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The Ethics Of Psychoanalysis: A Lacanian Perspective

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One of the most popular terms in psychology today is the adjective “inappropriate.” In every clinic, at every case conference, we hear that “the client presented with inappropriate affect,” “the client was inappropriate,” and so on. This usage warrants reflection. What is appropriate affect? What makes someone's affective state appropriate or inappropriate? And what is it that that person's affect is appropriate to or for?

“Appropriate” is presumably not meant in some platonic sense as a universal, immutable quality or characteristic of an emotion; most psychologists who use this term would not claim, I suspect, that they are saying that manifesting a certain affect is inappropriate in every circumstance, in every single place on earth, in every culture, and in every historical era. Yet they are claiming that, in their specific historical time and place on earth, certain affects are always inappropriate in certain circumstances—in clinics or hospitals, or in the therapeutic setting. If a patient becomes verbally aggressive during a therapy session, many therapists are quick to tax him or her with inappropriate behavior. But isn't it often simply an ordinary transference response, reflecting the way the patient tended to deal with one or both parents, or a negative reaction by the patient to a certain approach to therapy being adopted by the therapist? How can anything that occurs in the therapy setting be considered inappropriate? If the patient throws a vase out the therapist's window, isn't that telling? Isn't it, in fact, telling of what the therapist has not allowed or not brought the patient to express in some other way?

The patient's behavior here could be understood as “acting out”—*not* in the thoroughly degraded sense the term has taken

on in contemporary practice, where it means no more than “acting badly,” but rather in the psychoanalytic sense in which it is not construed as “the patient's fault.” For “acting out” has to do with things the patient finds it impossible or unpleasant to say, or with what the therapist is not enabling the patient to say or come to grips with through speech. Or the patient's behavior here could be understood as resistance, which as **Lacan (1966)** says, is ultimately the analyst's resistance to doing or saying something to keep the analysis talking, and talking about what counts (as he says, “there is no other resistance to analysis than that of the analyst himself,” p. 595). One might say that there are no inappropriate affects in therapy; there are only inappropriate ways of practicing therapy. This is not to deny the existence of people who, regardless of the technique employed, are neither ready nor willing to engage in genuinely therapeutic work. But for those who are ready and willing, there is no such thing as an inappropriate affect-affects simply are.

Terms like “appropriate” and “inappropriate” are signs that a good deal of contemporary psychology has enlisted itself in the service of conventional morality and norms, devoting itself to molding patients' behavior so that it will be appropriate to modern-day working conditions and prevailing values. The patient who displays “appropriate affect” in therapy is thought to be likely to go on to display “appropriate behavior” at home, in the workplace, and in society at large. Psychology reveals, in its ever greater use of such terms, that it is quite thoroughly engaged in the task of making individuals conform to widespread social, cultural, political, and economic norms. As **Lacan (1966)** says in “Science and Truth,” in his usual no-holds-barred way, “psychology has discovered ways to outlive itself by providing services to the technocracy” (p. 859). In his 1959-1960 seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, **Lacan (1992)** asserts that psychology, like a number of the other emerging “human sciences”—such as sociology, anthropology, and so on—has enrolled in the service of goods, has become “a branch of the service of goods” (p. 324), working in the service of a society in which the commodity is king.

In so doing, much of psychotherapeutic practice—not all, of course, for there are notable exceptions—has simply adopted the moral and cultural values of the “society at large,” if indeed there

is such a thing. I imagine that most of you have read enough of Lacan's work to know to what degree he was critical of the fact that the analysts who came to the United States before or during World War II often adapted psychoanalytic practice in such a way as to conform to values then prevalent in American culture. Indeed, **Lacan (1966)** even criticizes Anna Freud, who did not emigrate to America, for referring to such criteria as “the achievement of a higher income” to suggest that an analysis she had conducted had been successful (p. 604). Psychoanalysts themselves began to promise patients social and economic success and to adapt their practice in such a way as to attempt to foster such goals in analysis.

