

*Confidentiality
Ethical Perspectives and
Clinical Dilemmas*

Edited by
Charles Levin
Allannah Furlong
Mary Kay O'Neil



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Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
INTRODUCTION	ix
Charles Levin, Allannah Furlong, and Mary Kay O'Neil	
Contributors	xvii

SECTION ONE: THINKING ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

1 <i>Confidentiality as a Virtue</i>	3
Jonathan Lear	
2 <i>Trust, Confidentiality, and the Possibility of Psychoanalysis</i>	19
John Forrester	
3 <i>Having a Thought of One's Own</i>	29
Arnold H. Modell	
4 <i>The Why of Sharing and Not the What: Confidentiality and Psychoanalytic Purpose</i>	39
Allannah Furlong	
5 <i>Civic Confidentiality and Psychoanalytic Confidentiality</i>	51
Charles Levin	

SECTION TWO: DILEMMAS IN TREATMENT, RESEARCH, AND TRAINING

6 <i>Some Reflections on Confidentiality in Clinical Practice</i>	79
Otto F. Kernberg	
7 <i>Psychoanalytic Research and Confidentiality: Dilemmas</i>	85
Robert Galatzer-Levy	
8 <i>Confidentiality and Training Analyses</i>	107
Ronald Britton	
9 <i>Confidentiality, Reporting, and Training Analyses</i>	113
Robert Michels	
10 <i>Confidentiality, Privacy, and the Psychoanalytic Career</i>	117
Mary Kay O'Neil	

CHAPTER 1

*Confidentiality as a Virtue*

Jonathan Lear

Although current concerns about confidentiality tend to focus on the intrusion of outside agencies, I focus here on a problem that is *internal* to psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic practice. The question I raise is whether something is *inherently* unethical in the psychoanalytic situation. Here I am not talking about boundary violations or various forms of excess and bad behavior. I mean problems that arise even when we are on our best behavior.

The problem arises from a conflict between two important values. First, we need to transmit knowledge. We cannot train a new generation of psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, we cannot transmit new insights and improvements in technique, unless we can pass on what we know and what we learn. We also need structures of recognition—journals, professional organizations—in which true expertise can be recognized, and a class of teachers selected to impart knowledge to the next generation.

Second, there is a need to preserve confidentiality, a need that is special to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

In medicine, for example, there may be all sorts of reasons to keep, say, the results of an HIV blood test confidential. But a breach in confidentiality does not compromise the results of the blood test. In contrast, in psychoanalysis confidentiality is *constitutive* of the process.

I should like to dedicate this paper to Jay Katz, a wise and humane man who first taught me to think about psychoanalytic ethics.

Psychoanalysis is a response to a fascinating fact about the human psyche: it represses. The unconscious is constituted by repressing forces, and the analysis is a peculiar response to repression. It is an attempt to lift or modify repression under certain delicate conditions. Roughly speaking, an analysand enters analysis in a situation where he is keeping certain secrets from himself. The analysis is a transformation of a situation such that a person moves from a condition in which he is keeping secrets from himself into a condition in which he now has a private life. Now he is no longer keeping those secrets from himself, but he may choose to keep secrets from others. There is a movement, you might say, from secrecy to privacy. And the very existence of psychoanalysis depends on the kind of environment that will allow that process to occur.

As it turns out, breaching confidentiality breaches the process itself. Imagine a new reality-TV show, *Analysis!* in which people confess their inner secrets, try to free associate, and so on. There will be an “analyst” who makes some analytically minded comments from time to time. And we can tune in and watch the spectacle. Any clinician who has really worked with a person’s defenses and resistances will see straightaway that this would be the expression of one more defense. In the name of “making the unconscious conscious,” this kiss-and-tell would be one more way of keeping things repressed in the name of letting it all hang out.

