Gender & Psychoanalysis
An Interdisciplinary Journal

(1999). Gender and Psychoanal., (4)(4):333-365

Religion, Freud, and Women

Jeffrey Rubin PHD ℹ

Religion enjoys a problematic standing in psychoanalysis. Since its inception, psychoanalysis has traditionally pathologized and marginalized religion. The standard story is that Freud, the exemplar of Enlightenment rationalism, critiqued the childish illusions underlying religious belief and revealed its seamy underside. While religion has had a Janusfaced history—fostering morality and fueling oppression; promoting civic concern and legitimating fundamentalism—it is more complex than Freud's account of its origins in childhood fears and compensations would suggest. “Religion, Freud, and Women” examines a hidden source of Freud's rejection of religion, namely, his problematic relationship with his mother. In this essay, Rubin draws on revisionist psychobiographical material about Freud's relationship with his mother to demonstrate that he unconsciously linked religion and the maternal. His fears of the latter led to his rejection of the former. If it is unanalytic to fail to explore the hidden meanings and functions of religious experience, it is antianalytic to take anything on faith including atheism. In rejecting religion and disavowing spirit, perhaps psychoanalysis has rejected a good deal more than superstition. A psychoanalysis that worked through its countertransference about religion would open the door to a contemplative psychoanalysis, which would open up a potential space for a more meaningful spirituality.

> *Psychoanalysis has always been a religion in which you are not allowed to believe in God [Adam Phillips, 1994].*

Dr. Rubin practices psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy in New York City and Bedford Hills, New York. He has taught at various psychoanalytic institutes and universities including The Postgraduate Center for Mental Health, The Object Relations Institute, The C. G. Jung Foundation of New York, and Yeshiva University.

Religion has played a crucial role in human history, A nuanced history of religion would include accounts of compassion and persecution, wisdom and fundamentalism. Religion has presented visions of moral excellence and deepened social justice. It has also legitimated social oppression, generated wars, distributed power, and regulated procreation.

From the deep spirituality infusing Martin Luther King's visionary social activism to the person whose daily life is enriched by their contemplative meditative practice, religion can serve some very constructive functions in our world. It can provide meaning and social cohesion, foster concern for and tolerance of others, lessen narcissism, provide a sense of connectedness to something larger than the isolated, encapsulated self, and offer intimations of the sacred.

And yet, despite its potentially salutary nature, religion has been pathologized and marginalized by the vast majority of mainstream psychoanalysts. The locus classicus for the debunking of religion is Freud. What "the common man understands by his religion," according to Freud (1930), is:

> *[T]he system of doctrines and promises which on the one hand explains to him the riddles of this world with enviable completeness, and, on the other, assures him that a careful Providence will watch over his life and will compensate him in a future existence for any frustration he suffers here. The common man cannot imagine this Providence otherwise than in the figure of an enormously exalted father. Only such a being can understand the needs of the children of men and be softened by their prayers and placated by the signs of their remorse. The whole thing is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life [p. 74].*

Religion, according to Freud (1927) and many subsequent psychoanalysts, was an illusion; a universal obsessional neurosis (p. 43); a childhood neurosis (p. 53); a form of masochism (1930); a reaction formation against unacceptable impulses (1927); a "delusion" (1927, p. 31); a remnant of prescientific thinking adopted by the psychologically neurotic and immature (Rubin, 1996).

Religion is, for Freud, an "illusion" (1927, p. 30), an unrealistic belief that contradicts experience and reason. An illusion is not an error but a "wish-fulfillment" (1927, pp. 30-31). While he points out that illusion is not necessarily "false" and that "the truth-value of religious doctrines does not lie within the

scope of psychoanalytic inquiry" (p. 33), he nonetheless proceeds to condemn it as comparable to a "childhood neurosis."

Two childhood wishes or psychological needs seemed to lead people to construct religious beliefs: the necessity of coming to terms with the complicated emotions of a child's relation to his or her father and the child's sense of helplessness in the face of the danger of the inner and outer worlds.

Helplessness arouses the need for protection. Religious ideas, according to Freud, are born of the need to make tolerable the human sense of helplessness. They are designed to offer compensation, consolation, and protection from our existential vulnerability. Religion "allays our fears of the dangers of life" (1927, p. 33).

"I do not know," Freud wrote to Pfister, a minister and a therapist, on November 25, 1928, "if you have detected the secret link between the [Question of] Lay Analysis and the [Future of an] Illusion. In the former I wish to protect analysis from the doctors and in the latter from the priests" (Freud, 1963, p. 126). Freud objected to religious dogmatism, intolerance, and delusion, its illusory consolations, ungrounded beliefs, superstition, fanatical clergy, and persecuting clerics.

Subsequent psychoanalysts with rare exceptions have agreed. But a minority of analysts such as Silberer (1917), Menninger (1942), Horney (1945, 1987), Pfister (1948), Jung (1958), Fromm (1960), Kelman (1960), Milner (1973), Loewald (1978), Rizzuto (1979), Meissner (1984), Kohut (1985), Ulanov (1985, 1996), Winnicott (1986), Roland (1988), and myself (Rubin, 1996, 1998) have nonreductionistically examined religion and pointed out its positive contributions to human life. For them, Freud's account of religion's origins in wish fulfillment and its uniformly defensive character are not the last word on religious experience. They have pointed to various aspects of religion's salutary dimensions, including its "supportive aspect" and "civilizing influence" (Kohut, 1985, p. 261); its ability to sensitize us to the inner life (Jung, 1958), lessen human anxieties

(Pfister, 1948), facilitate "self-integration" (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 182), deepen and amplify the quality of one's life (Meissner, 1984), and "foster life by inspiring love" (Menninger, 1942, p. 191). Participating in religion can promote "cultural experience" (Winnicott, 1986, pp. 35-36) and "well-being"—being fully awake and alive— which could expand the psychoanalytic vision of optimal psychological health (Fromm, 1960). Exposure to Asian meditative practices can

reduce psychoanalytic ethnocentrism and expand psychoanalytic conceptions of subjectivity (Roland, 1988; Suler, 1993; Rubin, 1996, 1998).

But despite this minority current, the vast majority of psychoanalysts have concurred with Freud's unequivocally negative assessment of religion. If Freud buried religion alive then most of his successors put further nails in religion's coffin. But there are several striking things about Freud's critique of religion quoted above: the gendered pronoun “his” (as in “his” religion which “explains to him the riddles of this world ... and assures him that a careful Providence [imagined as an enormously exalted “father”] will watch over his life”); the simplistic theistic definition of religion (as a paternal father); and the reductionistic explanation of religion as serving a singular infantile function (as paternal protection for the terrified child). Freud's critique of religion, from a strictly Freudian point of view, begs for further exploration because it raises more questions than it answers. Here a few questions that come to mind for me: Freud's critique of religion is supposedly based on, and directed explicitly to, the “common man.” What about the uncommon man or women? Freud's account of religion may be valid, at least in some ways, for the common man, but is it applicable to a woman or a man who is a genuine spiritual seeker, a contemplative, or a mystic? I have no doubt that the concept of the divinity has certainly served protective (paternal?) functions throughout history. Does Freud's typology explain goddess religions?'[1] Is paternal protection the essence of nontheistic religions with no god such as Taoism and Buddhism? (Tibetan Buddhism has a deistic cosmology but Theravadin

[1] *Freud admitted that he could find no place “for the great mothergoddesses, who may perhaps in general have preceded the father-gods” (1913, p. 149).*

Buddhism and Zen Buddhism do not.) The history of religion demonstrates a tremendous range of forms of religious expression including moral action, the way of devotion, philosophical reflection, and the practice of meditation. If religion is so multifarious then why did Freud reduce it so drastically? Did his reductionism have personal as well as cultural roots? Does religion ever offer meaning, community, connectedness, solace, and even a postconventional perspective on morality, in addition to protection against and consolation for childhood fears and terrors?

