Wisdom Won from Illness

Essays in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England
2017

Printed in the United States of America

First printing

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lear, Jonathan, author.
Title: Wisdom won from illness: essays in philosophy and psychoanalysis / Jonathan Lear.
Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016017882 | ISBN 9780674967847
Subjects: LCSH: Psychoanalysis and philosophy. | Reason. | Literature—Philosophy. | Philosophical anthropology. | Philosophy and social sciences.
Classification: LCC BF175.4.P45 L434 2017 | DDC 150.19/5—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016017882

CHAPTER ONE

Wisdom Won from Illness

1. From its inception, psychoanalysis claimed not merely to be an effective therapy for psychological suffering, but to shed light on the human condition. But what kind of insight is this? To be sure, psychoanalysis opened up vistas of psychopathology. But is the sum total of our insight *into* illness, or is there wisdom to be won *from* illness? The ancient Greeks bequeathed us a concept of wisdom (*sophia*) that makes it problematic that any such wisdom is possible. For Aristotle, theoretical wisdom is a deep understanding of how things are. It includes a grasp of the truth, as well as of the correct scientific theory in which the truth is embedded—a grasp of the causal connections and basic structure in terms of which it all fits together.[1] For living organisms, Aristotle thought that what they are shows up in conditions of health. From this perspective, wisdom is essentially about health and well-being. Pathology is a falling away from health, and there are indefinitely many ways in which that might happen. Such multiplicity and falling short is not the stuff of wisdom—at least, so Aristotle thought.

Aristotle also marked off a special form of wisdom, "practical wisdom" (*phronêsis*), appropriate for humans, which is the capacity to think effectively and well about how to live. A practically wise person can grasp what goods are worth pursuing in a fulfilling life: she can think through how to attain them, and she can make her thinking effective in living a good life. For Aristotle, the conclusion of practical reasoning is not a theoretical proposition about what to do, but rather *the very doing* of that act.[2] This is a different kind of wisdom than theoretical wisdom, and Aristotle mentions Thales as an example of a person who understood the principles of the universe but

accidentally fell into a well while thinking.[3] At first glance, it would seem that psychoanalysis could have nothing to do with practical wisdom either. For, practical wisdom aims at and exemplifies human flourishing. A practically wise person, Aristotle thought, is capable of happiness (*eudaimonia*)—a full, rich, meaningful life lacking in nothing that is needed for the happy life that it is. By contrast, psychoanalysis is concerned with the myriad ways people fall ill psychologically. It addresses people who are suffering, failing to thrive. There are, Aristotle thought, indefinitely many ways that can happen, and grasping some of these failures does not count as wisdom.

There are two familiar modes of response—one deriving from Plato, the other from Nietzsche. In the *Republic,* Plato offered a rich account of psychopathology as a way of delineating by contrast what psychic health consists in. The accounts of disease bring into relief an image of psychological flourishing. The Nietzschean route is to insist that humans are uncanny animals, sick in their own nature. Wisdom thus must be won *through* the sickness; indeed, wisdom *is* the sickness that constitutes us as human. There are intimations of both lines of thought in Freud's work.

In this essay, I want to take a different tack. I want to argue that wisdom is about health *and* that psychoanalysis can be both an understanding *and a manifestation* of human health. Wisdom can be won from illness—and not simply in the sense that pathology lends insight into health, but in that it gives us direct and immediate insight into who and what we are.

2. From early on, Freud encouraged his patients to try to say whatever came into their minds, but by 1912 he had formalized this into a principle of technique he called *the fundamental rule* of psychoanalysis.[4] The analysand was enjoined to speak his or her mind without inhibition or censorship. By calling this rule fundamental and attaching the definite article—it was *the* fundamental rule—Freud placed it at the center of psychoanalytic practice. And in "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," written in 1914, he advanced a history of the development of psychoanalytic technique that emphasized abandoning deep interpretation in favor of facilitating the analysand's own associations:

> Finally, there was evolved the consistent technique used today, in which the analyst gives up the attempt to bring a particular moment or problem

> into focus. He contents himself with studying whatever is present for the time being on the surface of the patient's mind, and he employs the art of interpretation mainly for the purpose of recognizing the resistances which appear there, and making them conscious to the patient. From this there results a new sort of division of labor: the doctor uncovers the resistances which are unknown to the patient; when these have been got the better of, the patient often relates the forgotten situations and connections without any difficulty.[5]

We can see here a shift in Freud's image of psychoanalytic expertise: away from a claim to knowledge of hidden contents of the mind and toward a claim to practical knowledge—namely, the ability to facilitate a process that would otherwise be stuck, impeded, or conflicted. This is the process of the analysand coming to speak his or her mind. The analyst does not abandon a claim to expert knowledge, but, for Freud, the expertise is now focused on method: how to facilitate the free flow of consciousness in another.

