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The Place of Psychoanalysis in the History of Ethics

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Abstract

Psychoanalytic writing rarely features on university ethics curricula, so the idea that psychoanalysis has a place in the history of ethics may be a surprise. The aim of the paper is to show that it should not be. The strategy is to sketch in outline an enduring line of inquiry in the history of ethics, namely the Platonic-Aristotelian investigation of the relationship between human nature, human excellence and the human good, and to suggest that psychoanalysis exemplifies it too. But since the suggestion, once made, seems not only true but obviously true, the paper spends some time exploring why the place of psychoanalysis in the history of ethics has so often been overlooked, before developing the outline more fully and offering detailed reasons as to why psychoanalysis fits it. One consequence is that Freudian and (in a sense explained) 'relational' variants of psychoanalysis continue the Platonic-Aristotelian line of inquiry in interestingly different ways.

Keywords

Aristotle; Freud; Winnicott; Bowlby; moral psychology; character; psychoanalysis; virtue ethics

1.

Psychoanalytic writing rarely features on university ethics curricula,¹ so the idea that psychoanalysis has a place in the history of ethics may come as a surprise. By the end of the paper I hope to have shown that it ought not to. The strategy is simple: to sketch in outline an enduring line of inquiry in

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¹ An exception is the Cambridge English Faculty, where Freud was (and perhaps still is) regularly studied as part of a paper called 'The English Moralists' [*sic*].

the history of ethics, and then to argue – again and of necessity, only in outline – that psychoanalysis exemplifies it too. Indeed once the two outlines are superimposed, my intended conclusion seems not just true but obviously true, so I also attempt to explain why the place of psychoanalysis in the history of ethics has so often been overlooked.

By ‘psychoanalysis’ I mean exclusively psychoanalytic *theory*, so even if psychoanalysis, as a therapy, has a connection with ethics because both practitioners and theorists have been concerned with the ethics of the analyst-patient relation,² that’s not a connection I want to make anything of. I also want to stress that I don’t regard psychoanalytic theory as a single theory. On the contrary, I shall make quite a lot of the theoretical differences between some central commitments of Freud’s psychoanalysis – what I shall call ‘Freudian psychoanalysis’ for short – and ‘relational’ psychoanalysis, a term I shall explain shortly.³ My claim, however, is that there is a place in the history of ethics for both varieties of theory: the differences affect the way each variety relates to that history, but not the fact that they do. Of course there is more to psychoanalysis than just these two varieties of it,⁴ but if I can make the claim out for these two, I suspect it will be clear enough how a place in the history of ethics is to be found for further varieties as well.

There’s also a great deal more to the history of ethics than anything psychoanalysis might be thought to play a part in, and perhaps more than one place in the history of ethics for psychoanalysis.⁵ The place I have in mind for psychoanalysis, however, is a quite particular one and I call attention to it because the salience in philosophy’s recent history of the themes which occupy it makes the almost total absence of psychoanalysis from the philosophical discussion all the more striking. I have in mind a long tradition of

² See Judy Kantowitz, *Writing about Patients* (New York: Other Press, 2006); cf. Jennifer Radden, *The Virtuous Psychiatrist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³ The term is due to Stephen Mitchell, *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1988). For helpful introductions, see Mitchell and, on the British ‘relational’ writers, Eric Rayner, *The Independent Mind in British Psychoanalysis* (London: Free Association, 1990).

⁴ For example I have nothing whatsoever to say about Jungian psychoanalysis, and no excuse except my own ignorance and the length of time it would take to remedy it. On the other hand most of what I say here applies not only to psychoanalysis in the official acceptance of the term – i.e. theories produced by members of the world’s various Psychoanalytical Associations – but also to the theories associated with a range of schools of psychodynamic psychotherapy outside the institutions of psychoanalysis.

⁵ Philip Rieff’s *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) is explicit about Freud’s standing as a moral thinker, but it is concerned mainly with his (first-order) ‘ethic of honesty.’

thought about the relationship between human nature, the good life for man, and human goodness; that is, about the relationship between the kinds of creatures we are, the kind of life that's good for us, and what it is for a human being to be a good one of its kind. Though hard to pigeonhole – it overlaps 'axiology' (the theory of the good) and moral psychology – it's also very familiar, and corresponds to part of what is known as 'virtue ethics,' though for various reasons I shall avoid using this term again.⁶ For the sake of a label, I'll refer to this tradition of thought as 'the great tradition' in moral psychology,⁷ since such a number of significant moral philosophers – including, in their very different ways, at least Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hume, Mill, Nietzsche, and Bradley – have contributed to it. The outlines of Freudian psychoanalysis I must assume are familiar.⁸ Relational psychoanalysis on the other hand is harder to sum up neatly, partly because there is no one pre-eminent relational theorist. It is exemplified by certain British writers of the mid-twentieth century, who may be less well-known to philosophers – D.W. Winnicott, W.R.D. Fairbairn, John Bowlby, and other "Independents" – and also by some of their forerunners (e.g. Ian Suttie) and descendants (Charles Rycroft, Peter Lomas), by some independent-minded Kleinians (Wilfred Bion, Margot Waddell) and Freudians (Hans Loewald), and by some contemporary American theorists (e.g. Heinz Kohut, Stephen Mitchell).⁹ I intend this list to be typical, not

