Sujet Supposé Savoir: Transferential Dynamics in the Case Method

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What is the role of speech in the transference? And, conversely, what is the role of the transference in speech? How does the relationship between these terms 'speech' and the 'transference' structure the analytic situation? These then are some of the important questions that emerge early on in psychoanalysis since there is no guarantee that the analysand will speak in a way that can take the process of analysis forward or which will eventually lead to a cure; but, nonetheless, the methodological wager in psychoanalysis is that it is an ethic of speech (De Certeau and Logan, 1983). The basic rule in the analytic situation is to say whatever comes to the analysand's mind; this process is called 'free-association' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1967a, 1988a). The analysand is often unable to obey this simple rule in practice because it violates the usual conventions of conversation in everyday life, where a sense of decorum and propriety demands that not everything that comes to mind should be spoken openly. The analysand therefore finds it difficult to speak in the specific way that is demanded of him in the analytic situation, where he can feel free to jump from any topic to just about any topic without being too mindful of what the conscious and unconscious connections are between seemingly disparate topics. The rule of free-association however is often misunderstood because analysands labour under the idea that they have to narrate everything that has ever happened in their lives to the psychoanalyst. They wonder how, if at all, they will find the time necessary to do so. This thought then leads to failures in speech (i.e. in free association) since the analysand is now overwhelmed by the enormity of the task ahead, and this leads, in turn, to performance anxiety. But that is precisely what is not needed in psychoanalysis; it is not necessary to recount the entire life of the analysand during the process of analysis.

The Basic Rule

The basic rule of psychoanalysis merely says that the analysand must honestly report everything that comes to the surface of his mind. It is only after he has had his say, and sufficient psychic material has been generated, and a positive transference is in place, that the analyst should hazard an interpretation. And, then again, the analyst may prefer to wait if the analysand is willing to attempt an interpretation or a construction on his own; it is only at the point that the analysand is close to making a comprehensive interpretation that the analyst sets out a formal 'construction', which brings together a number of prior piece-meal interpretations (Freud, 1938a). Hence, the paradox that is inherent to the method of free-association. In order to make progress in the treatment, the analysand must be willing to free-associate (as opposed to having a normal conversation), but given the usual 'inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety' that characterizes an analysand at this stage of analysis, it becomes enormously difficult for the analysand to free-associate with the cheerful spontaneity that is envisaged in Freudian metapsychology. So, free-association, in the strict structural sense, becomes possible only at the end of the analysis when the analysand has found some relief from the governing set of symptoms that hold him in its grip even though the treatment can only end if the analysand is willing to free-associate in the strong sense of the term (Freud, 1938b). Overcoming this structural 'paradox of free-association' then requires that the analysand work within the ambit of a positive transference. The analysand will free-associate only with the epistemological assurance and the ethical re-assurance of somebody whom he trusts. He needs to work with somebody whom he feels has done this sort of thing before and brought the analysis to a successful close (Freud, 1912; Freud, 1915;

Freud 1916-17). So when the analysand fails to speak, the psychoanalyst is supposed to think through the state of the transference rather than merely ask or urge the analysand to speak up like in everyday life (Chaitin, 1988).