Once Freud's account of religion in particular is questioned there are some larger issues that arise for psychoanalysis in general. Does psychoanalysis have an unconscious normative atheism, assuming, that is, that atheism is healthy

and religious belief is psychopathological? Is it anti/unanalytic to take anything —including atheism—on faith; that is, as normative? Could it be an expression of our own countertransference to assume, a priori, that atheism has "landmark status" and cannot be touched and religious belief is an open (pathogenetically tinged) book? Could unconscious wishes, meanings, and functions that are eminently worthy of psychoanalytic investigation ever live in the heart of an atheist, as well as a theist? What is the unconscious meaning and function for psychoanalysts of accepting irreligiosity or nonbelief as inherently natural and religiosity or belief as inherently pathological?

Psychoanalysis has critiqued religion for at least four reasons: (1) its psychopathological substrata; (2) its abuses—the "crime and misdemeanors" that Freud (1927) pinpoints ranging from killing those with different beliefs to rationalizing social oppression; (3) the allegiance of psychoanalysis to science, with its commitment to rationality and proof and its antipathy to dogmatic, unsubstantiated beliefs; and (4) its championing by Jung who was persona non grata in mainstream psychoanalysis after his break with Freud.

The history of religion has provided ample examples of the first three. There is certainly a psychopathological substratum to some religious beliefs and practices. Freud and many subsequent psychoanalysts have correctly discerned the way religious theories and rituals have been utilized for a variety of defensive and pathological functions ranging from denying disturbing realities to rationalizing selfdepriving behavior.

The history of religions is certainly a story about magical beliefs, fanaticism, and persecution. From the Crusades to contemporary religious cults and fundamentalism, religion has been implicated in fostering intolerance and magical thinking and rationalizing brutality and murder. Millions of people have died in the name of religion.

The third reason that religion has been critiqued in psychoanalysis is because of the commitment of many psychoanalysts to science, and the pursuit of impartial reason. One of the ways that psychoanalysis validated its fledgling status as a revolutionary discipline of unsettlement in an intellectually hostile world, was to align itself with science. By linking itself to science, claiming that it was a science, psychoanalysis attempted to give itself the stamp of epistemological validity and approval and thus justify and fortify itself (Rubin, 1998). Religion is seen, from such a perspective, as a developmentally immature form of thinking.

We can speculate that the fourth reason that religion may have been neglected in psychoanalysis is that it is associated with Jung, who explored Western and Eastern religion and mysticism as well as alchemy and the occult. The cases of Ferenczi, Jung, and Rank illustrate that deviation from Freud was not allowed in psychoanalysis. There was tacit if not explicit censorship of dissidents, who were treated as heretics. Jung was viewed as a misguided heretic by many psychoanalysts after his break from Freud. The disavowal of religion within mainstream psychoanalysis may have been a way of distancing itself from Jung (Ann Ulanov, personal communication) and Freud's negative view of him so as not to go against the Freudian grain and risk the marginalization that Rank and other dissident thinkers had experienced.

In this paper I will suggest that psychoanalytic animus against religion has a fifth source, namely, gender. Religion, like all human phenomena, is overdetermined; that is, it has multiple meanings and serves a variety of diverse functions—from the theistic religions such as Catholicism to nontheistic ones such as Buddhism and Taoism. Despite the fact that religion is heterogeneous, Freud conceptualizes it in a unidimensional way, and then critiques the singular function that he has reduced religion to. Freud *consciously* equated religion with the paternal. Man creates God, a protective Father, according

to Freud, in order to allay our existential feelings of helplessness in a cold, heartless universe.

It was Freud who first taught us to search for the disavowed; to question conscious motives and meanings; to place as much emphasis on what is *not* said as what is overtly emphasized. If we only listen to Freud's conscious critique we may miss the unconscious danger that religious experience stirred up in him and miss the real source of his animus against religion. Freud's thinking about religion, like all human conceptualizations, is intimately connected to his history, character, and conflicts. Freud's religious views reflect underlying and unresolved conflicts and ambivalences stemming from his own development. “Behind the Freudian argument about religion,” notes Meissner (1984), “stands Freud the man, and behind Freud the man, with his prejudices, beliefs, and convictions, lurks the shadow of Freud the child” (p. vii). There were compelling historical and theoretical reasons why Freud critiqued religion in the way he did including the commitment to science and empirical proof of psychoanalysis, the Enlightenment suspicion of religion's superstitions and illusionary salvations, and religion's checkered history. But there are also highly

personal and subjective reasons for Freud's attack on religion stemming from his childhood, particularly his relationship with his mother (Van Herik, 1982; Rizzuto, 1998)[2]

Freud claimed, in a strikingly anti-Freudian way that begs for further analysis, that the mother-son relationship is "altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships" (Freud, 1933, p. 133). The conflict that permeates every other human relationship and is at the hallmark of the classical Freudian vision, is conspicuously absent in the mother-son relationship in Freud's account. Given the pervasiveness of conflict in human life and relationships, it is striking—I would even say *symptomatic*—that Freud claims that the mother-son relationship is the only conflictfree human relationship. From the classical psychoanalytic perspective Freud bequeathed us, his relationship with a mother he consciously idealized, signals disavowed unconscious difficulties in his relationship with her. In this paper I shall offer a revisionist, Freudian

[2] *I came across Rizzuto's (1998) and Van Herik's (1982) examination of similar issues as I was preparing this paper for submission.*

reading of Freud's life and work that asserts that despite his conscious idealization of the mother-son relationship, he unconsciously struggled with the maternal and the disavowed difficulties that he experienced. In particular, he struggled with subtle, narcissistic exploitation, which triggered a fear of fusion, engulfment, and psychological usurpation and self-effacement. These then became enshrined in his theories and practices, particularly his reductionistic conception of and aversion to religion. Freud unconsciously equated religion with the maternal, particularly with the experience of fusion with an other/mother, that opened up terrors of engulfment and self-loss that he spent a lifetime keeping at bay. Theoretically critiquing and marginalizing religion aided Freud in simultaneously avoiding his disavowed vulnerability to emotional intimacy and selfnullification even as it also illuminated unconscious facets of religion. The subsequent pathologization and neglect of religion by psychoanalysis was greatly shaped by Freud's personally generated scotoma.

Freud and His Mother[3]

Emphasizing the importance of an author's life has low prestige in our current intellectual climate. There is a general skepticism about psychobiography in

psychoanalysis and a tendency in poststructuralist discourse to diminish the significance of the author by focusing on language rather than the one who writes. Illuminating the personal soil out of which a theory grows does not invalidate it, although it can shed light on its context and range of applicability.

When one examines Freud and his life in a *Freudian* light, namely, without uncritically accepting traditional accounts and with an interest in the importance of what is *not* said and what is said symbolically and derivatively, extant biographical information, letters, and Freud's own theoretical writings yield new and provocative questions and important hypotheses. In contrast to the vast majority of investigators who follow Freud's defensive lead and focus on the impact of his

[3] *This section is heavily adapted from, and adds new material to, a section of a previous work by the author in a different context (Rubin, 1998).*

father, I shall argue that the hidden impact of Freud's mother was also crucial to his development and his theories. In doing this I am attempting to specify more concretely the problematic relationship he had with his mother that is alluded to in Gay (1988) and Roazen (1971). The former speaks of “Freud's evasion of his complicated feelings about Amalie Freud” (p. 335), while the latter maintains that Freud was the victim of an “obscure [emotional] deprivation” (p. 41).

Freud's Family: The Hidden Fault (Line) of the Mother

Freud's family life is difficult to fathom. There is only meager data available about it. Freud suppressed vital information about himself. The “veil of disguise” Freud (1910a) detected in dreams is mirrored by a veil surrounding his family. The very information that would help us gain a more complete understanding of his family is often missing from Freud's writing. In his autobiographical study (1925b) there is scant mention of his parents or his childhood. In a letter to his fiancèAe in April 1885 he indicated: “I have destroyed all my notes of the last fourteen years as well as letters, scientific extracts, and manuscripts of my works. Among letters, only family letters have been spared. Let the biographers labor and toil, we won't make it too easy for them” (quoted in Gay, 1988, p. xv). This gesture of concealment was repeated more than once in later years. In 1907 he also burned his papers. And in the spring of 1938 as he was readying himself to depart from Austria for England,

Anna Freud and Marie Bonaparte reclaimed papers he had thrown in a wastebasket (Gay, 1988).