The fact is, repressions don’t get lifted on TV. One needs an environment of trust, and that trust is established in significant part by the maintenance of confidentiality. That is why, *in psychoanalysis, confidentiality is not just one value to be weighed against competing values, it is constitutive of the process itself.*

The issue does not simply arise because of the nature of repression. The mode of treating patients in analysis is the analysis of the transference. This is not just an analytic technique, it is constitutive of psychoanalysis. Now the idea that we are analyzing a transference rather than exploiting it, making suggestions, or engaging in hypnosis helps to define who we are and what we are doing. Not that we always succeed at our task, but we should always be trying. In this way, avoiding suggestion becomes a *constitutive ideal* of psychoanalysis. And there is a serious question whether this ideal is fatally compromised when confidentiality is violated.

One way to begin to see the problem is to consider the issue of informed consent. Three problems immediately present themselves. First, what could possibly count as informing a person? Second, how

much of the analytic process would get disturbed by doing so? Third, who is giving the consent and for what is the consent being given?

When does one raise the issue of informed consent? If an analyst says at the very beginning, even before the analysis proper commences, that some of the information may be transmitted to colleagues or published in a professional journal, it is fair to say that the potential analysand has no real idea what his consent involves. And there really is no saying how much such a statement might disturb the unfolding of the analytic process. Nor could we predict what might never emerge precisely because there is an underlying concern that the situation is not sufficiently safe. It is easy enough to say "it's all grist for the mill," but it is simply not known how self-serving for analysts such a slogan is.

If one waits for the analysis to take hold before asking for consent, further problems arise. Suppose that there is a good working relation between analyst and analysand and the transference is well-established. If at this point the analyst introduces her own desire and makes a request of the analysand, this will obviously have significant transference implications. But let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that we could analyze all the transference and countertransference implications. (Obviously, this is unlikely to the point of being practically impossible.) The analysis would no longer unfold according to the patient's needs; it would unfold according to the analyst's desires. Of course, we should not be prisoners to a phony idealization of the analytic situation as having only to do with the analysand's wishes, fantasies, and conflicts. We can accept that the analyst is also a participant in the analytic situation. It is one thing to acknowledge this. It is quite another to use this acknowledgment as an excuse for taking over the analytic situation so that it is either spent dealing with the analyst's desires or it ends up in a defensive silence about them.

There would be a further complication for the analyst. The analyst would then act on a desire to communicate information and that is usually tied to powerful desire for professional recognition. As a profession, psychoanalysis is in many ways self-abnegating and, thereby, frustrating. Whatever good work you do is done in private. And it is critical to the analysis that our own sense of worth and good work is not overly dependent on the analysand's judgment or recognition. I do not have surveys to go on, but I do notice anecdotally among analysts who attend conferences that a certain hunger for recognition is not getting satisfied in the analytic situation. Fair enough; but there is then a question to what extent these desires are getting

entangled in the countertransference. And what internal pressures are there to ignore the countertransference?

Certainly, these countertransference pressures can easily skew an analyst's view of the case. With some notable exceptions, a case that is a mess is not worthy of transmission. The generic analytic case history that one reads in a journal has this broad structure: the analyst spends some time in confusion; there are false starts and stops; there is an impasse or two; suddenly the analyst finds the impasse is broken and can see an interpretive and dynamic reason why; and then there is great progress. Is this really the way analytic stories unfold? Or has an analyst's own wishes helped to shape the story? And if an attuned analysand wants to gratify his analyst by presenting such a story, how many analysts are going to interpret that wish?

If that problem is put aside, there is yet another scenario. Assume the analysis is going well—the analyst is well aware of her countertransference wishes and is handling them well. In what seems like a good moment, the analyst asks the question in the most responsible way she knows how. In short, let us assume the best possible scenario for giving analytically informed consent. There is still going to be a problem of who (or what) is giving the informed consent and for whom or for what he is giving consent.

