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The Analytic Attitude: An Introduction

The analytic attitude ranks as one of Freud's greatest creations. If the analyst is to provide the analysand with the best chance for a searching and beneficial analysis, then he or she must maintain this attitude with a high degree of consistency. Both the findings of psychoanalysis as a method of investigation and its results as a method of treatment depend on this consistency. But what is the analytic attitude? Something so important should be formulated in a relatively concise, complex, and generally acceptable way, yet we have no such formulation. None was offered by Freud, though a version of his ideas on the analytic attitude can be derived from his papers on technique (see chapter 2), especially when these papers are considered in the context of all his works.

Over the years, many other analysts have published significant contributions to this topic. Typically they have done so in connection with their discussions of analytic technique. From a very long list of notable contributions of this sort, I wish to mention those made by Sandor Ferenczi, Karl Abraham, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, Wilhelm Reich, Otto Fenichel, Edward Glover, John Strachey, Ella Freeman Sharpe, Theodor Reik, Ernst Kris, Rudolph Loewenstein, Annie Reich, Edith Jacobson, Kurt Eissler, Ralph Greenson, Leo Stone, Jacob Arlow, Charles Brenner, Merton Gill, and Heinz Kohut. But it must be noted that this rich literature presents difficulties. For one thing, the chief emphases in these contributions are not always the same, there being variation, for example, with respect to the desirability of the analyst's maintaining emotional detachment, making early, deep interpretations, and focusing intensively on transference. Emphases also vary on manifesting a caretaking and self-expressive humanness, engaging in forceful and dramatic confrontations, and centering attention on the uses and significance of empathy. For another thing, in many in-

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stances the relevance of these discussions to the analytic attitude, being only implicit, must be teased out, and so may be construed differently by different readers. And finally, some of these technical contributions are more controversial than others, or at least are more difficult to include in a general synthesis.

But it is not only in writings on technique that one may find contributions to a formulation of the analytic attitude, for this attitude is often beautifully exemplified in analytic writings on psychological development, psychopathology, general theory, the theory of the analytic process, and applications to the humanities. Here, the names of Erik Erikson, D. W. Winnicott, Heinz Hartmann, and Hans Loewald, to name now only a few of many, may be added to those already mentioned. In these writings the analytic attitude is exemplified in the kinds of questions that are raised, the evidence that is selected, the clear-sighted and balanced way in which it is interpreted and integrated, and the individualized evocative mode of expression ("the voice") that has been cultivated. Thus the psychoanalytic literature as a whole may be read from the point of view of what it can teach about the analytic attitude. Again, however, there are difficulties. One finds variation with respect to what should be taken as the major features of the analytic attitude, in addition to which some of these exemplifications are more open to theoretical controversy than others or present more obstacles to a general synthesis.

Could it be that what stands in the way of a satisfactory formulation of the analytic attitude is a problem that is more fundamental than anything that has yet been mentioned? Analytic pedagogy suggests that there is such a problem. It has become a pedagogical commonplace to acknowledge that, as a rule, students learn more about the analytic attitude from undergoing their own personal analyses and the supervision of their clinical work than they do from case seminars, more from case seminars than from didactic courses on technique and the theory of the analytic process, and more from these didactic courses than from independent reading. This commonplace recognizes how much always depends on context, most of all on the concrete context made up by the individual analyst and analysand, the nature of the problems being analyzed, and the phase of the analysis under discussion. Consequently, the project of presenting a definitive set of generalizations about the analytic attitude cannot be undertaken very hopefully, for these generalizations will serve only as the roughest of guidelines for sorting out, one from the other, the full, the compromised, and the failed analytic attitude. Moreover, a set of such gener-

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alizations cannot fail to sound like an overblown admonition to be a good analyst.

