

Building Bridges: Negotiation of
Paradox in the Analytic Process
by Stuart Pizer
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The psychoanalytic community at present is deeply engaged in defining what has come to be called the relational approach to psychoanalysis. Building Bridges: Negotiation of Paradox in the Analytic Process is Stuart Pizer's contribution to this effort. In this volume he explores some distinguishing characteristics of the relational point of view, and illustrates their technical and theoretical consequences in a long clinical study and several shorter vignettes. Pizer is espousing a point of view that we take to be controversial. We want to use the opportunity of discussing his book to consider the validity of this point of view and more especially its relation to what we will call modern classical psychoanalytic theory.

"I believe," he writes, "that in the psychoanalytic process, the transference/countertransference tapestry is woven between analysand and analyst through a process of intersubjective negotiation. Much of what is essentially mutative in the analytic situation is rendered through mutual adjustments that occur largely out of awareness in both parties. Only some of this process need ever become conscious to the patient or to be explicated through interpretation (page 3)."

Pizer shares this belief with such other relationalists as Mitchell, Aron, Greenberg, and Gerson, who downplay the centrality of the classical triad of interpretation, insight and therapeutic change, and who feel that "something else" in an analysis accounts for its therapeutic properties. Because this "something else" often occurs out of awareness, it is difficult to characterize. Through speculation, clinical example, and comparison with the more familiar doctrines of classical analysis (as he understands them), Pizer attempts to clarify the nature of this mutative "something else," and to demonstrate its importance as both an organizing and defining concept (theoretical) and mutative experience (clinical) of relational psychoanalysis. Its delineation as an ongoing process of the negotiation of paradox in which "the very substance and nature of truth and reality are being negotiated toward consensus in the analytic dyad (page 4)," forms the core of a book whose subject matter will be of interest to many.

However, Pizer seems to have a deep distrust of classical technique and an intense belief that it does not represent a viable or desirable approach to the clinical situation. This belief, and a corresponding tendency to over-narrow what "classical" psychoanalysis means, are the sources of the questions that we had about this study of negotiation and paradox in the psychoanalytic situation. For example, Pizer maintains that the classical notions of conflict and compromise formation are not only dichotomous with, but actually opposed to, his relational theory of paradox. He illustrates paradox with the well-known quote from Winnicott (1969): "A new feature thus arrives in the theory of object-relating. The subject says to the object: 'I destroyed you,' and the object is there to receive

the communication. From now on the subject says, 'Hello, object.' 'I destroyed you.' 'I love you.' 'You have value for me because of my destruction of you.' 'While I am loving you, I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy (page 90).'" (p10)

What can we gain by forbidding this paradox to reside under the general heading of conflict and the specific one of ambivalence? It is the simultaneity of the loving and hating (i.e., the conflict, that makes ambivalence the complicated and paradoxical thing that it is, as opposed to the simpler phenomenon that we refer to informally as "mixed feelings." In addition, Winnicott's views on the destruction of the object have been incorporated to a greater or lesser extent into almost all current psychoanalytic thought, not exclusively the relational. (Ellman et. al. 1998).

Pizer's own discussion of the difference between paradox and conflict raises echoes of previous work by classical analysts, sometimes of a very conservative persuasion. Pizer writes: "Conflict connotes dichotomous (or trichotomous and so on) interest or tugs between people or groups; or, in individuals between divergent tendencies within a bounded nucleus of the self. On the other hand, paradox resides in the multiplicity of bounded nuclei within the self where simultaneously coexisting nuclei (self states, affects, self representations and so on) reciprocally contradict or negate each other." (p65)

This idea reverberates with more traditional psychoanalytic views suggesting Kernberg's (1975) distinction between splitting and repression. Pizer continues: "Conflict can be resolved through interpersonal negotiation or mediation Intrapsychic conflict may be resolved through choice ... or renunciation Paradox cannot be resolved (Winnicott, 1971); mutually negating elements continue to exist, and the negotiation of paradox yields not resolution but a straddling or bridging of contradictory perspectives." (p65) Brenner (1983) addressed the permanence of conflict and the idea that change involves the alteration of compromise formation rather than the relinquishment of wishes.