In other words, not just much of psychology, but even much of psychoanalysis seems to have adopted the goal of helping the patient perform better in the society of goods, in our present form of consumer capitalism. The patient must be helped to overcome obstacles standing in the way of improved concentration in the work arena, of getting along with superiors, subordinates, and colleagues, and of getting a bigger piece of the pie for himself or herself, as well as those close to the patient.

A survey was recently conducted at Cornell University regarding the correlation between salary and neuroticism among corporate managers. Those managers perceived to be only slightly more neurotic than average by their coworkers were paid on average \$16,836 less per year, and those perceived to be somewhat more neurotic were paid still less per year—all of which confirms Freud's claim that there is nothing more costly in life than neurosis.¹ Of course, Freud's main concern was not the pragmatic aim of helping the patient earn a bigger piece of the pie. His technique was largely dedicated to the revelation of desire—the uncovering of those wishes the patient had been keeping out of sight and out of mind.

Thus, my first point about the ethics of psychoanalysis is that it concerns the analysand's desire. That desire obviously affects the analysand's performance in every facet of his or her life, but the first task of analysis is to attend to desire itself.

Human desire is very unwieldy, unruly, and unmanageable. First of all, we spend a great deal of time and energy pretending it is not there, pretending that what we want is not really what

we want, keeping our desire out of sight-keeping it from others and from ourselves. If and when it is pointed out to us by others, we vigorously deny its existence.

Second, Lacan teaches us that our desire is such a precious thing to us that when faced with the possibility of its satisfaction, we often run the other way, preferring to remain unsatisfied so as to keep our desire alive-in other words, there is a certain satisfaction in simply going on desiring. Satisfaction of desire has a tendency to make the desire disappear, and we often prefer the tension itself of desire to its satisfaction. Freud refers to this, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1953), as the wish for an unsatisfied wish (pp. 148-149).

Third, the desires we uncover in ourselves in the course of analytic treatment sometimes seem foreign to us, not really our own. As Lacan puts it, our desires are in fact initially the Other's desire: As infants we want what our little brothers and sisters have, even if we would not know what to do with it, and as we grow up, our desire models itself on our parents' desire and on the desire of others around us. That is why we often find ourselves inhabited by the desires of the previous generation, wanting what our parents seem to have wanted, certain configurations of desire being passed on in this way from generation to generation. As we uncover those desires in dreams and fantasies, we may well feel they are alien, foreign, other-not our own. Unconscious desire is foreign desire; it is desire we do not easily recognize as our own. As Lacan (1966) says, "the unconscious is the Other's discourse" (p. 814): It consists of other people's speech about what they wanted. How did their discourse and their desire get inside of us? And how can we get rid of it?

Given the fact that desire is, by its very nature, the Other's desire-given that "desire comes from the Other" (Lacan, 1996, p. 419)-how am I to know what *I* really want? Indeed, who is this "I" whose desire I seek to determine? A good part of the work of analysis involves a sifting of what I myself want from what others around me wanted-their desire may in fact disgust me and yet contain the secret of my own fondest longings. The hope is that I may make certain of the desires that inhabit me my own. While psychoanalysis does not take it as an immediate

aim to change the analysand's desire, an inevitable part of the work of analysis consists in sifting through the desires one is inhabited by and finding one's own way in the terrain laid out in advance by others.

Desire And Guilt

I will now turn to the relationship between desire and guilt. It would seem to be widely accepted that acting on one's desire often brings on guilt. If, for example, my momentary or longstanding desire is to humiliate someone who has humiliated me, and a situation finally presents itself in which I am able to do so, my moral sense of right and wrong may make me feel guilty afterward for having stooped to the morality of "an eye for an eye." Lacan, however, makes a surprising comment about guilt in Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. He claims instead that *guilt arises precisely when I do not act on my desire*-when I let slip by the occasion to express my hostility, when I swallow my pride instead of lashing out.

We have to distinguish here between guilt and regret. Regret may be what I feel after I humiliate this person and start thinking about what the fallout might be-maybe he will try to strike back, maybe what I did will get back to someone I would not want to know about it, maybe I should have done things differently. That does not make me feel guilty-at some level I am still happy about what I did. Guilt is not cut of the same fabric as that. "The only thing one can be guilty of," says **Lacan (1992)**, "is giving up on one's desire" (p. 319).