⁶ Chief among these is that the phrase 'virtue ethics,' thanks in part to the usage of its friends but mostly to that of its foes, has come to be associated with a distinctive ethical theory, with its own distinctive answer to the question what it's morally right, in some given circumstances, for an agent to do. But some of the great revivalists of the Platonic-Aristotelian 'great tradition' – including Anscombe – began their revival precisely because this was a question they wanted *not* to have to ask. So, handy though it might be if the phrase had not been appropriated in this way, it is surely the wrong way now to guide the reader's mind to the 'great tradition.'

⁷ I borrow the term, of course, from F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

⁸ But see for example Sigmund Freud, 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis,' *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), vol. XXII, pp. 3-158; and Jonathan Lear, *Freud* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁹ See D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (London: Karnac, 1990) and *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985); W.R.D. Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); John Bowlby, *A Secure Base* (London: Routledge, 1988) and *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Charles Rycroft, *Psychoanalysis and Beyond* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985); Peter Lomas, *True and False Experience* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), and *Doing Good?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); W.R. Bion, *Second Thoughts* (London: Karnac, 1984); Margot Waddell, *Inside Lives* (London:

exhaustive. One basic thought which connects these writers and which explains the 'relational' label is that human beings by nature seek relatedness to others as an end in itself, not as a means to something else (for example, food or the release of 'instinctual tension'). They are connected also by the importance they assign to the quality of our relations with others in the theory both of the proper development of our natures and of the good life for us. More specifically, 'relational' theorists hold that our relations with others play a part in the proper development of our natures precisely insofar as our relations with others – though they do not put it like this – are formative of our powers of practical reason, and it is in this rationalist conception of human nature that the community of outlook between relational psychoanalysis and the 'great tradition' in moral psychology is most strikingly to be found.

2.

To say psychoanalysis has a place in the history of ethics is to say it *is* ethics, that is to say, that it is at least in part philosophy. But it is important not to overstate this claim. I don't want to claim that psychoanalysis is *only* philosophy, or even that that part of it which *is* philosophy is only moral philosophy: if psychoanalysis is in part philosophy at all, then some of it is surely philosophy of mind. I do want to claim, however, that psychoanalysis – both the Freudian and the relational varieties – is in part a continuation of the 'great tradition' I have identified, but under a different name.

The claim that psychoanalysis is in part moral philosophy belongs with the question of 'the status of psychoanalysis.' The correct approach to that question is surely that since psychoanalytic utterance is highly various – compare a particular analyst's interpretation of a particular dream; the claim that a certain kind of psychological problem in adulthood has this or that infantile cause; and the claim that guilt is fear, but with an internal rather than an external object – no one-size-fits-all answer to it stands a chance of being right.¹⁰ So the standard answers (such as 'it's hermeneutics'

Duckworth, 1998); Hans Loewald, *Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1978), and 'The Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis,' in P. Buckley (ed.), *Essential Papers on Object Relations* (New York/London: New York University Press, 1986); Heinz Kohut and Ernest Wolf, 'The Disorders of the Self and their Treatment: An Outline,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 59 (1978); Stephen Mitchell, *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis*.

¹⁰ I take this to be one moral of Brian Farrell's *The Standing of Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

and ‘it’s science’) can be at best only partially true (and if true, true of different parts). This leaves some theoretical room for yet another answer – that it’s moral philosophy – to be partially true too. Nor should the fact that psychoanalysis contains some general claims about human nature (e.g. ‘the child has an innate drive to seek out others’¹¹) disqualify it as moral philosophy. Once upon a time Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* was regarded as too ‘descriptive’ to count properly as moral philosophy, on the grounds that it too contains such claims, but our conception of what to count as moral philosophy has I take it simply shifted (or shifted back). However, I’m not going to argue any further in the abstract that psychoanalysis is in part moral philosophy. Rather I am going to show that theoretical concerns that are central to the ‘great tradition’ in ethics are also central to psychoanalysis, from which it follows that psychoanalysis is (partly) ethics, and thus belongs to its history.

3.

The psychoanalyst Hans Loewald said in the 1970s that ‘the psychoanalytic process, and psychoanalytic findings and theory, are ... concerned with man as a moral being.’¹² More recently Margot Waddell has described the subject matter of psychoanalysis as ‘the moral and emotional growth of the self, the character.’¹³ And Peter Lomas writes that the question with which prospective patients arrive for therapy – and a question which by implication therefore has to be addressed by psychoanalytic theory – is (even if they do not put it quite this way) Socrates’ ‘how should I live?’¹⁴ These have been among the central preoccupations of the ‘great tradition’ since Plato and Aristotle. The three psychoanalytic writers are fair representatives of the relational strand in psychoanalytic thought. Psychoanalysis, at least of the relational variety, and moral psychology as exemplified by the ‘great tradition’ would therefore seem to be one and the same inquiry.