Presence of Socrates

The relationship between speech and its placement in the discursive context of the transference however is not specific to psychoanalysis per se, but is related to the larger contexts of the rhetorical and dialectical traditions from which it emerges (Chaitin, 1996). In the dialogues of Plato, the disciples of Socrates find it easier to summon a greater degree of eloquence and participation when Socrates, the facilitator, is in the agora but feel a sense of psychological 'deflation' when he is not. This sense of a direct physical presence or physical absence in initiating and sustaining the pedagogical transference, and, subsequently, an indirect psychological presence and absence once the role of the facilitator is internalized by the participants in a discussion is a crucial attribute to the structure of the clinical transference in the analytic situation as well. It was from instances such as this in Greek philosophy that Lacan developed the idea of a 'subject presumed to know'. It is the physical and/or the psychological presence of the facilitator of a discussion in the locus of the 'subject presumed to know' that was to serve as the specific trigger of the positive transference. What does the facilitator know apart from the rules of moderating a discussion? In the Greek context of the Socratic dialogue, the facilitator - in this instance, Socrates himself - is supposed to know the true or correct definition of the terms whose meanings are sought to be clarified through the 'cut-and-thrust' of philosophical debate, even though that was not the formal Socratic contention at all. Socrates was always clear that there is bound to be an excessive attribution of knowledge in interpersonal situations by both the onlookers and the interlocutors when it is characterized by the positive transference (Schleifer, 1987). The facilitator in a philosophical discussion is not supposed to proactively define anything like a lecturer, but merely keep the discussion going until participants gain a better understanding of what is at stake in the discussion. It is important to remember that there was also a 'cathartic' element in these philosophical discussions. So, needless to say, the participants in these Socratic dialogues feel 'spent' at the end of the various symposia that they participate in; they can't help but wonder how Socrates was able to do this sort of thing day after day (Brenkman, 1977; Ragland-Sullivan, 1989). What was the passion that kept the figure of Socrates going? For Lacan, the crucial notion here is that of 'the subject presumed to know'. Whether or not the Socratic figure actually knows the answers to these philosophical terms and questions is not what is at stake. It is the presupposition that there is somebody who either knows the answers, or who knows how to cope with the problem in the absence of an answer, that is captured in the idea of the 'subject presumed to know'. This operative presupposition in the mind of the analysand is that there is somebody who is in the locus of the 'subject presumed to know' though he may not necessarily know who is in the locus of the subject presumed to know in the sense of having personal knowledge of the facilitator or the analyst. The discursive possibilities inherent in this presupposition are what emerge as the elementary forms of speech in the analytic situation in Lacan's structuralist 'take' on psychoanalysis. This is because it is equally important for the analysand, at the end of the analysis, to 'de-suppose' the analyst as the 'subject presumed to know' in the attempt to work-through the residues of the transference, or sublimate it in new contexts. Psychoanalysts in training often displace the residual transference, if any, on to the profession of psychoanalysis itself.

Socratic Facilitation

This brief but synoptic view of the role of the 'subject presumed to know' in the contexts of Greek philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis will then help us to ask the same set of questions albeit in a different context - that of the case method in professional schools of law and business, where the answers to the assignment question are by no means obvious to the class. These are situations which require that students open up and think-through problems in ways that they are not used to. Here, again, the case instructor, who must moderate a discussion, must proceed with a lot of restraint. He must remember not to compete with the students in

seeking a solution, but must minimize his participation, exercise caution, and be willing to listen. What this means is that a genuine case discussion is not necessarily a simple but logical unfolding of the problem until a satisfactory answer is reached, but will often proceed, if necessary, in 'fits-and-starts' that we encountered earlier in the context of free-association in psychoanalysis. The facilitator must remember not to lose his nerve at this point and jump-start the class with a quick solution (Hammond, 1976, 2002; Ellet, 2007). Instead, he too, like the Socratic facilitator, must understand that there is a cathartic element in a case discussion. He must regulate the levels of energy and participation in the classroom in such a way that the pace of discussion is evenly spread out both amongst the possible range of topics and participants in the class, but not merely for the sake of participation. If however the class clams up, is not prepared for a discussion, gets bogged down in a falsetto discussion, or simply loses its way or interest, it won't help to repeatedly urge the students to speak up or leave the class in a huff or in disappointment (Srinivasan, 2009).

