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Religion and Death a Century Later

ABSTRACT: About a hundred years ago, Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud penned influential writings on the nature of religion and how the religious imagination construes death. This article assesses the current relevance of their ideas in light of experimental psychology, neuroscience, and psychohistory research in recent decades. Topics include Terror Management Theory; the psychology of fundamentalism; Jungian archetypes as emergent outcomes of nature-nurture interaction; and the continued relevance of archetypes for understanding the psychology, history, and sociology of religion. We then subsume these disparate topics into a unified and evidence-based perspective on religion and death, and conclude with clinical and social implications.

Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912) and Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) staked out contrasting views on the nature of religion. Jung saw the world's mythologies and religions, like the dreams of individuals, as a repository of symbols innate to the human psyche and pointing towards wholeness and healing. Freud, also viewing religion and dreams as related expressions of the unconscious, construed both as wishful thinking that provides a compensation in fantasy for actual deprivation, especially sexual deprivation, and the wish for an all-powerful and nurturant parent. In Jung's framework, death is a symbolic construct representing psychic transformation, while in Freud's it is a literal reality denied by the false promise of an afterlife. What relevance do these ideas continue to have a century later and what else can we say at this time about the nature of religion and the problem of death? There are innumerable ways of answering these big questions, of course; in this short article we present a view informed by empirical findings from neuroscience, psychohistory and experimental psychology.

While the Jungian and Freudian theories of religion summarized above are not necessarily incompatible, it is not obvious how they can be brought into a common conceptual framework. Interestingly, however, each theory appears to have some empirical support—Jung's from neuroscience (Panskepp, 1994;

Ellis and Solms, 2018; Becker and Neuberg, 2019) and Freud's from psychohistory (Reich, 1930/1980; Greven, 1992; Strozier et al, 2010; Heimlich, 2011) and experimental work on "Terror Management" (Solomon et al, 2015). After discussing evidence pertinent to each theory, we will offer a new and unified approach to the topics of religion and death, and will conclude with clinical and social implications.

Let us begin with Freud's concept of death as a literal reality and religious notions of afterlife as wishful delusions of immortality. Humans certainly observe that other members of our species—and living things generally—are mortal. From this, the individual can reliably infer that his or her own days are also numbered, a source of chronic if generally repressed anxiety (Solomon et al, 2015). Two caveats are needed, however, which significantly complicate this picture. First, death is not the kind of literal reality that is directly observable, like trees and dogs, but is indeed a symbolic construct as Jung said. In *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life*, Robert Jay Lifton (1979) identified three polarities that capture the symbolic meaning of death in contrast to life: stasis vs. movement, disintegration vs. integrity, and separation vs. connection. These polarities, which are Lifton's version of archetypes, also seem to characterize the umwelts of human neonates and infants, linking the end of individual life with its beginning. Thus, while death is undoubtedly an actual reality, its meaning is by no means as straightforward as one might naively assume.

The second caveat is related to the first: the symbolic construction of death (and birth) flows from a constitutive capacity of the human mind/brain—imagination—that pervades all aspects of human culture, including science, commerce, and politics, not only religion. In *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker (1973) argued that *all* of culture is shaped by the same wishful thinking about death that Freud attributed to religion. This is evident, for example, in the obsession of scientific medicine with extending human longevity at any cost and in the building of financial or political empires by individuals hoping to achieve immortality through their heroic achievements.

This is not to say that belief in a literal afterlife has the same epistemological validity as the periodic table or the law of gravitation, only that scientists and other secular people are not exempt from the pervasive influence of death anxiety. Interestingly, it is not apologists for religion making this point but rather scientists themselves, in particular experimental psychologists investigating "Terror Management," a topic to which we now turn.

TERROR MANAGEMENT THEORY

Terror Management Theory (TMT), a vast body of peer reviewed research inspired by the work of Ernest Becker, examines the inter-relationship of

four primary factors—chronic death anxiety, self-esteem, group identity, and belief systems (Burke et al, 2010; Solomon et al, 2015). As early as age three, children become aware that other animals—goldfish, cats, grandfathers—die. Older children, when their egos become sufficiently formed, realize that they too are going to die; death is now more than the grief of losing significant others and becomes the terror of imagined self-annihilation. Thus begins a lifelong struggle with terror management, a process which can be characterized by various levels of self-deception.

