

It’s not hard to imagine why Love and Its Place in Nature (now in a second edition, with a new preface by the author) has, in the decade or so it has been in print, received less attention from the philosophical community than it deserves. Its subtitle announces it as a “A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis,” and Freud is thought of by most analytic philosophers as the icon of a discredited orthodoxy, or in any case as the purveyor of a doctrine too esoteric and self-contained to be of interest to anyone who is not already a Freudian. They should not have been deterred. Lear’s treatment of Freud is not particularly orthodox: it purports to present psychoanalysis psychoanalyzed, a view which stands to Freud’s as the successful analysand’s self-interpretation stands to the complaint with which, years before, he first walked into his analyst’s office. Freud provides Lear with a way of raising and thinking through a range of important but generally neglected issues, and what we are brought to see about them remains even when the specifics of the Freudian theory are peeled out from underneath. Consequently, even if one finds much of the Freudian picture hard to believe, Lear’s work is still of great philosophical interest. (I will come back to the question of how to characterize the relation between the pre-analysis and post-analysis versions of a self-understanding; in the meantime, when I describe a view as Freudian, I will mean Lear’s revised Freud, with its admixtures of, among others, Aristotle, Kant and Wittgenstein.)

Philosophy of mind for the most part takes as its subject matter minds that are clearly distinct from bodies, and that belong to persons who are themselves clearly distinct from the world around them. These minds are filled largely with propositional attitudes, i.e., thoughts that are clear enough for their contents to be expressed as sentences, and that can be neatly classified by type of attitude (as beliefs, desires, imaginings and so on). Thinking proceeds by applying concepts, which trigger inferences that move from one propositional attitude (e.g., a belief or a desire) to the next. What the received view overlooks is that all of the above are psychological achievements, and this is a part of Lear’s picture that must be right, whether or not the whole Freudian story is. The infant starts out life without the
distinctions between its mind and its body, and between itself and its envi­
ronment; primary-process or archaic thought moves by association, rather
than in regimented patterns of inference, and is expressed not in concepts
or as propositions but as fragmentary and relatively concrete imagery. (In
adult pathology, also as bodily symptoms, or slips of the tongue.) We need
to be able to see how the mental articulation that has been almost the exclu­
sive focus of philosophical attention emerges from this far less differentiated
state, if only because the process through which the adult mind crystallizes
will constrain what the adult mind can be.

The Freudian methodological ambition is to explain this development
entirely in psychological—as opposed to, say, biological or neurological—
terms. (Again, Freud as Lear has him; for a rather different description of the
project, see Patricia Kitcher, *Freud’s Dream: A Complete Interdisciplinary
of one phase of the account will give some of its flavor. Suppose a child in its
oedipal stage wishes to marry its mother. That thought should not be given
a secondary-process, i.e., overly sophisticated, reading, since, for example,
the child cannot be expected to have mastered the adult concepts of sex
or marriage; the wish may take the form of images of incorporation. Now,
not only is wishing not yet distinct from imagining, the further distinction
between daydream and (here, psychic) reality is not in place either, and
the “phantasy” incorporation of the child’s mother is tantamount to the
incorporation of the “phantasy” into the child’s emerging psychic structure:
something like a model of the child’s mother is now part of its mind. (Or
again, the child’s oedipal wishes are not in fact going to be satisfied; the
characteristic response to frustration is identification with and imitation of
the lost love-object; as before, the distinction between imagined imitation
and actual imitation is not yet in play.)

Since the most salient characteristic of the child’s mother, from its point
of view, is her responsiveness to its drives, the child’s phantasiéd incorpo­
ration of its mother is its having acquired a part or aspect of its mind that
is similarly responsive to those drives. Further, in responding, mothers en­
courage self-interpretation; that is, they prompt their children to say—and
to make up their minds about—what it is they want. So the child now has
a part of its mind that is in the business, albeit at this point very crudely,
of coaxing primary-process thought up into articulated, secondary-process
thought. This phase of psychological development exhibits a pattern com­
mon to other phases as well, in which the unavailability of the distinction
between phantasy and reality, at the level of archaic thought, explains how
features of a more organized mind are copied, and so augment the mind
The process of becoming an individual is never complete. Pathological cases, in which mental activity remains archaic because it is being repressed, get most of the publicity. But much primary process thinking will not have been conceptually regimented just because one has not gotten around to it. Lear argues, in *Open Minded*, that to have a mind is always to be generating new proto-mental material. (This is another important claim that is detachable from its Freudian surroundings; if any account like this one is correct, the philosopher’s model of the fully articulated mind is deeply unrealistic.) There will always be a reservoir—the it, or “id”—of unassimilated and unintegrated mental activity. So there is always a place later on in life for more complex and elaborate variations of the process we have just glanced at; psychoanalysis itself is one of these, and it will be useful to give a first-pass rendering of the technique as Lear presents it.

