

International Review of Psycho-Analysis, 11:369-372 (1984)

Practice and Precept in Psychoanalytic Technique. Selected Papers of Rudolph M. Loewenstein With an Introduction by Jacob A. Arlow. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press. 1982. Pp. 240. £17.50.)

Review by Arnold D. Richards

Practice and Precept in Psychoanalytic Technique brings together 13 papers written by Rudolph Loewenstein between 1951 and 1972, 12 of which deal with technique and the theory of technique.* Excluded from this collection are the five landmark papers Loewenstein co-authored with Heinz Hartmann and Ernst Kris, his *Christians and Jews: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1951), his 'In Memoriam' essays, and a number of brief contributions and review essays. Grouping these papers on technique in a single volume makes a certain amount of repetition perhaps unavoidable. But though one cannot read the collection cover to cover with any sense of continual discovery, Loewenstein's major arguments retain their importance and so bear repeating. The book clearly establishes the value of the insights and technical recommendations which issues from Loewenstein's ego psychological perspective. The first paper in the collection, 'The problem of interpretation' (1949), is a treasure trove of useful dos and don'ts exemplifying the balanced viewpoint Loewenstein brought to the major issues of psychoanalytic technique. His major contribution to the problem of interpretation, as Arlow observes in his excellent introduction to the volume, was to emphasize that 'interpretations do not represent the sum total of the analyst's interventions' (p. 5), and to describe, accordingly, the range of interventions necessary if interpretations are to have their desired dynamic effect. Confrontation, clarification, and questioning of the analysand are among the dimensions of the analyst's activity that are addressed in these pages. Loewenstein's sensitivity to the various constituents of the interpretive process serves as a necessary counterweight to the tendency of analysts to 'define' analysis as a therapeutic modality in which the transference neurosis is resolved by 'interpretation' in the narrow sense of the term. Indeed, Loewenstein's papers are of particular value for the very reason that they help us steer between the Scylla of psychoanalytic rigidity and the Charybdis of wild analysis.

Within the context of Loewenstein's treatment of interpretation several topics are worthy of mention. His reconsideration of Freud's analogy between psychoanalytic and archaeological investigation (chapters 1 and 7) is noteworthy for clarifying anew the limits of the comparison: 'even the best preserved relic of antiquity may remain unnoticed until the curiosity of some searcher uncovers it; only then can it become capable of influencing the present. By contrast, the buried remains of an individual's past may influence his present not only during but because of their concealment and it is precisely due to this indirect influence they exert on the patient's actual behavior that they become subject to investigation and thus can be uncovered at all' (p. 129). Of special note is Loewenstein's attentiveness to 'the nature and development of defense mechanisms against superego demands'; he reminds us that frequently it is not drives but superego concerns (guilt) that are repressed. This insight is particularly relevant to patients with so-called narcissistic personality disorders, whose impulsive, drive-oriented behaviour frequently

* *The remaining paper included in the volume concerns the psychodynamics of masochism, 'A contribution to the analytic theory of masochism'.*

masks unconscious guilt. We should mention as well the fruitful yield of Loewenstein's continued interest in speech and language as they impinge on psychoanalysis. This topic—which is the subject of an entire paper (chapter 4) and figures in two others (chapters 7 and 10)—is of continuing importance. Loewenstein was a pioneer in efforts to relate issues of speech and verbalization to a theory of cure. Drawing on Karl Bühler's classification of speech functions (1965), Loewenstein conceptualized the analyst's role as 'transforming the appeal function of the patient's speech into the expressive function by showing him, through interpretations, how he expresses or describes something about himself when he speaks of persons or things outside himself' (p. 56). Loewenstein's conclusion that 'in the formation of analytic insight verbalization is an essential step' (p. 61) anticipates a great deal of subsequent research in this area. His discussion of speech and language does not, of course, exclude consideration of the importance of non-verbal communication and unconscious communication. Loewenstein himself was certainly aware of these dimensions. 'To be sure', he observed, 'not all relevant processes during an analysis occur on the level of consciousness; nor have all of them been verbalized. And yet, without verbalization on the part of the patient, without interpretations, without gaining of insight, there would be no analysis and thus no such processes' (p. 65). This last point is an important analytic principle, as relevant now as in 1952, the year Loewenstein presented the paper from which it is drawn (chapter 4).