The basic strategy of terror management consists of identifying oneself—a mortal being—with something larger than oneself that is imagined to be immortal. For children, merging psychically with their parents typically provides a temporary refuge from the terror of self-annihilation. As a person matures, however, it becomes painfully obvious that parents—as well as parent surrogates such as teachers, bosses, or political leaders—will also die and are thus incapable of providing the needed immortality. Identification with the larger social group of which parent figures are delegates then becomes the terror management strategy of choice. This requires a belief system in which the group will persist indefinitely and in which the individual will be remembered as a valued member of the group.[1]

Such systems of social/symbolic immortality take many forms. Examples include religious communities, nations, and even the international scientific community. Being a member in good standing of any such group confers self-esteem, security, and a measure of symbolic immortality. Note that such meaning systems do not necessarily include belief in a literal afterlife. Scientists can feel that they will live on in the contribution that they make to the larger scientific enterprise, especially if their work is widely cited. Having children provides another avenue of symbolic immortality available to most anyone, independent of other social accomplishments.

Terror Management Theory, sketched only briefly here, has proven to be a rich source of testable hypotheses. Sheldon Solomon et al's *The Worm at the Core: on the Role of Death in Life* (2015) summarizes this research for the general reader. Here are some examples. To test the hypothesis that group identification functions to manage death anxiety, an ethnocentrism questionnaire is administered to subjects on the sidewalk under two conditions—in front of a funeral parlor and in front of a convenience store. Questionnaires collected in front of the funeral parlor show measurably more ethnocentrism. Other experimental studies also demonstrate, conversely, that challenging cherished beliefs makes death imagery and ideas more salient.

Nor are the belief systems at issue in this research limited to ethnic or national group identities. For example, a person who identifies as a left activist will become more leftist in response to death reminders, and a person

who identifies as a scientist will become more militantly pro-science and opposed to anti-scientific viewpoints. These findings are independently corroborated by research showing that death anxiety increases the desire to proselytize, independently of the content of the belief system being propagated, and that proselytizing alleviates death anxiety. All of this suggests that increased ideological polarization in the world at the present time may be related to increased death anxiety.

Note that increased death anxiety can result from direct sources (e.g., increased exposure to mass media saturated with death imagery) and/or indirect sources (death anxiety induced by challenges to one's cherished beliefs due to clashes of culture). The latter shows the relevance of TMT to understanding a number of trends in our historical period related to ideological polarization, such as the huddling together of like-minded individuals in "silos" on the internet and on social media and the "New Atheism" of figures such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins (de Waal, 2013), who have been described as "evangelical atheists."

Also relevant in this historical context is research showing the effects of death reminders on support expressed for types of political candidates. Compared with a control group that did not receive death reminders, the treatment group in one such experiment preferred charismatic candidates to relationship-oriented candidates or ones who promised to "get things done." This suggests that charismatic leaders such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Narendra Modi, and Vladimir Putin may be capitalizing on an era of death anxiety resulting from a worldwide "clash of cultures" in our time of globalization and expanding telecommunications (D'Agostino and Benson, 2021).

On top of this death anxiety induced indirectly by cultural globalization, the COVID-19 pandemic was a massive direct source of death anxiety. Here TMT sheds light specifically on the political paradox of Donald Trump's surprisingly strong support in the 2020 presidential election with voters devastated by a pandemic that was greatly exacerbated by the president's own actions and inactions (D'Agostino and Benson, 2021). TMT predicts that increased death anxiety, such as from the pandemic, will increase support for a charismatic leader, not necessarily one taking effective action to ameliorate the problem.

To be sure, there were other, countervailing effects of pandemic-induced death anxiety on the 2020 election (D'Agostino and Benson, 2021) as well as other factors unrelated to TMT that influence voter behavior. Indeed, the increased appeal of charismatic leaders during a period of heightened death anxiety did not prove decisive in the 2020 US presidential contest. However, it might help explain the surprisingly high support for Trump not-

withstanding his incompetent policy response and undermining of his own public health officials.

Other TMT research explores the nexus between self-esteem and group identification. Confirming the hypothesis that group identification is driven by threats to self-esteem (with self-annihilation being the ultimate such threat), individuals whose self-esteem is experimentally undermined cling more to their cultural meaning systems than those whose self-esteem is experimentally boosted. In addition, when individuals' self-esteem is undermined, they spontaneously produce more death-related words than those whose self-esteem is boosted, confirming that self-esteem and group identification function to keep death anxiety at bay.