Freud mentions his father much more frequently than his mother in his autobiographical writings. His mother thus remained more enigmatic than his father (e.g., Roazen, 1971, p. 39). Jacob Freud is depicted as a kind, decent, gentle, likeable, passive, placid man. As he neared the end of his life, and experienced illness and marked physical deterioration, Freud experienced his father as weak and decrepit, and dwelled on the lack of courage of the "paralytic old man" (Freud, 1900, pp. 216-217).

The available portrayals of Freud's mother are not flattering. Abraham (1982-1983) emphasizes Amalie Freud's "predatory, emotionally consuming nature" (p. 444). According to Abraham, Freud's mother was "possessive and demanding" (p. 450). Roazen (1971) describes her as "domineering" (p. 48) and "imperious." He notes: "many in the family suffered from her authoritarian character. According to family lore, her middle daughter, Dolphi, was not allowed to have a life of her own; she gave herself up to taking care of her mother, who even as an old woman was a 'tornado.' For Dolphi as Freud's son Martin related it, 'Constant attendance on Amalie had suppressed her personality into a condition of dependence from which she never recovered'" (p. 45).

Freud's son Martin's depiction of his grandmother concurs: "My father's mother, Amalie, whom I knew very well was a typical Polish Jewess, with all the shortcomings that implies, she was certainly not what we would call a 'lady,' had a lively temper and was impatient, self-willed, sharp-witted ..." (M. Freud, 1967, pp. 201-203). Freud's niece, Judith Bernays Heller, who in her youth had spent much time with her maternal grandmother, concurred with her cousin's assessment and added further: "she was charming and smiling when strangers were about, but I, at least, always felt that with familiars she was a tyrant, and a *sefish* one" (Heller, 1973, p. 338). "There is every indication" as Roazen (1971) aptlynotes, "that Amalie Freud was—to use her son's vulture imagery in his study of Leonardo—a tough old bird" (p. 45).

Drawing on Grinstein's (1990) research concerning "novels and other literary works to which Freud alluded in associations to his dreams and in his letters to Fliess, as well as [Freud's] list of 10 'good books,'" Holt (1992) notes the "striking similarities" Grinstein found in the "depictions of mother figures and other women that seemed to have impressed Freud." These works repeatedly present "the woman as an aggressive, threatening, and nongiving figure" (Grinstein,

1990, p. 400). Mothers are usually harsh, cold, and dominating" (Holt, 1992, p. 10). Zetzel (1966) detected a striking discrepancy between Freud's published account of the Rat Man (1909b) and his clinical notes. In the published case "The father was seen as an important real object—one who interfered with or threatened his son's instinctual impulses.... The patient's mother ... was only

mentioned in six brief, essentially unrevealing statements" (p. 220). Yet Zetzel noted "more than forty references to a highly ambivalent mother-son relationship in the original clinical notes" (p. 220).

Freud was his mother's first born and supposedly her undisputed favorite: "A man who has been the indisputable favorite of his mother keeps for life the feeling of a conqueror, that confidence of success which often induces real success" (E. Jones, 1953, p. 5). His mother referred to him, according to Ernest Jones, as "*mein goldener Sigi*" (p. 3). Freud describes his relationship with his mother Amalie, in idealized terms: the relationship between mother and son is "altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships" (Freud, 1933, p. 133).

In my view, Freud's idealized portrait of the mother-son relationship reflects a defensive process that conceals her negative and disappointing qualities and thus protects Freud from the anguish of confronting the shattering truth about their relationship.

Freud's description of the psychosexual development of the girl offers important clues as to his actual experience of his mother (e.g., Tomkins, 1963; Stolorow and Atwood, 1979). Discussing the girl's transition from the preoedipal phallic stage to the oedipal period when the powerful attachment to the mother ends, Freud (1933) wrote: "The *turning away from the mother is accompanied by hostility;* the attachment to the mother ends in hate. A hate of that kind may become very striking and last all through life; it may be *carefully overcompensated* later on; *as a rule one part of it is overcome while another part persists*" (pp. 121-122; emphasis added). The reproaches against the mother, according to Freud, include that she gave the child too little milk, which is experienced as lack of love, and she gave birth to other siblings.

> *But what the child grudges the unwanted intruder and rival is not only the suckling but all the other signs of maternal care. It feels that it has been dethroned, despoiled, prejudiced in its own rights; it casts a jealous hatred upon the new baby and develops a grievance against the faithless mother ... we rarely form a correct idea of the strength of*

these jealous impulses, of the tenacity with which they persist and of the magnitude of their influence on later development. Especially as this

343

jealousy is constantly receiving fresh nourishment in the later years of childhood and the whole shock is repeated with the birth of each new brother or sister. Nor does it make much difference if the child happens to remain the mother's preferred favourite. A child's demands for love are immoderate, they make exclusive claims and tolerate no sharing [p. 123; emphasis added].

The references to (1) the mother's "preferred favourite" (e.g., mein goldener Sigi) who is "dethroned," "despoiled," and "prejudiced in its own rights" by the repeated births of new siblings; (2) the "carefully overcompensated" repressed hostility; (3) the self-blame encoded in the description of the child's "immoderate" and "exclusive" claims for love that "tolerate no sharing"; which exculpates the "faithless" mother who has traumatically disappointed the child, all suggest that Freud's description of "female" development is, in fact, a depiction of the negative aspect of his own experience with his mother. In these descriptions of "female" development are embedded unconscious derivatives of Freud's narcissistic rage at his own "faithless" mother who traumatically "dethroned" and "despoiled" him—supposedly her "preferred favourite"—by giving birth to seven siblings in ten years.

Freud's account of why the girl becomes alienated from the mother while the boy does not, offers further autobiographical information:

[G]irls hold their mother responsible for their lack of a penis and do not forgive her for their being thus put at a disadvantage [p. 124] ... [W]ith the discovery that her mother is castrated it becomes possible to drop her as an object, so that the motives for hostility which have long been accumulating, gain the upper hand. This means, therefore, that as a result of the discovery of women's lack of a penis they are debased in value for girls just as they are for boys and later perhaps for men [pp. 126-127].

This account is problematic. Why does the boy also not devalue and drop the mother as a love object because she has no penis?

These contrasting accounts of psychosexual development for the boy and girl suggest a "defensive splitting of the maternal imago"

(Stolorow and Atwood, 1979, p. 67). The idealized image of the mother is preserved in Freud's account of the boy's oedipal development. The “faithless” mother who deprived and disappointed him tends to emerge in his account of the girl's psychosexual development, where it was more sequestered and thus provided less opportunity for the repressed rage to emerge. Further, as noted by Tomkins (1963), the despised attributes of the repressed, split-off image of Freud's mother reappear in his idea that the inevitable outcome of female development is a deficient sense of justice.

In Freud's depiction of *parents* in his oedipal formulations, the same sort of displacement of blame and exculpation is operative. The available evidence suggests, as discussed earlier, that Freud experienced his father as passive and weak. It is thus difficult to imagine a less likely candidate for the menacing “paternal” figure of the oedipal drama than Jacob Freud. Since there is such a remarkable discrepancy between the strong and punitive figure of the oedipal *theory* and his own placid and decrepit father, one is forced to wonder about the identity of the powerful and dangerous figure to which Freud's theory refers. In “Female Sexuality” Freud (1931) mentions the girl's “dread of being killed (? devoured) by the mother” (p. 227). While this is sometimes a projection of their own hostility, Freud also attributes it to “A dread which on its side justifies the death wish against her.... It is impossible to say how often this dread of the mother draws countenance from an unconscious hostility on [the mother's] part, which the child divines” (p. 237). In men the dread of being eaten refers to the father, “but is probably the result of the transformation of oral aggressive tendencies directed upon the mother. The person the child wants to devour is the mother who nourished him” (p. 237). Freud, as Abraham (1979) aptly notes, “does not mention the possibility of the mother's hostility directed onto a son (only onto a daughter), but it seems just as likely that the boy may divine a hostile intent in his mother, to which he may respond and with which he may identify” (p. 74). This may be one reason why Freud (1930) places such emphasis on the protective function of the father: “I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection” (p. 72). Is it conceivable that the terrifying and castrating figure of Freud's oedipal theory is

a displaced image of his mother who is experienced by Freud as devouring and depleting (e.g., Abraham, 1979, 1982-1983)?