'Is' and 'Ought"

This is where the challenge is in Socratic facilitation, which is preoccupied with ensuring more than a false sense of participation. The notion of a 'subject presumed to know', in the strong sense of the term, for instance, is something that is much more likely to emerge when contentious or fundamental issues emerge in a case discussion. Here the class is often split between, for instance, the 'is' and the 'ought' dimensions of a case analysis. Or, alternatively, there could be a more fundamental sense of disorientation from shifting perspectives in a litigation workshop, where a student is asked to switch from the locus of a plaintiff to that of a defendant or vice versa. In such situations students understand that the process of argumentation or making recommendations in the context of legal situations and business situations is not specific to the situations as such, but rather to the locus from which an argument is being put forth or a solution is being sought. The case method at such moments impinges not merely on their analytic or discursive abilities, but on their sense of professional identity as well. There are, needless to say, instances of students who will not agree to switch loci even for practice in a workshop that teaches the basics of litigation and the rules involved in constructing arguments for or against a proposition, since they feel that their sense of justice, professional identity, or ideological affiliation is at stake. What the case method forces students to do however is to work with a 'non-essentialist' notion of the arguments that are possible 'for' or 'against' any given motion in a specific instance of litigation or the analysis of strategic options before making a recommendation. Learning to navigate this sense of theoretical disorientation by developing the analytic, cognitive, and discursive skills needed to lawyer the case, or think-through a specific set of options in the context of business policy or strategic management then is a part of the skill-sets that are needed in the context of the case method. This is where the notion of the 'subject presumed to know' is important. The Socratic facilitator is able to help the participants to 'work-through' the affects in addition to analyzing the differences between the ethical, the epistemological, and the ontological dimensions of the gap between the 'is' and the 'ought' in the context of the case method (Leader, 1994). This is important because most forms of cognitive or existential disorientation leads to a loss of interest in the topics or areas being discussed amongst the participants. These then are the situations in which participants suspect that a solution can be found though not necessarily in a particular book, but often through forms of transferential representations in the learning process. This then is a unique opportunity for case instructors to work-through residual forms of transference from their training as case instructors, where they begin by identifying the different cognitive-cum-stylistic options available amongst the senior faculty and to sublimating the residues of such forms of transference in course of time to the case method itself.

Locus of the Facilitator

It is at this point that they will make the necessary transition from 'supposing' to 'de-supposing' the 'subject presumed to know' (the role models of case instruction to which they were exposed) as the regulative function of an ethical or a dialectical locus rather than to a person as such. It is, interestingly, desire which will keep them

going like Socrates; since, as Lacan points out, the regulative element in transferential desire (in the professions) is not pre-given but rather self-reflexive. It must therefore be displaced on to the problems of method sooner or later if it is to be self-sustaining process. The case method is named after Socrates then precisely because this figure is synonymous with the process of transferential 'self-disruption' in the Greek tradition of pedagogy. What made this self-disruption an event that is worthy of our notice is the fact that it has interesting implications for the relationship between speech, the transference, and the role of the unconscious within the ambit of the case method. The prototype of disruption which emerges in discursive situations for Lacan is captured most effectively in the psychoanalytic axiom: 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (Miel, 1966; Gasperoni, 1996; Wilden, 1981). This axiom formalizes the split that the speaking subject experiences between the 'statement' and the 'utterance' in any discursive use of language (Benveniste, 1958, 1971). The unconscious, to put it simply, is that which emerges in the structural gap between the statement and the utterance. That is why techniques of literary analysis are now being used to interpret the formations of the unconscious; that is also why it is possible to claim, like many literary critics do, that 'literature is the unconscious of psychoanalysis' (Hartman, 1961; Felman 1982a; Gallop, 1984; Ragland-Sullivan, 1984; Felman, 1989; Wright, 1998).