Now, it need not be argued that doing analysis is taxing intellectually and emotionally and that, as this work is done by human beings who, fortunately, are neither machines, saints, nor romantic heroes, it is not to be expected that in each and every case the analyst will function impeccably from beginning to end. But to recognize human limitation and variability is not to conclude that it is useless or foolish to attempt to set forth standards of excellence for analytic work. Nor is it to come to the conclusion that formulating the ideal analytic attitude is equivalent to idealizing, platitudinizing, or being oppressively perfectionistic. For it is on the individual analyst's efforts to approximate this ideal that the beneficial effects of analyzing largely depend, and in the final analysis it is these individual efforts which must concern us. Therefore it seems to me that it will be worth the effort and the risk to introduce the chapters that make up this book with a brief outline of my conception of the analytic attitude. The chapters themselves will have to bear most of the burden of exemplifying this conception. Ultimately, it is concrete exemplification that counts.

The Analyst Maintains an Attitude of Neutrality

The analyst remains neutral in relation to every aspect of the material being presented by the analysand. This is material that is presented not only verbally but nonverbally, not only consciously but pre-consciously and unconsciously, and not only in great distress but sometimes blithely or blandly. In his or her neutrality, the analyst does not crusade for or against the so-called id, superego, or defensive ego. The analyst has no favorites and so is not judgmental. The analyst's position is, as Anna Freud (1936) put it, "equidistant" from the various forces at war with one another.

The simplistic, partisan analyst, working in terms of saints and sinners, victims and victimizers, or good and bad ways to live, is failing to maintain the analytic attitude. In this failure, he or she can only be encouraging the analysand to fixate on some pattern of paranoid and depressive orientations, to persevere in sado-masochistic fantasizing and acting out, or to engage in wholesale repression of disturbing factors.

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In contrast, the analyst who remains neutral is attempting to allow all of the conflictual material to be fully represented, interpreted, and worked through. The neutral analyst is also attempting to avoid both the imposition of his or her own personal values on the analysand and the unquestioning acceptance of the analysand's initial value judgments. In addition, the neutral analyst is being unassuming, for it is a plain fact that for a very long time very little is known or understood well enough to warrant the analyst's forming any opinion at all on the desirability or undesirability of one or another course of action or mode of experience. (The exception being only that there are rough guidelines for what may seriously disrupt the continuity or effectiveness of the analysis or threaten the basic welfare of the analysand. These factors include the analysand's constant precipitation of life crises, prolonged absences, nonpayment of fees, acts of gross delinquency, physical illness, toxicity, suicidal depression, schizophrenic regression, etc.)

Owing to his or her recognition that over the course of an analysis the analysand will present highly selective and changing pictures of other people, the neutral analyst remains nonjudgmental about these others, too. It is particularly important to maintain this neutrality in relation to parental figures and spouses, for to some extent the analysand is identified with them and is vulnerable to the same value judgments that may be passed on them. Also, the analysand may be referring to other people in order to represent indirectly, as in a dream, some disturbing feature of his or her own self. For this reason, too, the analyst must take care to regard these others neutrally. But the effort to remain neutral toward all parties concerned should not lead the analyst to avoid looking at things honestly and, when appropriate, taking them up forthrightly with the analysand. It is not a departure from neutrality to call a spade a spade.

To achieve neutrality requires a high degree of subordination of the analyst's personality to the analytic task at hand. Subordination of personality is not to be understood as making misguided, futile, and phobically aseptic efforts at elimination of personality, as in total non-expressiveness. It is to be understood in terms of the analyst's appropriate moderation, regulation, and often simply curtailment of any show of activity of a predominantly narcissistic sort. Narcissistic activity both implies and readily makes for disruptive countertransference reactions. It is the sort of activity through which the analyst tries to cure by "force of personality," or to "win at analysis" (as though at war), or to demonstrate analytic "genius" conclusively. Such vanity

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and impatience obviously preclude maintaining the analytic attitude through appropriate subordination of personality. Another such interference lies in the analyst's adopting a condemning attitude toward that which is different, not readily understandable, or difficult. In this case the analyst too easily feels frustrated because the analysis is not developing in the wished-for or expected way, and so he or she is all too ready to become self-righteous and punitive. Additional problems of this sort stem from the analyst's insisting, in a blunt, rigid, and disrespectful way, on a few familiar lines of interpretation. For in being thus insistent the analyst is being a bully and is not allowing the analysand to explore freely and experience fully the complex network of derivatives of unresolved, unconsciously perpetuated, infantile issues. Because these are the issues in terms of which the analysand has been living his or her painful and limited existence, they must be helped to emerge into the light of analysis in their individualized forms.