A second example: Pizer asserts that "the important therapeutic yield of these ongoing and recurrent negotiations goes beyond such products of negotiation as an accepted insight, a retrieved recollection, or a self-analytic reflection on the mind's defensive patterns." He seems to mean that the well-known and highly-valued products of analytic engagement (insight, recollection, understanding) are not the primary cause of analytic change, nor are the tools that produce them (reconstruction, interpretation and the analysis of defense). "Something else" in the engagement process itself is more important. But although there are in truth some areas of disagreement here with traditional analytic thought, there is also far more agreement than Pizer seems to recognize. Many analysts agree with the overriding primacy of the engagement process, with the notion that negotiation is and should be continual in the analytic process, and that insight, recollection, etc., can be and often are products of negotiation. We agree that the process of negotiation yields something beyond its obvious concrete agreements, although we may understand differently what that something is. Some of these similarities are very striking.

But there are also important differences. We do not agree with him about the secondary importance of insight. Yet many classical analysts believe that the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis results, to borrow a phrase from Loewald (1960), from "the engagement of two persons in a process of negotiation that is an intervention designed to set ego development in motion." Pizer asserts that the negotiation process eventually allows the analysand the possibility of more options in living, hope for increasingly negotiating in the world, and greater human connection. These are ego developments. The similarity of this statement with Loewald's cannot be missed. Pizer's efforts to distinguish relational psychoanalysis from its forerunners are laudable, but denying similarities where they exist does not help to distinguish. Instead it distorts the picture of both.

Pizer supports his position with the assertion that analysands recall as significant moments in which their analyst seemed to recognize the patient's essential being or affirm personal caring beyond what they expected. These recollections are interesting, but what they mean about psychotherapeutic change is not established by assertion alone. Even if they are universal, we have to wonder whether that moment was indeed the heart of the mutative experience? Or was it a flag, or a screen memory, or just something wonderful that was the culmination of many necessary years of slow, plodding, deliberate interpretation, recollection, reconstruction, and defense analysis? Reflecting back on our own treatment experiences is provocative but does not provide answers to these kinds of questions.

Finally, Pizer gives considerable credit to Winnicott for his model of therapeutic action. He writes (page 7): "As I see it, the process of psychoanalysis may be conceived of as an exchange of 'squiggles' between adults without pencil and paper. By such an exchange, mostly verbal, of marks and 'remarks' offered in evocative and resonant sequence, analyst and patient become co-creators of a relational construction that represents and communicates a place of intersection of their separate experiences together over time. Neither the analyst's 'squiggle'—be it interpretation, clarification, confrontation, empathic reflection, or self-disclosure—nor the patient's 'squiggle'—be it historical, narrative, transference impression, manifest dream or other association constitutes an X-ray rendering of the 'self's core.'" But relational psychology is not alone in having made use of this powerful Winnicottian metaphor. Different schools of thought may have interpreted it differently—including Winnicott's—but they have certainly pondered and absorbed and often integrated it. Again, Pizer insists on difference without recognizing similarity in a way that paradoxically obscures contrasts, leaving us unconvinced that the concepts of negotiation and paradox, however central they may be to relational psychoanalysis, are exclusive to it.

This artificial polarization is most troublesome in Pizer's depiction of classical clinical practice. He writes: "Classical technique, based as it is on the adherence to ideals of neutrality, anonymity, authority and abstinence from enactment is a positional approach to negotiation with the patient (who is then implicitly humiliated by being invited unilaterally to express her 'interests')." (page 196) He takes the most negative possible view of this stance, in spite of the efforts classical analysts have made to indicate that they do not understand or use it so coldly. He apparently sees the classical situation as

implicitly humiliating, and feels that to be the only truth of classical psychoanalysis. Yet there is abundant evidence that not all analysands experience it that way, and indeed that many thrive in the serenity of a classical technique based on the ideals of neutrality, anonymity and abstinence (we will talk about authority in a minute), to the extent that these ideals can indeed be adhered to in the real life of everyday clinical practice.

There is a paradox here. Pizer's assertion that classical analysis is never negotiation contradicts the relational commitment to a relativistic stance. Pizer asserts that "the principles of negotiation support the principles of relational psychoanalysis," and yet what he argues most for is his unwillingness to include the principles of classical psychoanalysis in the negotiation process.