Freud (1931) himself provides evidence for the claim that hostility toward the mother is projected onto the father: “‘How is it, then, that boys are able to keep

intact their attachment to the mother, which is certainly no less strong than that of girls'? ... 'Because boys are able to deal with their ambivalent feelings towards their mother by directing all their hostility onto their father'" (p. 235). This process seems to be theoretically enacted in Freud's formulations of the Oedipus complex.

Additional evidence of a hidden (encrypted) negative dimension to the mother can be found in Freud's (1900) discussion in *The Interpretation of Dreams* of anxiety dreams. This account casts doubt on both Freud's idyllic, ambivalence-free characterization of his relationship with his mother and suggests that it may have been hate, rather than love, that Freud concealed: "It is dozens of years since I myself had a true anxiety-dream. But I remember one from my seventh or eighth year, which I submitted to interpretation some thirty years later. It was a very vivid one, and in it I saw *my beloved mother, with a peculiarly peaceful sleeping expression on her features, being carried into the room by two (or three) people with birds' beaks and laid upon the bed*. I awoke in tears and screaming, and interrupted my parents' sleep" (p. 583).

Freud's associations to the dream included the idea that the birdbeaked figures derived from an illustration of an ancient Egyptian funerary relief in "Phillipson's Bible" (p. 583) and that "The expression on my mother's features ... was copied from the view I had had of my grandfather a few days before his death as he lay snoring in a coma. The interpretation carried out in the dream by the 'secondary revision' must therefore have been that my mother was dying" (p. 583).

It is worthwhile to view the dream in the context of a section in *The Interpretation of Dreams* on "Dreams of the Death of Persons of Whom the Dreamer is Fond," in which Freud discusses dreams involving "the death of some loved relative—for instance, of a parent" (p. 248). Freud distinguishes two classes of such dreams—"those in which the dreamer is unaffected by grief ... and those in which the dreamer feels deeply pained by the death and may even weep bitterly

in his sleep" (p. 248). Speaking of the latter he says: "The meaning of such dreams, as their content indicates, is a wish that the person in question may die" (p. 249).

Freud's dream illustrates the second class yet his discussions of the dream emphasize that the image of his dying mother conceals sexual rather than aggressive wishes. This constitutes further evidence of the way in which Freud

segregated hostile feelings from his account of his relationship with his mother and maintained an idealized, ambivalence-free image of her (e.g., Stolorow and Atwood, 1979, p. 54).

Why did Freud have such hostility toward his mother? One explanation is that he felt betrayed by her—in giving birth to seven babies in ten years Freud's special relationship with her was dramatically undermined as he was repeatedly abandoned. But there is, in my view, another important reason for the negative affects Freud experienced. He also felt exploited and depleted by his mother. Due to his disavowal of his negative feelings, conscious idealization of his mother, and reticence to provide more data on this topic, my claim is not immediately apparent and eludes definitive and explicit assertion and proof. A perusal of his theoretical remarks on man's "dread" of women, the narcissism of parental "love," and the depleting nature of love in general may, however, enable us to circumvent Freud's censorship and gain a more nuanced portrait of this troubled relationship. Freud encourages the utilization of theory-asautobiography in his discussion in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901b) of his inability to recall a patient's name: "There thus runs through my thoughts a continuous current of 'personal reference', of which I generally have no inkling, but which betrays itself" (p. 24). In what follows I shall examine and interweave "theoretical" and biographical/autobiographical material in the attempt to illuminate the subtle and disavowed experiences that seemed to deeply haunt and shape Freud's life and work.

It is difficult to jibe Freud's (1916-1917) idyllic, ambivalence-free account of the relation between mothers and sons which "provides the purest examples of an unchangeable affection, unimpaired by egoistic considerations" (p. 206), with his claim that parents are narcissistic: "If we look at the attitude of fond parents towards their children, we cannot but perceive it as a revival and reproduction of

their own, long since abandoned narcissism ... [the child] is to fulfill those dreams and wishes of his parents which they never carried out ..." (1914, pp. 90-91). "A mother," claims Freud (1933), "can transfer to her son the ambition which she has been obliged to suppress in herself" (p. 133).

Is Freud's claim regarding the narcissism inherent in parenting autobiographical, an expression of his own experience with a narcissistic mother? Freud seems to acknowledge this in a brief footnote in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). I will reinsert the footnote into its proper place in the passage (and italicize it) so that Freud's claim can be read as

a continuous statement and grasped in its entirety: “almost every intimate relation between two people which lasts for some time—marriage, friendship, the relations between parents and children—*perhaps with the solitary exception of the relation of a mother to her son, which is based on narcissism …* contains a sediment of feelings of aversion and hostility, which only escapes perception as a result of repression” (p. 101).

One wonders with Holt (1992) if Amalie Freud exemplified the narcissistic women Freud (1914) wrote about in “On Narcissism”:

> *[S]trictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them.... Such woman have the greatest fascination for men, not only for aesthetic reasons … another person's narcissism has a great attraction for those who have renounced part of their own narcissism and are in search of object-love.... The great charm of narcissistic women has, however, its reverse side; a large part of the lover's dissatisfaction, of his doubts of the woman's love, of his complaints of her enigmatic nature, has its roots in this incongruity between the types of object-choice [p. 89].*

That Freud may have been on the receiving end of the dark side of narcissism is suggested by the “bitter thought” revealed in his analysis of the central wish of the specimen dream in “On Dreams.” Freud stops short of explicating the dream, failing to draw closer together “the threads in the material revealed by the analysis, and show[ing] that they converge upon a single nodal point.” He claimed that “concerns of a personal and not of a scientific nature prevent … [his]

doing so in public … I should be obliged to betray many things which had better remain my secret, for on my way to discovering the solution of the dream all kinds of things were revealed which I was unwilling to admit even to myself” (p. 640). The central wish in the specimen dream is “I wish I might for once experience love that cost me nothing” (1901a, p. 672).

Let us reflect once more on Amalie Freud's description of her son, “mein goldener Sigi.” Are these words an expression of unconditional love, or rather, of ownership of an idealized possession that is valued for what it might vicariously offer in terms of borrowed self-esteem? By this I mean that he may have been asked to “fulfill those dream and wishes of his parents which they never carried out” and, in particular, the “ambition” which his mother had been “obliged to suppress in herself.” Freud's family was poor. When he was born his

family occupied a “single rented room in a modest house” (Gay, 1988, p. 7). There is some evidence that during Sigmund's boyhood and youth Jacob Freud's business was declining and that this “impecunious wool merchant” (Gay, 1988, p. 4) needed to be supported by his wife's family and others. The family's poverty may have been painful or at least difficult for ambitious Amalie Freud, who had seven children in ten years and lived in cramped quarters. Could it be that she felt deprived and disappointed about her life and sought some sort of vicarious vindication through an alternative source—such as her intellectually gifted son? Freud may have been his mother's favorite, but the cost of her narcissistic “love” was high: he had to give her what she wanted, rather than get what he emotionally needed.

In this light, Freud's further strange and counterintuitive depiction of women as having a less developed conscience and sense of justice and their debilitating effect on men becomes less perplexing. Speaking of women, Freud (1925a) claims that “they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great necessities of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection and hostility” (pp. 257-258).