In that same year, Freud added a footnote to a new edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams:*

> The technique [of dream-interpretation] which I describe in the pages that follow differs in one essential respect from the ancient method: it imposes the task of interpretation upon the dreamer himself. It is not concerned with what occurs to the interpreter in connection with a particular element of the dream but with what occurs to the dreamer.[6]

By this stage in his theorizing, Freud thinks the therapeutic method of psychoanalysis works through the self-conscious awareness and understanding of the analysand.

With the benefit of hindsight, Freud's picture of technique seems a bit wishful. One way to view the development of psychoanalytic technique since Freud is as a response to analysands who could not be helped simply by such straightforward treatment.[7] Still, as with any great thinker, one can read Freud as reaching beyond himself. Whatever the revisions of technique (and these may be considerable) and however limited the achievement in any particular case, the broadscale aim that Freud laid down for psychoanalysis is the unfettered movement of the self-conscious mind in its own activity. When, in his maturity, Freud famously wrote, "Where id was, there ego shall

be,"[8] his injunction was not that the repressed unconscious should be replaced by unconscious defensive ego strategies[9] but that self-conscious awareness and understanding should attend and inform the workings of the mind. Let us call this aim "Freud's legacy."

What shall we do with it? We, of course, have a choice of inheritance. There is room for interpretation of what we might mean by the claim that psychoanalysis facilitates the development of self-consciousness; and there is room to decide whether we want to accept the claim under any interpretation. There is no reason to stick to Freud's legacy simply because it comes from Freud. Our relationship to this legacy ought to be shaped by what, on reflection, seem to be good reasons. And yet, psychoanalysis teaches that legacies tend to be fraught—often in ways we do not fully understand. We ought thus to be wary of quick dismissals. So, for example, the term *self-consciousness* can be used to pick out any of a family of phenomena—a bare awareness of oneself, a sense of embarrassment in the presence of others, apperception, an awareness of an act as one's own, or a sense of oneself as a certain type of person—and one can choose any of these meanings and insist that psychoanalysis is not particularly about *that.* Or, one can decide that self-consciousness is a purely cognitive state, decide that such cognitive states are distinct from emotional states or from states of desire and again conclude that psychoanalysis could not possibly be so confined or confining. But there is no need to legislate such a division of psychic life. In human beings, emotional and desiring life can be shot through with self-consciousness (though it need not be). There is, of course, a picture of the mind in which self-consciousness stands over our emotional and desiring life, as though from a distance, observing it. And some experiences make it seem as though this picture is accurate. But there are powerful reasons for thinking this is a misleading image of our conscious mental life.[10] Properly understood, self-consciousness can be, in itself, emotional and desiring.

3. A more powerful objection to Freud's legacy takes the form of a dilemma. *Either* we take the claim that psychoanalysis facilitates the development of self-consciousness and tie it tightly to Freud's own understanding of facilitating free association according to the fundamental rule—in which case it is too narrow to cover the important psychoanalytic work that has burgeoned out from there. *Or* we interpret this claim broadly to include a wide range of techniques—for example, the naming of states that have remained

unnamable for the analysand, or repairing the damaged capacity to represent one's mental states, or drawing attention to projective identifications or the total transference situation. These are situations in which the analyst says things that would never simply flow from the associations of the analysand, by identifying resistances à la Freud, in which case the claim that psychoanalysis facilitates self-consciousness becomes vague. Precisely by covering such a wide range of phenomena, it is not clear what work the claim does.

I want to place psychoanalysis on *both sides* of this dilemma—and argue that, ironically, that is the solution to the problem. The fundamental rule is an important paradigm, both because it gives us a way to look carefully into the microcosm—to see how a person's mind unfolds as he tries to speak it out loud—and because thereby it gives us a basis for branching out by expanding and enriching technique.