In this same context, Lacan talks about what leads people to give up on their desire, or to give ground when it comes to their desire-in other words, to give precedence to someone else's desire over their own. Sometimes, he suggests, it is done in order to "do good," that is, with some idea of doing what is right in mind. "Doing things in the name of the good," **Lacan (1992)** says, "and even more in the name of the good of other people, is something that is far from protecting us not only from guilt but also from all kinds of inner catastrophes. To be precise, it doesn't protect us from neurosis and its consequences" (p. 319).

Indeed, as Freud discovered very early on in his work with hysterics, neurosis results precisely from the repeated attempt to squelch one's own desire in order to do good, to do what one believes to be the right thing, to obey the dictates of one's superego. The superego is one of the most paradoxical facets of the human psyche: It plagues those who are most preoccupied with doing the right thing more than those who are not; it is most severe and unrelenting with those whose behavior is the most upright (Freud, 1961, pp. 125-128). As Lacan (1992) says, "Whoever attempts to submit to the moral law sees the demands of his superego grow increasingly fastidious and cruel" (p. 176). In effect, the superego takes pleasure in berating the ego even when the ego is doing as much as possible to keep the id under control. A vicious cycle develops in which some of the id's aggressive energy is satisfied by the superego's attacks on the ego.

A person's supposed desire to do good must then be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion: The person is often deriving at least one supplemental satisfaction from so-called "good works." Let me provide a recent example from one of my analysands. The analysand had for several years viewed a certain man in his PhD program as a "pompous ass" and a "jerk," and fantasized about saying it to his face. The occasion presented itself, the analysand thought about doing so, but then backed away. Later, feeling guilty even though he had not said anything, he claimed that he backed away because it "wouldn't have accomplished anything," but also that he "felt good" that he had been able to control himself—in other words, it allowed him the narcissistic satisfaction of feeling superior to the "jerk." He nevertheless went on to say that he would "never forgive" himself for having missed the opportunity; he intended to take an ostensibly counterintuitive satisfaction in beating himself up forever for not having said anything. Such personal gains clearly throw into question the value of the supposedly "morally superior" solution of backing away. The guilt the analysand felt about this outcome need not be seen as owing to his having had "evil thoughts" of insulting his fellow student, but rather to having given up on his own desire, having shied away from a long-awaited confrontation.

If there is an ethical injunction to be drawn out here in the

psychoanalytic context, it is “Avoid guilt; it leads to neurosis!” Do not act in accordance with what you believe to be the good of your fellow man or woman; act in accordance with your own desire. For your guilt disappears *not* when your therapist hugs you and repeats over and over that “it’s not your fault” (what Robin Williams does with his “patient” in *Good Will Hunting*). As nice as that might feel momentarily, guilt only truly disappears through a kind of human action, through a lifelong approach to acting on the basis of your own desire.

It should be kept in mind that Lacan is not talking about clinical structures in which guilt does not enter the picture and in which the analysand never feels constrained by any moral strictures whatsoever; this discussion does not apply to psychopaths, for example.

In many respects, Lacan is doing no more here than restating what **Freud (1961)** says in Chapter 7 of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Freud asserts that when someone gives up on satisfying a certain drive, such as an aggressive impulse, he or she nevertheless feels guilty because the wish to give in to that impulse persists in the mind and the superego takes cognizance of it. Freud adds that the energy of the unsatisfied drive is then transferred to the superego, which uses it against the ego. This economic principle leads Freud to conclude that “we should be tempted to defend the paradoxical statement that conscience is the result of instinctual renunciation” (pp. **128-129**). Stated a bit more simply, guilt feelings result from giving up on one’s drives; a guilty conscience is the result of giving ground when it comes to one’s drives.

Lacan’s conclusion that “guilt results when you give up on your desire” is obviously very close to Freud’s. Indeed, Freud’s formulation reminds us that **Lacan (1996)** later modifies his conclusion, essentially saying that guilt results when you do not pursue the satisfaction of your drives. Lacan had postulated that human desire tends to *avoid* satisfaction in order to go on desiring, and thus his shift in the early to mid-1960s to a concern with the drives essentially marks a renewed emphasis on *satisfaction* itself. We might say that, unlike Freud, Lacan seems to make a prescription out of it: “Don’t give up on your desire,” or more precisely, “Don’t give up on drive satisfaction.”