But if psychoanalysis belongs to the ‘great tradition,’ and indeed according to some seems so obviously to belong to it, why hasn’t the fact been more widely noticed? The idea that psychoanalysis has affinities with

¹¹ Lomas, *True and False Experience*, p. 67.

¹² See Loewald, *Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual*, pp. 5-6. He goes on ‘It would be false to claim that it is a biological science in any traditional sense of the word “biology”.’

¹³ Waddell, *Inside Lives*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Lomas, *Doing Good?*, p. 3.

ethics is not unheard of within philosophy, but those who have made the connection – Richard Wollheim or Jonathan Lear, for example¹⁵ – are outliers, in addition to which, where affinities have been noted, these are almost invariably with Freud: ‘relational’ variants of psychoanalysis where the affinities are arguably at their most obvious tend to go unnoticed.¹⁶ I’m going to suggest various explanations, but I will say in advance that I don’t think any of these explanations provide a good reason. It is only thanks to confusion that more has not been made of the connection already.

One possible explanation is the idea, familiar since Anscombe’s ‘Modern Moral Philosophy,’¹⁷ that morality tended for most of the twentieth century – that is, for most of the lifetime of psychoanalysis – to be theorized as a set of prohibitions and commands, and the questions about it that were of interest to philosophy tended to be about how to identify these prohibitions and commands, and about their foundation. But if there is an ethical dimension to psychoanalysis, it more obviously concerns not the search for a criterion of right action or its meta-ethical standing but *how one should live* or the *good life for man*. It is possible therefore that the once-prevalent view of the subject matter of ethics prevented these issues, and thus the concerns of psychoanalysis, from being acknowledged as ethical at all. But while this might have been a good explanation when Anscombe’s article came out, more than 50 years ago, it is no longer so. Philosophy has been strongly interested in the kinds of ethical question psychoanalysis raises for a while now, without apparently noticing that psychoanalysis is interested in them too.

A second possible explanation, or family of explanations, connects with the long-standing aspiration of psychoanalysis to be ‘value-free.’ But it is hard at first to pinpoint why this should have helped to mask psychoanalytic theory’s ethical content, and for this reason I’ll spend some time discussing some false starts. The aspiration to value-freedom went along with

¹⁵ See Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1984) and, more especially, ‘Bradley and the British School of Psychoanalysis,’ in Wollheim, *The Mind and Its Depths* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1987); Jonathan Lear *Aristotle: the Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and, more explicitly, *Love and its Place in Nature* (London: Faber, 1992). See also Ilham Dilman, *Freud and Human Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) and its companion volumes; John Cottingham, *Philosophy and the Good Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Pauline Chazan, *The Moral Self* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁶ The exceptions here are Chazan and, more complicatedly, Lear and Dilman, who present strongly ‘relational’ readings of Freud himself.

¹⁷ Anscombe, G.E.M., ‘Modern Moral Philosophy,’ in her *Collected Philosophical Papers vol. III: Ethics, Religion and Politics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

psychoanalysis' view of itself as a branch of science or medicine. But the expression of the aspiration is itself muddled, because to affirm an aspiration to so-called value-freedom is partly a way of affirming an *ethical* commitment – one, moreover, which there is no reason to think is a proprietary commitment of natural science – to pursue truth without prejudice, objectively. All the same, even once we recognize the ethical commitment expressed by the 'value-free' slogan, we are no closer to showing why the *subject matter* of psychoanalysis is ethical any more than we are to showing the subject matter of astronomy is ethical, so it is beside the point here. A second way of understanding the aspiration to value-freedom is as a commitment – again an ethical one, of course – within psychoanalytic *practice*, to tolerance or the suspension of judgment: thus Freud encouraged patients to report dreams, fantasies, and so on about which they might well feel guilty or ashamed without fear of condemnation. This is a laudable commitment perhaps, but again irrelevant to the ethical subject matter or otherwise of psychoanalytic theory.

However, the psychoanalytic commitment to tolerance or non-condemnation has sometimes been based – though there's no very good reason why it should have been – not on the value of tolerance but on the supposedly shaky credentials of morality. This gets us closer to something like an explanation. Freud's work is pervaded both by doubts about the credentials of morality and by a narrow construction of morality as a set of prohibitions and commands very similar to that which Anscombe identified in 'modern' ethics. As to the narrowness, insofar as Freud has much to say about 'moral development,' he seems to think the topic concerns only the development of the superego, the internal agency responsible for enforcing moral prohibitions and – as he would see it – other curbs on instinctual gratification.¹⁸ As to the doubts – and not counting Freud's skepticism about the divine, though it implies skepticism about morality insofar as morality is presumed to be of divine origin – Freud seems to have thought that morality is, despite the apparently basic claims it makes on us, merely an instrument of something else. As Wollheim has put it, morality is (for Freud):

in its origins and throughout our lives, simply a price that we pay ... for relief from external fear. We are frightened in childhood, we interiorize the fear by substituting an internal [object, i.e. the superego] for an external object, we

¹⁸ See for example, S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), vol. XIX, pp. 3-68.

