

What Are We Reading?

Chetrit-Vatine, V. (2014) *The Ethical Seduction of the Analytic Situation. The Feminine –Maternal Origins of Responsibility for the Other*. Karnac, 215pp.

Viviane Chetrit-Vatine is a training and supervising analyst for adults and children, a researcher in both France and Israel, a former President of the Israeli Psychoanalytic Association, and she has published in French and English journals. (e.g. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (2004, 85 (4) 841-856) “Primal Seduction, Matricial Space and Asymmetry in the Psychoanalytic Encounter”). The title of her book spiked my curiosity, and I found the clarity of her thought, argument and writing style impressive. Her thesis can be summarized as follows: Given the double asymmetry of the analytic encounter, which she describes as both an ethical and primal seduction, the analyst is required to be an “ethical subject” guided by an ethics of “responsibility for the other”. Chetrit-Vatine begins with an overview of Freud’s and other analysts’ views of ethics and then draws extensively on the writings of Emmanuel Levinas (French philosopher on Ethics, 1906-1995) and Jean Laplanche (for example, Laplanche (1997). *The theory of seduction and the problem of the other*. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* 78: 653-66.). She also references the works of French analysts and philosophers less familiar to North American analysts, such as Bokanowski, Brun, Assoun, Aulagnier, Jonas, Kristeva, and Rousillion, which further enriched this book.

Levinas described maternity, pregnancy and the womb as an ethical space because “it metaphorizes the capacity for making a space for the other, even at the risk for my being”. Posing an ethics of “responsibility for the other”, he suggests this ethic resides in the feminine-maternal dimension of the adult, “in his/her potential capacity to let him or herself be touched, penetrated, taken hostage, interpellated by the other’s fragility. This feminine maternal order makes the analyst capable of being receptive, capable of emotionally cathected listening, of recognizing alterity, of respecting the limits of this other, and, therefore, of affirming him” (p. 163). Chetrit-Vatine argues that Laplanche deemphasized the ethical dimensions arising from the nature of the analytic situation, and so did other analysts who have focused on the maternal in the analytic encounter (containing -Bion), (holding -Winnicott). She convincingly shows that there is an analogy between the patient in analysis and a child’s

legitimate need for and expectation of an ethical other, a need that requires satisfaction, and, if it has not been, it still awaits it. With Laplanche, she believes that the analyst, to a large extent, provokes the transference that ensues in the treatment s/he provides, and carries the responsibility for its consequences. I thought that Chetrit- Vatine’s reflections on the analyst’s passion were illuminating. She cites Bion’s view that passion consists of love, hate and a search for knowledge and can be described as “an optimal emotional position” (p.61). Like Bion, she distinguishes it from countertransference, understood as evidence of repression.

I found Chetrit-Vatine’s book intellectually stimulating, eloquent, clinically accessible, and highly relevant given our profession’s struggle to come to terms with violations of patients by some of our colleagues. Chetrit-Vatine’s proposed ethics for psychoanalysis parallels the ethics inherent in the mother (primary caretaker)-child relationship, especially with regard to its essential asymmetry and taboos. The patient has entrusted him/herself into our care at the point of maximal vulnerability, is essentially unknowable, and has a series of rights that the author beautifully outlines. Chetrit-Vatine’s proposed ethics is one that comes before the desire for knowledge and truth, it is an ethics rooted in a “feminine” position of “responsibility for the other”, rather than a “masculine” focus on power. I highly recommend this very rich and important book to all analysts and everyone interested in an ethics for psychoanalysis.

~ reviewed by Rita Teusch, PhD