

Regulate the Unconscious?

What guarantee for the practice of psychotherapy would be given by the university title of psychologist or psychiatrist, as required by the Accoyer amendment?

Certainly whoever has undergone such a process is at least supposed to know how to read and write, also to have some acquaintance, through theoretical studies and training, of mental illness. But beyond this?

Transference and its handling are not learned on school benches or at the bedside of the sick. Whether or not it is recognized as such, transference is the essential motor of all relation and all the more of any therapeutic relation. The therapist can use it in the sense of suggestion, with variable success. But Freud invented psychoanalysis by choosing to turn away from hypnotic suggestion, which appeared to him an abuse and above all a misrecognition of the subjective conflict demanding to be heard through the suffering of the symptom.

Psychoanalysis utilizes the transference with the particular aim of elucidating unconscious mechanisms. Its coming into play almost automatically in the cure is the way that allows the subject to learn what is being said about him by his symptom, beyond what he imagines he knows about it, and also to learn whom it is addressing; finally, to learn what he is expecting or hoping for, which is often impossible.

From this point of view psychotherapy and psychoanalysis are opposed and psychotherapy is a short-circuiting of analysis. Shall the subject testify to an amelioration of his symptom, without having gotten to the root of his difficulties? Shall the therapist judge by the criteria of normality that the subject is autonomous enough to confront the vagaries of existence?

But in practice this opposition is more relative. Lacan, the pragmatist, considered that even a psychoanalysis deserved to be qualified as such only retroactively, on seeing its results, about which only the subject who has submitted to the experience can testify. In addition, the supervision, whereby an analyst speaks about his practice to another analyst whom he recognizes to be more experienced, has been maintained in all analytic associations. It is always a question of learning to tell the difference between what has its source in the analyst's own subjectivity versus that of the patient. A difficult exercise, in which comprehension and experience are worth nothing unless they are elucidated by the test of transference in the cure of the practitioner herself.

It so happens that most of those who are professional psychoanalysts are already psychiatrists or psychologists, although such training is not in any way sufficient. Certain others join them in recognizing the necessity of a clinical training in tandem with their analytic training.

A priori, therefore, the Accoyer amendment is not absurd. It is, however, useless, since it says nothing about the training truly required in order to have a valid practice. And that is why it is harmful, for if additional qualifications are necessary to get these diplomas, who shall have the power to appoint those who will be their trustees and dispensers? Are professors of psychiatry and psychology recruited on the basis of their psychotherapeutic or

analytic training? Is the State going to call upon “formative” (teaching) therapists and analysts when such formation cannot be...formatted? Will it recognize groups, associations, and schools of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as being entitled to certify its own members? On what criteria? What would have become of Lacan, his practice, and his teaching, if the association that expelled him had had the power to prohibit him from teaching and practicing?

The advantage given to conformity and the status quo that such a solution could not help but establish would be damaging to what of the unconscious is by definition reluctant to inscribe itself in any preformed framework. The price to be paid in suffering and in the violence of symptoms would then be increased all the more. It is likely that the evermore extreme outbursts in our time of cults and serial killers are reacting to a growing normalization in the reception and response given to all kinds of subjective suffering.

There remains the argument for protecting consumers' right to know if they are addressing a competent practitioner or a guru ready to exploit their credulity. But is it a diploma that's going to shelter them from a bad experience or a false path? Furthermore, even by using transference to plant suggestion, you can't make just anyone do just anything. Reputation, and recognition by peers and above all by patients, are criteria relied on by good sense and are worth all the institutional safeguards, which can always be circumvented.

Lastly, what is produced in the very course of a cure, psychotherapeutic or psychoanalytic, is rather difficult to evaluate. If Freud had been judged by the physicians on the faculty at Vienna on the basis of the topics he discussed with his patients, he would not have been able to pursue his investigations very far. And if he spoke about the “storms of transference,” if he repeatedly said that all the arguments used by thinkers of his époque to oppose psychoanalysis carried no weight when compared to the reactions generated by the resistances of his patients, isn't his proof that, in order for a cure to prove effective, something else is required than the immediate adherence and permanent and unreserved consent of the subject engaged in it? If a subject is unhappy with his analyst, is he going to take his complaint before a judge or authorized agency, or will he take up the matter in the framework of the treatment, even if it means coming to acknowledge an impasse leading to its interruption? Legislation in North America may tend to make consensus the basis of social co-existence, to the point of requiring proof of consent of partners at every step of a sexual relationship, which certainly makes for progress in individual freedom. But such expectation is not compatible with unconscious determinations, which are compelling at another level altogether.

So what are the inconveniences due to the absence of regulation of psychotherapies and psychoanalyses? The consequences of such regulation, on the other hand, are foreseeable; they are inevitable because determined by the unique logic of the unconscious.

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