placate the internal representative of the fear by the sacrifice of instinctual gratification, the gain in tranquillity outweighs even the crippling loss of satisfaction, but the sacrifice has nothing independently to recommend it.¹⁹

Through Freud, this combination of a narrow construction of what morality is with skepticism about it has come to permeate psychoanalysis much more widely. Winnicott, for example, despises the idea of ‘moral education,’²⁰ not because he despises the idea of the proper development of human nature, which in an alternative idiom is just what the phrase ‘moral education’ picks out: on the contrary, this is what Winnicott’s version of psychoanalysis is all about. He despises it because he sees it as coterminous with the mere enforcement of a set of dos and don’ts.²¹ The idea that asking how one should live might also belong to the subject matter of ethics thus does not cross his mind; the question tends instead to be classified as a question about ‘personal’ or ‘emotional’ development, understood as an entirely separate matter.

This brings me to a third, also ill-founded, understanding of what it is for psychoanalysis to be value-free. Conceiving morality narrowly *and* doubting the solidity of the claims morality makes on us is a recipe for confusion. For it is then but a short step to the claim that the ideas in the light of which skepticism about morality is advanced – human freedom, perhaps, or the full development of our natural capacities, or a life in which our appetites are satisfied rather than frustrated – are not ethical at all, but ‘scientific,’ ‘statements of fact,’ or the like. This is the origin in psychoanalysis, I think, of the confused idea that *because* it investigates (let us say) the kind of life which would constitute the fullest development of human potentialities, it counts as a ‘value-free’ inquiry. (Cf. a parallel confusion in Marx.²²) But the very opposite is true: it is just because psychoanalysis is concerned with these questions that it is concerned with the ethical.

Here, then, we have some explanation of why the affinities of psychoanalysis with what philosophers pursue under the banner of the theory of the good and moral psychology have not been more widely recognized

¹⁹ *The Thread of Life*, pp. 204-5.

²⁰ See his essay ‘Moral Education,’ in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*.

²¹ Lomas, by contrast, urges us to connect the notion of the moral not with ‘duties and penalties’ but, following the lead of Julia Annas in *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), with ‘attractive notions like those of goodness and worth,’ *Doing Good?*, pp. 3-4.

²² See Michael Rosen, ‘The Marxist Critique of Morality and the Theory of Ideology,’ in E. Harcourt (ed.), *Morality, Reflection, and Ideology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

within psychoanalysis – and note that though the three psychoanalytic writers I cited at the beginning of this section all explicitly articulated concerns which are clearly shared with the great tradition in ethics, only one (Lomas) was explicit *that* they are shared. But this scarcely excuses the fact that these affinities have not been more widely recognized by philosophers. It is as if psychoanalysis had hung up a sign outside its door saying ‘no ethics here’ and philosophy, for once in its life, had taken somebody’s word for it.

4.

I want now to justify the claim that psychoanalysis is a continuation of the ‘great tradition’ under another name by saying more about what I take the outlines of the great tradition to be – that is, rashly no doubt, by giving a thumbnail sketch of 2,500 years of moral philosophy. This will also enable me to be explicit about the distinctively different ways in which Freudian and relational psychoanalysis come to take their places within it.

The developmental theories of different philosophers in the tradition of course differ from one another in content while also overlapping significantly. The best way to characterize the tradition is thus to put together a schema, such that all contributors to the tradition instantiate most of its features (though not invariably the same ones), and some contributors instantiate all of them. So first, there is a division (usually tripartite) of the powers or faculties of the human mind, always including reason and the power of choice for reasons. Secondly, there is a developmental norm, be it (for example) harmony of the soul (Plato), self-realization (Bradley), the perfection of our natures (Mill), or the fullest possible development of the potentialities with which we are by nature distinctively endowed (Aristotle). Thirdly, this development is associated with human well-being, or satisfaction, or *eudaimonia*: for our natures to develop in accordance with this norm is *good for us*.²³ Fourthly, the attaining of this norm is identified with

²³ This is a commitment shared by Kant, as long as ‘our natures’ is allowed to include our rational natures as Kant conceived of them, as I think it should. Obviously the term ‘our natures’ is ambiguous: it could either mean ‘what we are like’ or it could mean ‘those features we possess thanks to belonging to the order of nature.’ If it means the second, then clearly our rational natures as Kant conceived of them do not belong to our natures. But the commonalities between Kant and, say, Aristotle seem to me so important that it is worth using ‘our natures’ in the first of the two senses in order to capture them. Again, argument is needed to bring Kant into what looks like the eudaemonist fold, since Kant rails against

the obtaining of a certain *relation* between the different powers or faculties of the mind: typically, reason's having the right relation to the rest (though what that relation is remains to be specified). And finally, a story is told (in more or less detail) about how, over the course of a human life, these different powers appear on the scene and come to obtain (or fail to obtain) that relation to one another.