By contrast, the classical practice that Pizer sees as so authoritarian and forbidding has a much stronger tradition of negotiation, and recognition of its importance, than Pizer gives it credit for. Every enduring psychotherapy represents a successful relationship, explicit or not. The use of the couch, the fee, dealing with missed sessions, answering questions, not answering questions, giving advice—in short, everything an analyst does or does not do, and everything an analyst asks the patient to do or not do, is subject for negotiation. So is the matter of interpretation and the analysand's reaction to it. This is so true, in fact, that the analyst who takes a no-negotiation approach is likely to be an analyst with a very small practice and a lot of free time.

On the matter of authority: classical psychoanalysis has received much criticism for authoritarianism over the years. Much of the classical literature, and many of today's training analysts, came out of the fifties and sixties. The picture of rigidity and dogmatism in classical psychoanalysis is a function of the training and economic climate of that time. It was a hierarchical era and also a time of analytic plenty when there were plenty of candidates and plenty of patients. The practice at the time of reporting upon training analyses certainly added a burden of authoritarianism to the psychoanalytic situation, and the knowledge that there were always others waiting in line for one's place on the couch may also have had an impact on the way psychoanalytic negotiations were carried out. But that was a singular moment in the hundred year history of analysis. Classical practitioners now do not work by fiat. We understand what Zetzel, Greenson and others warned about even then: interpretation can only be effective in the context of a relationship.

In short, Pizer's description of his approach to clinical practice does not appear to be very different from what classical analysts do. Our experience as contemporary Freudian analysts has consistently been that over time the spoken and unspoken communications between analyst and analysand allow their two realities to approach each other so closely, and to produce such complex meeting of minds, that it is not uncommon for them to arrive at identical associations or memories at the same time.

Pizer attempts to delineate the aspects of the analyst's role and function that contribute to therapeutic effectiveness. He writes (page 32-33): "The analyst maintains the practice of concerted self-analyses while participating in the analytic dyad. Within this self-analytic

practice ... attention turns continually toward the integration of genetic themes, the consideration of patterns of transference, repetition and reflection on character defenses and resistance. But it is our humility—that gives us the freedom, along with the responsibility, to keep potential space open for negotiation.”

This is an eloquent description of an analytic ideal commonly held by the analytic community at large, rather than the defining platform of one psychoanalytic party versus another. And it is hard to know what to make of it in contrast with Pizer's very bitter and pejorative (it seems to us) view of classical analysis and classical analysts. On page 112 he refers to "the canonical formulas of analytic technique," and on page 188 he depicts the classical analytic situation as characterized by a "nondisclosing analyst who arrogates to himself the nonnegotiable position of arbiter of reality, who sits as a neutral observer outside the one-person dynamic situation, is inherently humiliating to the patient and may well iatrogenically embed resistances to negotiating a change process." And again (page 190): "While classical analysts have argued that traditional technique is particularly well-suited for the analysis of aggression and negative transferences, it may well be that the maximized power asymmetry of the classical patriarchal, patronizing analytic position in its very structure actually incites aggression by dichotomizing power in ways that inherently humiliate the patient with its a priori terms for negotiating the treatment."

In warm contrast to this frightening rendering of the classical analyst appears his relational colleague, who embraces "more mutualistic ... intersubjective approaches to the analytic process in which the analyst shares countertransference experience ... discloses aspects of her own subjectivity ... monitors the irritation of humiliating potential in the necessarily asymmetrical analytic relationship and accommodates 'resistances' in more affirmative rather than oppositional terms, seeking the articulation and inclusion of those multiple 'interests' served by a patient's presentation of various resisting stances in the analytic potential space." (p195-196) But the first is such a caricature that it is difficult not to wonder if the second is not one as well.

This polemical and political tone is unfortunate. Pizer comes across in his case presentations as a sensitive and thoughtful clinician who treats his patients wisely and well. The most valuable lesson of this book for us was the recognition that there is a group of serious psychoanalysts who harbor a very painful and, we believe, distorted view of the attitudes and practices of many of their colleagues. We believe that this has been brought about in part by our exclusion of many of this group from training at "our" institutes and membership in "our" organizations. We will look less fearsome as we become better known and more open to observation and to dialogue.

References

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