PSYCHOANALYSIS IS SPIRITUALITY[1]

Donald L. Carveth

I have argued (Carveth 2013; 2018) that psychoanalysis is and always has been an ethical practice despite our attempts to disguise the fact. We have always stood for life over death, love over hate, and truth over lies. Our therapy has always involved an, albeit subtle and tactful, attempt to help patients evolve psychologically, an effort to facilitate their progression from narcissism to object love (Freud 1914), and from paranoid-schizoid (PS) persecutory anxiety and shame to a depressive/reparative (D) capacity for concern for the other and for mature, reparative guilt (Klein 1975 [1946]; Winnicott 1965). This evolution is tantamount to what in the psychology of religion is called a conversion.

In 'On Narcissism' Freud wrote:

> In the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love.
>
> Freud 1914: 84

But Freud was so uncomfortable sharing this emphasis on the centrality of love with the religions he so hated that he mostly suppressed this way of speaking and, even here, his valuation of love is merely instrumental, a means to the end of avoiding illness, by no means an end in itself. Fifteen years later, in 'Civilization and its Discontents', Freud (1930) bluntly rejected and mocked the Christian love command.

In his 'New Introductory Lectures', Freud argued that psychoanalysis has no other *Weltanschauung* than that of science itself and is only interested in 'submission to the truth and rejection of illusions'

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(Freud 1933: 82). While acknowledging that in practical life the making of ultimate value judgements is unavoidable, these are left to the liberty and responsibility of the individual. In this view, psychoanalysis is committed only to a penultimate 'ethic of honesty' (Rieff 1959: 9), restricting itself to helping analysands transcend self-deception. But the idea that psychoanalysis has no ethic other than that of honesty is not honest. At best it is an illusion, hopefully without a future. For, like it or not, 'Where Id was there ego shall be' (Freud 1933: 79) is a moral imperative requiring far more than replacing illusion with truth: it enjoins us to transcend impulsive action in favour of delayed gratification and self-control. Sublimation of primitive drive is encouraged: 'It is a work of culture, not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee' (Freud 1933: 80). To avoid 'illness' we must transcend narcissism in favour of object love; and to avert self-destruction we must bind Thanatos with Eros (Freud 1920) and overcome the harsh, punitive superego that is a 'pure culture of the death instinct' (Freud 1923: 52). In these and other ways the Freudian ethic far exceeds the demand for self-knowledge. While others fail to practice what they preach, we psychoanalysts refuse to preach what we practice. We disguise our ethic of love beneath a medical façade. We pretend to promote health over illness rather than goodness over badness. Perhaps some colleagues have comprehended this but chosen to keep up the disguise for strategic reasons, but I think we have mostly lacked either the understanding or the courage to admit who we are and what we are about.

Freud championed strict psychic determinism, frequently referring to what he called 'the illusion of Free Will' (Freud 1919: 236), even while defining the goal of psychoanalytic therapy as setting us free from inhibitions, symptoms and compulsive repetitions, just as some philosophers walk around with deterministic theories in their heads while holding their spouses, children, and perhaps even themselves, responsible in a myriad of ways. In our legal systems and our everyday lives, like the Abrahamic religions, we assume free will, guilt and responsibility. Yet in psychoanalysis we have sought to obscure the ethical and existential dimensions of our work through resort to a medical discourse that at least appears compatible with determinism. But while physical illness can be defined objectively in terms of biologically built-in norms, our very preference for life over death cannot be justified in this way; it is a subjective choice and we know that human beings are free to choose to sacrifice their lives in the service of other aims: such as giving birth; going to war; or committing suicide. Similarly, the ethical choices that make up the fabric of our daily lives entail subjective value judgements: whether or not to cheat on our spouses or our taxes; to keep our oath not to reveal state secrets or become a whistle-blower; and so on.

As psychoanalysts we know that much of the anxiety and suffering our patients bring to us involves such moral issues. While we should not be 'superego-ish' with our patients, we must nevertheless carry the conscience in the treatment until such time as our patients are able to carry it themselves. All but our most psychopathic patients count on us to have a conscience. And a central ingredient of the conscientious practice of psychoanalysis involves knowing the difference between the conscience and the superego. While the superego, as Freud taught us, is composed of Id aggression turned against the self, plus the internalization of socially constructed and culturally relative mores, folkways and laws, the conscience, I have argued, is grounded in our mammalian and primate heritage and the universal norm of reciprocity formed in early attachments and identifications with nurturers, those who kept us alive and to whom for this we are indebted. Early on René Spitz (1965) gave us films in which the babe at the breast puts its fingers in mother's mouth, as if to feed her back and, later, spoons food to her as she does to him. In playgrounds all over the world children are heard saying 'That's not fair! You had your turn, now it's mine!' Freud himself got only half of the universal norm of reciprocity. While *talion* law prescribes an eye for an eye, the law of conscience obliges us to return love for love received. The point has seldom been more beautifully put than in Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas Oratorio (Chorale No.59).

Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier,
o Jesu, du mein Leben;
Ich komme, bring und schenke dir,
Was du mir hast gegeben.

In English the last two lines read:

I come, bring, and give to Thee,
that which Thou hast given me.

Regrettably, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1923) absorbed conscience into superego, thus obscuring for us the important differences and conflicts between them. As my old friend and mentor Eli Sagan (1988) pointed out, Mark Twain (2005 [1885]) gave us in *Huckleberry Finn* the classic illustration of this conflict. Huck is a product of a racist society and, as such, has an immoral, racist superego. As he floats down the Mississippi on a raft with his friend Jim, a runaway slave, he is torn by his superegoic urge to write to Jim's owner turning him in and his conscientious desire to protect the

friend he loves. After much anguish he decides 'OK, I'll go to hell!' and tears up the letter. Similarly, in Victor Hugo's (2012 [1862]) *Les Misérables*, Javert, the superego personified is a policeman for whom the Law has been the whole of morality. Faced with the existence of a higher moral principle, he commits suicide.

It is the demonic superego composed of id aggression turned back against the self that threatens us with hell-fire, while the conscience, identified with the nurturer, mediates the love that defends us in the face of persecution. Freud's blurring of the difference between superego and conscience parallels his failure to distinguish the two very different types of guilt: persecutory and reparative (Klein 1975 [1946]; Grinberg 1964). If I've injured someone and while he bleeds I flagellate myself, this is persecutory guilt inflicted by the superego. But if I drop my cat-o'-nine-tails and grab my first-aid kit and start bandaging, that is a reparative act of conscience.

In my view, it is unfortunate that mainstream psychoanalysis chose to follow James Strachey's (1934) call for the modification of the superego instead of its disempowerment in favour of conscience. In the same vein, Roy Schafer (1960) advanced the quite un-Freudian notion of a 'loving and beloved superego', an idea cobbled together from a few occasional, rather off-hand comments of Freud's that are in marked contrast to his overall view of the superego as a sadistic agency needing therapeutic 'demolition' (Freud 1940: 180). I submit that Schafer's 'loving and beloved superego' is not the superego at all, but the conscience.

In seeking to elaborate this distinction between superego and conscience I am urging psychoanalysts to belatedly recognize the difference between Law and Gospel, a distinction long-recognized in theology and in no way to be conflated with that between the so-called 'Old' and 'New' Testaments, for law and gospel, superego and conscience, are to be found in both. Whereas the superego utilizes the law in order to condemn and punish, the conscience, grounded in identification with the nurturer, mediates the love that assists fallible human beings in their never entirely successful struggles to keep the law, and forgiveness in the face of inevitable failure.

Freud himself, together with Franz Alexander (1925) and Sandor Ferenczi (1928 [1927]), viewed the goal of psychoanalysis as the 'demolition' or 'complete elimination' of the superego and transfer of the moral function to the rational ego. But as David Hume (1739-40; 1748) explained in the 18th century, we cannot deduce an ought from an is: science is descriptive, not prescriptive. While the ego

can help us know what *is*, it cannot tell us what *ought* to be. This is the domain of both superego and conscience. We clearly need the law (superego), but the law must be subordinated to the authority of conscience. For if modification of the superego is our aim, we need conscience to inform us how and in what ways it needs to be modified. 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil' (Matt 5: 17).

Clinically speaking, I have come to the conclusion that, ultimately, the only way out of persecution by the sadistic superego is through reconciliation with conscience. Our patients come wrecked by or fearful of success, or criminals from a sense of guilt; or plagued by anxiety or depression or painful psychosomatic and hysterical conditions; or caught in relationships in which they are bullied or exploited, etc; all states reflecting the unconscious need for punishment for real and imagined crimes or sins. A good deal of PTSD amounts to 'moral injury' (Shay and Munroe 1998), punitive guilt for actions felt to be unforgivable. Beyond the suffering we inflict on ourselves via the tyrannical superego is that inflicted by others who, unwilling or unable to bear their own guilt, project and induce it in us, their scapegoats. This is the domain in which we work, not moralistically but conscientiously.