Notice that I do *not* say that the relation among the faculties in which attaining the relevant norm consists always involves the dominance of reason: I have deliberately formulated the fourth point in such a way as to allow both irrationalist and the more typical rationalist moral psychologies to exemplify the common structure. Nor does the common structure mention virtue or moral goodness. For though some central figures in the tradition have, in their different ways, identified the perfection of our distinctive endowments not only with the life that is good for us and with the obtaining of a certain relation among our faculties but also with moral goodness, I want to leave open a space for controversy about the place of moral goodness in the good life for us, and so to set out the common structure in such a way that neither those who deny the supremacy of moral goodness in the good life nor those who deny it a place there altogether are debarred from exemplifying it.

Now this schematic version of the great tradition in moral psychology cuts a great many corners. The point of so doing, however, is that with the schema in place, the fact that psychoanalysis belongs to the great tradition is easy to see, because the schema is one which both Freudian and relational psychoanalysis exemplify. They exemplify it, however, in markedly different ways, but the claim needs to be qualified if pointless controversy is to be avoided. Notice that I've chosen to contrast relational psychoanalysis with Freudian theory rather than with some more narrowly specified

eudaemonism by name in, e.g. *The Metaphysics of Morals* (tr. Mary Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). But his conception of eudaemonism sounds so much more like Bentham than it sounds like Aristotle that it is not obvious that anything he says either sinks Aristotle or indeed prevents Kant himself from being classified as a eudaemonist. (See on this issue T.H. Irwin, 'Kant's Criticisms of Eudaemonism,' in S. Engstrom and J. Whiting (eds.), *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 66-101.) Thus while Kant denies that 'happiness' is connected with practical reason, he is content to associate practical reason with 'die wahre Zufriedenheit' and with 'a satisfaction of its own proper kind' ('eine Zufriedenheit nach ihrer eigenen Art', *Grundwork*, sec. 1, *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten*, Akademieausgabe pp. 395-6) which, while it doesn't say *the same* as Aristotle, is enough to show Kant too fits point three of the schema.

aspect or phase of Freud's theory (e.g. 'drive theory').²⁴ The reason is that the contrast I want to draw with relational psychoanalysis applies equally to Freud's (earlier) drive theory and to his (later) 'structural theory' – explanations in a moment. There is a simplification buried in this terminological choice, however, since there are some – in my view conflicting – 'relational' elements in Freud too.²⁵ But I hope the simplification is excusable as long as it's understood that the 'Freudian' label as I use it isn't meant to cover *everything* Freud thought, but rather some of the most familiar lines of his thinking.

Now though Freudian theory as I have characterized it is certainly the best-known example of a psychoanalytic theory, it is – or so I want to maintain – a curiously off-beat example of a moral psychology in the great tradition. But why? One thought is that this is a result of Freud's narrow conception of morality, which I have already mentioned, but in fact this thought is unlikely to supply an explanation however it is spelled out. If a narrow conception of morality is taken to mean a dos and don'ts conception which excludes an interest in the proper development of character altogether, then Freud's having such a conception would show him to be not an off-beat contributor to the great tradition but no contributor at all. This is clearly not what is wanted here. This *may* be the conception of morality – or one of them – that Anscombe had in her sights in 'Modern Moral Philosophy.' But the difference between her 'modern moral philosophers' – a term which may in the end capture only some academic moral philosophers of the late nineteenth and early to middle twentieth century – and Freud is that, whereas the former really weren't interested in character development, Freud *was* interested in it, but – as I tried to explain in the previous section – didn't think of it as an aspect of his interest in morality. There is one sense, then, in which the narrowness of Freud's conception of morality connects chiefly with how he classified his own interests, and only secondarily – if at all – with what his interests were.

Of course Freud did conceive of what he called morality narrowly, in the sense that he thought it was concerned ultimately only with the forbidden,

²⁴ For a brief and useful analysis of the different phases of Freud's theorizing, see Peter Fonagy, 'Psychoanalytic Theory from the Point of View of Attachment Theory and Research,' in J. Cassidy and P. Shaver (eds.), *Handbook of Attachment* (New York/London: The Guilford Press, 1999).

²⁵ An oft-cited example is Freud's gloss on the notion of an 'infant,' that it 'includes ... the care it receives from its mother': 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), vol. XII, p. 219 n. 4.

permitted, and required. Readers of 'Modern Moral Philosophy' will recognize in this kind of narrowness what Anscombe calls a 'law conception' of morality.²⁶ But, as can readily be seen from the great tradition itself, a law conception is fully compatible with an interest in the proper development of character. Kant had a law conception if anybody did, but he also contributed significantly to the great tradition and combined his law conception with an interest in the perfection of human character.²⁷ So to say that Freud was an eccentric contributor to the great tradition because he had a law conception of morality, though he did indeed have one, cannot be right.

Is Freud's eccentricity relative to the great tradition traceable to the fact that, between roughly 1905 and 1920, his conception of the development of character is virtually identified with psychosexual development, while his theory of the ego and its distinctive history comes on the scene only later? Certainly that is part of the story, but there is a set of more basic explanations – more basic because they survive the appearance in Freudian theory of the concepts of ego, superego, and id, which echo the tripartite divisions of the mind found elsewhere in the great tradition (feature one of the schema I outlined). These more basic explanations are as follows. First, in both 'classical' (i.e. pre-1920) Freudian drive-theory and in the later structural theory, socialization spells frustration; secondly, socialization includes unforced compliance with the requirements of morality (though of course it includes more besides); and, thirdly, the agent of socialization is reason.²⁸ Now the mainstream view in the great tradition is that, to the extent that reason comes to govern our other faculties, to that same extent our true

²⁶ Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy,' p. 30.