Reality And “The Good”

When Lacan tells us not to act in accordance with what we believe to be the good of our fellow man or woman, it is similar to the injunction he formulates in Seminar VIII, *Transference* (Lacan, 1991), regarding the analyst's role. He says that the analyst must not aim at what he or she considers to be the analysand's own good, but rather at the analysand's greater Eros. Eros is obviously a much broader term than desire, including love, pleasure, and the satisfaction of the drives. The general idea is thus that treatment conducted to achieve what the analyst believes to be for the good of the analysand will always be limited by the analyst's own biases, beliefs, prejudices, and personal perspectives (whether political, religious, or theoretical).

It is, after all, elementary prudence for the analyst to conduct treatment in accordance with what he or she knows something about, and Lacan suggests that the only thing the analyst, like Socrates, can rightfully claim to know something about is Eros, human desire, or to put it differently, the three passions—love, hate, and ignorance, the latter including the many ways in which we try to avoid knowing anything about love and hate. It would seem to be sheer prudence for the analyst to direct the treatment for the analysand's greater Eros. (As Lacan [1991] says, we are not there for the patient's good, but “in order that he love” [p. 25].)

When it comes to the analysand's good, the analyst is no better equipped to know it than the analysand's girlfriend, coach, priest, or ballet instructor. After all, *one's good*—if, in fact, any sort of coherent account of the good can be given—is always correlated with *one's world*, and what the analyst knows is the world of the analysand's discourse, not the social-economic world the analysand functions within. At least, the analyst knows it little better than those who live with the analysand day in and day out. That has not stopped certain analysts from believing they are there to help their poor analysands stop living in a fantasy world and see reality more clearly, in their terminology, acquire better “reality contact.” In many cases, the contemporary therapist's notion of “reality contact” seems no more profound than shaking the client and telling him to “Wake up and smell the coffee!”

This is a far cry from Freud's subtle and complex distinction between the pleasure principle-which, in its search for instant gratification, is inclined to short-circuit in daydreaming and hallucination-and the reality principle which, as Lacan shows in Seminar VII, has to do with taking notice of signs of our own internal states. We become aware of what is going on inside of ourselves by hearing ourselves speak, react, cry out, and so on. The reality we come into contact with, according to Freud's texts, is our own psychological reality, i. e., the reality of the way in which perceptions and language mesh in the psyche. I will not go into the details of Freud's description of the reality principle in "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (Freud, 1966) and in Chapter 7 of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, or Lacan's elaborate discussion of it in Seminar VII, as it would take us too far afield here. But one thing that becomes clear upon close examination is that it is not about the testing of external reality in some sort of direct, unmediated way, but rather about getting clues about what is going on within our own psyche by reading the *speech* that comes out of our own mouths and out of other peoples' mouths.

The point is that Freud never said, to the best of my knowledge, that the analyst, by having gone through his or her own analysis, sees the external world more clearly or has better reality contact than the analysand, and Lacan says that we all continue, even after analysis, to see reality through the lenses of our fantasy, changed as that fantasy may be by the end of analysis. Rather, what the analyst should have acquired, by going through his or her own analysis, is a better sense of his or her own psychological reality-that is, of the desires and drives that inhabit him or her, and how they affect work with analysands.

Analysis does not enjoin us to "take our desires for reality," in the sense of the 1960s graffiti slogan, but rather to *come to grips with the specific reality of desire*. It enjoins us to stop putting our desires aside, stop putting them on hold so as to get on with our projects in the workaday world. The reality we deal with in analysis and explore is that of the unconscious desires that are the mainspring of our actions and moods, unbeknown to ourselves: "the reality that is there at our very core" (Lacan, 1992, p. 26). This is not an injunction made by the analyst to the analysand, of course, which the analysand might then not live up to and about

)which the analysand might be accused of not trying hard enough; it is not a voluntaristic principle that one can execute if one just wants to strongly enough. Instead, there are very real constraints that are usually stopping the analysand from acting on his or her desire.