Precisely because the issue concerns the unfolding of the unconscious, if the process is working it unfolds in its own way, bypassing a person's conscious will. Here there is a question: to what extent can I speak for my own unconscious? From a psychoanalytic point of view, the answer must be: very little. The process of psychoanalysis—what Freud called making the unconscious conscious—is a process of accepting responsibility for one's unconscious.¹ It is precisely because I cannot speak for my unconscious that analysis is necessary. So if I stand up boldly and say, "I hereby give you informed consent to let the unfolding of my unconscious be public property," it is unclear what kind of gesture I am making. It is unclear of whom or for what I am speaking. And it is certainly unclear to what extent my supposed informed consent is actually disturbing the process over which I am supposedly giving informed consent. In the spirit of Rousseau, consider the man who sails his boat to the coast of an unknown land and who plants a stick and says, "I declare all this for King." What could he possibly mean by "all this"? What could this

¹I discuss this in detail in my book *Love and Its Place in Nature* (Lear, 1998).

gesture possibly be? And yet, it may end up having the most disturbing effects on any poor souls who happen to be living in the region.

What about informed consent after a successful analysis? The analysand is so grateful he wants the wisdom won from his analysis to be transmitted. And the analysand now has the analytic skill to know what he is talking about. He can continue his own self-analysis, it is grist for his mill, and so on. Why not then? This is not to say an analyst could never do this well. But, even here, there are serious problems that tend to get overlooked.

Much significant analytic work is done after the analysis is officially over, in significant part around the question "what has my analysis done for me?" The needs, desires, real-life and fantasied quirks of the analyst are fading into the imaginative and symbolic background, and the meaning of the analytic function, the meaning of one's own past and future life, is coming into the foreground. It is precisely then that the analyst injects his request. It is hard not to see this as a disturbance of the postanalytic period, one that is induced by the analyst's desire. (It is similar to approaching a close relative at a funeral and asking a personal favor. Even if it is for a good cause, it is not the right time. And if the issue is a charged one, then, however worthy, it will of course disturb the mourning process.)

Either the analyst leaves the analysand to deal with the consent request or invites him back to discuss the issue. Who is going to pay for these sessions? Is this the appropriate time to have a discussion about whether the analysand should or should not accede to the analyst's requests?

So far, I've focused on the constitutive nature of confidentiality for the analytic process. I now want to focus on the constitution of the self. One of the psyche's fundamental meaning-making activities is to construct stories about who one is and how one got to be how one is. These stories occur at all sorts of levels, from primitive fantasies to sophisticated narratives, and have many functions, some more defensive than others. Still, it is crucial to its very constitution that the self has certain self-defining narratives however distorted or rigid. One of the values of analysis is to allow this narrative capacity to take on less rigid, more imaginative, and responsive roles. Of course, there are many potential problems here, and I think there are myriad ways both analyst and analysand can defensively valorize the construction of narratives. In general, I am concerned that the analyst's desire for a narrative can get in the way of the analytic process. But

I'll leave this problem aside and consider a different question: Who is this story *for* and, more important, *whose* story is it?

The answer ought to be that it is the analysand's story and it is for the analysand. But to what extent is this answer compromised by the analyst telling his or her story of the analysand's story? Isn't the analysis ideally supposed to be a place where the analysand works out *his own* story? Of course, the analysand needs the interpretive aid of the analyst. But the aid is supposed to facilitate *self*-knowledge, not the analyst's knowledge. And this self-constructive process does seem to be interfered with by any process in which the analyst is giving his own version—beyond, that is, the analytic activities of interpretation. This is another important reason for confidentiality: the analysand may wish to preserve the privacy of his story as a way of treating it as *his* story, not someone else's. For him, the privacy of his fundamental narratives may be constitutive to his own sense of self. Suppose an analysand treats the narratives constructed in analysis as essential to his sense of identity. And suppose it is important to him to keep that identity private. Must the analyst assume that this is necessarily an atavistic wish that needs to be analyzed *away*?

If the analysand knows that his analyst is going to be publishing material that includes his case history, that has to generate conflicts. In the first instance, if there is a prospect that the analyst will tell a different story from the analysand, would this put into question the story that he has been constructing in the analysis? But, if the stories should coincide, does that cast doubt on the story truly being the analysand's? Obviously, these are questions that can be addressed, issues that can be analyzed. But to take the issues seriously is to see them fanning out in all sorts of directions. And the question then becomes: to what extent is the analysis being hijacked by the analyst's desires?