In a successful analysis, the analysand starts out plagued by what is in fact archaic mental activity, perhaps in the form of vomiting, or an inability to drink, or a fear of horses. (Recall that in archaic mental life, the distinction between mind and body is not yet on board.) Over the course of the analysis, the troublesome primary-process thought is tracked down, and on an appropriate occasion the analyst offers an interpretation of it: a secondary-process thought, i.e., one that is conceptually and inferentially regimented, which the analysand recognizes as being, as it were, what he had been thinking all along. And with a successful interpretation, the analysis is substantially concluded; the thought in question now has structure enabling it to interact with other similarly structured thoughts, that is, it is now part of the conscious mind, and the analysand can now think through its consequences on his own. Psychoanalysis, according to Lear, consists in the assisted uptake of regions of archaic mental activity into articulated secondary-process thought that is tractable to the I, the articulated and structured part of the mind. (As before, when the analysis ends, the analysand should incorporate a model of the analyst, that is, a part of his mind that generates secondary-process interpretations of archaic mental activity in this way.)

At many points in both volumes, Lear emphasizes the affinities between the philosophical and the psychoanalytical enterprises. I have no idea whether what I have just sketched is what psychoanalysis is really like; but it is a striking and all-too-rarely satisfied description of what one hopes for in a philosophical interlocutor. Philosophy usually begins as a proto-thought, expressed by something along the lines of a repeated insistence that, say, words stand for things, or maybe, that no matter what, you die alone. In a
conversation with such an interlocutor, one arrives at (or moves closer to) a clearly articulated and argued philosophical theory, of which one wants to say that it is what one had meant all along.

Lear wishes to highlight affinities between Freud and Wittgenstein as well, but notice how our comparison of philosophical conversation to the conversation Lear describes gives us a way of saying what is wrong with much Wittgensteinian practice. The characteristic Wittgensteinian exercise of tracking down the philosophical proto-thought and exposing its incoherence in fact works (though this is not the way a Wittgensteinian will put it) to repress the proto-thought, rather than provide an articulate interpretation for it. (“So you want to say that words stand for things? Let me tell you a story about construction workers and slabs.” “You die alone? Do you mean that you’re alone in the room? Or that, when you die, it’s you who are dying? Maybe you don’t mean anything.”) Repressed proto-thoughts pop up somewhere else, for instance as symptoms of hysteria, and so we should not be surprised at that familiar consequence of a Wittgensteinian upbringing, a sort of philosophical hysterical paralysis that prevents its victims from writing, from taking ideas and running with them, or from being philosophically productive more generally. Wittgenstein advertises himself as providing philosophical therapy; Lear’s picture of therapy allows us to see Wittgenstein as the worst possible sort of therapist. (This characterization should not be taken to apply to all Wittgensteinians. Just for instance, Cora Diamond is a Wittgensteinian if there ever was one, and exhibits none of these symptoms; she is also very close to being the ideal philosophical interlocutor I have just described.)

How far can we trust Lear’s description of the way a mind emerges from the field of archaic thought, and of what is going on in psychoanalysis? The worry is that, as Lear points out, archaic mind has proto-theories about its own workings, and because they can inform what the archaic mind does, they can be mistaken for satisfactory accounts of psychic activity. For instance, the archaic mind sometimes understands getting rid of a problem as expelling it, as vomiting it out, and early on in Freud’s intellectual development, these images were remade into the theory of catharsis; but the phantasy of discharge, while psychologically important, was not an adequate account of what was going on in the minds of Freud’s patients.

How do we know, then, that we ought not to accord this status (that of misapprehended proto-theory) to the account we have just seen? The problem is this. Allow that an interpretation is validated by the analysand’s uptake of it. Still, the analysand’s “sublimated satisfaction” at being understood involves the idea that the interpretation tells us what he had really
meant, or had really been suffering from, beforehand. And that idea, however natural it is to the analysand, cannot be underwritten by identity of content of the archaic thought and the secondary process thought that is its interpretation: the secondary-process thought has both more conceptual content, and less associative content, than the primary-process mental activity of which it is an interpretation. So what is it that really explains the analysand’s uptake, and makes one interpretation satisfactory and another unsatisfactory?