Lacan moves away from the term “reality,” introducing the term “real,” which he defines as that which always returns to the same place. In psychical reality, the real is what we keep coming back to over and over, keep acting on over and over, or keep shying away from without knowing why, and without being able to do anything about it-the real is our symptomatic behaviors and affects that are always based on the same unconscious desire, love, or hatred, the same unconscious motive or motor force. That is the only kind of reality the analyst is equipped to bring the analysand into contact with.

This implies an ethics in psychoanalysis of grappling with psychical reality, of coming to terms with unconscious desire in all its ambiguities, ambivalences, and aporias. Lacan takes this at least one step further when he explores the paradoxical fact that our pleasure is often greater when it involves a transgression, the breaking of a law. This it is not simply a pleasure that falls under the pleasure principle, but a pleasure that must overcome an internal obstacle, a pleasure that goes beyond the pleasure principle. In this realm, we may indeed pursue courses that are not at all pleasurable, in the ordinary sense of the term, but that nevertheless provide a kind of satisfaction Lacan terms “jouissance”-a satisfaction taken in doing things we know are supposed to be “bad” for us or for society.

Lacan (1992) refers to this as the “paradox of jouissance” (p. 193), reminding us that it is a paradox Socrates tried to get around by suggesting that it is impossible to know the good and not act in accordance with it-in other words, Socrates tried to resolve the paradox by suggesting that such a person's *knowledge* of the good must be deficient-and that Aristotle tried to resolve by suggesting that such a person must make an error of judgment, not regarding the universal statement, “it is good to taste what is sweet,” but rather regarding the particular statement “this particular thing is sweet.” Therein must lie the error introduced into the moral syllogism, according to Aristotle.

Analysts must not believe they can dispense with the paradox of jouissance by simply taxing the subject who operates in this paradoxical way with a label of “perversion,” for this modus operandi is at the very crux of a great deal of neurotic behavior-as, for example, in the case of the neurotic who speeds down the road precisely when there is nowhere pressing to go, who shoplifts precisely when he or she has plenty of money, and so on.

This paradox has to do with the intimate relationship between desire and the Law, a relationship Lacan explores at great length in his work. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, he cites Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans 7:7, where we see that the relationship between sin and the Law was already apparent to the early Church fathers: “I can only know sin by means of the Law. Indeed, I would never have thought to covet had the Law not said ‘Thou shalt not covet.’” The very idea of sin and the attractiveness of doing what is sinful are themselves created by the Law. There is no desire, strictly speaking, without prohibition. To call perverted or morally debase patients who are particularly attracted by the very thing they cannot have, by the very thing that is forbidden or illegal, is simply to ignore the very nature of desire.

The Law can, in fact, be understood to bring into being the only thing that might correspond in psychoanalysis to what is called the Sovereign Good in philosophy: the supreme good constituted by the Law that prohibits incest-Mom. **Lacan (1992)** never uses the term “good” in his own conception of psychoanalytic ethics, but says if there is such a thing as the Good in psychoanalysis, it's Mom (p. 70). And she is brought into being as the Sovereign Good precisely when our access to her is denied. Lacan gives her a couple of other nicknames as well: “the Thing,” suggesting that she is the most important thing, *das Ding* (“the Thing” in German), found in a number of Freud's texts, and even “the Freudian Thing.”

Given that we desire precisely what is prohibited, how can psychoanalysis claim to aim at a total reconciliation or harmonization of our desires? If our most deeply rooted desire is for what we cannot have, how can psychoanalysis blithely offer solutions to the dilemma of human desire?

Freud and certain other analysts looked to sublimation as a way to satisfy that strongest of all desires with a different object.

Freud provides several different accounts of sublimation, and Lacan suggests that sublimation involves elevating an ordinary object to the status of the Thing. Sublimation is a theoretically thorny area, but an important one if we are to avoid falling into the rut of the so-called “solutions” to the paradox of human desire and satisfaction offered up by many contemporary psychologists and psychoanalysts. I will consider that rut now, and take up Lacan's critique of it in his work spanning the 1960s and 1970s.