²⁷ The fact that Kant wrote *The Metaphysics of Morals* is sufficient evidence of his *interest* in character. On the question whether his interest in character is consistent with other commitments of his in ethics, see Barbara Herman, 'Making Room for Character,' in Engstrom and Whiting (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 36-62. On the general misguidedness of seeing 'Kantian' (and indeed utilitarian) ethics and 'virtue ethics' as mutually exclusive classifications, see Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, revised edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. xxiv. Of course Aristotle had an interest in the forbidden: see *NE* 1107a9-1107a27: 'in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder ... simply to do any of them is to go wrong.' As Anscombe said once, referring presumably to this passage, 'you can't get Aristotle's Decalogue out of the doctrine of the mean,' discussion, Chequers Philosophy Society, Oxford, c. 1992.

²⁸ Freud called it the 'reality principle,' but given what the principle *does* – that is, adjust our behavior to the environment in the light of what we more basically want (or want to avoid) – it is surely instrumental reason under another name. See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), vol. XVIII, pp. 1-64): it 'carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction ... as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure,' p. 10.

natures are realized – given the sorts of creatures we are (i.e. creatures distinctively endowed with reason), that is what is *meant* to happen – and, thanks to that, our lives go best when that is so. This picture is much in evidence in Aristotle, for example, where the perfection of our rational part implies not the sacrifice of pleasure, but the availability of new pleasures. (For Aristotle these are the pleasures of virtue, but that is incidental here.) For Freud, by contrast, socialization through the agency of reason is a requirement of survival. But survival and instinctual gratification place conflicting demands on us: Freud's 'discontents of civilization' stem from the fact that socialization does not, even ideally, replace primitive sources of satisfaction with sophisticated ones without remainder.²⁹ This is not to say that Freud denies the connection between self-realization and flourishing, the third feature of the 'great tradition' schema. On the contrary, there is a way for him to maintain the connection while nonetheless asserting that government by reason brings frustration. For it would not be a great exaggeration to say that, for Freud, *we* remain the (for him) least developed part of ourselves: the 'real us' is the id. (Note again the contrast with Aristotle: 'the thinking part is, or most nearly is, the individual self.'³⁰) So the developmental process by which '*wo Es war, soll Ich werden*'³¹ – where it was, there I shall come to be – represents not self-realization but a move in just the opposite direction.³²

By the same token there *is* a relation among our faculties which would need to obtain for us to become what we most truly are, but it involves the dominance not of reason but of appetite. Insofar as morality is something which only comes on the scene with the development of the ego, Freud was like Nietzsche in classifying morality as an enemy of human fulfillment. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Freud did not give us a picture of what the more authentic satisfactions of life beyond morality might be like. This was in part because he did not envisage a form of life without morality (since he

²⁹ Rycroft speaks of the 'snarl-up' created by 'Freud's assumption that there is an intrinsic opposition between a chaotic, primitive, emotional, pleasure-seeking id and a rational, realistic, integrated ego,' *Psychoanalysis and Beyond*, p. 122.

³⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics* book IX, 1166a10-1166a29.

³¹ 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis,' *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), vol. XXII, p. 80.

³² Thus Freud borrows from Kant the idea that morality is essentially directed against inclination – that is, against promptings from our non-rational natures: see, e.g. 'The Economic Problem of Masochism,' *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), vol. XIX, p. 167 – but, crucially, dropping Kant's idea that rationality (except perhaps instrumental rationality) belongs to our natures too.

thought that morality was both inevitably frustrating and simply inevitable); and in part because the features of distinctively human living which, in his view, bend our natures out of shape include much more than just morality, thus drastically limiting the materials out of which a picture of such satisfactions might conceivably be constructed. This nettle was grasped by Jacques Lacan, a strong advocate of the view that the story of the progressive dominance of reason is a story not only of growing frustration but of growing inauthenticity. According to Lacan, every human being's authentic voice is supposed to be the unedited flow of the unconscious,³³ and since the unconscious is (according to him) in some sense impersonal, the story of the 'constitution of the subject' is *as such* a story of distortion or falsification of what human beings really are. Whether this really implies a picture of a possible life beyond not only morality but every other bit of alleged superstructure that normal socialization brings with it is to be doubted. But it's Lacan's sensitivity to this strongly irrationalist strand in Freud – precisely the strand I wish to contrast with 'relational' psychoanalytic thinking – that underlies his (surely exaggerated) claim to be a 'true Freudian', rescuing Freud from betrayal by his rationalist followers.

5.