Freud's conscious rationale for why women do not develop the same strong superego as men is that there is a differential course followed in the Oedipus complex. According to Freud, women, un-like men, do not give up the Oedipus complex in an absolute way because they have no castration to fear. With the absence of the fear

of castration, girls do not denounce oedipal longings or internalize sexual prohibitions. The Oedipus complex and the formation and development of the superego, which is its heir, suffers, failing to “attain the strength and independence which give it its cultural significance” (p. 129).

There is an absence of clinical evidence within psychoanalysis for this dubious claim. In fact, psychoanalysts, sexologists and biologists have, in the words of Gay (1988), “raised damaging doubts” (p. 519) about its veracity. Freud (1918) claimed that men “dread” women and women deplete men. Speaking of primitive man, Freud said: “The man is afraid of being weakened by woman, infected with her femininity and of then showing himself incapable. The effect which coitus has of discharging tensions and causing flaccidity may be the prototype of what the man fears.... In all this there is nothing obsolete, nothing which is not still alive among ourselves” (pp. 198-199).

Enrichment, as well as depletion, occurs in human relationships. While depletion may be a periodic feature of man's experience of women, Freud posits it as a universal dimension of human relationships. It is reasonable to assume that it was Freud's experience in particular with a mother whose emotional abandonments and narcissistic exploitation enervated him. A son of such a mother might well “dread” women and anticipate—based on previous experience-that women would deplete him. When Marie Bonaparte once commented: “Man is afraid of women,” Freud replied: “‘He's right …’” (Gay, 1988, p. 522). In this context Freud's infamous question, “What do women want?” might be rephrased: “What does my mother want from me?”

If Freud lacked clinical data from within psychoanalysis demonstrating gender differences in either the development of conscience or a sense of justice, then what is the source of his dubious claims about women's supposed ethical inferiority? Freud, in my view, reifies his own painful experience of maternal abandonment, betrayal, and psychic depletion caused by their enmeshed relationship into a universal lacuna in women, a deficient sense of morality.

Freud's claim about the perfection of the mother-son relationship appears to have been more of a wish than a clinical observation. There is no evidence that Freud's self-analysis investigated this crucial relationship or that he ever worked through its impact on him.

Freud attributed his own pathology to his Czech nanny. That his mother's influence was defensively denied is strongly reflected in Freud's one-sided assessment of the origins of his difficulties in which his mother is only briefly mentioned at all. Describing his attempts in his self-analysis to understand the causative influences in his own neurosis, Freud writes to Fliess on March 10, 1897:

> *[M]y “primary originator” [of neurosis] was an ugly, elderly but clever woman who told me a great deal about God and hell, and gave me a high opinion of my own capacities; that later (between the ages of two and two-and-a-half) libido towards matrem was aroused; the occasion must have been the journey with her from Leipzig to Vienna, during which we spent a night together and I must have had the opportunity of seeing her nudam … and that I welcomed my one-year-younger brother (who died within a few months) with ill wishes and real infantile jealousy, and that his death left the germ of guilt in me [p. 219].*

Freud himself recognizes the incompleteness of his explanation. In the same letter he writes: “I still have not got to the scenes which lie at the bottom of all this” (p. 219). In his analysis of a dream in the postscript to this letter he supposedly provides the missing pieces: “She was my instructress in sexual matters, and chided me for being clumsy and not being able to do anything ... she encouraged me to steal ‘Zehners’ [ten-Kreuzer pieces] to give to her.... The dream can be summed up as ‘bad treatment’” (pp. 220-221). It is instructive to juxtapose the issue of “bad treatment”—which Freud ascribes to the Czech nanny—with an autobiographical remark and some theoretical reflections by Freud on ambivalence and splitting. *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud admits: “my emotional life has always insisted that I should have an intimate friend and a hated enemy. I have always been able to provide myself afresh with both ...” (p. 483).

Freud (1913) maintained that “ambivalence,” the “simultaneous existence of love and hate towards the same object” (p. 157), is present in everyone. Furthermore, “The feelings which are aroused in ... relations between parents and children ... are not only of a positive or affectionate kind but also of a negative or hostile one” (1910a, p. 47). We need to recognize that “at a very early age ... the

two opposites should have been split apart and one of them, usually the hatred, have been repressed” (1909b, p. 239).

Writing about Little Hans, Freud says, in words that may well represent the defensive operations he performed in relation to his mother and nanny: “[T]he conflict due to ambivalence is not dealt with in relation to one and the same person; it is circumvented ... by one of the pair of conflicting impulses [hostility] being directed to another person [the nanny] as a substitutive object [for the mother]” (1926, p. 103).

Given Freud's propensity for splitting—his tendency to “circumvent” the conflict of ambivalence by making someone the hated enemy and someone else the all-good friend—it would not be prudent to accept his own conscious assessment of the nanny's culpability and the mother's innocence at face value. His nurse —who gave him “a high opinion of his capabilities” and “provided me at such an early age with the means of living and surviving”—is designated, by Freud, as the “hated enemy,” which exculpates his mother and thus enables him to protect and preserve an idealized image of her.

Amalie Freud died on September 12, 1930. On September 15, 1930, Freud wrote to Ernest Jones (1957): “I will not disguise the fact that my reaction to this event ... has been a curious one ... I can detect ... an increase in personal freedom.... No grief otherwise ... I was not at the funeral ...” (p. 152). In a letter to Ferenczi he wrote that his mother's death “has affected me in a peculiar way, this great event. No pain, no grief ... at the same time a feeling of *liberation, of release* ... (Freud, 1960, p. 400). If Freud loved her so much—if the mother's bond with the son is “altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationship”—then is it not odd and symptomatic that he had no emotional reaction to her death? The “feeling of liberation, of release” and the “increase of personal freedom” suggest that Freud was imprisoned by his relationship with his mother.

Describing the effect on analysts of self-unconsciousness, Freud (1912) emphasizes that “every unresolved repression in him constitutes what has been aptly described by Stekel as a blind spot' in his analytic perception” (p. 116). Freud's relationship with his mother created a blind spot or scotoma in his views of reality and relationship: he saw Nature and relationships as dangerous and personally

threatening: “Nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable” (1927, p. 21). “She” is oblivious to our fate and is composed of “impersonal forces and destinies” (p. 22). The tone of “personal aggrievement and disillusion,” can be read, as a metaphor of “parental callousness” (Mary Midgely, quoted in J. Jones, 1996, p. 99). It is interesting to reflect for a moment in this context upon Freud's decision to go to medical school. In his autobiography Freud described his decision “to become a medical student” at the age of 17, after hearing Goethe's essay “On Nature” read aloud (1925b, p. 8).[4] Goethe describes “nature” (in terms that beg for recontextualization in terms of the maternal) as an inscrutable, narcissistic, smothering, devouring, and predatory woman/mother who is dishonest and rejoices in illusions. She demands compliance and tyrannizes those who try to break free from her suffocating grip. One is powerless in her presence:

> *Nature! We are surrounded and embraced by her: powerless to separate ourselves from her and powerless to penetrate beyond her. Without asking or warning, she snatches us up into her circling dance, and whirls us on until we are tired and drop from her arm. We live in her midst, and know her not. She is incessantly speaking to us, but betrays not her secret. We constantly act upon her, and yet have no*

> *power over her.... She is always building up and destroying; but her workshop is inaccessible.... She loves herself, and her innumerable eyes and affections are fixed upon herself ... She rejoices in illusion. Whoso destroys it in himself and others, him she punishes with the sternest tyranny. Whoso follows her in faith, him she takes as a child to her bosom.... We obey her laws even when we rebel against them; we work with her even when we desire to work against her.... She is cunning, but for good ends; and it is best not to notice her tricks [Goethe, 1869, quoted in Rizzuto, 1998, pp. 207-208].*

Freud wrote to Emil Fluss on May 1, 1873, shortly after hearing Goethe's essay: "Today it is as certain and as fixed as any human

[4] *In a footnote to Freud's (1925b) "An Autobiographical Study," James Strachey claims that G. C. Tobbler actually wrote this and Goethe attributed it to himself (e.g., p. 8).*

plan can be.... I have decided to be a Natural Scientist and herewith release you from the promise to let me conduct all your law-suits. It is no longer needed. I shall gain insight into the age-old dossiers of Nature, perhaps even eavesdrop on her eternal processes, and share my findings with anyone who wants to learn" (Freud, 1969, p. 424; quoted in Rizzuto, 1998, p. 208). Was Freud's attraction to medicine, at least in part, an attempt to figure out "Nature's secrets," that is, what had been done to him by his mother? In his study of Leonardo da Vinci (1910b) Freud wrote about fathers and mothers and the origins of religion: "We recognize the roots of the needs for religion in the parental complex; the almighty and just God, and kindly Nature, appear to us as grand sublimations of father and mother [respectively], or revivals and restorations of the young child's ideas of them" (p. 123). Destroying illusions was central to Freud. He wrote to Rolland that "a great part of my life's work ... has been spent [trying to] destroy illusions of my own and those of mankind" (Freud, 1963, p. 341). Did Freud's deep commitment to destroy and live without illusions, particularly the religious illusions of "God and kindly Nature," relate in any way to puncturing the mystifications of his mother?