If we think about what makes human life valuable, we come upon a handful of terms: *freedom, happiness, reason, love, truthfulness, being in touch with reality, and self-consciousness.* What they have in common is that while they can be found in the details of life, they are also overarching terms—life-values, really—that have an essential vagueness about them. That is why we need poets and playwrights and novelists and philosophers: to help us reimagine and rethink what these values might consist in, how they might be lived. We need to be able to link the details of our lives with our most significant overarching concerns. That need is not going to go away—at least so long as there is something recognizable as the human condition. Our humanity—not merely the biological species *human* but what makes human life distinctive and valuable—partially consists in wrestling, both individually and communally, with what these values mean and how they actually fit into a life well lived. One way to live a meaningful human life is to give *determination* in one's life to these *determinable* (and thus somewhat vague) categories.[11]

In effect, Freud's legacy is to bind psychoanalysis to the Western humanistic tradition by offering a remarkable determination of what we might mean by *self-consciousness.* In this way, psychoanalysts ought to join the ranks of poets, playwrights, novelists, and philosophers who help us understand the most basic values of human life. In this essay, I want to sketch out how that might be.

The fundamental rule is one determination of what we might mean by *self-consciousness:* one that brings self-consciousness into the microcosm by enjoining the analysand to speak *everything* that comes to mind, no matter

how small or trivial. There is elegance in the simplicity of this rule. Prima facie, the task looks easy: all one has to do is speak one's mind. And if, following Freud, one thinks of the fundamental rule as partially constituting psychoanalysis, then one can see simply by looking at the activity that it is structured so as to promote self-consciousness in the analysand.

As I said in the introduction, no one can follow the fundamental rule.[12] This is an empirical discovery of some magnitude. Freud insists that this inability to follow the rule flows from a difficult-to-understand *refusal* to follow it. That is, we are motivated not to allow self-consciousness to unfold in this way. Sometimes these resistances are themselves unconscious—and thus Freud came to recognize that the psychoanalytically significant unconscious cannot simply be identified with the repressed. He introduces the concept *ego* in part because he recognizes that the unconscious lies on both sides of the repressing-repressed divide.[13] But, he also notes, on occasion we can *experience* the resistance as itself an aspect of the unfolding self-conscious experience. So, for example, he instructs analysts to tell their analysands:

> You will notice that as you relate things various thoughts will occur to you which you would like to put aside on the ground of certain criticisms and objections. You will be tempted to say to yourself that this or that is irrelevant here, or is quite unimportant, or nonsensical, so that there is no need to say it. You must never give into these criticisms, but must say it in spite of them—indeed, you must say it precisely *because* you feel an aversion to doing so.[14]

And in a footnote he recalls his own experience:

> We must remember from our own self-analysis how irresistible the temptation is to yield to these pretexts put forward by critical judgment for rejecting certain ideas.[15]

This means that not only is the spontaneous unfolding of self-consciousness fraught, but that on occasion we can become immediately and directly aware of the conflict. It need not be merely an empirical hypothesis, an inference based on evidence such as a pause or a sudden change of subject.

It is here that the psychoanalyst begins to have something significant to say to the philosopher. When Aristotle said that humans are by nature

rational animals, he did not mean that humans were just like other animals, except that they had a special added-on capacity—rationality.[16] Rather, he meant that rationality is the *form* of human life. That is, it is a transformative capacity. We are creatures for whom, when we are flourishing, thoughtful self-consciousness can shape our lives. Now, Aristotle was certainly aware of the possibility of intrapsychic conflict, and he knew that conflict can show up in self-conscious awareness. He thought there was what he called a nonrational part of the soul—through which we express emotion and desire—that *in a way* participates in reason.[17] One of the central tasks in human life, he thought, is to train the nonrational soul to "speak with the same voice" (*homophôneô*) as the rational part.[18] This is a remarkable achievement of intrapsychic harmony, but often we fall short, in which case the rational and nonrational parts of the soul speak with different voices. In this situation, a person can *feel* the conflict between judgment and desire—or between judgment and emotion. Philosophers tend to look on psychoanalysis as offering an extension of this picture: that the conflict often escapes conscious awareness because the desire is unconscious, and the desire is unconscious because it is in some way unacceptable and therefore repressed. If that were an accurate picture, psychoanalysis' ability to make a contribution to the philosophical tradition would be limited. Even Plato recognized that we have desires of which we are unconscious in waking life, that only come to the surface in dreams:

> Those [desires] that are awakened in sleep, when the rest of the soul—the rational, gentle and ruling part—slumbers. Then the beastly and savage part, full of food and drink, casts off sleep and seeks to find a way to gratify itself. You know that there is nothing it won't dare to do at such a time, free of all control by shame or reason. *It doesn't shrink from trying to have sex with a mother as it supposes, or with anyone else at all,* whether man, god or beast. It will commit any foul murder, and there is no food it refuses to eat. In a word, it omits no act of folly or shamelessness.[19]

But Freud's recognition that we are constitutionally unable to follow the fundamental rule makes an importantly different point: not simply that there is forbidden desire beyond the horizon of self-conscious awareness, but that the domain of self-consciousness is itself disrupted and distorted in ways it usually does not recognize and certainly does not understand.

