

Psychoanalysis, Moral Philosophy and Developmental Psychology
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I am grateful to Stephen Groarke for his thoughtful and thought-provoking comments. I think there are some real disagreements between us, but also some misunderstandings, so if I can clear up even the latter, that will be something.

In my paper I focused on the ‘dual roles claim’, the claim that some concepts central to at least certain versions of psychoanalysis classify people in respect both of their degree of mental health and of their degree of psychological maturity. I argued that no concept can be expected to play both roles, and that the real point of these particular psychoanalytic concepts is first and foremost to do neither, but rather to draw ethical distinctions. Groarke in his reply is concerned with that claim of mine, but perhaps more concerned with a corollary of it, which I stated but didn't argue for, namely that psychoanalysis is, in part, continuous with moral philosophy. The fact that I didn't argue for that second claim, or indeed set it out very fully, may perhaps explain why it sometimes feels as if we are talking at cross purposes.

For the better part of his reply, it looks as if Groarke is opposed to both claims. Towards the end, however, things look otherwise. As long as what I call ‘psychoanalysis’ is not psychoanalysis, but what Groarke calls something else – perhaps ‘developmental psychology’, perhaps ‘Freudian revisionism’ – he can, he says, agree with everything I say, because it's consistent with what *he* calls ‘psychoanalysis’. Indeed if this switching of labels is granted, my arguments not only don't touch anything he wants to defend, but can be recruited to his own cause of rescuing psychoanalysis from distinct and mistaken views to which it is all too easily assimilated. So it looks as if all that divides us may be, after all, a verbal question – how properly to use the word ‘psychoanalysis’. Is that really all there is to it?

In the paper I self-consciously used the word ‘psychoanalysis’ very broadly, as a lazy abbreviation for ‘psychoanalysis and, more broadly, psychodynamic psychotherapy in the Freudian tradition’ (PAGE). With the term used that way, there are bound to be theoretical disagreements within what's properly called psychoanalysis. Indeed that remains true even if we don't use ‘psychoanalysis’ as a lazy abbreviation for anything: the history of psychoanalysis, even quite narrowly defined, has been full of disagreements. It doesn't follow that ‘psychoanalysis’ can mean anything one wants it to mean. But it does follow, I think, that the proper use of the word ‘psychoanalysis’ is anchored not to a single theory or set of theses, but to – among other things – a shared ancestry (for example, in Freud's work), to a set of institutions, and to a set of therapeutic practices, whose relations to theory may themselves be quite loose. That is not Groarke's view. On Groarke's view, some of the theories netted by the word ‘psychoanalysis’ as I use it are bad theories, and as *he* uses the word, only the best theory – whatever it is, and of course Groarke has his own views about that – deserves the label. That isn't *just* a verbal disagreement, because the question whether the proper use of ‘psychoanalysis’ is anchored to a theory or to something else is itself a theoretical question. But it isn't a theoretical question I even attempted to address in my paper, so it would be disappointing if the issue between Groarke and myself turned out to be only that one.

In search of a more satisfying locus of disagreement, then, let's consider the claim that psychoanalysis is, in part, continuous with moral philosophy. In Groarke's (as I understand it) Lacanian view, psychoanalysis has got nothing to do with moral philosophy. He regrets that I do not mention Lacan – which, by the way, I do in a different paper which does argue for the claim, though there's no reason Groarke should have known that.¹ Groarke only hints at what it is in Lacan that, in his view, makes the

¹ ‘The Place of Psychoanalysis in the History of Ethics’, *Journal of Moral Philosophy* (2013) DOI 10.1163/17455243-4681030, p. 14; print version forthcoming.

point so decisively: something to do with the unconscious, and something to do with the ‘necessity of libido’ as opposed to the ‘freedom of relating’. I suspect there’s a misunderstanding here, however, and the contrast between psychoanalysis even in Groarke’s very restricted sense and what I call moral philosophy is less sharp than he imagines. It only appears otherwise because Groarke is too ready to identify moral philosophy as such – and of course I am a moral philosopher – with some mainstream opinions within it, and to which he is opposed. (He’s right, of course, that ‘the vast majority of moral philosophers have shown little or no interest in psychoanalysis’, but I would have thought that the mere existence of the paper to which he is replying would have been some kind of evidence that I’m not one of them.) Let me explain.

For a start, I don’t think I actually say in the paper that psychoanalysis is ‘of a piece with Aristotelian ethics’ (Groarke PAGE), though the idea that I did lies behind a fair bit of Groarke’s criticism. What I said was that it’s of a piece with something broader than the views either of Aristotle or of his followers, a

philosophical tradition going back to Plato and Aristotle which focuses on the connections between human nature, human excellence and the good life for human beings.