"No analyst," claims Freud (1910c), "goes further than his own complexes and internal resistances permit" (p. 145). And Freud may not have gone further in his view of religion than his conflicts with and fear of his mother would permit.

Freud was an incompletely emancipated visionary, whose work both opened up breathtakingly innovative vistas even as it enshrined conventional presuppositions and prejudices (Rubin, 1998). Freud oscillated between an admixture of “progressive-critical” and “regressive-conventional theorizing” (Breger, p. 57): “Freud is continually moving forward in radical directions” notes Breger (1981), “and retreating to safe conventional ground, first revealing material that raises the most critical questions about his society's values and practices and then slipping back to side with those very values against society's victims” (p. 8). Much of Freud's work, including his metapsychology, case studies, theories of sexuality, neurosis and anxiety, conceptions of masculinity-femininity, and views of religion, exemplify this unresolved conflict.

Freud and Religion

Freud's friend, Rolland Rolland, a poet and student of the Indian saint Ramakrishna, challenged Freud's one-dimensional account of religion as an illusion and a type of childhood neurosis in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927). Rolland agreed with Freud's critique of religion, but felt that Freud had not concerned himself with “the deepest sources of the religious feeling.” In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud (1930) attempted to address Rolland's concerns: “[T]he true source of religious sentiments.... consists in a peculiar feeling, which he [Rolland] himself is never without, which he finds confirmed by many others.... a sensation of ‘eternity’, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, ‘oceanic’.... it is the source of the religious energy” (p. 64). This experience caused Freud “no small difficulty” (p. 65). Freud does not deny its existence but admits that he cannot discover it in himself.

Lacking personal experience of such unitive religious-spiritual experiences and perhaps unconsciously recoiling from fusion experiences because they triggered the deadly specter of psychological usurpation and self-effacement by whomever he was connected to (who might smother and devour him like “Nature” did), Freud offered an interpretation: “one is justified in attempting to discover a psychoanalytic—that is, a genetic—explanation of such a feeling” (p. 65). Freud claims that Rolland incorrectly interpreted the oceanic experience and viewed it as a residue of a regressive, preoedipal experience, before the ego had learned to distinguish itself from the surrounding world. He derives that feeling from the narcissistic union of the infant-mother; an infantile wish to merge with mother. In pointing to the genetic derivation of this experience, Freud did not deny the validity of Rolland's claim. And he usefully clarified

infantile and irrational sources and aspects of such experiences. In terms of the former, individuals experience, at times, archaic attempts to fill earlier emotional voids from childhood. And there certainly are, relative to the latter, pathological states in which the boundaries between self and other, self and world vanish or are incorrectly drawn (Freud, 1930, p. 66).

But recent infancy research casts severe doubt on Freud's speculation that religion is a regression to a preoedipal period of symbiotic

unity, because there is no such experience even in the earliest stages of development (e.g., Stern, 1985; J. Jones, 1996). The irrationality of religion and religious belief was not the only reason Freud challenged religion. Because Freud never resolved his negative feelings toward his mother, the maternal took on dangerous properties. Connectedness to the maternal opened up the possibility of envelopment in nonbeing. This may be why Freud (1930) stressed the father's protective role for the helpless child: “The derivation of religious needs from the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it seems to me incontrovertible ... I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection” (p. 72). The infant Freud *was* helpless—not simply against the perennial existential dangers we all confront such as death, abandonment, and loss of love—but against being narcissistically exploited and psychologically usurped by his mother. From this perspective it becomes more evident why only the father, not the mother as well as the father, functions as a protector of the helpless infant against the terror of Nature and the universe. Freud's helplessness in relation to his mother engendered his views of religion.

Since Freud equated religion with the maternal he needed to pathologize and discredit religious experiences so as to avoid unresolved traumatic interpersonal experiences with his mother that he had spent a lifetime attempting to deny. Critiquing religion protected Freud from the deadly possibility of finding in anyone to whom he would merge—like in an oceanic experience—a potentially exploitative and treacherous other. It also shielded Freud from both the experience of perceiving his mother in a more negative light, and experiencing a shattering deidealization of his image of her.

That the closeness of a merger might be deeply dangerous for Freud—stirring up fears of exploitation or betrayal—is hinted at both in a telling remark to Karl Abraham about friendships and his troubled history of emotional intimacy. He informed Abraham: “I have always sought for friends who would not first exploit and then betray me” (quoted in E. Jones, 1955, p. 419). His relationships

with loved ones and colleagues were often characterized by initial idealization, subsequent bitter disappointment, and eventual withdrawal or acrimony.

Freud's rationalistic denunciation and invalidation of religion protected him from experiences of fusion in which his core issues and conflicts might emerge. To value religious experiences and to thereby open the door to fusion experiences and the threat of being devoured might be to confront dreaded truths of his own formative years that he had spent a lifetime unconsciously denying and avoiding.

The impact on Freud's thinking of his evasion of the maternal and his pathologization of the religious are at least twofold: (1) hidden religiosity and superstition infiltrated his own thinking; and (2) he neglected more mature facets of religious experiences. Meissner (1984) aptly links Freud's strong interest in superstition and the occult with his neglect of religion (p. 26). Freud (1901b) admitted: “I have a tendency to superstition” (pp. 249-250). In the 1904 edition of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Freud states: “My own superstition has its roots in suppressed ambition (immortality) and in my own case the place of that anxiety about death which springs from the natural uncertainty of life” (p. 260), especially for an atheist. Religion, according to Kolakowski (1990), is humankind's way of “accepting life as an inevitable defeat” (p. 73), by which I take him to mean, an inexorable movement toward death. Freud's fear of death is then not surprising, since he is a selfdescribed atheist and “godless Jew.” E. Jones (1957) recalls conversing on a number of occasions about occultism with Freud. In a letter in which he declined membership in an advisory council of the American Psychical Association Freud said: “If I were at the beginning of a scientific career, instead of, as now, at its end, I would perhaps choose no other field of work [than parapsychology] in spite of all the difficulties” (quoted in Meissner, 1984, p. 38). Could Freud's interests in superstition and the occult signal the “return of the religiously repressed”?

Freud did not recognize that religious life might evolve more “mature” forms of functioning and experiencing that transcend, rather than are simply reducible to, developmentally earlier and less mature meanings and functions (Loewald, 1978, p. 72). He neglected, for example, the potential value of oneness experiences. Because of his experiences with his mother, Freud did not realize that such experiences could be replenishing fusions or potentially

ecstatic unions that might enhance autonomy and individuality. Oneness experiences did not offer, for Freud, as they might for us, intimations of eternity or the glories and serenity of a nonconflictual now, but dreaded dangers of fusion and self-nullification. The potential value of contemplative and mystical thought and practice; the way, for example, that it can enrich and amplify a human life; afford meaning, offer solace, forge connectedness to something vital beyond the self, was also neglected by Freud.

