

Intimacy & Separateness in Psychoanalysis

Warren Poland

Notes by Michael Mervosh

CHAPTER 1 - Regarding The Other

Regard – what a wonderfully elastic word that is. From the French *regarder*, to look at or watch; and from the Old French *regarde*, implying guarding or protecting; and *rewarder*, to give a reward to. Regard, warden, guard – all belong to the same small genetic family.

Psychotherapy has its own internally hard-wired problem, one that is entirely internal to the discipline of psychology. It is the challenge to integrate the phenomena of human separateness and commonality.

The word “regard” has the flexibility needed to allow for an individual’s specific and unique viewpoints, along with an open and varied aspects of understanding another.

- *Psychotherapy is about a form of inquiry, a disciplined technique developed as a specific tool for allowing exploration of the hidden parts of a mind at work.*

If one looks closely at any kind of unfolding process, the enigma of separateness and commonality is always present.

For me, grasping reality always requires a stretch to try to realize what self and otherness mean, to struggle to contain with great difficulty the awareness that, while you and I share the same world, we have different and equally valid realities.”

- *Warren Poland*

Having the open mind of a beginner is the starting point for each and every session. That each time is ‘for the first time’ is vital so that the client’s self-inquiry not be carved to the design of the therapist’s favorite theory or view.

Long practice can lead to growing skills, but merely repeated experience can also lead to calling something growth that in fact is only personal comfort.

- *An irony innate to therapy is that while a client asks for a therapist’s help, therapy by its very definition is the study of whatever it is that people **do not** want to know about themselves.*

A client in therapy is in conflict, torn, pulled from as well as pulled toward insight.

- *When moving forward, especially towards the unknown, one always works at the edge of darkness, and too much clarity at work raises concern that what is uncertain has been left for the safety of what is congenial.*

Poland asked himself, as he passed the 50 year mark of doing therapy, what was the most important thing he had learned in that half century – it was that *the patient is somebody else!*

The therapist is the other's other.

The therapist's clinical participation in another's introspective journey is always primarily in the service of that client. We work at the service of the other.

There is a contribution the therapist makes even more basic than that of advancing the client's self-inquiry. It is the therapist's respectful recognition of the client as having a self in its own right, distinct and with its own values, regardless of those of the therapist.

Not only is such an attitude essential for exploration to unfold, but also it has a fundamental beneficial import in and of itself.

It is crucial for the client, for any person, to be seen, acknowledged, and appreciated for that person's unique self. Being seen and being gotten, without being acted on for the sake of the other's purposes, even therapeutic ones – this is vital and essential.

The therapist has many differing ways of coming to understand. One is conscious attention to unfolding associations.

Another has to do with experiencing the client's emotional world, doing so in a way that oscillates between engaged empathy and detached reflection. The therapist's self-inquiry is essential for this to succeed, for experiencing but not getting lost in the client's dream world brought to life.

The therapist's silent self-reflection is something the client picks up. It is through that picking up that the client develops their own ability to similarly shift between conflictual and observing spheres of the mind, to oscillate between their own subjectivity and a more objective view.

- *Technique is not simply explicit activity consciously planned. Much more significantly, technique is attitude actualized.*

Whatever the therapist says, from the most trivial clarification to the most profound interpretation, whatever the content of the words, also communicates an implicit individuating message:

No, I am not one of your ghosts, but as separate people we can speak to and with each other of what is going on. No, I am not part of your dream, but as a person separate from you, I can help you find the words to say it.

- *Contact between separate people replaces merger.*

“Intimate separation” is essential and intrinsic to the fundamental therapeutic situation, where two people can express the whole gamut of tensions which may arise between them.

When the world goes well, the client’s individuality, profoundly respected from the start, grows in autonomous strength through the collaborative work.

Not to appreciate theory is to believe that ignorance actually is bliss. Closing one’s mind to learning is mental suicide.

Nonetheless, rapid resort to cumulative knowledge, or theory (or abstractions), is counter-productive, closing questions rather than opening them. It is too easy to fall back on theory to minimize the discomfort of feeling lost when facing the edge of darkness, the land where inquiry lives.

An undesired consequence of therapeutic work done in psychotherapy ‘bubble’ is the tendency to pathologize life, that is, what happens outside of the bubble.

Dilemmas notwithstanding, it is hard not to feel awe at what an astonishing world was exposed when Freud pulled back the curtain hiding unconscious forces, and at how fortunate we are to be lost in exploring such terrain.

How privileged we are to be welcomed into the lives of specific, singular and unique individual others to share such a project.