These problems arise in an even more heightened form in training analyses. And training analysts who, as a group, are at the top of their profession are more likely to want to write up case material than are other clinicians. Now their material is, for the most part, coming from the analysis of candidates or from the supervision of cases presented by candidates. The pressures of their desires on candidates have not been sufficiently investigated. And there is a question as to what extent the training of the next generation is compromised by analyses in which very delicate issues are skated over.

In short, there is a tension between the demands of the profession and the demands of the art. Following the categories of the

ancient world, I would say that psychoanalysis is a master craft rather than a science. (This is the sense in which medicine is a master craft, not a science.) It applies very complicated knowledge in peculiar ways with the aim of helping people in peculiar ways. To what extent has the professionalization of the craft gotten in the way of the craft?

Are there ways to deal with these problems? Or, do we have to accept with Freud and Janet Malcolm that psychoanalysis is an "impossible profession"? Is the conflict I have been delineating irresolvable? Psychoanalysts ought to be well equipped to think about compromises, to think about better and worse approaches to a conflict. I want to go back to one of my heroes, Aristotle, because a feature of ancient Greek ethics may be of help.

The psychoanalytic profession has unwittingly approached ethics from one particular point of view and ignored another. It starts with Freud. It is striking that when Freud was interested in myth he went to the Greeks but when he was interested in ethics he went to the Jews and Christians. For him, ethics was the Judeo-Christian tradition, and that tradition was the tradition of the Law. That is one of two vibrant approaches to ethics in the western tradition, but it is a tradition of *thou shalt* and *thou shalt not*.

The ethics of the Judeo-Christian tradition is an ethics of absolutes and laws. This is certainly what concerned Freud. He was especially concerned with how these absolutes emerged in a cruel and punishing superego. But there is another rich ethical tradition, which begins with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and it stands in healthy contrast with the Judeo-Christian tradition. As an ethical tradition, it has been ignored in psychoanalysis.

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are all concerned with the virtues or excellences of the human psyche. They want to know what kind of character leads to the living of a full, rich, happy life, and they want to know how to instill that character. This is of ethical significance. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes it clear that laws and rule books are not themselves sufficient for an ethical life. Consider a virtue like courage. Aristotle makes it clear that there isn't going to be any rule book for courage, nor will there be any contentful law to obey. There are certain times when the courageous thing to do is to retreat, other times when the courageous thing to do is to keep on analyzing. Given any purported rule—"stand fast in front of the enemy" or "always say what you think"—there are going to be circumstances in which following the rule is foolhardy, immature, or

rash, certainly not courageous. A courageous person, with a certain sensitivity to the situations in which she finds herself, will have certain motivations to act on that sensitivity. She will know when to step forward and when to step back, and why. There won't be a hard-and-fast rule; there will be a sensitivity to life's changing circumstances.²

This is of course relevant to the analytic situation. For an analyst must have the sensitivity to know when it is time to step in with an appropriate interpretation and when it is appropriate to step back and let the analysand carry on his own analytic work.

Are there ways to build up good analytic characters? Do we need to build up analytic wisdom or good judgment? Aristotle had a word for this, the *phronimos*, which means the person of overall good judgment, the practically wise person. Aristotle needed to concentrate on the *phronimos* because courage isn't the only virtue; it is one among others. There is also, for example, generosity. In a particular set of circumstances, the disposition toward courage will tell you what the courageous thing to do is, and the disposition toward generosity will tell you what the generous thing to do is. But one needs to know overall what the best thing to do is. That is what the *phronimos* knows. And that is what she wants to do.

What kind of training will produce an analytic *phronimos*, that is, an analytically wise person? That question is too big to address here, but it is one well worth asking. I want to concentrate here on the smaller question of what it might be like to instill confidentiality as virtue. That is, what kind of training, what kinds of procedures, should we have in analytic institutes and in our professional organizations so that we instill in our own psyches a disposition toward confidentiality, and good judgment when it comes to all the particular complexities of confidentiality that might arise? Can confidentiality be a disposition or character trait of the soul? Can confidentiality become a part of us, a part of the way we see the world, a source of judgment that flows from deep within us?

