

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**SPECIAL ISSUE: Locating Psychoanalytic Ethics**

Like the generations of leaves, the lives of mortal men...

– Homer, *The Iliad*, p. 200

One of the reasons I like the study of astronomy is that it is a silent corrective to our inveterate narcissism; it locates our fleeting place in this stunningly complex and unimaginably expansive cosmos. While astronomy presents us with one hundred million galaxies, quantum physics presents us with a world of infinite possibilities – from the macro to the micro, we are exposed to a level of complexity that transcends human understanding. Edwin Schrödinger, the noted quantum physicist, wrote: “the concept of reality as such, as it objectively exists independent of all human observers, is indefensible, if not downright meaningless. Still the concept of reality is as indispensable in science as it is in everyday life” (Beller, 1999, p. 282). There is no doubt that the questions we ask determine the answers we get; Albert Einstein noted, “It is the theory that decides what we can observe (Gregory, 1988, p. 193).” If we construct our reality, we likewise construct any code of ethics. We do not, however, need the complexity of quantum physics to establish that fact; cross-cultural studies also make such a conclusion obvious.

Do human beings create ethical mandates and guidelines in order not to lose their balance in the cosmos of the psyche and/or the cultures in which they live? As a psychological construct, any ethical system has its roots in earliest childhood, its trunk, so

to speak, in a particular culture and its leaves in personal reflection and awareness. There is no immovable solid ground in which the tree of ethics grows; we live, consequently, with a necessary pretense, that is, as if it were so.

Determinism is one attempt, I believe, to find a solid ground; taken absolutely, it denies the possibility of ethics. Human experience suggests a more complex scenario. Although philosophical thought has struggled for centuries with the possibility or not of free will, psychoanalysis has shed some light on the issue with its experiential awareness that if human beings do not possess free will, in any complete sense, they can, with honesty and self-understanding, experience *freed will* – to borrow Edward Glover’s evocative phrase (Glover, 1963, p. 193). Freed will is what we hope for in psychoanalytic treatment; freed will has the promise of achieving personal authenticity. The concept of freed will is essential in any discussion of ethics. But, we can ask: What is it? Does it make sense to use the term? I do not believe there is an unequivocal answer to this question; rather, each individual must continually struggle to find an answer that is personally meaningful. Winnicott’s observation that each child we must *create the found world* – in reality a lifelong developmental task – suggests an answer. I believe that introducing any transcendent absolute into ethical discourse is problematic; there is, nevertheless, an absolute need for human beings, in their search for freedom, to dialogue on ethical questions. Such discourse contributes to creating the found world. But dialogue is not prescription. The need to feel that one is standing on solid ground is profoundly human and understandable. Such a need, however, frequently results, in the field of ethics, in conclusions that are offered as absolutes rather than as existentially normative. Clearly we stand on solid ground; but grounded, as we know, on the ever-moving

tectonic plates. We have no choice but to live with that awareness and with any anxiety it may generate.

We seem not so much to be condemned to die – as is every other living thing – as compelled to create meaning. Once one understands that there is no center to *the* universe, we are free to center our own universe; this is as true from an astronomical perspective as it is from a personal perspective. I believe this is what Schrödinger means when speaking about reality. History bears witness that we are free to create our own ethical reality, with all the potentially tragic consequences that that sometimes entails. Ethics as reflecting a relative, historically context-dependent, psychological construct may not be an insight that philosophical or religious fundamentalists would endorse; psychoanalysts should have less trouble. Less trouble if they are willing to entertain the possibility that there is no center to our ethical universe but what we make it to be¹. A viable ethical system is experienced to the extent that it promotes freed will, an experience of autonomy that offers more individual choice but less certainty- one that necessarily entails a modicum of livable anxiety. Psychoanalysis, among other philosophical and spiritual traditions, understands that an individual can never assume that his or her motives are not self-serving. When the inevitable anxiety of self-preoccupation recedes and connection with the world predominates, an individual can experience being alive. Rabindranath Tagore put it this way: “we live in the world when we love it” (Tagore, 1949/1977, p. 258). Ethics, I suspect, *begins* with a capacity to love the world, a capacity, as we know, which entails good-enough developmental experiences.

¹ “There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so...was Shakespeare’s way of saying the same thing.” (Hamlet)

The essays in this issue of *The International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* address the question of psychoanalysis and ethics. Each expresses a different viewpoint; no effort has been made to achieve a syncretistic ecumenism. Each was delivered at the 2004 Chicago Conference of the International Federation for Psychoanalytic Education.

Psychoanalysts are well acquainted with the birth of ruminating self-examination as having its seedbed in the *ought* of the superego. Addressing the “ought” of the superego and the vacuousness of a self-identity based on a consumer mindset; Walter Davis argues, in detail, for what he believes are the essentials of an authentic ethic. Calling on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, on contemporary news about Pat Tillman, on Kant, existentialism and psychoanalysis, Davis develops his cogent argument for understanding ethics. His article is a well-informed, carefully crafted *tour de force*. The result of psychoanalysis should be, as any clinician knows, the capacity to sustain a willingness, as Davis states, “to know and engage one’s repressed and disclaimed motives.” He argues that such a commitment is essential if an individual is to live ethically, by experiencing the freedom that awareness of the human situation brings.

Discoursing within the more traditional psychoanalytic cannon, Frank Summers traces the history of a psychoanalytic ethic from Freud’s understanding of making the unconscious conscious, with all the technical ramifications that such a position implies, to the contributions of the English object-relations theorists, as well as to the work of Kohut and the American relational school. Summers, in this elegantly written article, develops the thought of Kohut and Herbert Rosenfeld and focuses on the need to hear the patient rather than hear what one’s theories presume is being said. This profound respect for the

patient's communications becomes the foundation for understanding a viable psychoanalytic ethic. Lucidly developing his argument, he shows how the patient's self-creation is an essential aspect of psychoanalysis. And, in so doing, he evidences the deepest reading of a psychoanalytic ethic.

Jon Mills focuses on the specifics of an analyst's response, one's obligations not only to the patient, but also to oneself as well; that is, to those insights that an analyst experiences as personally normative. In this refreshingly candid and thoughtful article Mills creatively examines, through case material, the ramifications of a moral counter-transference. As a trained philosopher, in addition to being a psychoanalyst, Mills grounds his reading of Freud through the thoughts of such thinkers as Plato and Kant, Hegel and Lacan. There can be little appreciation of a patient's autonomy if the analyst has none for him-or-herself. Mills, both theoretically and practically, shows why an analyst's neutrality does not imply eliminating an analyst's individuality. He authenticates a self-aware individuality within the therapeutic relationship and shares the complexity of personal motivation with the reader.

In her quest to locate the ground springs of ethical awareness, Bonnie Litowitz focuses her lens on an individual's earliest beginnings. With a sharp eye, and ear, to the clinical manifestations of ethical awareness Litowitz examines the contributions of such writers as Piaget, Stern, M. Klein, Winnicott and Laplanche. She delineates the interactions between infant and caretaker from their preverbal to verbal stages and relates those earliest exchanges to the capacity for and acquisition of ethics. Litowitz likewise prepares the reader, I believe, not only to appreciate the delicate and formative nuances of early pre-linguistic experiences but, in so doing, offers the clinician a paradigm of the

consequences of the emotional communications between analyst and patient. Litowitz's essay is clearly reasoned and enjoyably informative.

If these essays stimulate an adventure for reflection, they will serve a useful purpose.

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