

Affect In Psychoanalysis: A Clinical Synthesis

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The Analytic Press, 1993 Hillsdale, NJ pp. 250

Another new theory ? Such was my concern as I opened this text on the role of affect in psychoanalysis. Happily this is not the case. Although the text is something of a tour de force in its re-reading of all the major thinkers from Freud on, its goal is to show the integrative effect of focusing on “affects” as the normative prism, as it were, through which to read both analytic theory and clinical practice. The text has four sections: 1. knowing and talking about affects, 2. the evolution of analytic thinking about affects, 3. dialectics of affect, and 4. technical implications of affect theory.

Spezzano’s basic thesis is that “affects give rise to relationships, and drives evolve out of the interplay between them.” p.112. And further: “The central and most radical argument of psychoanalysis is that human psychological life is, at its core, human affective life.” p113. While the author interprets this to mean that “affect” is more basic than relationship, I would argue that to speak about affects *is* to speak about relationships. Just as we know that we humans have an innate capacity for language, we do not know it, in fact, and cannot know it, until we use it. It is therefore, co-existent with use. So too, I believe, with affects and object relations. This may be more than a stylistic difference. Spezzano argues that implicit even in Fairbairn’s (p.98) conceptualizations is that when the child is reaching for the object he/she is doing so *in order to* experience a feeling of safety and/or self-valuation. While such a reading is possible, I believe that when human beings reach for “the other” they are doing so precisely to experience “the other” as such, with all the vicissitudes that such experience(s) entails. Such an approach is consonant with an English object relational model.

Dr. Spezzano's focus on the import of affect as a modus operandi is enormously helpful. When in his clinical section, for example, he reiterates the benefit of the analyst's "unknowing" and affectively interacting with patients, we can see the experiential logic of his approach. Recently it was the French analyst Francois Roustang (1983) who reminded analysts again, writing in the shadow of Andre Green, (1975) that ultimately an analyst must trust his clinical instincts and theory will surely follow. Dr. Spezzano's text repeatedly shows how, in the clinical encounter, it is the perception of and response to affect that mediates the analyst's response - - theory follows. In this vein Spezzano argues that in fact all of the major theories in psychoanalysis are, in fact, theories of affect, all of latent, as it were. His intent is to make them manifest.

Early in the text the author articulate his understand of affect within the historical shadow, as it were, of David Rapaport's struggles to achieve a comprehensive theory of affects. Spezzano establishes his thesis that *mental structure both originates out of and leads to an affective state. An affective state both contributes to the construction of and is the result of a mental structure.* p.52. Consequently, "affect is a form of thinking, knowing, planning, communicating and relating". p. 63. And in so doing he answers some of the issues that Rapaport raised.

Dr. Spezzano develops his thesis through a discussion of what we can call the evolution of truth out of dialogue. He correctly and insightfully focuses on the specificity of any particular cultural \ intellectual tradition, with the uniqueness of its language structures, as basic to an understanding of truth as an experienced reality. "Truth" phenomenologically speaking arises out of a particular dialogue. In this sense the author is speaking of truth, I believe, as both "made" as well as "found." The author does this well, even in view of other thinkers having approached a similar understanding. Note, for example, Winnicott's (1965) pervasive and compelling thesis that human adult play is repeatedly experienced only insofar as we are able to

create the found world. Having mentioned Winnicott I might note that I do not think it helpful, or sensible, to speak, as the text does, of both Winnicott and Kohut as both self- psychologists. Winnicott, for all of his original contributions, has no need to repudiate the import of drives and of unconscious fantasy in the evolution of the individual. Further we could paraphrase Winnicott and say that there is no such thing as a self! In other worlds even (individual) affects are relational.

Psychoanalytic history, as we know, has a way of surprising us as to what authors will ultimately be seen as significant, witness Ferenczi recent resurrection. Dr. Spezzano's captivation with such authors as Mitchell and Greenberg awaits, consequently, the judgment of time. His assertion, however, that *In many ways, interpersonal psychoanalysis has carried on the tradition of character and resistance analysis with more determination than any other school has.* p.202. need not. It is not substantiated by the text and seems rather gratuitous.

The author's discussion of character as the way our affective states are structured is one of the high points of the text: *The way ...(individuals) simultaneously inhibit and express their competing desires in their relationships, we call character.* p.185. His approach is simply stated, yet elegant in its understanding. Repeatedly circling his thesis Spezzano notes, for example, that *meanings are structures which a person lives before he thinks about them ...(the) central premise of affect theory is that essential human meaning categories are best understood as feeling states.* p.213. Another section, which deserves careful reading and serious reflections, is the author's discussion of the contemporary hermeneutic approaches in psychoanalysis.

Finally, I found Spezzano's apparent negative view of parents puzzling particularly in view of his clinical sensitivity and maturity. For example, *our parents will often lie about what they are doing so that we do not become aware of how we are being used and manipulated in the service of enhancing*

their sense of well being. p.108 The text is unclear whether such a dour judgment is solely that of Harry Stack Sullivan's or the author's. A similar confusion is evident with Spezzano's statement that *All relationships offer opportunities to use the other to maintain or generate certain specific affective states in oneself.* p.215. Does he mean to use in a popular (unconsciously?) calculating sense or in a technical Winnicottian sense? The text, repeatedly, leaves one unclear on this point. One can only hope that Lewis Thomas' (1984) reflections and observations on our capacity for altruistic cooperation can progressively hold sway in analytic reflections.

The text makes a scholarly contribution to analytic literature, notwithstanding the criticism I have offered. It is sure to provoke essential discussion.

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