Harmony Between The Sexes

Despite Freud's pessimism regarding the perfectibility of human relations, many analysts return again and again to a belief in an achievable, perfect harmony between the sexes. This notion corresponds, in the history of thought, to what might be called a *prescientific* belief, and differs considerably from knowledge in a modern scientific context. Psychoanalysts, Lacan claims, keep slipping into all kinds of prescientific constructs, all kinds of simplistic forms of pseudoscience and age-old philosophical notions.

Antiquity's view of the world was based on a fantasy, **Lacan (1998)** suggests—the fantasy of a preexisting harmony between mind (*nous*) and the world (p. 128), between what one thinks and the world one thinks about, between the relations between the words with which one talks about the world and the relations existing in the world itself. Modern science has rather decisively broken with this notion, presuming, if anything, the inadequacy of our preexisting language to deal with nature and the need for new concepts, new words, new formulations.

The fantasy that characterized antiquity's view of the world goes quite far, according to **Lacan (1998)**: It is—and I do not think he was the first to say so—all about copulation (p. 82), all an elaborate metaphor for relations between the sexes. Form penetrates or inseminates matter; form is active and matter passive; there *is* a relationship, a fundamental relationship, between form and matter, active and passive, the male principle and the female principle. All knowledge at that time participated, in Lacan's words, “in the fantasy of an inscription of the sexual link” (p. 82), in the fantasy that there is such a thing as a sexual relationship

(Lacan emphatically denies that there is such a thing; for an explanation of what he means by that see **Fink, 1995**) and that this link or relationship is verified all around us. The relation between knowledge and the world was based on a conception of copulation.

While it might seem unthinkable that such a fantasy could be at work in psychoanalysis today, the fact is that it is alive and well. A great many analysts and psychotherapists fervently believe that a harmonious relationship between the sexes *must be* possible. This view is based on what is thought to be a teleological perspective in Freud's work that supposedly grows out of the "progression" of libidinal stages known as the oral, anal, and genital stages. Whereas in the oral and anal stages, the child relates to partial objects, not to another person as a whole, in the genital stage, claim certain post-Freudian analysts, the child relates to another person as a whole person, not as a collection of partial objects.

I do not think you could find any such claim in Freud's work, but a thick volume was devoted to such notions in France in the mid-1950s, *La psychanalyse d'aujourd'hui* ("Contemporary Psychoanalysis"), in which a whole generation of analysts put forward the idea that when one successfully reaches the genital stage, a perfectly harmonious state is reached in which one takes one's sexual partner as a subject, not an object, as a Kantian end-in-himself or -herself, not as a means to an end. The crowning achievement of this stage is that one becomes what they call "oblative" -one becomes truly altruistic, capable of doing things for another person without any thought of the advantages it may bring to oneself. (I have already discussed the dubious moral virtues of doing things for the good of another person.)

Had that generation of analysts ever seen anything of the sort? It would be hard to believe. Nevertheless, those analysts did not hesitate to postulate such a perfect state of harmony between the sexes and of the total elimination of narcissism and selfishness, and to push genital relations as selfless, and oral and anal relations as selfish in their work with their analysands. Even though no one had ever seen such a thing, *it had to exist*.

In other words, it was a fantasy distorting psychoanalytic theory and practice. A similar fantasy is at work in contemporary psychology, at least in its most popular forms: Consider the by

now absolute best-selling pop-psychology book of all times, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. The title itself seems promising, suggesting that there is *nothing that predestines men and women for complementary relations*. But everything in the book after the first two chapters is designed to help the reader overcome difference and establish *the oneness (or One) that has to be*, the harmonious unity that the age-old fantasy requires.

Lacan's goal is to eliminate all such fantasies from psychoanalytic theory and practice. That aim could be understood as part of the ethics of psychoanalysis—the elimination of such fantasies, especially insofar as they hamper the subject's attainable Eros.