In the other paper of mine I’ve referred to already, I sketched an outline of what I call the ‘great tradition’ in moral philosophy, a phrase intended not to capture moral philosophy as a whole, which is very heterogeneous, but the inquiry into the relations between human nature, human excellence and the good life for human beings inaugurated by Plato and Aristotle, and which I take to be that part of moral philosophy with which psychoanalysis is (again in part) continuous. Crucially, the tradition is, as it were, a mechanism with a number of moving parts: change the position of any one of the moving parts and you get a different particular answer as to how human nature, human excellence and the good life for us are related to one another. Aristotle’s view of these matters is just one such answer – a distinctively optimistic answer, since he believed that the life of an excellent human being would not only be good *for* that human being but also consist in the practice of the moral virtues (though note that his catalogue of virtues doesn’t coincide with the familiar Christian or post-Christian one). Nietzsche, by contrast, thought (at least on one reading) that we get progressively *less* excellent as human beings and lead lives that are progressively *less* good for us the more we acquire the (Christian or post-Christian) virtues, though if you substitute yet another set of human excellences from those prized by either Aristotle or by the ‘morality of pity’, the relationship Aristotle affirmed between human nature, human excellence and the good life for us is restored. So Nietzsche and Aristotle have different conceptions of our natures, different conceptions of human excellence, and so different views as to the part played by distinctively *moral* goodness in the good life for human beings. Nonetheless they both have a place – though different places – in the ‘great tradition’, that is, a place somewhere on the map I sketched of possible answers to the Platonic-Aristotelian investigation. When I said in the present paper that psychoanalysis is, in part, moral philosophy, what I meant was that it too has a place somewhere on that map.

Groarke takes issue with me, however, because he *thinks* I meant that psychoanalysis occupies a *particular* place on that map. I’m not quite sure which place he thinks that is. Perhaps it’s the place occupied by Aristotle (“a style of ethical theory based on notions of *arete*, right habits, and a rational conception of the life of *eudaimonia*” (Groarke PAGE), though note that this is not the same as the more demanding and less credible view he also mentions, that a good life is one lived according to a ‘rationally laid plan’: it is consistent with Aristotle that we find out in detail what constitutes a *eudaimon* life only by the messy experiment of trying to live it); perhaps it’s something less tightly defined (a life lived according to ‘any general [moral] ideal, be it virtue, duty or utility’ (Groarke PAGE)) but which nonetheless gives pride of place in its account of human excellence to (contrast Nietzsche) moral virtue – rather than, say, to satisfied ambition or creativity or religious devotion. But I did not argue, and do not believe, that psychoanalysis occupies only *that* sort of place: that really is a misunderstanding.

In fact I think there is no single place psychoanalysis occupies on the map – unsurprisingly, because as I use the word ‘psychoanalysis’, it’s theoretically internally diverse. Some versions of psychoanalysis – which Groarke would not like to recognize as belonging to psychoanalysis at all – occupy places rather like Aristotle’s. Some occupy places more like Nietzsche’s (Karen Horney might – *might* – be an

example here²). But some, for example Lacan's, occupy places quite unlike either. So I also think that Groarke *ought* to agree that psychoanalysis, even on his restrictive way of using the term, has a place somewhere on my map. I don't think he *would* agree, but beyond the mistaken assimilation of the map itself to one kind of (as we can call it) moralizing position on it, I can't see a good reason for him not to. Groarke says that psychoanalysis is a 'new ethic ... rather than an ethics of the good', but I doubt that there is conceptual space for anybody – including Lacan – to be quite *that* new. As I see it, it's Groarke's projection of moralizing assumptions into my words, rather than anything I actually said, that leads him to assume that 'an ethics of the good' means an ethics of the *moral* good: it doesn't. On the other hand it is surely incoherent to speak about an ethic that is not informed by *some* conception (some 'general ideal') of how it is good to live, whether the goods in question are moral or artistic or athletic or devotional, or goods of self-expression or self-development, or of some yet other kind.

To make the point a little more fully, consider the Lacanian vision of mankind Groarke thinks I should have emphasized more: "libidinal necessity and the structural discontent of the human situation". (It's arguably also a Freudian vision, though don't forget either Freud's theory of sublimation, or his sexual liberalism, the latter of which traces at least part of the discontent to local social formations rather than an invariant psychological structure.) I assume the Lacanian phrases gesture at the idea that, given the fact that libido is both unavoidably pressing and unavoidably less than fully satisfiable, we are condemned to discontent. Maybe: but there is still a good in focus here - the good of satisfying desire, or of acting on one's desires. (As Lacan says, the 'categorical imperative' is 'Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?', 1960: 314.) If there were no such good, we could not explain why the impossibility of fully satisfying libido spells discontent. Our problem – on this view – is that given the desires to which we are subject (i.e., given that aspect of our human natures), the best possible lives for us fall short (probably) of human excellence and are (for sure) not very good for us. But to say all that is to occupy a position – indeed a kind of limit position that makes the whole map seem clearer - on my map. So even a psychoanalysis maximally attuned to Lacanian views about desire and the unconscious is on the map somewhere. To summarize: if Groarke's complaint is that I said psychoanalysis occupies what I've called a moralizing position on the map of possible answers to the Platonic-Aristotelian investigation I've described, there's a misunderstanding: I didn't say that. If his complaint is that his version of psychoanalysis doesn't occupy any position on the map, there's a mistake, because that version of psychoanalysis, like any other, is on there somewhere – and so is (in part) a part of moral philosophy.