Loewenstein's papers on technique can be viewed from a broader perspective as embodying the corpus of technical recommendations and modifications derived from the ego psychological contributions of Anna Freud and Heinz Hartmann. Anna Freud's work on ego defence and Hartmann's work on autonomous ego functions are indeed acknowledged by Loewenstein as the theoretical basis for his technical recommendations. At the time of their publication, Loewenstein's papers sought to bring psychoanalytic practice up to date with the theoretical advances of ego psychology. However, there is some question as to what extent significant changes in the psychoanalytic theory of mental functioning over the past 80 years have led to commensurate changes in basic psychoanalytic technique and the psychoanalytic theory of therapy. I have noted elsewhere (Richards, 1982) that proponents of major alterations in technique (Adler, Jung, Ferenczi, Alexander) have not remained within the psychoanalytic mainstream, which suggests that psychoanalysis is more receptive to revision of its theory of mental functioning than to modification of its technical procedures and the theory of therapy underlying them. There is agreement that Hartmann in his papers on autonomous ego functions and the conflict-free sphere proposed a significant change in the psychoanalytic theory of mental functioning then current. There is less agreement as to how substantive were the technical changes which followed from Hartmann's theoretical contributions, which make up an important part of what we refer to as 'ego psychology'.

In the first paper in the volume Loewenstein writes, 'Important though this influence of ego psychology has been, it has brought about no fundamental change in psychoanalytic technique, but rather a shift of emphasis which, however, has had significant consequences' (p. 43). Of what does this 'shift in emphasis' consist? In 'Some remarks on defenses, autonomous ego, and psychoanalytic technique' (chapter 3), Loewenstein delineates three indices of the shift: analysts (1) pay increasing attention to events and conflicts in later life and the present; (2) 'dwell ... more deliberately and more persistently ... on the resistance and on the ego aspect of the patient's production' (p. 43); and (3) 'accord greater attention to the patient's autonomous ego functions and the role they exert on conflict solution, and on the choice of pathways of gratifications, and, possibly, on the choice of defense'. I think there is a consensus regarding

these shifts, particularly (1) and (2), though to some extent the id analysis that Loewenstein disowns could be seen as a misapplication of Freud's psychoanalytic principles by some of his early disciples rather than as a direct consequence of 'prestructural' psychoanalysis. In regard to the third index ('greater attention to the patient's autonomous ego functions and the role they exert on conflict solution'), Loewenstein points out that this 'shift' is 'but the systematic elaboration of Freud's advice that analysis of resistance should take precedence over analysis of id derivatives' (pp. 43–4). It was Freud, Loewenstein reminds us, who in his early papers on technique offered the general advice that analysis should proceed from the 'surface' to the 'depth', just as it was Freud who warned against 'so-called "deep" interpretation at the beginning of analysis' (p. 44). Nevertheless, it was not until the publication of Anna Freud's *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* that defence analysis was placed upon a solid foundation. There are some in fact who assert that 'a technical lag' with regard to defence analysis persists to this day (Gray, 1982).