But the real challenge to philosophy comes with Freud's second major discovery: that the unconscious is active according to its own form of mental activity. Freud puts it concisely:

> To sum up: *exemption from mutual contradiction, primary process* (mobility of cathexes), *timelessness,* and *replacement of external by psychical reality*—these are the characteristics which we may expect to find in processes belonging to the system *Ucs.*[20]

To understand the challenge, we need better to understand these conditions, but right away we can see the broad outline of the problem. Philosophers have found deep conceptual links between *freedom, rationality,* and *self-consciousness.* In a nutshell: our freedom consists in our ability to act on the basis of reasons (not merely to be tossed about by mindless causes); and these reasons manifest our freedom by working through our self-conscious understanding. But if, following Aristotle, one takes it to be reason's task to *inform* human life, how is reason to appropriate not merely a hidden and recalcitrant realm of desire, but also an alternative, nonrational form of mindedness? Without a good answer to this question, the philosophical conception of human being is cut from its moorings and floats free of human life.

The ancient Greek philosophers bequeathed us a tradition now known as moral psychology. They thought we could ground a conception of what it is for us to live *well* by giving us a nuanced psychological account of who we are. And they thought we could then better understand what it is for us to live well with each other. But if we are partially constituted by another form of mindedness, this raises altogether new questions of what it would be for us to live well. Psychoanalysis not only brings the problem into view, but it also begins to offer a solution. And if practical wisdom is the efficacious understanding of how to live well, then psychoanalysis might have a claim to be a wisdom won from illness.

4. Let us look more closely at this form of other-mindedness. Ms. A came into analysis seeking help with intimacy. Over time I came to see her as inhabiting a disappointing world. No matter what happened to her, she would interpret it under an aura of disappointment. Obviously, real-life

disappointments and frustrations would focus her attention. But even if something she wanted occurred—getting promoted at work, asked out on a date by someone who interested her—she would diminish it: "The boss only promoted me because he wanted to promote my colleague, and he was too embarrassed not to include me" or "He invited me out because he got turned down by the person he really wanted to date." In short, no matter what happened in life—invited out/not invited out—Ms. A would tend to experience it as disappointing. I came to think of her as inhabiting a geodesic dome of disappointment, because each particular disappointment would be constructed out of a petite triangle. There would be two others—whether two parents, or two siblings, or a parent and a sibling, or two colleagues, or friends, etc.—in relation to whom she felt excluded and let down. She was unaware of how active she was in constructing the triangle and inflicting the painful disappointment on herself.

We are, of course, familiar with the idea of unconscious repetition, but in calling the unconscious *timeless,* Freud asks us to envision what the repetitions are all about. Each of the individual disappointments—over and over again—supports a structure of repetition. But the structure of repetition itself expresses a timeless thought: *that life shall be disappointing.* The thought functions as though it is an injunction, and its temporality is different from the familiar narratives of conscious life. Instead of a historical narrative of past, present, and future using familiar tensed verbs—"When I was a baby my mother wasn't there for me, now the boss at work lets me down"—the injunction hangs over all narratives, informing them with a timeless quality of disappointment. In this way, whatever the particular conscious narrative, a primordial structure of disappointment is timelessly held in place.

The timelessness of the unconscious can thus lend shape and durability to a life. From this perspective, the repetitions are manifestations of an underlying timeless persistence. This can contribute an uncanny sense that life is fated—for example, to be isolated and disappointing.[21] And the durability of this life-structure is reinforced by the unconscious also being, as Freud put it, "exempt from contradiction." Philosophers have interpreted this to mean that a person can at the same time believe both P and *not-P,* just so long as one of the beliefs is unconscious.[22] But that is not what Freud is getting at. Rather, in the grips of feeling disappointed, the countervailing evidence loses salience. It is not so much that the person has contradictory beliefs; it is that she loses the ability to experience herself as confronted with

a contradiction. Freud's point is that unconscious productions tend to present themselves as *unopposed*.[23]

This gives us a plausible way to understand the "psychic determinism" of unconscious mental life. The point ought not to be that there will always be a hidden, antecedent mental cause determining the will—how could we ever know that?—but that disappointment functions as a formal cause, casting an aura over the events that do occur and providing them with a misleading and unhappy-making interpretation. We cannot know with confidence what the chain of efficient causes has been, from past to present to future. But we can have confidence for thinking that *whatever* happens, and *however* it comes about, there will be a tendency to incorporate it into an interpretive frame in which a sense of disappointment rules.