Freud explicitly acknowledged that his views on religion were his own and “form no part of analytic theory ... there are certainly many excellent analysts who do not share them” (Freud, 1963, p. 117). Freud's knowledge of religion seemed confined to the Old and New Testament and the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian religions of antiquity. He focused on Judaism and Christianity. He did not study the religions of India or China. According to Ernest Jones (1957), Freud admitted that he regretted having ignored the rarer and more profound type of religious emotion as experienced by mystics and saints (p. 360).

The implications for psychoanalysis of Freud's pathologizing of religion are at least threefold: (1) there is a “return of the religious-spiritual repressed” in the form of hidden religiosity in psychoanalytic institutions, theories, and practices; (2) the experience of certain patients who are atheists or involved in religion are incompletely understood; (3) the value of contemplative traditions and the sacred are ignored and psychoanalysis is impoverished.

Religion disavowed by psychoanalysts becomes religion smuggled into psychoanalysis. Despite the avowedly antireligious character of psychoanalysis it is permeated with religiosity. Let me briefly give several examples. In a letter to Fliess on February 6, 1899, Freud spoke about “the religion of science, which is supposed to have replaced the old religion” (Freud, 1954, p. 276). Freud (1933) claimed that psychoanalysis had no Weltanschauung or worldview. But Freud worshipped science, the religion of empirical verification, as the new divinity. Psychoanalysis's “monotheistic epistemology” of science, in which it asserts without demonstrating that there is only one royal route to truth, deeply limits psychoanalytic thinking and reduces and neglects other humanistic paths to knowing, such as art and religion (J. Jones, 1996).

There are several other ways that religion permeates psychoanalysis. Many psychoanalysts engage in ancestor worship: treating the founders of the school of thought with which they are affiliated (Freud, Jung, Klein, Lacan, Sullivan, Kohut, and so forth) as idols and their writings as sacred, canonical texts. Certain practices are treated as rituals and to question them is taboo (Rubin,

1998). A fundamentalistic spirit all too often reigns in psychoanalytic institutions. Dissenters from orthodox theories are branded heretics and are excommunicated. This hidden religiosity made psychoanalysis unpsychoanalytic because it took too much on faith.

In psychoanalysis atheism is normative and religion is normative and religion is pathological. The clinical implications are at least twofold: (1) atheism is rarely if ever explored; rendering its meaning for a particular patient—even when problematic or psychopathological—unconscious. Religious belief can be neurotic. But irreligiosity can also be neurotic. One's disbelief can, for example, remove one from the fabric of life: protecting oneself against commitment and connectedness and insulating oneself from intimacy and loss. Irreligiosity can also hide one's aversion toward and devaluation of life.

I agree with Freud's (1930) admission that in his (1927) critique of religion he had neglected “the deepest sources of the religious feeling.” The second clinical implication of normalizing psychoanalytic atheism is that the religious experiences of many patients are all too often pathologized and its constructive facets—for example, its capacity to foster greater meaning, lessen narcissism, and facilitate personal integration and connectedness—is eclipsed. Certain facets of religion could enrich psychoanalysis (Rubin, 1998) as I suggested at the beginning of this paper: sensitizing us to the inner life (Jung, 1958), lessening human anxieties (Pfister, 1948), facilitating “selfintegration” (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 182), deepening and amplifying the quality of one's life (Meissner, 1984), and “foster[ing] life by inspiring love” (Menninger, 1942, p. 191). Involvement in Asian meditative practices can also attune us to a broader and more expanded cartography of states of consciousness and a greater interest in human creativity, love, and morality.

Psychoanalysis has been deeply enriched in many ways by the relational revolution of the last two decades. There is, for example, a heightened attunement to the irreducibly relational nature of human

development and the therapeutic process. Theology could expand the implications of the relational perspective in psychoanalysis further than psychoanalysts do by elucidating a crucial implication that analysts neglect. By stressing the larger life-world/field in which the psychoanalytic dyad is embedded (J. Jones, 1996, p. 83) theology contextualizes the relational perspective and takes it one crucial step further than psychoanalysis does. Tapping into the sacred; feeling “held in a larger circumference of being” (Ulanov, 1996, p. 192) offers profound meaning and solace.

Psychoanalysis neglects the sacred. The cost of a psychoanalysis that neglects or eclipses the sacred is that it embraces a secular modernistpostmodernist worldview in which the individual is disconnected from larger sources of meaning and solace. The individual in a secular world is a God-term; the ultimate ground of being and source of meaning. Freud (1927) claimed that to question the meaning of life is a sign of emotional illness. But the search for meaning—which is a central (although not exclusive) property of the religious life—may enrich one's life and be life-affirming rather than defensive (Corbett, 1996, p. 168). To not question the meaning of life can inadvertently lead to being attached to meaninglessness; thereby fostering alienation and anomie and compromising one's emotional health. Individuals are left unmoored and disconnected when they are not embedded in something beyond the isolated, unencumbered self. From such a secular perspective life is disenchanted; emptied of wonder, awe, sublimity, and sacredness. The alienation of many patients (and therapists) may not be unrelated to such a disconnection from the world in which psychoanalysis is embedded. Various substitutes are then consciously or unconsciously recruited to ground the disconnected individual. The self and the theories and organizations we are affiliated with, for example, may be treated as idols, which theologian Reinhold Niebuhr defines as "absolutizing the relative," by which he means making a particular, local partial truth into a universally valid one. Making the individual the ground of being leads to an excessively egocentric conception of self-experience. When the isolated individual is the ultimate source of meaning then altruism and self-centeredness are seen as dichotomized rather than intimately interpenetrating. There is then a greater attachment to our theories

and a lack of civility in psychoanalytic institutions, especially toward those with differing points of view.

Conclusion

> *It remains to be considered whether analysis in itself must really lead to the giving up of religion—Freud to Eitingon, June 20, 1927.*
>
> *In itself psychoanalysis is neither religious nor nonreligious—Freud to Pfister, February 9, 1909 [Freud, 1963, p. 16].*

The word *spirituality* arises with increasing frequency in psychoanalytic sessions, conferences, articles, and books. Where does this leave the

psychoanalyst, who was trained in an analytic culture that valued the clear-eyed reason of science and overwhelmingly pathologized and marginalized religious concerns? A moment of Freud's own undogmatic agnosticism about his atheism in *Future of an Illusion* serves as a suggestive reminder for us postclassical psychoanalysts treating people for whom religion and spirituality seem to be of increasing concern. “If experience should show—not to me—but to others after me, who think the same way—that we have been mistaken [in our critique of religion]” writes Freud (1927), “then we will renounce our expectations” (p. 53). Religion, like all psychological phenomena, has multiple meanings and functions ranging from the adaptive to the defensive and selfrestorative. Traditionally, religion and psychoanalysis have been segregated, with one assuming that it uniquely possessed the truth about human experience and the other being pathologized and marginalized. There needs to be a rapprochement of psychoanalysis and religion in which they each are more receptive to what light the other might shed on the art of living. A contemplative psychoanalysis would appreciate the constructive as well as the pathological facets of religion. If it is antianalytic to treat religion as inherently psychopathological as the majority of psychoanalysts have done, it is unanalytic to take religious claims at face value, without inquiring into the complex and multidimensional meanings and

functions they uniquely possess in the mind and heart of a particular person in psychoanalytic treatment. There needs to be a close encounter of a new kind between psychoanalysis and religion, in which neither discipline is presumed to have unique access to the sovereign truth and they are neither segregated from each other nor assimilated into one another (Rubin, n.d.). Psychoanalytic imperialism emerges when it tries to conquer religion; when it has a “nothing but” attitude toward religion; when everything religious is explained by and reduced to psychoanalytic categories. But religions need to avoid their own brand of intellectual (or spiritual) imperialism in which a religious text or meditational practice is treated as if it is the final truth about reality. Psychoanalysis and religion have different, although at times overlapping concerns. If they are too separate and autonomous then fruitful contact is precluded. No meaningful cross-pollination is possible when they are segregated and isolated. If they are too merged then important differences are eclipsed. The task for the disciplines of psychoanalysis and religion, like the challenge for individuals in a committed relationship, is to balance autonomy and connectedness (J. Jones, 1996) so that there is intimacy that preserves and enriches the autonomy of each. I have no doubt that we atheistic or agnostic analysts might just discover that a nonreductionistic contemplative

psychoanalysis of the future, in which spiritual and religious experience was valued as well as critically examined, could foster a civilization with greater meaning and sacredness and less discontent.[5]

References

Abraham, R. (1979), Freud and 'Mater': The Influence of Sigmund Freud's Mother on His Life and Work. Davis, CA: University of California Press.

