

Navigating Polaris - The Journey of a Developed Freudian

A Review of “The Road to Unity” by Leo Rangell

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Standing at the center of some of the greatest shifts in psychoanalysis, for the past 60 years, Leo Rangell has witnessed and contributed to the great debates of our time. His contributions span a staggering seven books and over 450 articles, which tackle a vast array of topics from metapsychology to applied psychoanalysis. His insights have remained a cut above the rest. This may be due to his commitment to remain in a dialogue with the pertinent issues of the day. Or, it may be due to his meticulous efforts to adequately fit the originality of his contributions solidly within the body of psychoanalytic theory. Or, it may simply be due to the wisdom of his life experience informed not only by six decades of clinical work but by his leadership experienced as well, twice President of: the International Psychoanalytic Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, and the his local Institutes. Regardless, his perspective is undeniably exceptional.

Now at the age of 93 drawing on his life’s experiences as scientist, clinician, teacher and executive, he embarks upon; perhaps, the most significant problem in the field today: How to organize the theory of psychoanalysis? In the “Road to Unity” Rangell, a “developed Freudian,” provides a comprehensive and definitive proposal on the nature

of psychoanalytic theory. This is an appeal for the Total Composite Theory. He believes that the future survival of the science psychoanalysis depends on this integration.

Rangell defines the main problem for psychoanalysis in chapter 2. The current state of theoretical pluralism has cumulatively been the most erosive force to psychoanalysis leaving it fragmented and deadlocked. Ultimately, the problem of pluralism shakes the confidence of the psychoanalytic consumer and inspires doubt and insecurity. “Is it acceptable” Rangell asks, “that a patient should turn out to have an Oedipal conflict or a problem with self-cohesion depending on which analyst he is with?” (2007, p. 7). In Chapter 3 through Chapter 9 he introduces the reader to the array of the pertinent players and incidents that historically shaped the development of pluralism beginning with Freud. He proposes that the early fractures with Jung, Adler and Rank, which resulted in their formal separation, fashion the prototype models for future splits. Rangell (1982) has detailed the powerful impact of dynamic leadership on theory development – transference to theory. The second series of splits came with Horney, Sullivan and Fromm and their greater attention to the political, economic, and interpersonal forces affecting the individual. Next, were the splits after the war that cut across ideological lines between Otto Fenichel and Franz Alexander on the topic of the analytic attitude and its technical implications. This contributed to the organizational splits in L.A., N.Y., Philadelphia and Washington-Baltimore. The 1960s saw further fragmentation with the arrival of Melanie Klein’s work to the U.S. and the advocacy of “two theories” by George Klein and his colleagues: Gill, Holt, Schafer, etc. This was quickly followed by Kohut in the 1970s and the organization of Self Psychology. Finally,

pluralism was given a quasi-official sanction by Wallerstein in his 1987 Presidential Address of the IPA.

Rangell illustrates how the various stages to the emergence of pluralism were fostered by four basic fallacies. First is the substitution of a pre-existing set of observations or parts of explanatory theory by another when both new and old are valid. The second pathogenic fallacy is *pars pro Toto*, a selection of a part and its replacement for the whole. A parallel to this is the simple discarding of necessary elements of the whole. The third logical deficiency occurs when knowledge and insight gained in one sphere is not aptly applied to related relevant situations. Finally, the fourth logical flaw is the failure to follow up one's thought or actions with the consequences that could be expected from new discoveries or insights. This treatment of theory construction has led to a drifting of the theory with no real efforts at "retention of consistency or intellectual unity" (Rangell 2007, p.99). Instead, we have the current state of theoretical pluralism and its consequential fragmentation.

Paralleling these splits Rangell traces the evolving character of the total composite theory. He begins with Freud's five metapsychological points of view: topographic, economic, dynamic, genetic and structural. In Chapter 4, the second total composite theory emerges with the contributions of Ego Psychology. This not only adds the adaptive point of view, outlined by Hartmann, to the original metapsychology but ushers in a major transition in the technique with the focus on defense analysis begun by Freud and carried on by Anna Freud.

In Chapters 10 through 13, Rangell works to separate the impact of the disenfranchised state of lay analysts and alternative theory alliance. Richards (1999), Rangell notes, has identified these two problems as a consequence of the “politics of exclusion.” Rangell agrees with the first claim but not the latter. He believes that these two important issues are temporally entangled but must be teased apart and treated separately. Ultimately, where the law may be relevant to the issue of lay analysis it is “hardly the arbiter in science” (2007, pg. 52). Chapter 11 is particularly interesting as Rangell distinguishes some of the historical antecedents, locates psychoanalysis in psychology via Freud (1926), and underscores the importance but not primacy of neurology and medicine in general. Like Freud, Rangell is advocating for a biopsychosocial model where the clinical findings are core and feed other ancillary applications, e.g., applied usage. How then does pluralism affect technique? Rangell answers this question by observing that small innovations in technique have become exaggerated into major dimensions of treatment. He notes that this is not only a prime example of *pars pro Toto* (i.e., ascension of the part to the whole) but often the result of a transference to theory. Here he reviews the leading themes of self-disclosure, enactment, and intersubjectivity and concludes that:

these [are] irrational incursions into the analytic instrument itself, and through that into the analytic process, which need to be recognized and corrected.... It is as though laxity and lapses, which may be unavoidable, are regarded instead as flexibility, which is desirable (2007, pg. 83).