While the superego itself is often immoral (Carveth 2015), loaded with the sadism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, all the ideologies with which we abuse ourselves and one another, on the deepest level the conscience knows all this is wrong. But unlike the superego which is always looking for opportunities to flog us, conscience sadly recognizes we are off the path, lovingly yet persistently calls us to return, and joyfully welcomes us when we do. On some level most of us know this is the therapeutic outcome we seek, but we lie to ourselves and others and call it 'mental health' when it really amounts to salvation, a concept usefully employed in both religious and secular contexts. In *Wonder Boys*, the 2000 film based on the novel by Michael Chabon (1995), Grady, a loveable but scruffy and pot-addled professor, is unable to complete his rambling, interminable second novel or claim the woman he loves and has impregnated. But in the final scene he appears transformed, neatly groomed, sitting at a laptop in an ordered study as outside we see his new wife arriving home with the baby. As he types the final sentence of his book the camera zooms in as 'SAVED' appears on his screen. The artists tell us what we desire, even if we ourselves are reluctant to know or say it out loud.

Recognizing the limitations of formal religious and meditative practises in promoting personal transformation, many religious today seek to become psychotherapists. There is widespread interest

in mindfulness meditation among psychotherapists, most of whom seem not to recognize that clinical psychoanalysis, in which the analysand is invited to 'free associate' and the analyst to deploy 'freely hovering attention,' IS meditation, of a type that moves beyond *mind*fulness toward *heart*fulness.

But in putting psychoanalysis together in this way with ethics, meditation, spirituality and religion, am I not ignoring that it has traditionally been associated with Enlightenment rationalism, materialism and atheism? Personally speaking, I have for most of my life struggled with the tension between my early education in the Anglican (Episcopal) faith and my later commitment to the Enlightenment 'tradition of suspicion', Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre. For some years I found refuge in the demythologizing approach of Rudolph Bultmann (1958), Paul Tillich (1952) and Northrop Frye (1991) which recovers the existential insight and wisdom of the New Testament as metaphor, and in the 'religionless Christianity' of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1991 [1958]) and other varieties of secular Christianity. (In this connection it has always struck me as odd and unfair that psychoanalysts who have no trouble understanding that Sigmund Freud was both an atheist and yet a proud Jew find it hard to credit that someone, like Jacques Lacan, could be both an atheist and a proud Catholic.) In any case, in recent years these demythologizing, secular perspectives have come to seem excessively dry, rationalistic and out of touch with the reality of my far more emotional, right-hemisphere spirituality. In *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World*, Iain McGilchrist (2009) describes the unbalanced civilization created by left-hemispheric dominance in the West.

I like to think that lately I am becoming more balanced, more honest, more religious and more deeply Freudian, all at the same time! After all, Freud's fundamental discovery is that we are all, at the very least, double: split between conscious and unconscious; manifest and latent; secondary process and primary process. For Melanie Klein we inhabit both the depressive/reparative and the paranoid-schizoid positions. We are all both Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. For it is not as if the primary process disappears when the secondary is active; not as if the unconscious disappears when the conscious dominates. Nor do paranoid-schizoid mental processes (splitting, projection, omnipotence, magical thinking) disappear when depressive-reparative dynamics (enhanced reality-testing, ambivalence, whole self and object relations and the capacity for concern for the other) momentarily predominate. For Freud, Klein, Wilfred Bion, Hans Loewald, Thomas Ogden and others, however much we may develop and integrate we remain divided, progressing and regressing, oscillating between PS and D.

But more importantly, I have come to recognize the splitting entailed in conceiving development as a one-way advance from PS to D (Carveth 2018, chapter 9). It turns out there is bad as well as good in D and good as well as bad in PS. The ambivalence attained in D can become excessively dispassionate, even paralyzing; and where would we be without the fine madness entailed in falling in love, or the willingness of soldiers to kill and be killed in the fight against fascism? Just as an excessively dispassionate rationality can be maladaptive, so splitting is adaptive in the face of a predator. As both Ernst Kris (1936) and Hans Loewald (1981) remind us, sometimes regression is 'in the service of the ego'; growth and creativity sometimes require rediscovery of our rootedness in the infantile and the unconscious. While the pessimistic older Freud regarded the id as 'a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitations' (Freud 1933: 73), in his most creative early work (Freud 1900) he viewed it as ordered by the laws of the primary process that creatively generate dreams, parapraxes, symptoms and transferences that often speak truths that the ego is desperate to censor.

There is no doubt some validity in Erich Fromm's (1950) distinction between authoritarian and humanistic religion, as in Neville Symington's (1994) differentiation between 'primitive' and 'mature' types of spirituality. No doubt we can categorize some religion, spirituality and mysticism as PS and some as D. But it is essential to recognize the strengths and weaknesses in each. While PS religion may involve superstition and magical ritualism (e.g. rounding up some virgins to throw into the volcano; dancing to make it rain; or including the names of sick or dying parishioners in the prayers of the people on Sunday), it can also generate passion, love, hope and community. And while D religion may be more rational and reality-oriented, it can be excessively intellectualized, dispassionate, and closed off from the terror, awe and mystery of intense religious experience.