A desirable degree of subordination of personality will be evident in the analyst's remaining curious, eager to find out, and open to surprise. It will be evident also in the analyst's taking nothing for granted (without being cynical about it), and remaining ready to revise conjectures or conclusions already arrived at, tolerate ambiguity or incomplete closure over extended periods of time, accept alternative points of view of the world, and bear and contain the experiences of helplessness, confusion, and aloneness that not infrequently mark periods of analytic work with each analysand.

The Analyst Avoids Either-Or Thinking

The analytic attitude is evident in the analyst's taking great care to avoid viewing significant problems and figures in either-or terms. For if there is anything that consistently characterizes psychoanalytic interpretation it is the analyst's recognition that multiple and often contradictory meanings and consequences may be usefully ascribed to one phenomenon, and that common meanings and consequences may be ascribed to apparently diverse phenomena. Much time in analysis is spent interpreting the analysand's need to see things as either black or white.

But progressive movement in analytic interpretation is not only

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toward increased complexity and tolerance of contradiction, it is also toward the greatest degree of particularity of that which is being explained. Freud (1909b) presented a model (one of many) of this blend of complexity and particularity in his account of the overdetermination of the Rat Man's rat complex. There, he returned again and again to the explanation of the choice of rats, striving to reach a point where he would be convinced that nothing else but rats would do for the cross-purposes of this man's obsessional neurosis. It is breathtaking to realize how long and how fruitfully he persevered.

The avoidance of either-or has been formalized in the principles of overdetermination (multiple meaningfulness of psychical phenomena) and multiple function (the interpretive focus on conflict and compromise formation within and among the so-called psychic structures—the id, the ego, and the superego). In another respect, the avoidance of either-or is based on the assumption that some degree of love-hate ambivalence characterizes every important activity and relationship.

If one takes seriously these principles of overdetermination, multiple function, and ambivalence, one can only judge it to be a failure of the analytic attitude to encounter an analyst speaking of what something "really" means. For to speak of the "real" meaning disregards these principles. The fact that one has discerned *further* meaning, *weightier* meaning, *more disturbing* meaning, *more archaic* meaning, or *more carefully disguised* meaning than that which first met the eye or the ear does not justify the claim that one has discovered the ultimate truth that lies behind the world of appearances—the "real" world. To make this claim is to engage in either-or thinking, and it is unanalytic in that no one feature of reality is any more real than another. The analytic attitude will be evident in the analyst's making a more modest as well as sounder claim, namely, that a point has now been reached in the analytic dialogue where reality must be formulated in a more subtle and complex manner than it has been before. At this point it is likely to be useful, even if difficult, for the analysand to give some sustained thought to this new development in the analytic material and not to be bound by versions of experience previously emphasized.

The Analyst Analyzes

The analyst's focus is on the interpretation of psychical reality. With this focus the analyst is not obliged to respond in kind to the analysand's emotional overtures. These overtures usually condense sexual

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and hostile as well as defensive and self-punitive features. They may take the form of rebellion or submission, control or helplessness, flattery or insult, excitement or lassitude, seductiveness or rejection, etc. The analyst's obligation is to analyze these overtures, particularly by interpreting their resistant and transference origins, functions, and significance.

By not responding in kind I mean, for example, not meeting love with love or rejection or exploitation; not meeting anger with retaliation or self-justification or appeasement; and not meeting confidences with thanks or with self-revelations of one's own. As a rule, responding in kind impedes the work of analysis. Sometimes the analyst is in a position to interpret these overtures immediately; sometimes only after preparatory confrontation of the fact of emotional pressure on the analyst and after clarification of its occasion and its connections. Most often he or she can only do so by deferring any response at all until the pressure has taken definite form, reached noteworthy intensity, and led to its own clarification, through the delivery of further associations by the analysand, which is to say only after a period of careful listening by the analyst.