To correct this, Rangell follows Fenichel’s dictum “treatment is through the rational ego” (Fenichel, 1941, pg 13). This does not imply technical rigidity, but highlights the aim of rationally explaining the irrational and invites the technical “variations...challenging

clinical phenomena in a general psychoanalytic practice [which] are as infinite as people are” (qtd. In Rangell, 2007, pg. 83).

Rangell proposes a single "total composite psychoanalytic theory" (1988, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2007), a theory that is cohesive and cumulative, aiming at "completeness with parsimony" (2007, p. 116): "total"- containing all nonexpendable elements, "composite" – a blend of all valid discoveries, and "psychoanalytic" - fulfilling the criteria of psychoanalysis (2007, pg. 85). This would be the third wave of the total composite theory. What is accepted into the theory is decided by both the collective and the individual. For Rangell, this includes every viable contribution including Freud's five metapsychological points of view and the sixth added by Rapaport and Gill (1959), and the adaptive point of view. Contributions converge from many directions and follow complementary series: attachment and separation, conflict and adaptation, neutrality and empathy, drive and object, tragic and guilty man, historical and narrative truth. Borrowing from the work of Reed and Baudry (1997), Rangell believes that three basic questions are crucial to the debate of divergent theory: "What clinical observations make the innovations necessary? Is the revision independent or does it link to or depend on some unrecognized aspect of previous theory? Does the new theory contradict some aspect of previous theory on which it silently depends?" (2007, pg. 101). Following Freud, he envisions the field as an overall science of man. The mind develops and is cultivated by its physical and social environment and is studied accordingly.

Rangell believes that a unitary theory remains elusive for reasons that are overdetermined.¹ First, there is a cultural influence that stems from the deep and pervasive affective pull toward diversity and away from unity. Where Rangell identifies this as particularly relevant to our culture highlighted in the concept of the “rugged individual” it was also addressed by Freud: “It is remarkable that, little as men are able to exist in isolation, they should nevertheless feel as a heavy burden the sacrifices which civilization expects of them in order to make a communal life possible” (1926, p. 6). Another reason can be found in the developmental pull to separate and attach. Then there is the influence from a group-pull in which people refuse to go along with convention but dread being different. As noted earlier, there is also a pull from the transference to theory and perhaps the ultimate influence, there is an identification with theory and the evolution of a professional identity. “An analyst becomes “a self psychologist,” “a classicist,” or “a Kleinian,” not one who simply thinks that way” (Rangell, 2007, pg. 94).

In the penultimate chapter Rangell offers a brief outline of his additions to the total theory. He presents these contributions in sweeping themes. These topics range from the conventional theoretical building of metapsychology (e.g., the unified theory of anxiety; emergence of the self and object; technique, superego – conflict of integrity; ego autonomy, unconscious choice and the decision-making process; the 14-steps of

¹ He does give voice to those who have different concerns. Bergman (2004) finds the total composite theory a “utopian solution” that denies the “ferocity of the emotions involved in the controversies” (qtd in Rangell, 2007, p. 95). Richards (1999), main concern is in putting “our scientific principles at risk if we decide in advance that we cannot accept any future paradigm shift in psychoanalysis” (qtd in Rangell, 2007, p. 92). The challenge for psychoanalysis to maximize integration, Richards notes, is the development of forums to talk with one another. Reasonable as this sounds, Rangell believes that both Bergmann and Richards are “bowing to the intensity of those who oppose it” (qtd. in Rangell, 2007, p. 95).

intrapsychic conflict from initiation to outcome) to the arena of applied psychoanalysis (e.g., subjects of politics, the dynamics of natural groups and public opinion).

In chapter 17, Rangell makes his final appeal for unity and internal reconciliation. Rangell, and from another perspective Brenner (2006), hold out the ideal of a scientific psychoanalytic theory. To reach this ideal, clinical data will need to continue to be gathered in a variety of ways within diverse clinical contexts. When emerging theoretical constructs are left to their domains of origin, however, they remain categorical in nature and nonintegrated. Here we find the “ferocity of the emotions involved in the controversies” that Bergmann speaks of (2004, pg. 263) but it is also where all too often we find stagnation. As these concepts are shared by the various domains their integral nature emerges and a chance for integration appears. We have seen this recently in the literature on actualizations and enactments. This may be one subtle characteristics of theory change that does not require a new scientific paradigm shift. Leo Rangell, once again navigating Polaris, has shown us the way to important possibilities.

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