These features of the unconscious—timelessness and exemption from contradiction—have a peculiar upshot: namely, that by the time people try to take self-conscious account of themselves, figure out who they are and what matters to them, they are *already* working with a largely unconscious sense of a world and their place in it. If, in trying to take stock of their lives, they overlook this aspect of life, they are in danger of constructing an illusion of self-understanding. This is of obvious clinical significance, for it means that the risk of going through a pseudotherapy is significant. But this insight also has philosophical import. We cannot legitimately think of the self as constructed by self-conscious judgments—about how to act, which desires to satisfy, what to believe, and so on.[24] For these judgments are themselves haunted by a core unconscious fantasy—for example, *that life shall be disappointing*—that provides its own source of unity for the self. In the case of Ms. A, disappointment was the most active principle constituting her life. The temptation to think otherwise derives, I suspect, from an inadequate anthropology: one that assumes that, but for the organizing principle of self-conscious judgment, we are threatened by an unstructured chaos of unruly desires. This is a philosopher's picture that goes back to Plato, but it does not capture who we are, and it ought to be abandoned. If a person is genuinely to take herself self-consciously into account, there must be a way of taking such a core fantasy into account. Psychoanalysis is aimed at doing this in an effective way.

These core fantasies tend to have a philosophical air about them. They began to form in childhood as an imaginative yet ultimately nonrational attempt to address a basic problem of human vulnerability. And then, precisely

because the unconscious is timeless and exempt from contradiction, the fantasies persist into adult life. The fact that they develop through the loose associations and condensations of primary process, that they embed hidden sources of satisfaction, and that they are regularly experienced as real adds to their durability. Ironically, our imaginations thus act like a resourceful philosopher who happens to lack the capacity for rational thought. As finite, nonomnipotent creatures, we are constitutively vulnerable in a world over which we have, at best, limited control. How disappointing that we cannot render ourselves invulnerable to disappointment! An imaginary strategy that the young Ms. A chanced upon was to render herself invulnerable to the world's disappointments by getting there first and, in fantasy, inflicting the disappointment upon herself. This is an omnipotent "victory"—being in control of the disappointment—that consists in a lifetime of suffering disappointment. It has this illusory benefit: it protects a childish sense of omnipotence from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. There is, as it were, a hiding place for her omnipotence, and the disappointments paradoxically reinforce her sense of power and control. Obviously, from the point of view of living *well,* this is a disastrous outcome. But to address this problem adequately, we need to find a way to acknowledge that the Freudian unconscious has a tendency to turn us, unbeknownst to ourselves, into misguided but stubbornly insistent interpreters of the world. How could one ever undo *that?*

5. At the beginning of a session several years into the analysis, I could hear Ms. A fall repeatedly into silence. She would break the silence with mundane stories about work, or superficial accounts of how she was feeling—and then she would fall into silence again. I let this go on for a while: I had a hunch that Ms. A was experiencing some internal pressure, and I wanted her to live with it for a while so that she might notice it. But at some point—as she was living inside a pause—I asked her if she was aware she was pausing, and whether there might be something on her mind. She said that actually she had been thinking about asking me if I could reschedule an hour. But she was reluctant to ask because she thought I would just say no. A little bit later, she admitted that she had had a daydream that I would be with another analysand, whom I preferred. So, here in the living present of the analytic situation was one of those petite triangles of disappointment that made up

her geodesic dome, only this time I was included. Obviously, this is an instance of what Freud called *transference*—an attempt to draw the analyst inside an unconscious drama. And, as we have seen, this means that the analyst and the analysand are together drawn into direct contact with that other form of mindedness that helps constitute who we are. Freud said, "Transference presents the psychoanalyst with the greatest difficulties."[25] He meant both the technical difficulties of handling it and the emotional difficulties of tolerating it. Freud came to see that this was the key to the efficacy of psychoanalytic treatment:

> But it should not be forgotten that it is precisely [transferences] that do us the inestimable service of *making the patient's hidden and forgotten impulses immediate and manifest.* For when all is said and done, *it is impossible to destroy anyone in absentia or in effigy.*[26]