Persona of Socrates

What is the transferential excess that generates the persona of Socrates in Greek philosophy? It is possible to argue, as Lacan does, that the Heideggerian distinction between 'empty-speech' and 'full-speech' is related to the manner of discussion in the Platonic dialogues, especially when we consider the role of the transference in inspiring the latter. This analytic distinction is formalized through the role of speech in the analytic situation (Lacan, 1953). The significance of starting with the Platonic context is related to the fact that it was Plato who created the persona of Socrates in Greek philosophy. Since Socrates is often represented as the 'patron-saint' of the case method, it is only appropriate that we should start with his example. There is a wide-spread perception in the dialogues that the rhetorical performance of the disciples of Socrates is related to his transferential presence. The relationship between the problems of desire, speech, and the transference, and the placement of Socrates in the locus of the sujet supposé savoir then is what is in contention in psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1973a, 1979a). This psychoanalytic formulation explains the fact that wherever there is a subject who is supposed to know the secret of the analysand's desire, there is the transference in the psychoanalytic sense of the term. Why is this usually the case? This is because the purpose of the analysis, according to Lacan, is to help the analysand to come to terms with his unconscious. This is especially the case in situations of acute 'psychopathology' where the subject experiences a distinct sense of 'splitting' that makes him feel as though the significant events of his life are happening to someone else. Furthermore, since the analysand does not have any direct access, knowledge, or understanding of his own unconscious, he participates in the analysis in the hope that the analyst will not only be more knowledgeable, but will help him to come to terms with whatever psychic-conflicts might be bothering him. The analysand however will not consent to going into analysis with the analyst unless there is already some pre-transference in place, especially because trust plays an important role in the analysand's willingness to disclose his problems and ask for help. The notion of a sujet supposé savior then is the pre-supposition of a knowledge that is thought to exist in the locus of the other; it is that presupposition which starts off the analysis or at least a desire for the analysis, or even the possibility of a cure for the analysand. Whether this will also lead to an actual cure though has to be determined a little later in the analytic process. But, nonetheless, this is a good start in what is also known as the 'positive' transference.

The Transference

The essential discovery in the theory of the transference from Freud to Lacan is that while the transference is synonymous with the analytic process, it is not reducible to the clinical situation since there are extramural transferences as well in everyday life. This is especially the situation in educational institutions, both in the

classroom, and as characterized most famously by the emotional patterns that can be discerned in terms of how Ph.D. students and their advisors and/or supervisors collaborate, learn, and relate to each other in pedagogical situations (Felman, 1982b; Con Davis, 1987a; Con, Davis, 1987b; Jay, 1987; Brooke, 1987). Hence, the psychoanalytic contention that wherever there is a subject 'supposed' to know, or even 'presumed' to know in some instances, there is the transference in the analytic sense of the term. While the transference was initially seen as analogous to 'noise' (as opposed to the 'signal' in a model of communication), which has to be discounted in order to correctly identify the intentional meaning of the signal, it is now re-defined as something that is structurally inevitable in terms of the 'signal-noise ratio'. It is not possible to analyze the speech of the analysand without encountering the transference of either a positive or a negative sort on the part of both the analyst and the analysand. The re-definition of the transference and the counter-transference, as a necessary structural accompaniment of the analytic situation, made it possible to understand it as an archaic template that structures and mediates the conscious and unconscious life of the human subject. Understanding the cognitive 'distortions' introduced by this archaic template then gave both the analyst, and, subsequently, the analysand, a clue to the latter's style of thinking-through and working-through the challenges of life, which the analysand had a propensity to avoid by 'self-disrupting' the linear path of progress that he might have set up for himself. The modalities of this self-disruption then are not arbitrary but linked to the formations of the unconscious, which vary in their manifestations in terms of the modalities of the transference and its interpretation in the analytic situation. Once the inevitability of the transference as a structural problem was recognized by analysts, an interesting discussion began between the different schools of analysis on the differences between the transference and the counter-transference, where the former relates to the affects that the analysand experiences for the analyst, and the latter pertains to the affects generated in the analyst in response to the disclosures, the personality, and other mannerisms that characterize the analysand.