This question looks difficult to tackle. A tip of the trade I learned from Aristotle is that when a question looks overwhelming, try to break it down into its constituent parts, try to see how it might apply to particular cases. If we are thinking about building up confidentiality as a virtue in the *analyst's* psyche, then we have to think about what we already know is crucial to analytic training.

²See McDowell (1998, pp. 3–22).

In psychoanalytic training, the case study is crucial. On one hand, it is a peculiar form of transmission of knowledge, needed because the level of understanding psychoanalysts are concerned with involves complicated and hidden dynamics of an individual human being. On the other hand, it is also important to realize that there is such a thing as too much detail and unnecessary detail. Psychoanalytic writers like Hans Loewald and D. W. Winnicott are able to bring clinical material alive, but they do it with thumbnail sketches, and they tend to avoid the form of case presentation.

Within the analytic world, in institutes, on editorial boards, at conferences, there always and everywhere should be this question: is a case study necessary to transmit this particular knowledge? Of the clinical material that really is of value in this case study, might it be communicated in some other way? Sometimes the answer will be no, but it ought to be a question we are asking and answering before we simply present clinical material to each other. We ought not simply to assume without question that the case study is an absolutely privileged form of transmitting knowledge.

There is one important benefit of this process that has nothing to do with confidentiality. If we know that the published case history we are reading has really passed the test, then we know it is there for a reason. We know the author and editors have gone through the process of asking, "Is this case history *really* needed?" and this gives us reason to pay attention. As readers, we will assume that potentially everything about the case is there to expand our knowledge and understanding.

One also must keep in mind that there are intermediate cases. For example, often what one needs is a particular clinical vignette. One does not need to locate that vignette in a larger case study. We tend to take it as an unquestioned good to locate a vignette in its larger context, for only by seeing the overall case do we really grasp the whole meaning of the vignette. Obviously, there is some truth to this. But rather than treat this as an absolute or unquestioned good, we should think of this as one good among others. Another good is striving to preserve confidentiality. One virtue of removing a vignette from a larger context is that it helps to preserve confidentiality. There is not going to be a hard-and-fast rule; on any occasion, there will be various relevant considerations. So we need to think about promoting analytic virtues rather than enforcing particular rules.

Here is one example of how I have dealt with this problem. In the preface to my book *Love and Its Place in Nature* (1998), I wrote:

People tend not to understand how unconscious meanings extend to the tips of their fingers. In the thousands of occasions in which an analysand has come to my office, I doubt there has been one in which the physical act of opening or closing the outer door has not been fraught with meaning. One analysand, as he entered my office for the beginning of a session, would leave the outer door a fraction of an inch ajar. As his hand let the door handle go, it would make a gesture as delicate as any I have seen in a ballet. The next step in the *pas de deux* was being turned over to me: his fingers *told me* to finish the job and close the door. I, of course, said nothing; but as time passed and the analysand relaxed into his analysis, he eventually became puzzled by this gesture. Here is a small selection of the meanings that began to emerge as he associated to it: He liked getting me to do something; he enjoyed the feeling of control over me, for he knew that I would have to close the door. Leaving the door ajar meant that nothing he was going to say was going to be so important or private that it should not be heard by someone outside. He longed for us to be working together on a collaborative project, and if we both closed the door, we were a team. My noticing that he left the door ajar meant that I was sensitive. He was scared of what might happen inside the room and wanted to know that the emergency exit was open and ready for an escape. He was afraid that I might try to rape him from behind and he wanted to be sure that people outside could hear his screams. He was hoping that others might accidentally come into my office and then he would get a glimpse of what the rest of my life was like. He was hoping that others would come in and that he would be the object of their voyeuristic pleasure. He wanted others to know we were a couple. He wanted to be the star in a porno movie. He was teasing me, setting up a game that involved his wondering whether I would ever ask him about it. He was testing my analytic resoluteness. Closing the door meant sealing his fate. Closing the door meant there was no escape from facing his own mind. And so on [pp. x-xi].

