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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Relational polemics

Dear Editor,

Eyal Rozmarin's (2019) recent review of my book on a critique of contemporary psychoanalysis is a polemical dismissal based on a biased political agenda. The review does not adequately capture the scope and depth of the work, is not a true rendition of what I actually wrote, is laced with rhetoric and sophistry, and is intellectually dishonest. First of all, the book is titled *Conundrums* (Mills 2012), not *Relational Conundrums*. Was this a slip? Is this a projection of Rozmarin's own ambivalence, or an indication that the relational school does indeed present its own theoretical challenges? Secondly, Rozmarin does not identify himself to the reader as an Associate Editor of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, arguably the leading relational journal in the world, who also trained in the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy & Psychoanalysis, the leading relational training centre in the United States, and has been a long-time collaborator with Adriene Harris, Muriel Dimen, and other noted relational authors who he charges me of mischaracterizing. I find these omissions a palpable conflict of interest given that his allegiances are not disclosed to the reader whom he is intent on deceiving by attempting to camouflage his political identifications.

After a gracious introduction, my detailed critique is reduced rather abruptly to a crass denial of the validity of my arguments as being "uncritical," "simplistic," and "distorted" (p. 166). The tone of the review is based on attributing conclusions to my arguments that I do not actually make, pulling quotes out of context, and misrepresenting the critique I have to offer as a refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the subject matter I analyze (p. 167). One is left to wonder how such a book could have possibly passed a blind peer-review process and been published, let alone win a Goethe Award for best book, receive wide scholarly attention, and form the basis of an international conference held in Israel in 2015, the conference proceedings of which were published in the relational journal, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* (see Govrin 2017; Kuchuck and Sopher 2017; Mills 2017, 2018; Razinsky 2017; Roth 2017; Shalgi 2017; Ullman 2017; Yadlin-Gadot 2017).

I am accused of reading the relational literature without providing textual evidence to substantiate my arguments in an "impressionistic and dismissive engagement" (p. 168) with contemporary theory. Let us take an example: "Stern's complex and influential notion of 'unformulated experience' (Stern 1997), which leans on the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions, cannot be reduced to a matter of linguistic articulation" (Rozmarin 2019, 168). Let's see what Donnel Stern (1997) actually writes in his book: "language is the condition for experiencing," and "All experience is linguistic" (p. 7). Here it appears to me that Stern has indeed "reduced" "all experience" to linguistic processes. Furthermore, Adrienne Harris (1996) tells us that: "Speaking is thus the source of self-structure" (p. 544). Does this look like a lack of textual evidence?

Rozmarin also indicts me for relying on "writing maneuvers" (p. 168) to set up my opponents through "a reckless dismissiveness of his subject matter" (p. 169) when he himself relies on the use of non sequiturs that are presented as fact rather than showing how my conclusions do not follow from the premises. In reverse order, he provides his own critique of my critique via mimesis: he uses the same trope of admonishing me that I do not engage original texts,

that I misunderstand relational authors, and that I employ straw man arguments to set up my interlocutors, only to burn them. Rather than engage the substance of my arguments, here we observe the relational propaganda of negation and contempt, hence gaslighting the reader about what was really written and discussed in detail in the book.

When it comes to questioning “my declared understanding of philosophy” (p. 168), Rozmarin fails to alert the reader that I am an academically trained philosopher with a PhD from Vanderbilt University and a Fulbright scholar of philosophy. In the end, Rozmarin challenges my “oracular” (p. 169) system of psychoanalytic metaphysics that attempts to trace the birth of subjectivity from unconscious agency in my Gradiva award winning book, *Origins: On the Genesis of Psychic Reality* (Mills 2010), what he calls “an unsophisticated, conventional and rather crude way of describing the human condition” (p. 169).

Prejudices and identity politics aside, readers will have to determine for themselves the verity and value of my critique of the contemporary psychoanalytic landscape, but what is most importantly expunged from Rozmarin’s missive, is that I identify myself as a practicing relational analyst who is providing an internal critique of the field, as if I am to be airbrushed out of any historical contribution to relational self-critique.

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