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ROZMARIN, E. 'To be is to betray: on the place of collective history and freedom in psychoanalysis', *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 2011, 21,3, pp. 320-345.

Rozmarin introduces his rich and difficult paper on freedom in psychoanalysis with these questions: 'How might contemporary psychoanalysis help us think about freedom? How could it, as a practice, help us to be free?' (p.320). Throughout the paper Rozmarin explores the relationship between freedom, guilt, memory and responsibility, raising crucial ethical questions: What is freedom when a subject is not self-sufficient but is embedded in an historical world of collective social forces? Given that the subject is constituted by and through the other, what is the subject's responsibility to the trauma of the other? How do we bear the guilt of living our singular lives in the face of the other's trauma? How can we forget the trauma of the other in order 'to be free to be ourselves' when such forgetting is experienced as the betrayal of those we love? Rozmarin builds his discussion using both philosophy and a clinical narrative in five richly layered parts.

#### Part I: Freedom and psychoanalysis

The paper's depth comes from the interplay between Rozmarin's use of philosophy to critique psychoanalytic concepts of freedom and subjectivity and then applying lived clinical experience to these same philosophical concepts in an ongoing dialectic. He posits that when the analytic relationship is conceived as an active critical engagement between two subjectivities, then it can act as a 'privileged kind of laboratory, a place where something new appears: that which transpires through the examined living *together* of the thought, ideology and history in which each singular subjectivity, each intersubjective relation and each collectivity are constituted' (p.323).

Rozmarin explains that the 'something new' that emerges from this examined living together is no less than 'new general thought' and new 'subjective possibilities' – in other words, he has identified the *psychoanalytic process* as a privileged site of *cultural transformation*. 'There is no other discipline constituted on the principle of immediate, ongoing critical practice. No philosopher has the gut-wrenching experience of his theory being met with anger or tears' (p.323).

#### Part II: Freedom in Adorno

In this section, Rozmarin employs the critical theory of Theodore Adorno (from the section on 'Freedom' in his work, *Negative Dialectics*) and the philosophical archeology of

Foucault to describe how subjectivity and notions of freedom change with historical shifts in power, government, and what constitutes 'truth'. In place of the power of absolute monarchy and the king's arbitrary rule, the Enlightenment placed self-sufficient 'Reason'. Rather than being subjected to the sovereign's techniques of bodily discipline and punishment, new state technologies created a *self-governing subject* who *internalized* 'an obligation to be normal'. Exterior power that regulates acceptable behavior became an interior power resulting in the pressure to conform to the norms of others. It is at this historical juncture, Rozmarin explains, that the psychoanalytic subject was born (p.325).

Adorno sees the superego as 'the subjective trace of the old king' (p.325), which casts a *spell* over the subject, dimming his/her individual will and consciousness in order to effectively maintain the subject's state of compliance to the norms of society. Adorno realized that a critique of the superego would have to be a critique of *the society that produces* the superego. Adorno claims that psychoanalysis failed to pursue this possibility and instead became a repressive discourse of social control. What is freedom when the subject of psychoanalysis is under the spell of a superego that maintains an internalized pressure to comply with the demands of society for 'normalcy' (these demands being most effectively communicated through the social institution of the family)?

Adorno claims that the idea of a 'pure subjectivity' is a perverted notion that denies the reality of the subject's inseparability from the world. Therefore, any idea of freedom must be conceived of as a *relation* between the subject and others and between the subject and the collective. This is illuminated by Adorno's further reflections on the superego as 'the presence in the subject of all that is other than the subject, of the interests and needs of others, of sociality in general...' (p.327). This expanded notion of the superego points to the possibility of *new forms of freedom*. Rozmarin now clearly elucidates the kind of freedom that he believes can be sought through psychoanalysis:

The potential for freedom lies in the difference between a subject who is conscious of his embeddedness in society and his consequent dependence and responsibility and a subject intent on defying his embeddedness, destined to existence in self-estrangement in a foreign world that is hostile to his pleas (p.328).

Rozmarin passionately asserts that psychoanalysis must not condemn individuals to an illusion of separateness and unquestionable social normativity where the only question that the individual in trouble can ask is 'What's wrong with me?' 'For there to be freedom we must also ask and allow the subject to ask "What's wrong with the world?"' (p. 329).