Ms. A associated to a litany of times throughout her life when she had wanted to speak but stopped herself for fear of disappointment, thereby disappointing herself. She could see for herself that this was a fractal moment: immediately graspable in the present, but containing in itself the large-scale structure of her life. She associated to any number of occasions in her life when she inhibited herself in this way. She could see—not just as a theoretical insight, but as an emotionally laden moment in the living present—that she was protecting herself from being disappointed *by me* by anticipating it and inflicting the disappointment *on herself.* She also grasped immediately and from the inside that her sense of rationality had been skewed. She knew with clarity and immediate availability to consciousness: *this triangle was her creation.* She then made a comment of unusual emotional intensity: "The rage I anticipate, the rage if you say no . . . no one has even said no. *It feels like an eternal obstacle, a weight on my throat,* keeping me from speaking." The power of these words cannot be gleaned from their content alone. To be sure, the statement was a sincere, accurate, and insightful account of her feelings; they also expressed her feelings and were uttered by her in the process of coming to self-understanding. As such, the statement might have therapeutic value. But, on this occasion, the power of the words went beyond that. It was as though a weight was literally lifted off her throat. One could hear her larynx open, her throat clear. Freud taught that the unconscious often speaks in corporeal terms, with bodily symptoms and corporeal

representations of mental activity.[27] In this moment, Ms. A is self-consciously describing her experience, and she is using a metaphor to do so: it feels as though a weight has been lifted from her throat. This is the voice of self-conscious experience. But in the same moment, her unconscious also speaks in its own form of mindedness. In a funny way, however, conscious and unconscious are, to use Aristotle's term, speaking with the same voice (*homophôneô*). It is as though the word has become flesh. Ms. A could feel the various voices in her psyche come together. She had a sense of vibrancy and efficacy: she could *feel* that she was actively taking this particular triangle apart. Her awareness of her efficacy was constitutive of this efficacy. That is, her ability to break this triangle down was flowing immediately through her self-conscious grasp of the artificiality of the triangle.

Do that again and again and again with the petite triangles as they keep coming up over time and you have the process that Freud called *working-through.* It is too simple to call this a step-by-step process, but it is sufficiently discrete that it takes the mystery out of the thought that over time the analysand herself can take apart a world that had hitherto held her captive. This is ethically significant in that it enables a person to live more realistically and truthfully.

6. When Aristotle isolates a special kind of wisdom (practical wisdom, *phronêsis*) and distinguishes it from theoretical wisdom, he is not trying to specify a certain subject matter (the practical) but rather a peculiar *form of causality*—one in which self-conscious understanding is itself efficacious in bringing about what it understands. This requires explication, of course. But grasping this point is important for understanding the peculiar efficacy of psychoanalysis, and thus the broadscale place of psychoanalysis in the Western humanistic tradition.

Even my simplest intentional action requires some degree of self-conscious awareness. Of course, it is this very awareness that often breaks down or goes missing in the myriad acts with which psychoanalysis deals. But we can understand such breakdowns better if we grasp the straightforward case. So, for example, in going to the store to buy food for dinner, I must be to some degree aware that that is what I am doing. That awareness helps constitute the intentional act as the very act that it is.[28] With a different understanding, I might perform the same physical acts but be doing

something different: for example, exercising; retracing my steps from a previous trip; taking a walk; hoping to meet a stranger; sending a message to a spy. I am also aware that my understanding of what I am doing is itself efficacious in bringing about the very thing I am doing.[29] Throughout the time I am shopping, my awareness of what I am doing is causally efficacious in the doing and is at the very same time an awareness of that causal efficacy as my own. The doing and the awareness of the doing are thus internally related to each other: they are, as Sebastian Rödl put it, "the same reality."[30] In normal psychic conditions, it is impossible that there should be one thing (my shopping for dinner) and another thing (my conscious awareness of shopping for dinner), as though I stood in relation to my acts as an observer. Of course, I can relate to myself as an observer, but it is precisely then that the normal psychic conditions of intentional action break down. Part of what it is for me to be shopping for dinner is that I must be immediately and nonobservationally aware that that is what I am doing. This awareness contains within itself an immediate and nonobservational awareness of my efficacy. I am aware that this is *my doing*.

There are three points to take away from this simplified example: (1) In ordinary intentional action, one is (to some degree, in some manner) self-consciously aware that one is performing the action. (2) This self-consciousness is internal to the action. (3) The self-conscious understanding of the action is causally efficacious in bringing about the very action it helps constitute.