There's much more to say about Groarke's piece but for reasons of space I will deal with only a few of the issues he raises, and those in a somewhat piecemeal way. These are about psychoanalysis, 'developmental thinking' and developmental psychology.

Groarke claims to detect 'inconsistencies' in my 'treatment of developmental thinking': though I am 'critical of the idea that normal babies are narcissistic', the 'developmental paradigm ... is implicit in [my] argument', because I 'uphold [it] *contra* psychoanalysis'. But unless I have misunderstood, this objection rests on a careless use of the phrase 'the developmental paradigm', which Groarke uses to cover both (i) the thesis that normal human maturation proceeds from illness to health and/or from badness to goodness, and (ii) some other claims about human development, that I glean both from developmental psychology and from common observation, e.g. about the reciprocity involved in normal parent-infant interactions, or about infantile sensory experience. Since (i) is a claim I attack, and (ii) is part of the evidence I rely on in order to attack it, it's no surprise that there's an inconsistency between them. The inconsistency only appears to be a dialectical error of mine if (i) and (ii) are both bundled into a sack labelled 'the developmental paradigm'.

But perhaps Groarke's real objection here is not that I'm inconsistent, but that in criticizing the views some (though not all) psychoanalysts have held about infancy, I appeal both to evidence from outside psychoanalysis (e.g., from developmental psychology), and to what Groarke calls 'an alternative model of norms and values, namely, an ethics of the good'.

To take the second point first, I've already said that there's no such thing as an 'ethics' – a view about how to live, or about what makes the difference between a life's going well and its going not so well –

² 'A disciplinary inner control system for the sake of insuring moral conduct ... [has] a cramping effect on man's spontaneity, ... [but] but inherent in man are ... forces which urge him to realize his given potentialities', *Neurosis and Human Growth*, New York: Norton, 1950/1991, p. 14.

that doesn't invoke some good, though it needn't be a moral good. Psychoanalysis can hardly fail to be interested in the difference between a life's going well and its going not so well, so – though some analysts are, for historical reasons, still allergic to the mere word – it must involve some 'ethics of the good'. I make no apology for the particular ethic I invoked in the paper, according to which the capacity for other-relating is a central excellence both in infants and in adults. Nor was the point of my criticism of the dual roles claim to get psychoanalysts to stop thinking in terms of the distinctions between differentiated and undifferentiated, paranoid-schizoid and depressive, and so on: the point was to invite them to see the concepts which structure much of their activity for what (in my view) they are, namely, concepts designed to mark (surely worthwhile) ethical distinctions. Or, as I put it in the paper, 'not to abandon the terminology as useless, but to try to achieve a proper understanding of what it means'.

Now to the first point, the legitimacy of bringing evidence from common observation or developmental psychology to bear on psychoanalysis. When Groarke says analysts know nothing about infants *qua* analysts, he surely overstates his point. For as he himself says, 'analysts learn about the earliest phenomena of human life through the unconscious consequences thereof', but to say that analysts (*qua* analysts) don't learn about infants *through observation* is not to say that they don't learn about them *qua* analysts at all. Moreover though Groarke is surely right that adult psychoanalysis is a highly distinctive source of knowledge, I doubt whether it's the *only* source of knowledge of infants available to psychoanalysts in their role as analysts: he seems to forget that there is, or has been, such a thing as the psychoanalysis of children, or that baby observation can form part of psychoanalytic training. (Unless all that is also 'not psychoanalysis'.) But just suppose adult analysis *is* the only source of knowledge of infants available to psychoanalysts in their distinctive role as analysts. There is still surely no *methodological* impropriety about a psychoanalyst's bringing what he or she has found out about something in one, highly distinctive way, into connection with what he or she can find out about that same thing in ways that are available to analysts and non-analysts alike. Analysts rely all the time on things they do not know as analysts: what their patients tell them would be unintelligible if they didn't know, in all the ordinary ways, that shops are places that sell things, that losing teeth can be an effect of old age, that cars can be symbols of status as well as means of transport and so on. So why should psychoanalysts not connect up whatever they are in a distinctive position to find out about infants with knowledge of infants gained through experience of their own infants, for example, or from developmental psychology? This brings me back, in conclusion, to Groarke's suggestion I mentioned near the beginning, that as long as what I say is taken as a comment about 'developmental psychology' rather than about what he calls psychoanalysis, the apparent disagreement between us disappears. I'm afraid I don't think that can be right. There's no insulating what we come to believe in one way from what we come to believe in another: if these various things conflict, at most one of them can be knowledge, a point which goes no less for psychoanalysis and developmental psychology in general than it does for what analysts come to believe about infants, whether *qua* analysts or *qua* something else.