Here we can turn again to *Open Minded*, a collection of essays most of which, in one way or another, address problems left unresolved in *Love and Its Place in Nature*. Lear uses “An Interpretation of Transference” and “Restlessness, Phantasy, and the Concept of Mind,” to work on the puzzle I have just outlined. Psychoanalysis is not just a theoretical but a therapeutic activity (more: it is in the *first* place a therapeutic activity), which is one reason why effectiveness in a therapeutic context is a criterion for correctness of an interpretation. But what accounts for the effectiveness of an analyst’s proposed interpretation? We should not think of him as simply advancing an elegant theory of his client’s mental contents, in the way that an anatomist might propose an elegant theory of people’s bodily contents for publication in a medical journal; such theories will speak to the client’s consciousness, but not to the archaic thought that needs to be integrated into consciousness. Lear’s solution is elegant: in transference the analyst himself becomes a figure in the analysand’s idiosyncratic and mostly unconscious culture, as it were; he both learns his way around it, and takes on meaning within it; thus he becomes able to speak from within it as, it might be, the analysand’s mother, or his superego. So the interpretation is effective partly because, from the point of view of the archaic mind, it comes from a character in what Lear calls the analysand’s “idiopolis”.

Even the transference-empowered analyst cannot simply propose any interpretation and make it stick, and even interpretations that are accepted may be the wrong ones. So if the point isn’t identity of content between proto-thought and thought, what is there to getting interpretation right? At this juncture Lear introduces an Aristotelian shorthand for the relation between archaic or primary-process thought and conscious thought: the former is the *matter* of the latter. (This way of talking could be extended in a way I would be very sympathetic to: if psychic *stuff* is the material cause of thought, logic or rationality is the formal cause of thought.) Interpretation is trying to bring matter together with a form it can take on, and materials constrain what can be done with them: a pattern of archaic associations will not take on just *any* form. This way of putting it does not show that there
is only one right interpretation; but the raw material in this kind of case is such that there will only be one, or at most a few, available interpretations that will work.

There is more to say about what it is to get an interpretation right, and there is much to say about the many themes in Lear’s work that I have not managed to touch on. But I want to pull the zoom lens back, because we now have enough on the table to provide a higher-level characterization of Lear’s very ambitious project. I began by mentioning Lear’s subtitle, “A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis,” and it is time to consider what such an interpretation would be.

Several chapters of Open Minded develop the idea that Freud and psychoanalysis are being repressed—by the larger culture, but also, and this is what I will confine my attention to, by professional philosophy. I remarked at the outset on the widely-held view that Freudian psychoanalysis has been discredited; Lear notices that a reflex-like knowingness about Freud actually allows one not to know much of anything about Freud. Already knowing that Freud has been discredited is a way of not thinking about, roughly, what motivated irrationality is really like, and how it figures in human life.

To say that philosophy is repressing psychoanalysis is to say that psychoanalysis lives in philosophy as something like archaic or primary-process thought. To provide a philosophical interpretation of psychoanalysis—that is, an interpretation for philosophy—would be to offer philosophy a secondary-process formulation in which the repressed, archaic thought would be recognizable. This interpretation would treat psychoanalysis as its matter, and impose on what is from philosophy’s standpoint the dangerous proto-thought a form that would allow it to engage other philosophical thoughts. (This would involve fitting it to concepts already in play in philosophy, and so equipping it to figure in inferences with other philosophical thoughts.) The effect would be to make the thought of psychoanalysis part of philosophical consciousness. For my own part, I think this would be a good thing; I agree with Lear’s introductory remarks to the effect that the (oxymoronic) profession of philosophy could use a bit of opening up, and its misleadingly idealized models of the mind would be a good place to start. There is, however, something that bothers me about Lear’s attempt to do this.

Recall that for an interpretation to take hold, it is not enough simply to present it as a bit of clearly articulated theory: theory speaks to the conscious mind, not to the field of archaic mental activity. In the analyst-analysand dyad, we saw that transference was necessary for interpretations to be effective; the analyst is effective because he can speak as (for instance) the analysand’s “mother”. If psychoanalysis lives in philosophy as repressed
proto-thought, an effective interpretation ought to require transference, or something closely analogous to it: Lear must be positioning himself in a culture of unconscious meanings produced by, as it were, the archaic mind of philosophy. Perhaps this is why so many stretches of Love and Its Place in Nature consist of Freudian appropriations of one or another member of the philosophical pantheon, and why so much of Open Minded is taken up with psychoanalytic readings of Greek philosophy and tragedy; by speaking about motivated irrationality in the voice of a familiar philosopher, Lear may be trying to reassure his inarticulately nervous readers that the thought is not as dangerous as all that—that one can acknowledge the full extent of irrationality and continue to philosophize. It is, however, a defining commitment of the philosophical tradition—taken on, if you like, in its incorporation of Socrates, its first lost love-object—that efforts at persuasion are to be conducted in the medium of articulated, secondary-process thought. I cannot see how to square that commitment with the need to rely on transference, and not nearly enough has been done to overcome my resistance to giving the commitment up.

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