Practical wisdom, for Aristotle, is excellence with respect to this peculiar form of causality: the ability to live well based on, and flowing from, one's correct understanding of how to live well. Practical wisdom is itself efficacious in bringing about the life it understands to be a good life. But then Aristotle thought that the good life must be one of psychic harmony, and this requires that the nonrational part of the psyche "listen well to" and "speak with the same voice as" the thoughtful, self-conscious judgments of practical wisdom.[31] But how does one bring this integration about? Aristotle approached this at the level of education and public policy: we need to train children from early youth into the right sort of habits (thus educating the nonrational soul to obey), so that by the time a person can make judgments about how to live, he will be wholehearted in his decision. But on how precisely this psychic unity is achieved, Aristotle is silent. That is, he tells us how to educate the youth, and he tells us that success consists in the nonrational

soul "speaking with the same voice as" or "listening better to" or "obeying" the reason's judgment. But he gives us no textured psychological account of what any of these conditions consist in. This, I think, is the place where Aristotle's moral psychology runs out of steam, though it is not clear that Aristotle sees that anything is missing. But an adequate moral psychology ought to be able to tell us more about what psychic integration consists in.

Our challenge is of course significantly different from Aristotle's. In particular, we are concerned with incorporating an unconscious, nonrational part of the soul that, as Freud teaches us, proceeds according to its own unusual form of mental activity. And we are often concerned with moments in the microcosm of an individual's life, when life is not going particularly well. But Aristotle's account of the practical shows us how self-consciousness can have its own immediate efficacy. Practical understanding is the cause of what it understands. This is a good place to start. And if we now go back to Freud's fundamental rule, we can see that it is designed to bring enhanced self-awareness to the mind's emerging productions. Some of those productions express the voice of the unconscious, and on favorable occasions self-consciousness can, via its own activity, effect an immediate transformation. One can see this transformation in Ms. A's utterance. Until that moment, Ms. A had gone through life—repetitively, timelessly—inhibiting herself by unconsciously anticipating her own rage. Ironically, it is precisely by speaking the truth of her condition that she was able to undo it. And she undid it via a direct and immediate understanding of what she had previously done unconsciously. This provides an example of self-conscious awareness *informing* the hitherto unconscious, nonrational part of the soul.

By now it should be clear that psychoanalysis aims at more than theoretical insight into oneself (however far-reaching and accurate). And it aims at more than the practical ability to take ameliorative steps when one notices a problem arising. All this may be of genuine help, but from a psychoanalytic point of view, more far-reaching psychological change is possible. The analysand can come over time to apprehend her activity *directly and immediately*—an activity that had hitherto been unconscious. This is why transference, and the handling of the transference, is invaluable. If the analysand is creating a disappointing world, she will bring that activity into the transference. And this puts her in a position to bring about her own psychic change—*actively, directly, immediately via the efficacy of her own self-conscious understanding.* This is a different mode of self-consciousness than

the theoretical understanding that, say, I have a tendency to experience events in disappointing ways. It is, rather, an immediate apprehension of self-consciousness informing her life. And it makes possible a change of psychic structure *via* a self-conscious grasp of what that structure has been and what it might become. I think of it as a practical efficacy of the self-conscious mind.

7. This raises some questions about our most basic values: Are we to be creatures whose humanity partially consists in taking responsibility for our humanity? In particular, are we to continue to be creatures who take responsibility for shaping who we are via a self-conscious grasp of who we might become? Or is the category *human* to be emptied out—evacuated of the struggles with meaning and value that, over the past several thousand years, we have come to see as constituting the distinctively human mind? At the limit, *human* becomes a merely biological category, the name for a species that can continue reproducing itself regardless of the quality of mind it instantiates. It is a contingent question whether the human mind, as we have come to know it, will continue to exist. It is a question that lies at the heart of the Western humanistic tradition; and it is here that psychoanalysis is poised to make an invaluable contribution.

It is these days fashionable to be concerned with outcome studies—for example, trying to measure how well psychoanalysis stacks up against other treatment modalities. I want to make a claim that is as earnest as it is ironic: the aim of psychoanalysis is psychoanalysis. And when it comes to this aim, no other treatment modality can match it!

Think of Aristotle's famous distinction between a process (*kinêsis*), like building a house, and an activity (*energeia*), like living in a home.[32] Building a house is a process that has a beginning, a middle, and an end; in this case, the process comes to an end when the house is built. Living in a home, by contrast, is an open-ended activity that can manifest a fulfilling way of life. Psychoanalysis, I want to claim, is both process and activity. As a process, it aims, in the first instance, to address specific problems the analysand is facing, or problems that become clearer as the analysis progresses. But ultimately, psychoanalysis (as process) aims at its own activity. Psychoanalysis as activity is precisely self-consciousness appropriating and finding creative

ways of living with the creations of one's own unconscious mental activity. Psychoanalysis has been shaped, and continues to be shaped, so that we might address the unconscious, nonrational aspects of the psyche in humane and understanding ways. This is an ongoing aspect of a full, rich, meaningful life.