In this section, Rozmarin writes a moving ten-page account of his work with a woman named Tal. Rozmarin identifies himself as a contemporary relational psychoanalyst and this report demonstrates his commitment to questioning his own subjective involvement in their work without renouncing his asymmetrical ethical responsibility to Tal's suffering. It also documents his critique of the oppressive social discourses that are part of the 'collective history' in which he and Tal are mutually embedded. While the case can be read as a compelling psychoanalytic narrative, it is important to keep in mind that Rozmarin offers it as 'clinical philosophy' (Stern 2011) in order to dialectically engage with philosophical notions of 'freedom' (p.323-24).

The case narrative begins by illuminating one powerful way that parents are instruments of social regulation and *unfreedom*: Tal and Rozmarin each struggle with issues related to gender and sexuality and grew up with parents asking the question 'Why can't you be normal?' Their resistance to social norms came at a cost to each of them – they both left their families in Israel and moved to New York. Rozmarin points out that by resisting the pressure from loved ones to be 'normal', 'the defiance can feel like betrayal of the people and places we love' (p. 336). This introduces the next major theme of the paper: To be is to betray. To live one's life against the grain of parental and collective expectations is experienced as betrayal by both the subject and the family.

Next we learn that this case narrative is not principally about gender trouble. Tal and Rozmarin are both children of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust; each of their families had moved to Israel in time to survive, but the Nazis exterminated all those relatives who had remained in Germany. Tal has bodily symptoms and a dream that point to unformulated intergenerational trauma. Referring to Israeli families who learned of their families' extermination in Germany, Rozmarin writes: 'Their untold burden became collective property... their loss and memories faded into ghosts, lurking in the unspoken, yawning gaps between generations' (p.338).

#### Part IV: Hope in the Present and Time Lost

Such a ghost—the ghost of her maternal family's past—haunts Tal. In order to live a life of her own desires, rather than living her life in memory of her family's ancestral souls, Rozmarin suggests that Tal must engage in 'ruthless forgetting'. 'If Tal has indeed been haunted by the ghosts of the forgotten dead and the forgetting perpetuated by the living, what form of remembrance could release her from the grip of their tormented souls and allow her the freedom to live?' (p.340). Rather, 'to be, she must betray the fullness of what cannot but escape memory' (p.343). Rozmarin emphasizes that we all must acknowledge the guilt of being able to live in the face of the loss and suffering of others.

## Part V: Philosophy in the Analytic Room

In the last part of the paper, Rozmarin reiterates that 'being is always a betrayal' and calls each of us to a new conceptualization of freedom:

'We all live in a spellbound society, in denial of unbearable injustice and violence—each individual who steps into our offices is the bearer of much more trouble than he or she can handle... We must choose whether to resign to living and practicing under the spell, to asking our patients to renounce their concern for others as mere fantasy replaceable with healthy self-servitude, or to embark on a journey of remembrance and recognition, and of critique of things as they are, towards unknown consequences' (p.344).

Rozmarin's paper is a challenging dialogue between philosophical discourse and clinical experiences of freedom. It forcefully demonstrates that freedom can only be understood in the context of intersubjective and historical embeddedness. There is one possible danger that I see in his paper: by using the lived experience of intergenerational survivors of the Nazi Holocaust to illustrate his themes, we as readers with different backgrounds may be seduced into thinking that this paper does not apply to us. We might be tempted to think of the Holocaust only as an isolated event. And yet, genocide is ubiquitous. Other 'forgotten' genocides abound around the world, including the treatment of Native Americans. In the modern era the death toll from genocide is over a hundred million people in scores of countries around the globe (Hinton 2002, p.23).

In the book *Annihilating Difference* (ibid), the anthropologist Scheper-Hughes introduces the concept of a 'genocide continuum' that brings everyday occurrences to our attention. She suggests that everyday acts of micro-genocide are 'conducted in the normative social spaces of public schools, clinics, emergency rooms, hospital wards, nursing homes, court rooms, prisons, detention centers and public morgues' (p. 369). Scheper-Hughes warns that we must be vigilant to the less dramatic, permitted, everyday acts of violence that reduce others to nonpersons, monsters, or to 'things that give structure, meaning and rationale to every day practices of violence' (p.369). While recognizing the risk of diluting the term 'genocide' by using it to describe events of everyday life, she points out the more dangerous risk of failing to recognize the everyday violence enacted by 'ordinary' good enough people. As Adorno might say, we need to be awakened from our 'spell'.

Awareness of the issues Rozmarin raises is crucial, especially in turbulent times such as ours. His efforts to highlight freedom as an ethical relationship to the other comes across with a special urgency both for our practice and our personal lives, and I strongly recommend this paper as essential reading for analysts and therapists.

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