

BOOK REVIEWS

The Ethic of Honesty

The Fundamental Rule of Psychoanalysis

M. Guy Thompson. (2004). Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.

Many readers of the *Journal* will already have been introduced to Thompson's work via his paper *The Existential Dimension to Working Through*, which was published in Vol. 13.1, and returns in this book as the closing chapter. In *The Ethic of Honesty* Thompson revisits, in varying ways, the most ancient of questions concerning the matter of truth and honesty. Central is the first of Freud's 'fundamental rules': that the patient speaks, without let or hindrance, of whatever surfaces. What a demand! To relate to another what is going on with us as each moment of time evokes a thought, a flicker of emotion, a bizarre conjecture; whatever. As we lie (lie?) on the couch Freud asked that we speak, honestly, of the shifting truth of our circumstances; if we could not comply, then the 'treatment' would not work. Although Thompson omits John Heaton's observation that a demand to speak 'the truth' is not technique, as Freud described, but a moral injunction, there is common ground. Both practitioners return us to many of the fundamental issues that Freud raised, and place them within a phenomenological investigation of what it is to be honest, and why it might matter that the unconsidered reports of who we are could hold much that reflected thought erases. As Nietzsche so succinctly observed, "My memory tells me that that I did this thing; my pride tells me I could not have done. Eventually, memory yields." In this book Thompson alludes to the enigmatic boundary between Nietzsche's declaration that truth is fiction, while at the same time demanding that those who speak and listen are waiting for words which are authentic. His arguments are placed firmly within a psychoanalytic framework, albeit one with which many orthodox Freudians might find usefully worrying. In doing so he opens up key therapeutic concepts in ways that demand our careful consideration. What is it to be 'neutral', why should we abstain from giving our clients what they want when, as is so often declared, that is the sole purpose of their weekly journeys?

The series of essays that comprise Thompson's book challenge both psychoanalytic and existential orthodoxies, specifically the wariness which the latter often regard such concepts as transference and counter-transference, and the use of 'free-association'. Here Thompson carefully unpicks key passages in Freud's writings, and disentangles these ideas from the manner in which many psychoanalysts have come to interpret them. With considerable erudition he demonstrate how much

misunderstanding has been created as a consequence, and asks us to re-evaluate these concepts in philosophical terms. For this reviewer, the most exciting section is concerned with the matter of 'free association'. Taking as his main text Heidegger's *What is called Thinking* he makes a compelling argument that 'to speak freely', to let language speak through us, and in doing so, perhaps to find meaning in both the words and the silences that come upon us, is central to Heidegger's concept of 'meditative thinking', in contrast to the rational, and perhaps rationalising 'computational thinking'. In such circumstances, to speak without aim is not 'aimless', but a fundamental commitment to disclosure. Yes, Lacan has absorbed Heidegger's variant of this, *Rede* and *Gerede* in his 'full' and 'empty speech' but much gets lost in subsequent mystification.

Thompson's project aims at clarity, and explores the phenomenology of free association from Husserl onwards, and also opens up the discussion on transference/counter-transference in which both the voices of psychoanalysts and philosophers can be clearly heard. Yes, one can dismiss these concepts out as hand as frequently self-serving (and the chapter on the therapist's ambitions is highly critical of those who hide behind interpretative techniques) but I have long felt that Heidegger's observation in his *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* that the philosopher gets his power and authority from 'not being understood' lies behind Lacan's redefinition of transference as a stance taken towards the possibility of self-knowledge – an injunction first embedded in western philosophy by Socrates. Although this 'need to know' can be experienced in all areas of life, it can be – and this book argues forcefully, should be – central to the practice of psychotherapy, Thompson's reflections on both the history and variant application of these ideas make compelling reading. As a former secretary of the Philadelphia Association, he also includes much of Laing's observations on the usefulness (or uselessness) of different psychotherapeutic approaches.

I admit that there were times when I felt that his own 'return to Freud' omitted exploring contradictory possibilities in Freud's variant views, such as his wish both to construct a 'scientific psychology' on Newtonian lines while trying to stay close to the reports of his patients and reject confirmable facts. That said, this is a thought-provoking volume, which deserves to find a home on any bookshelf that contains a mix of philosophy and psychotherapy. Strongly recommended.

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