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Emotional Truths of the Very Personal: The Countertransference of Ideology and Value

Too often there is a split between the overly intellectualized abstractions of psychoanalysis and the fundamental emotions that underlie clinical work. The use of bloodless, disembodied language, I would argue, is meant to keep its users far removed from the real emotions of flesh-and-blood experience, as articulated in the native language of our respective childhoods. Analytic training provides a handy venue for one's dreams of rebirth into a superior brave new world of training analysts and supervisors, replete with a jargon that coheres the conversion into a new family. The proud professional role of analyst and abstract theory provide an escape from the shameful body of childhood emotionality vulnerability, and disillusionment.

In this paper, I would like to make a plea to return the emotion-laden, native language of our childhoods to a respectable place in our theorizing. Our countertransferences of ideology and value are fundamentally emotional choices that are reflective of our personal journeys of suffering, despair, and hopefully, also redemption. Our experiences of love and loss, hope and disappointment contribute to a feedback loop that informs our ethics and values toward the world and ourselves.

The crux of analytic work lies in this juncture between the fundamental disillusionments of our lives and their transformation into the moral self-recriminations of shame or externalizing judgments of blame. I will use clinical vignettes to illustrate how the omnipotent belief in the linearity of wish magic, in which wish leads automatically to action, may be modified by the paradoxical non-linearity of a mourning process, in which wishes are disentangled from the necessity of their fulfillment.

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