Implications of the Transference

There was also an attempt made by the different schools of psychoanalysis to work out and think through the different phases of the transference in terms of the pre-transference, the transference proper, post-treatment transference, and so on (Malcolm, 1981). It was not clear in the beginning as to whether the analysand should be alerted to the fact that he is experiencing transferential affects. This is called the problem of 'interpreting the transference'. This is still an unresolved issue since some schools of psychoanalysis feel that the analysand should be alerted to the transference and the debate, if any, is about the modalities involved, including the need to time it correctly. Not all schools are sure about whether the analysand should be alerted to this phenomenon, but all of them factor the transference in some form into the interpretation of the analysand's discourse (Laplanche and Pontalis (1967b, 1988b). The transference is important then because it is a core clinical idea that all schools of psychoanalysis agree upon as a 'universal' phenomenon even though its manifestations may vary, and the modalities of its interpretation differ, depending on the analytic situation, and the circumstances that made an analysis necessary. To summarize: the transference may be defined as an affective manifestation of the archaic affective/cognitive template that the analysand developed in early childhood and whose structure he himself is not consciously aware of. It is, in other words, akin to a default program in an operating system, which the end-user may not understand too well even though he uses it all the time. The transference is important in the history of psychoanalysis because it gave Freud an important clue to situations when the process of analysis was abruptly terminated through a process called acting-out (Evans, 1996a). Here, the analysand prefers to do something outside the analytic situation because he experiences either problems of impulse control in the everyday sense, or feels a sense of symptomatic compulsion to do something that goes beyond the ethical ambit of his usual activities, or because he feels that the analyst did not bother to listen properly. These situations, according to Freud, are those where the vicissitudes of the transference has got the better of the analysand. But

the dangers of acting-out are not specific to the analysand; it is also possible for the analyst to act-out the counter-transference if he is not careful. The whole point of a training analysis is to prevent the possibility of counter-transferential acting-out by the analyst. A successful training analysis should make it possible for the analyst to work-through the complex representations of the transference to the archaic figures in his psyche without acting-out under provocation in the analytic situation. This is however easier said than done. Analysts sometimes act-out but if they are well-trained, they will not go into denial and take corrective action swiftly.

Acting Out

Acting-out is considered to be a regressive activity in the analytic situation. It is related to a situation in which the subject in analysis is not able to either think-through or work-through; there is then a regression of the libido to infantile forms of behavior that are complicated by the fact that the unconscious is now open. Of course it is not the libido as such that regresses, but certain signifiers, i.e. the ideational content to primitive modes of cognition. These phenomena then are to be found in other domains of activity as well, as Kets de Vries points out, in the inter-personal relationship, the 'emotional dance' between the consultant and the client, which is shot-through with transferential turbulence. This is an important problem in executive coaching since the client may conflate the locus of the consultant with the locus of parental figures and act-out unconscious psychic conflicts. Teaching and consulting then are instances where transferential phenomena are common-place, and acquainting professionals in these areas with transferential phenomena must be a part of their formal training. Kets de Vries offers consultants and clients a 2 x 2 matrix that students of strategy are well-acquainted with, in the form of a 'quadrant', in order to classify, and to theoretically work-through, the permutations and combinations of transferential problems that are possible in these turbulent encounters (Kets de Vries, 2009a). He also argues that executives who have a propensity to act-out are those who have never bothered to ask themselves what is it that they want out of their life; they have a compulsive propensity to rush towards more and more projects without any real understanding of the demonic forces that propel them in their pursuit of success. Such forms of compulsive behavior can be a cautionary tale however for all of us since acting-out is not specific to a personality type, but is a danger that can affect anybody at short notice under situations of extreme stress (Kets de Vries, 2009b). It is therefore important for executives to understand that material pursuits will not satisfy them beyond a point, and cultivate the quest for at least some measure of transferential authenticity in how they relate to themselves and others in their life (Kets de Vries, 2009c).