Here is my thinking about this example. First, it seemed to me that it was important to provide some clinical material to illustrate the general point that the slightest bodily movement can be fraught with meaning. My claim alone that people in general do not understand how meaning extends to their fingertips will not be concrete enough for readers to understand. On its own, the claim is an abstract and empty phrase. Second, I was able to provide clinical material in

isolation from the larger case history in which it is embedded. And so there is nothing in this fragment that picks out this one analysis from countless other analyses who give open doors meaning. Yet the particularity of the material adds life to the example. A reader can start to get a lively sense of the myriad directions in which an analysis might branch out in relation to one tiny symptom. This, I think, helps to bring the analytic process to light. Third, all the associations here are the analyst's. It is true that I collected them over years, and I am bringing them together to make a point. But it is not my narrative, nor do I disclose the larger narrative in which these associations are embedded. So, although there seems to be great particularity to the example, and thus a sense of clinical reality, there is nothing about the vignette that necessarily attaches it to a particular person. Many people could have come up with these associations or associations like them. (It is almost like looking at the x-ray of a finger: one has no idea whose finger it is, nor can one glean much of an idea of the larger skeleton to which the finger is attached. Still, there may be all kinds of things one can learn about fingers by looking at that particular x-ray.)

I do not pretend that this reasoning is not open to objection, nor do I think it complete, nor do I think that all clinical examples should be like this. But I do think that all clinical examples should be preceded by careful consideration of confidentiality before the analyst goes ahead. I simply give an example of the kind of reasoning that went into my decision.

Let me close with some suggestions for institutional reform. First, every institute should have an advanced course in ethical problems in psychoanalytic technique. This ought to be a problem-solving course, directed to specific cases and specific problems arising in the case. It should not simply be about generalizations concerning good behavior. And it ought to address in specific ways problems that arise around the issue of confidentiality. We develop good judgment about confidentiality both as individuals and as a profession by having continual discussion about how to resolve difficult cases. Not that there is necessarily one right answer about each case but that we cultivate a sensitivity and sensibility by trying out our judgments, by giving reasons to ourselves and our colleagues, and by listening to how others go through the process.

Second, there ought to be norms in the profession such that if a person is going to give a paper that involves a case presentation she has to explain why that method is needed. No doubt there are times

when we have to pass on information to each other that does threaten the confidentiality of an analysis. But we should never take the threat for granted. It should be part of our professional lives that we assume that whenever there is such a threat to confidentiality there is also a requirement to provide an explanation and defense.

Third, as professionals, we need to come up with alternative forms of recognition. Analysts have narcissistic needs too, and there ought to be institutional ways of gratifying those needs without the analyst feeling pressure to compromise her own commitment to preserving confidentiality. To give one example: one ought to be able to understand from one's colleagues, one's institute, and the larger professional organization that one is regarded as an *outstanding* analyst without feeling pressure to make a contribution to knowledge. The truth is that only a handful of people ever make a contribution to knowledge and most journal articles appear mainly to promote the career of the author. Of course, as long as there are professions, the world is going to have to tolerate mediocre journal articles. That is professional life. But we ought not to be promoting articles that threaten confidentiality. And we ought to be thinking of alternative forms of recognition.

My other calling is philosophy. And philosophy, too, has become a profession. But within that profession there lives the model and ideal of Socrates, certainly one of the greatest, if not the greatest, philosopher of all time. There is reason to think that, today, Socrates could not get tenure in any philosophy department in America or Canada. After all, he never published. His idea of philosophy was to go to the town square and talk philosophy with all comers. It seems to me quite a healthy reminder within the profession of philosophy, a thought that combats pride and arrogance, to realize that the greatest of our practitioners would not make it in the profession as it is structured today.