This fantasy on the part of the analyst derives from the notion of the harmony of the circle or sphere, that is, that the circle or sphere was the most perfect, complete of shapes. In Plato's *Symposium*, Aristophanes puts forward the view that once we were all spherical beings lacking in nothing, but Zeus split us in two, and now we are all in search of our other half. We divided beings yearn to be grafted back together, failing which we at least find relief in each other's arms (thanks to Zeus having taken pity on us and turned our private parts around to the inside). As Aristophanes says, “Love thus seeks to refind our early estate, endeavoring to combine two into one and heal the human sore.” Love is what can make good the primordial split, and harmony can be achieved thereby.

A great deal of ancient cosmology and astronomy up until Kepler's time was based on the fantasy of the perfection of the sphere, and much “scientific” work was devoted to saving the truth (*salva veritate*) by showing how the noncircular phenomena could be explained on the basis of movement in accordance with that shape of shapes, the circle. Epicycles were employed even by Copernicus, and thus the Copernican revolution was not as Copernican as all that. All Copernicus said was that if we put the sun at the center of the world, we can simplify the calculations, which in that case meant something like reducing the number of epicycles from sixty to thirty.

According to Lacan, it is not such a move, which keeps entirely intact the notions of center and periphery, that can constitute a revolution: Things keep revolving just as before. It is Kepler's introduction of a not so perfect shape, the ellipse, that

shakes things up a bit, problematizing the notion of the center. The still more important move after that, as Lacan sees it, is the idea that if a planet moves toward a point, a focus, that is empty, it is not so easy to describe that as turning or circling, as it had been called in the past: Maybe it is something more like falling. That is where Newton comes in. Instead of saying what everyone else had been saying for millennia-“it turns”-Newton says, “it falls.”

Despite this Newtonian revolution, **Lacan (1998)** claims that for most of us our “world view... remains perfectly spherical” (p. 42). Despite the Freudian revolution that removes consciousness from the center of our view of ourselves, it ineluctably slips back to the center, or a center is ineluctably reestablished somewhere. The “decentering” psychoanalysis requires is difficult to sustain, Lacan comments (p. 42), and analysts keep slipping back into the old center/periphery way of thinking. Hence the need for another “subversion,” another subversion that certainly will not be the last.

Conclusion

The analyst must thus, from a Lacanian vantage point, direct the treatment *not* in accordance with some preconceived notion of the analysand's good or best interest, but to facilitate the analysand's greater Eros. And the analyst must elaborate and continually reelaborate a psychoanalytic theory that attempts to free itself to an ever greater extent from a world view that is always and inevitably based, at least in part, on fantasies-some of which are older than others. Those fantasies, constitutive of the *Weltanschauung* the analyst brings with him or her to the therapy, are part of the countertransference baggage the analyst brings to the treatment, along with the rest of his or her biases and prejudices. For countertransference is, as Lacan defines it, “the sum total of the analyst's biases, passions, and difficulties, or even of his *inadequate information*, at any given moment” in the analysis (Lacan, **1966**, p. 225).

Analysts must continually reexamine their own viewpoints to see to what degree their approach to treatment is guided or skewed by modern-day and age-old illusions. This requires an ongoing reflection upon psychoanalytic theory and praxis.

I have obviously not, in this short paper, in any way exhausted Lacan's views on ethics-in fact, I have barely scratched the surface. Lacan devotes a great deal of attention to further paradoxes of human desire and jouissance, such as the death drive, transgression, and the conflict between desire and the drives; he explores the nature of “evil” and sublimation in detail; he reviews a number of different ethical systems, including those of Aristotle, Kant, Sade, and Bentham; and he provides certain insights into racism and sexism with his notion that what we tolerate least well in other people is their own particular way of obtaining jouissance.

If Lacan provides anything by way of a possible “solution” to the paradox of human desire and satisfaction, I would argue that it is not via sublimation, but rather via a changed relation between desire and the drives in each of us, for desire usually serves to inhibit the satisfaction of the drives and that inhibition has to be loosened if satisfaction is to be achieved (see [Fink, 1997](#), for further elucidation of that solution). This paper has provided a taste of Lacan's approach to a psychoanalytic ethics.

Notes

¹ The survey was discussed in *Business Week*, July 27, 1998.

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