We can usefully extend Fromm's distinction between authoritarian and humanistic religion to psychoanalysis itself. But even the most humanistic among us should strive to recognize some of the strengths of the older, more 'classical' approaches, together with the weaknesses and excesses of the reformers. In my recent (2018) book I argue in favour of a dialectical, comparative psychoanalysis that seeks through dialogue among the various paradigms - dare I say 'denominations' - to evolve a higher-order understanding that seeks to integrate the strengths of each.

Just as religion sometimes takes the form of empty ritualism, so psychoanalysis can amount to ritualistically lying on a couch four or five times a week—as if verbalizing in the presence of a certified

analyst operating with the sanctified theory will lead to enlightenment. Nevertheless, sometimes psychoanalysis, religion, spirituality and mysticism can actually bring about what Bion (1965) called 'transformations in "O"'-'O' being defined as 'ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself' (Bion 1970: 25). Transformations in 'O' move far beyond insight or self-knowledge; they involve change on the level of being not merely that of knowing. It is quite possible to know all about one's character defects while continuing to enact them. As the old story goes, 'Before my 10-year classical analysis I was a real SOB. I'm still an SOB, but now I know why!' My point is not to devalue classical or any other kind of analysis, but only to point out that just as religious practices often lead to little or only superficial personality change, so psychoanalytic therapies often fail to result in fundamental, structural change.

In my view, progress in psychoanalysis is irreducible to an advance from PS to D; it moves beyond both to what I refer to as 'PsD' (Carveth 2018, chapter 9) and James Grotstein (1997; 2004) called 'the transcendent position' - a kind of transitional area (Winnicott 1953) where, in moments of grace, one may temporarily synthesize the passionate intensity of PS with the realism, balance and symmetry of D. This is the kind of 'God spot' I have encountered in love, in beautifully conducted Anglo-Catholic services, and in blues joints in Chicago and Toronto when a band finds itself momentarily and joyfully 'in the groove.'

Most of the time I do my best to be realistic, to take science seriously, to forego superstition and magical thinking. But I can no longer deny that I am double, that I live in both PS and D, open to input from both hemispheres. Before my recent surgery and for a time afterwards I found myself praying again. Every year when I go to hear *Messiah* I weep like a child. When the test scores start rising again you might see me back at Saint Mary Magdalene lighting candles. I generally do the work of loving my wife in D but, thanks be to God, I frequently fall back in (PS) love with her. While there are certainly truths that are important to face in D, it seems there are other truths - including truths of the heart - that may only be realized in PS.

So, do I believe in God or don't I? In the past I would have said it depends on what you mean by God. Provided you give the term a secular meaning, such as Paul Tillich's 'ultimate concern,' then yes. But if you mean a supernatural being, then no. But today things are more complicated. Today I have something more than definitions in mind when I answer that 'I do and I do not' and proceed to quote Mark 9:24 - 'Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief!' Freud, the brilliant explorer of human

contradictoriness, remained ashamed of his superstitions and numerological preoccupations. He and many of his followers seem to believe we should be consistent and integrated beings, unitary selves, when our own science, psychoanalysis, shows we are not. I am trying to acknowledge and bear my contradiction. Although it is 'foolishness to the Greeks' and even to the rationalist in me, it seems nevertheless to be the case that I regard Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour.

Allow me to conclude by addressing the question posed in the title of this symposium: 'Are Psychoanalysis and Religion/Spirituality Compatible?' Insofar as they both recognize that human beings are profoundly split - Christ vs. Old Adam, Eros vs. Thanatos, Ego vs. Id, Conscience vs. Superego - and insofar as they both surrender omnipotent ideals of integration, they are parallel approaches to therapeutic transformation. Like the human beings they strive to help, they are themselves split and must strive to combine the vitality and passion of PS with the reason, conscience and concern of D. But in seeking this higher-order synthesis ('PsD' or 'the transcendent position'), they at the same time must recognize that such integration is only attainable by permanently imperfect, 'fallen' human beings in moments of 'grace'.

Both religion and psychoanalysis perpetually fall short of their ideals. It turns out that Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities, whom many expected to be sainted, was an abuser. One of his books is called *The Broken Body*. I am no more dismayed by the revelation of his brokenness than by that of another abuser, the founder of the Toronto psychoanalytic Society. Both of these men did many good things and many bad things. They were contradictory and challenge us to see both sides instead of splitting.

Psychoanalysis and religion have a shared diagnosis and prescription for what Freud called our 'human malaise': narcissism and its transcendence through love (Freud 1930: 135-6). This should make them mutually respectful allies instead of enemies. But for this rapprochement to be realized psychoanalysis must more fully appreciate and bear the contradictoriness it reveals, and it must learn to appreciate Gospel as well as Law. It must recover its conscience.

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