the analysand's, and equally needs to be acknowledged in its depth and scope. He or she knows that the images and the feelings aroused while listening, however acceptable as empathic intuitions of the other person's subjectivity, nevertheless are steeped in the dyes of his or her own life. "Precise" interpretation is impossible because of the irreducible gap between the self's immediate experience and the words in which it can be disclosed. It is the analyst's tolerance that exists as model for the analysand's: A further interpretation always possible. In short, in analysis, as in life, there is no closure. Accepting this is of the essence of the analyst's *askesis*.

Making self-disclosure the center of the analytic *askesis* must provoke a serious question: To whom is the disclosure made? By avowed intention, to the analyst, to be sure, who is the listening other? But self-disclosure can be to no purpose without a listening, comprehending self. That provision, however, is logically insufficient: For what qualifies the self to grasp the disclosure? When I reveal to myself an association of ideas, or memories, or images that tells me something new, who am I to authorize the novelty, let alone profit by it? I am the same self I was before - until and unless the disclosure has

effected a change. Why do I suddenly - or gradually - acquire a hitherto absent capacity for judgment? This question, essentially related to the philosophical problem of the transcendental ego, has always constituted a latent or manifest *aporia* for psychoanalysis. The ego-psychological solution, which is inherent in traditional Freudian theory, depends on postulating an "autonomous ego," that is, a part of the self never infected with neurotic conflict, or even unconsciously motivated. The source of this convenient mechanism would be located in the supposed course of normal psychic development outside the range of conflict, along with, perhaps, normal development of language and locomotion. An infallible arbiter calls the shots, as it were.

Unhappily, the presumption of autonomy has perilous consequences. In the first place, there is no way to be sure that any particular judgment is conflict-free; what looks that way may be instead the disguised surge of another conflictual tendency. Second, pursuing self-disclosure as an inevitably normalizing process leads to the "completely analyzed" person, an absurdity less frequently pronounced nowadays than when I was in training. But perhaps the most undesirable consequence is its implied attribution of omniscience to the analyst, who would be the last court of appeal to decide whether the new disclosure is a liberation or a repetition. Entrusted with autonomous judgment, as the one-who-knows, the analyst needs to be propitiated by the compliant analysand. Since the benefit of analysis is best attained when the attributed omniscience of the analyst is at last surrendered, if reluctantly, by the analysand, it is apparent that the presumption of autonomy may lead to its opposite. Nor would the outcome be beneficial to the character of the analyst, who would suspiciously resemble the Wizard of Oz.

Our latter state would be worse than our first, if we had to leave the matter there. But as with any other *askesis*, the benefit of ours declares itself in practice, not in theory. Self-disclosure enhances the self's available repertoire; new visions, new feelings, new attachments, or old ones that had fallen under the ban of repression and are now recovered, and recommend themselves to be tried out. It is in their success or their failure that their truth is established, truth here being pragmatic, not absolute. So, to recall Plato, by *askesis* infants acquire assurance, soldiers learn to fight, and, closer to our theme, the "virtues of the soul ... are acquired afterward by habit and practice."

ANALYTIC TRAINING

All these considerations apply to the training of the analyst. Training is an ongoing experience, a continuous *askesis* lasting a lifetime, because every new analysis thrusts the analyst into novel conditions that challenge his or her abilities. But the analyst's experience as analysand and as student establishes the preliminary grid to which novel conditions can be applied. What I have learned from myself and my instructors sets the parameters of my vision. I am not referring to theoretical indoctrination, although any theoretical system worth holding ought to be rational and coherent, but to the degree to which the beginning analyst can help induce the laborious *askesis* of self-disclosure in others. Conferring what have traditionally been known as the "rights and privileges" of practice is a serious matter indeed if what is at stake is the further development of other selves. I want to conclude with some remarks on this matter.

In his book *Oneself as Another*, in a chapter on ethics much influenced by Alisdair MacIntyre, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1992) wrote that

the unifying principle of a practice (profession, game, art) in its ethical character is insured by ... standards of excellence, which allow us to characterize as good a doctor, an architect, a painter, or a chess player. These standards of excellence are rules of comparison applied to different accomplishments, in relation to ideals of perfection shared by a given community of practitioners and internalized by the masters and virtuosi of the practice considered. ... Practices ... are cooperative activities whose constitutive rules are established socially; the standards of excellence that correspond to them on the level of this or that practice originate much further back than the solitary practitioner. This cooperative and traditional character of practices does not exclude controversy but instead provokes it, mainly with respect to the definition of standards of excellence, which also have their own history. It remains true, nonetheless, that competition between practitioners and the controversy over standards of excellence would not occur if the practitioners did not share a common culture that contained a rather lasting agreement on the criteria defining levels of success and degrees of excellence. (p. 176)

This quotation strikes me as fully pertinent to the uncertainties and disputes that have arisen in our day over the standard of training in psychoanalysis. Ricoeur, who had earlier written a long book on psychoanalysis, based upon Freud's writings, might have been commenting on current American psychoanalysis, or at least on the comparable struggles of French psychoanalysis. In summary, Ricoeur (1992) presents four considerations:

1. The ethical claim of our works derives from standards of excellence.
2. These standards originate in the ideals of perfection of a community of fellow practitioners.
3. Controversy over standards of excellence are bound to happen.
4. The controversy has a use only if there is some basic agreement on what excellence is.

Take, for example, the profound issue in psychoanalysis that is too often intellectualized under the name "countertransference." If we go along any distance with my interpretation of psychoanalysis as the disclosure of the self through the interacting agency of another self, we are faced by the question: Is this a personal interaction or an objective interaction? When you are my analysand, do I confront you as a self with whom I am in personal relation, or an "object," in the scientific sense, that I try to understand? The dangers of excessive pursuit of the personal have become notorious these days, and need no further emphasis by me, but the limits of objectivity in analysis are apt to be passed over because of the scientific pretensions of many analysts. It is true that we see students of psychoanalysis who are quick to grasp this situation, we might even say "instinctively," but others, among whom I must confess myself to have been in my early days, are at best clumsily, at worst intractably, detached from the personal. They require much attentive super-vision, preferably while still in training analysis.

Thoughts like these ought to dominate our discussion when we are in dispute over qualifications for the practice of psychoanalysis, length of training, extent of supervision, number of hours per week defining correct practice, and the like. We ought to be as liberal in our openness to differences of practice (and theory) as we ought to be conservative in our demands for excellence. But to this end we must be willing to listen to other points of view than our own, and as much for the purpose of learning new truth as for refuting error. We need to be as willing to respond to the demand "Show me!" as to confront other schools - traditional Freudian, Kleinian, Kohutian, Lacanian - with it. In brief, if our intention is to decide whether or not we enter into ongoing dialogue with other schools, I am all for entering, and I would add the other meaning of "schools," namely, the specific institutes offering to train psychoanalysts. But if concessions are to be made, they must follow full exposition of what they entail. For example, does another school share the same goals of psychoanalytic treatment, and if not, why not? Do the intensity and duration of training suffice to establish what I have called the *askesis* of self-disclosure? To put off the dialogue because we are convinced of our own superiority, or even just equality, does not promote the ethical purpose of psychoanalysis. Issues of power (who is to run the show?) or of economics (How are we going to get paid if there are too many of us?) or of professional status (Who has the right academic degrees?) have to be diagnosed as diversions and treated accordingly when we take counsel together. We who represent the *askesis* of psychoanalysis now, especially because we are transmitting an endangered tradition, need to be surer than ever of our true ethical foundations.

END NOTE

¹All references to Plato's use of the word *askesis* were located for me by Victor Bers, Professor of Classics at Yale University.

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