The analyst's ideal is to rely so far as possible on interpretation and careful preparation for interpretation through confrontation and clarification. This ideal will appear to be inhumanly rigid, exploitative, authoritarian, or unsupportive only to those who reject the general guidelines of psychoanalytic understanding and so do not appreciate the benefits ultimately to be derived from the analyst's consistently maintaining the analytic attitude. There does exist a stereotype of the Freudian analyst as one who maintains an arid, stiff, utterly impersonal atmosphere in the analytic session. But in fact there is always room in analytic work for courtesy, cordiality, gentleness, sincere empathic participation and comment, and other such personal, though not socially intimate, modes of relationship. These modes of relationship are recognized to be part of the preparation for interpretation in that they help develop an atmosphere of safety within which the analysand may begin to communicate that which is most distressing, exciting, secret, or conceptually unformed. In addition, these modes of relationship help the analyst to work in as relaxed and poised a fashion as possible.

Because it would fall within the province of technique to discuss fully how far one may go, and in which direction in order to prepare the way for interpretation, nothing of that sort will be developed here. But emphasizing the importance of careful preparation does belong to

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a formulation of the analytic attitude, and it is this consideration which warrants my saying that the analysis should take place in a context of unabashed, unfussy, untheatrical, and unhectored human relatedness. This requirement holds even if most of that relatedness is shaped and limited by a radical division of labor between analyst and analysand. (As I said, the analyst is not obliged to respond in kind.) And this requirement holds even if at one time or another most of that specialized relatedness will itself be examined analytically as to what it implies for the analysand in the way of gratification, deprivation, and compromise.

In this respect, there is a tension in analytic work that can never be dispelled, nor should one try to dispel it. The question of preparation for interpretation introduces just one aspect of this general tension which may be summed up in the following way. Except with respect to relatively clearcut extremes, the analyst cannot know *exactly* just when, what, how, and how long to interpret, or, as the case may be, not to interpret but instead to listen or introduce some other type of intervention. As a rule, the meanings and effects of the analyst's interventions and silences may be adequately formulated only after the fact, if then. Will it be or was it "correct" to smile when saying hello or goodbye, to laugh at the analysand's joke, to ask or answer a particular question? Has the analyst persevered adequately in working through an issue interpretively before concluding that interpretation has reached its limits and that perhaps what Eissler (1953) called a parameter is now in order? Can the analyst be sure in advance what will be the "cost to the ego" (as Eissler called it) of each intervention or, I would add, nonintervention?

In these respects, it is not necessary that the analyst get obsessively bogged down in doubt about what to do or how to be. For I do believe that much is already known about how to prepare the way for, and to arrive at, timely and plausible if not probably correct interpretations, and I also believe that what is known can be taught to students and consolidated and extended by them as they gain clinical experience. The fact remains, however, that analysts cannot avoid experiencing the tension of being required to act under conditions of incomplete understanding. They must be prepared to intervene interpretively and expressively (or to refrain from that) just in order to develop further whatever understanding they already believe has been achieved. The analyst who tries to avoid this tension rather than recognize and accept it as being one of the inherent features of analyt-

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ic work is the analyst who is seriously involved in his or her illusions of omniscience, in either-or thinking, and in artificial impersonality.

A final word on the analyst as analyzer. Analyzing is not giving didactic instructions on how to be a "good" or comfortable analysand, nor is it teaching psychoanalytic generalizations about individual development or the way of the world. Certainly it is not giving advice and reassurance or issuing commands or prohibitions. As a rule, acting in any of these ways is neither analyzing nor preparing the way for interpretation. Most likely it is setting limits on what can be worked through later in the analysis. Consequently, such departures from the analytic attitude should be carefully limited. They may only be expressions of the analyst's narcissistically wishing to play guru. And the more the analyst plays guru, the more he or she reinforces the resistance to one important aspect of what remains to be analyzed more fully, namely, the analysand's presentation of a weak, empty, fragmented, "castrated," ego to the analyst in hopes of receiving his or her good ministrations (which, for the analysand, may be sadistic, rapacious, depriving, etc.). Freud (1919) noted long ago that one should never underestimate the human being's irresolution and craving for authority. One of the analyst's temptations, much played on by the irresolute analysand, is to purvey wisdom when it would be more appropriate to the job at hand to analyze wisely. //

The Analyst Aims to Be Helpful

As has been mentioned, analytic help is offered not through advice, reassurance, exhortation, or other such measures, but so far as possible through careful listening and judicious and well-prepared interpretation. The help that is offered is help in understanding one's past and present life more fully in order to be able to change oneself for the better (however that may be individually worked out over the course of analysis). //

Analysts do not view their role as one of offering or promising remedies, cures, complete mental health, philosophies of life, rescue, emergency-room intervention, emotional Band-Aids, or self-sacrificing or self-aggrandizing heroics. It is more than likely that each of these alternatives to a primarily interpretive approach manifests countertransference.