The Socratic Method

To go back now to our point of departure: Where is all this coming from? The Lacanian answer is 'Socrates' insofar as this figure represents the prototype of the transference in the Western notion of subjectivity. It is this model that is presupposed in the case method, which is also described as the 'Socratic method'. The figure of Socrates is not invoked merely because Socrates liked to ask questions like case instructors, but because the relationship between speech, desire, the unconscious, and the transference enter the history of ideas through the dialogues of Plato. Socratic disciples are said to experience a sense of deflation the moment he leaves the room. This sense of deflation is known as 'aphanisis' in psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1973b, 1979b); it marks the disappearance of the speaking subject in the chain of signification, when the gap between the statement and the utterance seems inescapable except in situations where a positive transference offers the possibility of suturing the gap through a process of imaginary or symbolic restitution in the contexts of creativity (Durand, 1983; Heath, 1981; Ragland-Sullivan, 1996). But, when the student is able to feel the transferential 'presence' of the teacher, he is able to summon an 'eloquence' that leaves him astonished by his own performance. This is the essential pedagogical insight that Plato uses to make an interesting set of links between a theory of the soul and a theory of pedagogy through the transferential mediation of Socrates, who is in the locus of the facilitator, rather than, strictly speaking, a teacher in the doctrinal sense of the term. Socrates, then, unlike religious figures, did not preach a specific doctrine that could be passed on. He was more preoccupied like a case instructor with

the methodology of facilitation rather than with the codification of a formal doctrine which can be put together neatly in management programs.

The Socratic Method has a number of modern equivalents including the modalities of learning, learning to learn, and so on. The important thing however is that unlike religious teachers, the Socratic figure does not make a knowledge claim. The only thing that Socrates claimed to know was that he did not know anything more than the bare minimum needed to facilitate a discussion on philosophical topics (case instructors take heart!). But the performative dimension of facilitating a discussion with Socratic modesty and brilliance leads to transferential effects where the interlocutors attribute knowledge repeatedly to Socrates (Srinivasan, 2000; Srinivasan, 2002). It is this phenomenon that was started by a student of Socrates himself who identified his ability to perform to the enabling presence of the facilitator in the room. This notion of 'presence' however does not have to be taken literally; it is more of a transferential presence though there are, admittedly, manifestations of this phenomenon where a case discussion stops suddenly when the instructor leaves though it may carry on, even in his absence, if the positive transference is in place. Socrates then is the prototype in the Western world of the psychoanalytic notion of the 'sujet supposé savoir' because of his capacity to contain the complex range of affects and emotions that emerge when the unconscious opens up in these discussions without acting-out. The capacity to 'contain' then is defined as a kind of philosophical sobriety in Plato's Symposium, which ends with the Socratic figure leaving the symposium early in the morning, after a night of philosophical discussion, without any sense of wear and tear despite staying up the whole night. The other participants however fell into deep sleep and remained asleep for the better part of the day to recover from the heady combination of wine and philosophy (Brenkman 1977; Ragland-Sullivan, 1989).

Conclusion

The challenge in case facilitation, then, is not unlike those that are represented in these Socratic dialogues. The emotional effort in these discussions is linked to the transferential burdens that the facilitator must bear without complaining since not all the participants in a case discussion will be up to it. The rules of the case discussion then must be repeated ad nauseam. The process of deciding who will speak, when, to what purpose, and for how long, must be moderated with tact and diplomacy (Christensen, 1991a; Christensen 1991b). The difference between empty speech and full speech must not be invoked only as an analytic distinction in theory, but must be deployed in practice. The question of whether or not the transference should be interpreted must be faced head on. Strategies to contain those discussants that are on the verge of acting-out must be in place without the case facilitator succumbing to the temptations of acting out in his turn (Evans, 1996a; Laplanche and Pontalis, 1967c, 1988c). And, above all, the case facilitator must be able to inspire a desire for speech, and, even more importantly, a desire to speak rather than be content with merely using a case as a differential feature to the theoretical framework (Chaitin, 1988; Lacan, 1973c, 1979c). While a case discussion may not have the space that is presupposed in the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis, which is to say whatever comes to mind, i.e. free-associate, it still promises the participants much more room to have their say than any other pedagogical system in place. The case method, like psychoanalysis, can be understood, or at least re-invented, as in a response to the invitation of Jacques Lacan when he said in Seminar XVII: 'Come on, say anything, it will all be marvelous' (Evans, 1996b). The persistence of the case method then is a testament precisely to this sense of the 'marvelous' that Jacques Lacan anticipated, albeit in the context of his seminars on psychoanalysis in Paris (Roudinesco, 1990; Marini, 1993; Roudinesco, 1999).

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