If Freud – taking on trust the simplification involved in the contrast between 'Freudian' and 'relational' psychoanalysis – is an eccentric or non-standard contributor to the great tradition in moral psychology, relational psychoanalysis is much closer to the mainstream. There is a variety of ways in which this might be shown. One is this: where Freud is a pessimist about the relation between socialization and flourishing, relational psychoanalysis is optimistic. This is partly because relational psychoanalysis treats a range of characteristic human pursuits – friendship, play, art, religion – as things we engage in for their own sakes rather than as substitutes for instinctual gratification, so learning to engage in them is a matter of expanding our sources of satisfaction rather than of carrying us farther and farther from the real thing.³⁴ And it is partly also because, according to relational psychoanalysis, some important components of morality – reciprocity and

³³ Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, Le Séminaire XI, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973.

³⁴ See for example, the essays in Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*.

a concern for others – are present in us in primitive form almost from the word go (our ‘germinal capacity for social interaction,’ as Bowlby put it³⁵), and this at least leaves room for the idea – though there is much more to be said about this – that acquiring a mature moral consciousness perfects our natures rather than pulling them out of shape.

But perhaps the most direct way to make the point is by reference to the importance relational psychoanalysis attaches – though these are not terms all relational theorists use – to the idea of *integration* and the contrasting idea of *splitting*.³⁶ Integration is a developmental norm, that is, it marks a way we are supposed to be if our natural potentialities are to be most fully realized (feature two of the schema). Since the effects of splitting are things we suffer from, integration also marks a way in which our lives go well for us and, correspondingly, splits a way in which they go badly (feature four). And not only is integration a matter of a certain relation’s obtaining between the parts or faculties of the mind (feature three) but that relation – and here is the major point of contrast with Freud – consists in the dominance, or the co-dominance, of reason. For ‘integration’ – in adults at least – means (roughly) the integration of the whole of our mental life to our rational selves.³⁷

³⁵ Bowlby, ‘Caring for Children,’ in his *A Secure Base*, p. 7.

³⁶ The ideas of splitting and integration occur in many different places in the psychoanalytic literature in related but different senses; the sense intended here is explained in the main text. For the idea in Freud (splitting as a consequence of the denial of some external or psychic reality), see ‘An Outline of Psychoanalysis,’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXIII, tr. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press/ Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), pp. 202-4. For Klein’s ideas (‘splitting the breast into two aspects, loved and hated, ... [and] the splitting of a different nature ... which gives rise to the feeling that the ego, as well as its object, is in pieces,’ see Melanie Klein, ‘Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant’ (1952), in Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), and the ‘Explanatory Notes’ (by Edna O’Shaughnessy), *ibid.*, pp. 324-6; also Eric Rayner, *The Independent Mind in British Psychoanalysis*, pp. 22-3.

³⁷ My strategy throughout this paper has been to underplay differences *within* relational psychoanalysis in order the more clearly to bring out its contrasts with Freud and its points of contact with the ‘great tradition.’ But one internal difference – well-grounded or not – now needs to be noted. On some versions of relational thinking, the integration of the whole of our mental life to our rational selves – the fact of (say) desire and emotion standing in proper relation to our capacity to deliberate, to evaluate evidence, etc. – is understood as one aspect of our mental functioning (reason) bringing others (desire, emotion, and so on) under its control: the ‘dominance of reason’ mentioned above. In other versions, by contrast, that same state of integration is understood not as the domination of one thing by another, but as the mature form of a constructive collaboration between ‘adaptive’ or ‘objective’ and imaginative or affective aspects of mental functioning which, if all is well, exists from the start (‘co-dominance’ above). For the former, see for example A. Bateman and

In most relational psychoanalytic theory, good enough caregivers enable infants to 'digest,' or to make sense of, or genuinely to have, difficult experiences by partly digesting them for them, as Margot Waddell puts it.³⁸ But more important than this claim about *how* it happens is *what* is said to happen: in the context of good enough care, this 'digestive' capacity is internalized, so that one gradually comes (in Judy Shuttleworth's words) to 'develop a structure within [oneself] for dealing with [e.g. one's] own distress. ... [One] internalizes the mother's capacity to think about [oneself] , [thereby acquiring] a new sense of self ... [which] makes possible a degree of tolerance of, and openness to, experience.'³⁹ This 'degree of tolerance or openness to experience' is what integration means. Without it, experiences risk being denied, leading 'a split-off, repudiated existence on the edge of the mind, but with an undiminished, if not actually increased, potential for impact on the life of the individual.'⁴⁰ Acknowledging them, on the other hand, means they can be brought into proper relation with our capacity to deliberate, to evaluate evidence, and to form intentions, plans, and so on: that is to say, integration subserves practical rationality. As Winnicott puts it – though it is not clear that 'the id' is really a sufficiently inclusive term here:

In [a healthy mature person] the id becomes gathered into the service of the ego, and the ego masters the id, in contrast to pathological states in which 'the id remains relatively or totally "external" to the ego.'⁴¹

P. Fonagy, 'The Development of an Attachment-Based Treatment for Borderline Personality Disorder,' *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 67:3, 2003; for the latter, see for example, Charles Rycroft, 'Beyond the Reality Principle,' in *Psychoanalysis and Beyond*, p. 103: 'In what way can a chaos experience the external world in such a way as to be organized by it? ... [This problem does] not arise if one starts from the assumption of primary integration and regards maturation as proceeding not from chaos to organization but from simple to complex forms of organization'; the latter theme is also pervasive in Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature*.