Might there not be a similar ideal available for analysts? One might begin by wondering: why are meetings at psychoanalytic institutes called "scientific meetings"? What is the felt need to see these meetings as "scientific"? When physicists meet, they do not call their meeting "scientific"; it is just a meeting. They do not need to call it scientific because there is no question as to whether it could be anything else. Whence the anxiety about being scientific? I am not sure of the answer, but I suspect that it derives from the fact that, until recently, the psychoanalytic profession in North America has been exclusively directed by medical doctors. And medical doctors

as a group do tend to experience some ambivalence and anxiety about whether their profession is a science. At the heart of medicine, there is the art of making people better, promoting health. Of course, this activity requires expert knowledge but, in general, the activity of medicine is not that of acquiring knowledge, but of applying already acquired knowledge in the practical activity of promoting health. Something about this makes doctors uncomfortable, and it leads to the promotion of a scientific self-image.

However that may be, as soon as one characterizes one's meetings as "scientific meetings," there is already linguistic pressure to conceive of the activity as one of passing on knowledge. There is pressure to conceive of ourselves as passing on facts, newly discovered items of knowledge. In this way, the scientific self-image of psychoanalysis encourages us to pass over important questions of confidentiality.

Obviously, one needs to keep up the most rigorous standards of inquiry and thought. By bringing the term "science" into question, I am not at all joining up with relativists or nonobjectivists. I am just pointing out how a word can have its peculiar defensive influences within a profession. And this should give us reason to become more conscious about how we can rigorously transmit knowledge without having to fall unconsciously into clichés about what knowledge transmission consists of.

After a word of caution, the most important point I want to make is not a specific recommendation but an expression of hope. Here is the preliminary word of caution. Even when one talks about how to promote analytic virtues, there is a danger of complacency. The problem is that if you really do believe that in the end there is no rule book but that you must trust the good judgment of wise people, then the wise people may complacently overlook something they ought to be attending to. So, to take a notorious example, Aristotle formulated his theory of the virtues in the midst of a culture of masters and slaves. He even devoted several chapters in the *Politics* justifying a certain type of slavery.³ Complacency is a very important problem, and I see no alternative but to try to live with it in as vibrant a way as we can. Again, there is no rule book for overcoming complacency.

Alas, neither is there any Archimedean point totally outside the universe of human foibles, vanity, and prejudice—one from which one can stand and absolutely determine which judgments are good judgments. Consider the psychoanalytic profession's struggle with

³ See Aristotle (1984, I, 4–7).

the question of whether or not homosexuality is a disease. What a marvelous mess! Professions exist to ensure a certain standard of training and good judgment. They do this up to a point, but groups by nature will also tend to promote the prejudice of the day, allow unwise people to acquire undue influence, squelch originality, and so on. There is no magical antidote. The best one can do is the best one can do.

Now for the expression of hope. To live within the human realm is to live with these sorts of problems. Of course, we can ignore them. But there is no good alternative to thinking as hard as we can about what it would be to train analysts well. There is no good alternative to thinking hard about how we might build up a good analytic character. To direct ourselves toward instilling confidentiality as a virtue in the psyche is, I think, an incredibly hopeful activity. For to think that confidentiality might be a virtue is to express trust in the judgment of those who do have this virtue. For it commits us to this idea: if you want to know what is the right thing to do in a particular set of circumstances, from the point of view of confidentiality, ask the person who has the virtue. And if you have the virtue, you can turn to your own judgment and to the opinions of those you respect. There is no higher authority.

This simple idea commits us to hope for the future. For even if we do not know all the answers to the myriad problems of maintaining confidentiality while transmitting knowledge, maybe the next generation will be in a position to know better. For if we do our best to instill confidentiality as a virtue in the upcoming generation of analysts, then we can legitimately hope that the sensitivities and judgment they develop will outstrip our own. It is always a pleasure when one feels one can trust the judgment of another. It is a special delight when one can feel that amidst the vagaries of human existence, amidst all the ignorance in which we live, one is nevertheless helping to train judgment in which one can trust.

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