Aristotle tells us that when it comes to living organisms, the psyche is the form or principle of unity of such creatures.[33] When it comes specifically to humans, that principle is to be understood in terms of the psyche's rational activity in an active and full life.[34] This, he concludes, is the characteristic activity of human life; it gives us the conditions of our flourishing.[35] His point is *not* that human life should be consumed with rational thinking. Rather, he thinks it is given to us to be thoughtful, self-conscious creatures. This includes a thoughtful, self-conscious appropriation of the nonrational parts of our psyches.[36] That is, our emotional lives and our desires should not be strangers to us, dominating us through our ignorance, but should be aspects of our lives that we, in one way or another, appreciate and comprehend. For Aristotle, this is what it is to be human. And to live well in this way is what it is for us to flourish. But psychoanalysis *considered as activity* is just this characteristic human activity: the thoughtful, self-conscious appropriation of the unconscious, nonrational parts of the psyche. Of course, we know much more than Aristotle did about what is involved in taking on such a task. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis is carried out in the service of living a flourishing human life. And it is itself a manifestation of such a life. Psychoanalysis is a way humans flourish as the active, thoughtful, self-conscious creatures that we are.

By now it should be clear that psychoanalysis gives us a new sense in which wisdom can be won from illness. Psychoanalysis provides significant insight into hitherto poorly understood forms of human suffering; but it is also an exemplification of human health. For the task of living well with one's own unconscious does not go away when, say, the acute suffering of neurosis has been eased. Living well with one's unconscious is a life task, one that is appropriate to thoughtful, self-conscious activity. And we come to understand better what this task consists in as we watch psychoanalysis itself deepen and enrich its own techniques, in response to the myriad challenges that arise in the treatment situation. This is the activity of determination that helps us better comprehend this determinable: *psychoanalysis is the*

activity of thoughtful self-consciousness informing human life. That is, as psychoanalysis develops, we should come to better understand what it means for self-consciousness to inform human life. Certainly what psychoanalysis has already taught us is that we should expect psychic integration to be improvisational, ironic, syncopated, jazzy, and creative.[37] Philosophers need to understand that any plausible sense of "psychic unity" will be to some extent uncanny. We should not expect or want the "unity" of a marching band.

It would seem, then, that in the first and primary instance, the wisdom that psychoanalysis offers is practical and, one might even say, poetical. For the person who inhabited a disappointing world, psychoanalytic transformation did not consist primarily in the theoretical insight that she had been inhabiting a disappointing world (though that was a moment in the treatment), but in the creative opening up of new possibilities for living. These are possibilities that came into being for her via her developing practical and poetical awareness that those possibilities exist. It is, as we have seen, an immediate and direct grasp of one's own efficacy in the self-conscious creation of new possibilities. Unlike theoretical wisdom, whose knowledge is caused by what it knows, practical and poetical wisdom *is* the cause of what it knows. Self-conscious thought comes to understand that it has new possibilities for living by creating those possibilities, and it creates those possibilities precisely by self-consciously coming to grasp what they are. This creative opening-up is constituted by self-consciously *appropriating* the creative powers of (hitherto unconscious) imagination. Creativity here is not simply the recognition of a new possibility; it is a creative manner of thinking that itself opens new possibilities for living. This is why the emerging wisdom is practical and poetical: it is the cause of what it understands.

The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard famously said that to become human or to learn what it means to become human does not come that easily. By now we can begin to grasp what this might mean. Think of becoming human not in terms of biological birth, but in terms of what Aristotle considered our characteristic activity: thoughtful, self-conscious activity of the psyche that takes responsibility for living a human life. Psychoanalysis is a manifestation of just such activity. The same is true of learning what it means to be human. Kierkegaard is not concerned with the theoretical mastery of a difficult subject matter, the "human condition"; rather, he is concerned with what we learn practically and poetically when

we go through the process of becoming human. Kierkegaard's use of "or" is exegetical: "to become human" and "to learn what it means to become human" are two ways of naming the same activity of psyche. What Freud and subsequent generations of psychoanalysts have discovered is that that very activity of psyche is, to a significant extent, the activity of psychoanalysis itself. No wonder it has not come that easily.