For me the most problematic and the least useful part of Hartmann's contribution to analytic theory is his positing of ego autonomy, i.e. of autonomous ego functions operating in a conflict-free sphere. I do not find it surprising, then, that throughout these papers Loewenstein repeatedly indicates his ambivalence regarding the relevance of the conflict-free sphere to questions of technique. In the first paper of the collection, 'The problem of interpretation' (1949), he claims that interventions which foster 'the analytic atmosphere' contribute 'to the strengthening of the conflictless sphere of the ego' (pp. 18–19), only to add in a footnote that 'as a matter of fact, the strengthening of the conflictless sphere of the ego is mainly brought about by interpretation' (p. 19n), i.e. by the interpretation of conflict. In contending that the analyst's alliance is with the conflict-free sphere of the patient's ego, Loewenstein is referring to 'the patient's perceptions, memory, thinking, reality testing, capacity for self-observation and understanding of others and his faculty for verbal expression'. His point, it seems, is that the analyst allies himself with the patient's autonomous ego functions. But Loewenstein seems to have had some doubt as to the theoretical wisdom of using a conflict-free sphere in this way. In a paper of 1965 he writes, 'Intrasystemic conflicts probably exist only in conjunction with intersystemic ones' (quoted by Arlow in his introduction, p. 10). However, in the final paper in this collection, 'Ego autonomy and psychoanalytic technique' (1971; chapter 13). Loewenstein remains intent on emending, on the basis of Hartmann's contribution, Freud's classic dictum regarding the effect of psychoanalysis: 'Where there is conflictual ego', runs the paraphrase, 'the autonomous ego should acquire increased control' (p. 226). Nevertheless, one should consider the following points in evaluating Loewenstein's attempt to derive technical implications from Hartmann's postulate of the conflict-free sphere: (1) Regarding the analytic alliance, might it not be theoretically preferable to say that the analyst allies himself with ego functions that have not been seriously impaired by conflicts than to say that he allies himself with ego functions operating in a discretely conflictfree sphere? Loewenstein was aware, as we all are, that unconscious wishes and fantasies play a significant role in the initial therapeutic engagement of the analysand. The analysis is often initially fuelled by unconscious wishes and magical fantasies which the patient brings to the analytic situation; these wishes and fantasies are only gradually supplanted by the patient's 'work ego' (see Olinick et al. (1973)). (2) Regarding the theory of therapy, using 'conflictual' and 'autonomous' as adjectives characterizing the ego tends to (needlessly, I believe) reify it in a counter-productive way (Schafer). I would argue that at this point it makes better sense, both theoretically and clinically, to think in terms of ego functions

that may be altered by conflict in various ways, and to various degrees, than to posit an 'autonomous' ego oblivious to conflict.

In summary then, Loewenstein's papers on technique exemplify the cautious, evolutionary development of technique that has characterized the history of psychoanalysis. They are transitional in nature; they hark back to certain aspects of Freud's technical writings, aspects insufficiently appreciated and not firmly grounded until the work of Anna Freud and Heinz Hartmann in the 1930s and 1940s, even as they look ahead to issues (e.g. the status of non-interpretive interventions in analysis, the relationship of speech to psychoanalytic insight) that are of major importance to analysts of the current generation. And though one might raise questions regarding the theoretical status and usefulness of Hartmann's concept of the conflict-free sphere and remain sceptical as to its serviceability as a basis for technical recommendations, Loewenstein's technical insights, especially those bearing on matters of defence and resistance, have retained much of their power to illuminate, sometimes quite strikingly, the practice of psychoanalysis.

REFERENCES

BUHLER, K. 1965 Sprachtheorie: Die Darstellungs-funktion der Sprache Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer.

GRAY, P. 1982 'Developmental lag' in the evolution of technique for psychoanalysis of mental conflict J. Am. Psychoanal. Assoc. 30:621-655[à]

LOEWENSTEIN, R. M. 1951 Christians and Jews. A Psychoanalytic Study New York: Int. Univ. Press.

OLINICK, S. et al. 1973 The psychoanalytic work ego: process and interpretation Int. J. Psychoanal. 54:143-159[à]

RICHARDS, A. D. 1982 The superordinate self in psychoanalytic theory and in the self psychologies J. Am. Psychoanal. Assoc. 30:939-957[à]