The aim and purpose of psychoanalysis - What is absent in our professional self-understanding?

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Abstract

In my presentation I will explore few contemporary ways of understanding the goals of our clinical work, i.e. psychotherapeutic/psychoanalytic cure. The relevant concepts in addition to ‘aim’ are ‘purpose’ and ‘goal’, and on the other hand ‘result’, ‘outcome’ and ‘effectiveness’. Is the therapeutical aim to remove symptoms or rather to enhance psychic consciousness and development or to ‘emansipate’ the individual? Traditionally psychoanalysis has underlined the latter but it seems that this question has remained relevant also today in our western societies, and especially when psychoanalytic community is facing the demands of the ‘evidence based medicine’.

According to Bruce Wampold the psychotherapy institution has historically two different paradigmas: medical and social/contextual. In last decades, the medical model has become dominant in many western societies, including Finland. Quantitative outcome research is mostly carried out according to this paradigm, and the ‘result’ is often equated with symptom-reduction. The medical model sees psychical problems as individual maladies – and the social-societal perspective to psychic suffering is missing. There has been amazingly few discussions and critical statements against this view, even amongst the psychotherapists themselves.

We must ask: in what way is psychotherapy goal-directed activity? Who is going to set the goals? On one hand, the answer is simple: The individual patient-therapist pair is to set the goals together, in relation to patient’s problems, values and perspectives. But on the other hand, psychotherapy with its goals, theories and mechanisms is deeply rooted to modern way of life, its ethics, metaphysics and economy. In my view, it is of utmost importance to see how these kind of ”ideological” patterns effect on our work with our patients.

According to the most radical ideology critisism, the psychotherapy institution has become part of an ’economical paradigm’, in which the goal is to fabricate individuals, who can produce and consume, who must continually strive to enjoy and be happy and who shouldn’t ask difficult questions (f.ex. Zizek).

I will compare more closely three views: that of Freud’s, Lacan’s and Mikael Leiman’s (meta-model). By contrasting these, I try to highlight some important dimensions.

What is the specific position of psychoanalytic praxis, theory and research in relation to these questions? The position is never innocent, objective or free of values. In the best spirit of psychoanalytic tradition, we must try to find out what is unconscious and absent – even ideological - in our own profession. Our professional self-observation could make these “blind spots” more explicit, more present.