

LEAR, JONATHAN. (2009). 'Technique and final cause in psychoanalysis: Four ways of looking at one moment'. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 90: 1299-1317.

Jonathan Lear is an established, prolific psychoanalytic author whose works attempt to reformulate various aspects of Freud's legacy into contemporary relevancy. He brings with him the atypical quality of philosophical scholarship, a direction he began early in his career while studying philosophy in Cambridge. His text *Aristotle The Desire to Understand*, for example is a creative outcome of this period. He latter grapples with such basic philosophical ideas with regard to other psychoanalytical contexts (Lear 1988, 2000). The present paper is no exception.

In 'Technique and final cause in psychoanalysis: Four ways of looking at one moment', Lear introduces the Aristotelian concept of 'final cause' and attempts to incorporate the 'spirit' of it's significance into his present thesis. He argues that the final cause (the ultimate goal of psychoanalysis) is freedom, although particularly understood within different ideological approaches. He concludes that this idea provides the *only* unity for psychoanalytic technique amongst the different approaches he examines in this paper. He carefully considers one analytic moment from the psychoanalytic technical perspectives of Paul Gray, Hans Loewald (who was his long term mentor), contemporary Kleinians and Jacques Lacan. How well he manages to avoid reifying these traditions in the abstracted format of a professional journal is almost less compelling then the cogent conceptualizations of freedom that he gracefully extracts from these four core approaches. His elucidation of the particular traditions is absorbing, gracefully articulated, and accessible as he masterfully interweaves the threads of his central arguments throughout his persuasive conceptual and methodological analyses. Gray, Lear concludes, argues for a freedom of reflection. Lowewald emphasizes a freedom to allow possibility for new possibilities essentially linked to mourning. Kleinians offer a freedom to think by tracking the massive disruptions of projective and introjective phantasies. The Lacanians focus on removing the disruptive obstacles from the processes of unconscious symbolization so that the analysand is free to resume interpreting its symbolic activity'.

One of Lear's distinguishing qualities as a writer and a scholar is his ability to fluently reflect upon on the complexities of psychoanalytic theory and practice through a philosophical lens. He challenges us to question what we understand by freedom and how we aim for it. The aim of analytic intervention, he states, is to:

... facilitate a movement in the direction of (some aspect of) freedom. To do this, one needs to take the final cause into account...only once we have a better understanding of the final cause of psychoanalysis (freedom) will be able to adequately adjudicate differences about the *formal* cause – the technique that constitutes the form of psychoanalytic activity. For the form ought to also to be (a manifestation of) freedom" (2009 p. 1315).

To have a layered understanding of this quotation, Lear (as with most prolific authors) must be considered within the context of his own writings and not on the basis of a single paper. In an

earlier text, *Happiness, Death and the Remainder of Life*, Lear has already carefully reconsidered the teleological basis of Aristotle's theory of ethics developed in *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle himself offered the metaphor of 'taking aim', as an archer took aim towards the target that all human endeavors aim, a 'good' or 'happy' life (Lear 2000, Aristotle 1998/350 B.C. 1.2.1094a22-b11.). A good and happy life, according to Aristotle was possible for the virtuous person who reflected on the virtues that constituted who one was and who one wanted to be. Such a reflective investment in one's character was a manifestation of human freedom, a 'high water mark' of ethical activity as Lear states from his text on Aristotle (1988/2007 pp.186-191). In the present paper, Lear is inviting his reader to engage in this kind of freedom rendering activity of self reflection about what freedom is with regard to ones own psychoanalytic practice and particularly how the various technical approaches facilitate freedom or not, as our analysands struggle with what it is that constitutes their existence in a way that matters to them. Such a reflective investment in one's character (both analyst and analysand) is a manifestation of human freedom, and one that Lear is endorsing in the contemporary context of psychoanalysis.

In the 2000 text, Lear asks the central question of how contemporary psychoanalysis facilitates our orientation towards everyday experience; e.g. how a self-disrupting mind (disrupted by the unconscious) can find happiness (the desire to understand ourselves through reflection, as Aristotle concluded), and how we can understand these disruptions without relying on overarching principles such as teleology. Teleology, a philosophical doctrine that attempts to purposively encapsulate the goal of all human strivings, cannot account for the mind's inherent self-disruptions, disruptions which Lear views as non-purposive. Disruption he argues, breaks through established psychic structures and therefore opens itself up to a possibility for new possibilities, not included in a structure (such as a concept, or doctrine) (2000 pp. 112, 128). He establishes that 'good' is an enigma and therefore the goal of psychoanalysis is enigmatic (Ladson Hinton, personal conversation 2011). In the present paper, Lear picks up the threads of this thesis and introduces another enigmatic signifier - the final cause of freedom- as a sketch of an answer to what psychoanalysis is for. While purporting to fill in the gap (what are we aiming for?) he does not really give us a substantive answer. He is giving us the kind of answer that only makes sense in the context of the philosophical contributions of Heidegger and later Wittgenstein (whom he invokes several times in his 2000 text). This perspective does not recognize a fundamental gap between the experiences of our everyday lives and the content of our ideas about our lives (2000 pp. 8, 23, 32). According to this view, we are situated in our intersecting worlds of everyday activity, and being human cannot be separated from our thoughts about being, as they too are contextualized from the worlds of signification we exist in, not the least of which is language. Freedom, for Lear, does not exist in principle but as an ontological dimension of the analytical process that cannot be understood merely in technique (the form) or theory (the content). He refers again to this perspective in the present paper in his discussion regarding how Kant, Hegel and Heidegger have similarly influenced Lacan and Loewald with regard to their conceptualizations of subject and object-relations (2009 p. 1312). He states:

For Lacan, the fact that we are 'thrown' into a culture and historical epoch – and thus into a field of meanings that we did not author and in terms of which we must understand ourselves – means that we are inevitable alienated; for Loewald, it is in this thrown field that one has at least the possibility for authentic self-development and open engagement with the world (Ibid).

Lear's claim that freedom is the final cause for psychoanalysis is oriented from a contemporary philosophical stance which holds that human being does not have itself as its own basis alone as we are constituted in and by our worlds of experience. Or as he states another way; '...philosophy does not lie over there, in theory; it pulses in the heartbeat of the clinical encounter' (2009 p 1308).

Lear is a welcome and seasoned voice in the contemporary debates that are necessary to keep psychoanalysis and analytical psychology vital and relevant in today's world. Philosophical inquiry is at the heart of his paper and one of his central aims, I think, is to pass the baton on to us – to enliven our own philosophical curiosities so that we can become free to be ('freedom from any particular image', or ideology) and to therefore let others be. Philosophy for Lear reaches into our everyday lives. What and how we live our beliefs (critically held or otherwise) is fundamental to how we treat each other as well as how we practice analytically. He reminds us that our commitment to recognize and accept the palpable reality of others is an 'inescapable ethical commitment' (2009 p. 1313).

References

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