³⁸ Waddell, *Inside Lives*, pp. 30-31: describing a mother who successfully soothes a baby who becomes distressed in mid-feed, she says 'crucial to this experience of integration was the fact that the mother had ... understood and contained the baby's distress'. She was 'able to resist being overwhelmed' by it and to offer 'the baby ... a true version of himself, not one that was distorted by anxious preconceptions on the mother's part.'

³⁹ 'Psychoanalytic Theory and Infant Development,' in Lisa Miller et al. (eds.), *Closely Observed Infants* (London: Duckworth, 1989), p. 36.

⁴⁰ Shuttleworth, 'Psychoanalytic Theory and Infant Development,' p. 37.

⁴¹ Both quotations are from Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes & the Facilitating Environment*, p. 40. See Freud, 'The Ego and the Id,' p. 25. Winnicott is of course echoing one of the most strongly rationalist and thereby 'relational' passages in Freud. Cp. Also 'New Introductory Lectures,' p. 80: '[The] intention [of psychoanalysis is ... to strengthen the ego ... so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id]. Cp. also Waddell: 'the aim of

And, echoing Freud and (more distantly) Plato, he adds ‘it is the self that must precede the self’s use of instinct; the rider must ride the horse, not be run away with.’⁴² Thus relational psychoanalysis exemplifies (as Freudian theory does) the second, third, and fourth features of the great tradition’s schema. But not only that: whether it’s because socialization is consistent with flourishing and the agent of socialization is reason, or because integration requires the (co)-dominance of reason, relational psychoanalysis not only exemplifies (as Freud does) the second, third, and fourth features of the schema but exemplifies it (unlike Freud) *in the same way* as Plato, Aristotle, and Kant: it is by reason’s having a pre-eminent role in relation to our other faculties of mind that we perfect our natures, and this in turn represents the best kind of life for the kinds of creatures we are.⁴³

Such, indeed, are the affinities between relational psychoanalysis and these mainstream figures in the great tradition that it rather undersells their relation to one another if we say simply that one part of psychoanalysis (relational psychoanalysis) is closer to the mainstream than another part of it (what I am calling Freudian theory). For this acquiesces in the conventional psychoanalytic way of recounting its own history, with Freud’s foundation of psychoanalysis as the watershed and subsequent developments within it – however far theoretically they may stray from Freud – not of comparable importance. There may be reasons within psychoanalysis for telling the story this way. Psychoanalysis has been under almost continuous attack since it first made its appearance, and embattled groups tend to play up their homogeneity. Moreover psychoanalysis has, for almost as long, been subject to internal disputes and secessions, so that to downplay the ancestral connection with Freud problematizes the question of what makes psychoanalysis one thing rather than many things.⁴⁴ But outside the institutional structures of psychoanalysis there is no reason to go along with this view of the history of the subject. Though in

psychoanalysis could be described as seeking to make available to the patient more aspects of the self,’ *Inside Lives*, p. 55.

⁴² Winnicott, ‘The place where we live,’ in *Playing & Reality* (Penguin), p.116. Cp. Loewald: ‘[Becoming a person] involves a continuous appropriation of unconscious levels of functioning, an owning up to them as potentially *me*, ego’, and ‘integrating the id into one’s life context as an individual self.’

⁴³ It goes without saying that psychoanalysis, both relational and Freudian, exemplifies features one (the taxonomy of powers or faculties of the mind) and five (a story about how the developmental norm is or is not attained).

⁴⁴ For this kind of skepticism about whether there is any real reason to apply just one label to all the theories to which ‘psychoanalysis’ conventionally applies, see Charles Rycroft’s essays, *Psychoanalysis and Beyond* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991).

the hundred-year internal history of psychoanalysis, relational psychoanalysis may appear primarily as a variation on something set in motion by Freud, in the 2,500-year tradition which is the history of moral psychology and which stretches from Plato to contemporary relational psychoanalysis, it's some of the theoretical commitments for which Freud is most remembered that are exceptional, the highly conspicuous deviation from a mainstream which so far seems to have resumed its course.⁴⁵

Of course to show that Freudian and relational psychoanalysis connect with the 'great tradition' in contrasting ways is not yet to say that Freudian irrationalism is less good than the rationalism of the mainstream, nor that, even if it is, the distinctively psychoanalytic contributions to that mainstream have any special claim to our attention over the claims of their more familiar philosophical stablemates. For the present, it is enough if I have shown that because the central concerns which characterize the great tradition in moral psychology are also those of psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis – whether Freudian or relational – deserves a place in the history of ethics.

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⁴⁵ Is it a coincidence that psychoanalysis appears on the scene at round about the time when – according to Anscombe – 'modern moral philosophy' does, and thus when an interest in the proper development of character, as part of the moral philosophy curriculum, goes underground?

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