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Well-prepared analysts expect analysands to respond ambivalently and resistantly to analytic help because, as I shall continue to emphasize, unconsciously analysands can only view understanding and changing as dangerous. Analysts know that their analysands will live up to their agreement to abide by the fundamental rule and other practical arrangements of analysis only in the compromised ways by which they characteristically live up to all their other significant agreements. They know that they will have to direct many of their interpretations at these compromised, conflictual, resistant ways of collaborating.¹ Consequently, analysts expect their work to be demanding, and they anticipate that it will require full use of their intelligence, tact, empathy, vigilance, interpretive ingenuity, and patience.

Because the analytic attitude, therefore, has no place in it for undue therapeutic or didactic zeal, it provides no *work-appropriate* opportunity for the analyst to feel frustrated, disappointed, or impatient. This is so with respect to the consequences of a single intervention, a single session, or the entire course of the analysis. The analyst expects to find out only as the work proceeds what can be accomplished analytically. It is therefore puzzling, to say the least, when one hears an analyst complain about an analysand while conveying no recognition of the fact that he or she is ventilating a countertransference reaction. In such an instance, the complaining analyst does not see that therapeutic or didactic zeal has replaced the analytic attitude. In the cases in question, the analytic questions always remain ① what can be learned from the unyieldingness of certain characteristics which have already been subjected to considerable analysis, and ② what can be learned from the analyst's having begun inappropriately to feel frustrated, disappointed, angry, or impatient. Sometimes the lesson to be learned is that the analysis has gone as far as it can go (for the time being, anyway). In extreme cases, the lesson may be that analysis is not the method of choice. But very often, assuming that the analysand has been selected with some care and that the analyst is adequately equipped, the lesson is just that some negative countertransference has developed which calls for self-analysis or supervisory consultation.

A major feature of the analyst's helpfulness is the maintenance of a respectful affirmative attitude. Although this constituent of the analytic attitude will be described and illustrated in some detail in later chapters, a few words about it are in place here. Recognizing, as Freud did, that the analysand fears insight and change, the analyst is always

1. William I. Grossman, personal communication.

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ready to view the difficulties presented by the analysand not in a negative light but rather as meaningful, even if still obscure, expressions of the very problems that call for analysis. These difficulties are compromises. That is to say, they are ways in which, unconsciously, the analysand simultaneously obtains gratification, maintains a sense of security and integration, and satisfies needs to be punished. Because the analysand has a large stake in maintaining the status quo, the analyst must approach the attendant difficulties respectfully. When, for example, an analysand says, "Suspicion is the only way of looking at the world in which I have confidence," the affirmative analytic attitude will be expressed not in trying to induce the analysand to give up that conviction as soon as possible, but rather in trying patiently to understand and interpret all the emotionally contradictory uses of that conviction in the analysand's psychical reality. For the analyst, analyzing is not an alternative to being helpful, it is the analytic way of being helpful. It is just that the manifest gains produced by this effort to be helpful may not be immediate, unambiguous, of an expected or easily recognizable sort, or instantly responded to by the analysand with unbounded joy.

I lay no claim that this introductory outline of the analytic attitude is particularly original, that it is adequately comprehensive and detailed, or that it is entirely incontestable. As I indicated earlier, it is intended to convey as briefly as possible the ideal I have come to aspire to in my work as an analyst. This ideal selectively condenses the best of what I have learned from my teachers, my reading, my clinical work, and my previous efforts to teach or to write on topics that bear on the analytic attitude. The extent to which I have approached my ideal may be judged not so much from this introduction as from the following chapters on theory, empathy, interpretation, and technique.