Abraham, R. (1982-1983), Freud's mother and the formation of the oedipal father. *Psychoanal. Rev.*, 69:*441-453*.

Breger, L. (1981), Freud's Unfinished Journey: Conventional and Critical Perspectives. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

[5]*This paper was enriched by the feedback of Emma Anderson, Claude Barbre, Jim Barron, Lou Breger, Jerry Garguilo, Jim Jones, Esther Menaker, Mary Traina, and Ann and Barry Ulanov.*

Corbett, L. (1996), The Religious Function of the Psyche. New York: Routledge.

Freud, M. (1967), Who was Freud? In: The Jews of Austria, ed. J. Fraenkel. London: Valentine Mitchell.

Freud, S. (1900), The Interpretation of Dreams. Standard Edition, 4&5. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.

Freud, S. (1901a), On dreams. Standard Edition, 5:*639-685*. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.

Freud, S. (1901b), The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. Standard Edition, 6. London: Hogarth Press, 1960.

Freud, S. (1909a), Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old-boy. Standard Edition, 10:*1-147*. London: Hogarth Press, 1955.

Freud, S. (1909b), Notes upon a case of obsessional neurosis. Standard Edition, 10:*153-318*. London: Hogarth Press, 1955.

Freud, S. (1910a), Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. Standard Edition, 11:*1-55*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.

Freud, S. (1910b), Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood. Standard Edition, 11:*58-137*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.

Freud, S. (1910c), The future prospects of psycho-analytic therapy. Standard Edition, 11:*139-151*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.

Freud, S. (1912), Recommendations to physicians practising psychoanalysis. Standard Edition, 12:*109-120*. London: Hogarth Press, 1958.

Freud, S. (1913), Totem and Taboo. Standard Edition, 13:*1-161*. London: Hogarth Press, 1955.

Freud, S. (1914), On narcissism: An introduction. Standard Edition, 14:*67-102*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.

Freud, S. (1916-1917), Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. Standard Edition, 16. London: Hogarth Press, 1961.

Freud, S. (1918), The taboo of virginity (Contributions to the psychology of love, III). Standard Edition, 11:*191-208*. London: Hogarth Press, 1958.

Freud, S. (1921), Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. Standard Edition, 18:*65-143*. London: Hogarth Press, 1955.

Freud, S. (1925a), Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes. Standard Edition, 19:*241-258*. London: Hogarth Press, 1961.

Freud, S. (1925b), An Autobiographical Study. Standard Edition, 20:*1-74*. London: Hogarth Press, 1959.

Freud, S. (1926), Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety. Standard Edition, 20: *75-172*. London: Hogarth Press, 1959.

Freud, S. (1927), The Future of an Illusion. Standard Edition, 21:*1-56*. London: Hogarth Press, 1961.

Freud, S. (1930), Civilization and Its Discontents. Standard Edition, 21:*57-145*. London: Hogarth Press, 1961.

Freud, S. (1931), Female sexuality. Standard Edition, 21:*221-243*. London: Hogarth Press, 1961.

Freud, S. (1933), New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. Standard Edition, 22:*1-182*. London: Hogarth Press, 1964.

Freud, S. (1954), The Origins of Psycho-Analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts, and Notes, ed. M. Bonaparte, A. Freud, & E. Kris; tr. E. Mosbacher & J. Strachey. New York: Basic Books.

Freud, S. (1960), The Letters of Sigmund Freud, ed. E. Freud; tr. T Stern & J. Stern. New York: Basic Books.

Freud, S. (1963), Psychoanalysis and Faith: Dialogues with the Reverend Oskar Pfister, ed. H. Meng & E. Freud. New York: Basic Books.

Freud, S. (1969), Some early unpublished letters of Freud. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 50:*419-427*.

Fromm, E. (1960), Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis. In: Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, ed. E. Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, & R. DeMartino. New York: Harper & Row.

Gay, p. (1988), Freud, a Life for Our Time. New York: W. W. Norton.

Grinstein, A. (1990), Freud at the Crossroads. Madison, CT: International Universities Press.

Heller, J. (1973), Freud's mother and father. In: Freud as We Knew Him, ed. H. Ruitenbeek. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. *334-340*.

Holt, R. (1992), Freud's parental identifications as a source of some contradictions in psychoanalysis. In: Freud and the History of Psychoanalysis, ed. T. Gelfand & N. Kerr. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, pp. *1-28*.

Horney, K. (1945), Our Inner Conflicts. New York: W. W. Norton.

Horney, K. (1987), Final Lectures. New York: W. W. Norton.

Jones, E. (1953), The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 1. New York: Basic Books.

Jones, E. (1955), The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 2. New York: Basic Books.

Jones, E. (1957), The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 3. New York: Basic Books.

Jones, J. (1996), Religion and Psychology in Transition: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Theology. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Jung, C. G. (1958), Psychology and Religion: East and West. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kelman, H. (1960), Psychoanalytic and Eastern wisdom. In: The History of Psychotherapy, ed. J. Ehrenwald. New York: Jason Aronson.

Kohut, H. (1985), Self Psychology and the Humanities. New York: W. W. Norton.

Kolakowski, L. (1990), Modernity on Endless Trial. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Loewald, H. (1978), Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Meissner, W. (1984), Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Menninger, K. (1942), Love Against Hate. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.

Milner, M. (1973), Some notes on psychoanalytic ideas about mysticism. In: The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men. London: Tavistock, pp. *258-274*.

Pfister, O. (1948), Christianity and Fear. London: Allen & Unwin.

Phillips, A. (1994), On Flirtation: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Uncommitted Life. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rizzuto, A-M. (1979), The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rizzuto, A-M. (1998), Why Did Freud Reject God? New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Roazen, p. (1971), Freud and His Followers. New York: Meridian.

Roland, A. (1988), In Search of Self in India and Japan: Towards a Cross-Cultural Psychology. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rubin, J. B. (1996), Psychotherapy and Buddhism: Toward an Integration. New York: Plenum.

Rubin, J. B. (1998), A Psychoanalysis for Our Time: Exploring the Blindness of the Seeing I. New York: New York University Press.

Rubin, J. B. (n.d.), Close Encounters of a New Kind: Essays on Psychoanalysis and Buddhism.

Silberer, H. (1917), Problems of Mysticism and Its Symbolism. New York: Moffat.

Stern, D. (1985), The Interpersonal World of the Infant. New York: Basic Books.

Stolorow, R., & **Atwood, G.** (1979), Faces in a Cloud: Subjectivity in Personality Theory. New York: Jason Aronson.

Suler, J. (1993), Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Eastern Thought. Albany, NY: State University Press.

Tomkins, S. (1963), Affect, imagery, consciousness. In: The Negative Affects, Vol. 2. New York: Springer.

Ulanov, A. (1985), A shared space. *Quadrant*, 18:1:*65-80*.

Ulanov, A. (1996), Vicissitudes of living in the self. In: The Functioning Transcendent. Wilmette, IL: Chiron, pp. *190-217*.

Van Herik, J. (1982), Freud on Femininity and Faith. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wilber, K. (1998), The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion. New York: Random House.

Winnicott, D. W. (1986), Home Is Where We Start From. New York: W. W. Norton.

Zetzel E. (1966), An obsessional neurotic: Freud's Rat Man. In: The Capacity for Emotional Growth. New York: International Universities Press, 1966, pp. *216-228*.