Other studies show that self-esteem is related to the extent to which a person lives up to the ego ideals constructed by their culture. Personal beauty and fame have typically been so idealized across many cultures, and personal wealth is idealized in capitalist cultures, which construe it as the product of an individual's talent, frugality, and hard work. Confirming these relationships and consistent with the TMT framework, death reminders are found to increase admiration for famous people and belief in the lasting nature of their work. Thoughts of death also increase the attractiveness of luxury items and induce people to plan more extravagant parties. Counting paper money reduces fear of death, as compared with control subjects counting blank pieces of paper.

Finally, and consistent with the symbolic immortality conferred by posterity, death reminders prompt thoughts of having children and thoughts of having children mitigate death anxiety.

FUNDAMENTALISTS VS. HUMANISTS: TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF RELIGION

In light of the foregoing, it is clear that religion is one kind of symbolic immortality system among others, a special case of terror management. TMT experiments generally employ exposure to death reminders (death-related words or imagery) as the treatment condition, or, conversely, manipulate another causal variable to measure the effect on spontaneous production of death-related words or imagery. For example, self-esteem can be boosted or undermined by administering a short achievement test and telling subjects that they scored above or below the average. TMT research does not generally examine individual personality differences, but in one study, subjects were partitioned into high and low self-esteem groups based on a psychological test; the results were similar to those from studies where self-esteem was experimentally manipulated.

The topic of self-esteem links TMT to other bodies of empirical research, such as the attachment literature, which shows that individuals with high baseline levels of self-esteem typically experienced secure attachment in infancy and early childhood (Fonagy, et al 2014; Fraley, 2018). Such individuals are still vulnerable to adverse experiences in later life, including death anxiety, but navigate such experiences with more resilience and are less overwhelmed by them.

The nexus between self-esteem and authoritarianism in terror management also merits further investigation. There is evidence that threats to self-esteem increase death anxiety, which in turn increases authoritarian identifications with social groups (e.g., ethnocentrism) and charismatic leaders. Here TMT intersects with research in psychohistory and political psychology showing the roots of adult authoritarianism in the childhood experience of punitive parenting (Greven, 1992; Milburn and Conrad, 2016; D'Agostino, 2019).

All of this suggests the need to distinguish two poles in a continuum of religion, which can be designated "fundamentalist" and "humanist." We hypothesize that fundamentalist denominations (e.g., Southern Baptists) attract individuals with low baseline levels of self-esteem while humanist denominations (e.g., Unitarian Universalists) attract high self-esteem individuals. It is plausible to assume that such a typology characterizes all religions; other examples include the Orthodox and Reformed branches of Judaism, the Wahhabi and Sufi movements in Islam, and Opus Dei and the Focolare Movement within the Catholic Church.

There is some evidence that supports this picture. Based on interview data and the writings of adherents, Strozier et al (2010) provide rich and detailed descriptions of fundamentalist belief and personality systems. The picture that emerges from these descriptions is one of low self-esteem being displaced onto "human nature," which is seen as inherently deformed. While the Book of Genesis says that humans are made in the image of God, this is not a salient feature of human nature for fundamentalists of the Abrahamic religions, who dwell on the effects of the Fall and the bondage of all people to sin. Salvation is completely unmerited; those who God chooses for salvation do not deserve to be saved and remain forever unworthy.

This contrasts with the viewpoint found in religious humanist writings, including Gourgey (2021) on Torah and the teachings of Jesus, Taylor (2018) on Black empowerment, Armstrong (2004) on the history of Jerusalem, Aslan (2011) on the origins, evolution and future of Islam, and Barber (2020) on faith and social justice in the United States. For religious humanists, creation in the image of God is the essence of human nature and evil is a

deformation of this essence. While they acknowledge that violence and oppression have marred society for centuries, they view history as a story of moral progress. For religious humanists, the future is uncertain but whatever it holds, humans will create it and will either flourish or perish together.

In summary, the fundamentalist might say "I'm not OK and you're not OK," to quote Eric Berne, "but God saved me." By contrast, the religious humanist might say "God is the infinite potential in all of us." What might account for such differences in belief and personality systems? Wilhelm Reich (1930/1980) and Adorno et al (1950) examined the role of sexual repression in the etiology of right-wing authoritarianism, including religious fundamentalism. Greven (1992), Heimlich (2011), Milburn and Conrad (2016), and Benson (2016) explored the nexus between punitive parenting and fundamentalism. D'Agostino (2019) used Q-sort data, psychoanalytic concepts, and Perceptual Control Theory to show how punitive parenting may give rise to the authoritarian personality.

In light of this research, it would appear that Freud's outlook in *The Future of an Illusion* continues to be relevant today, but applies mainly to the fundamentalist and not the humanist variants of religion. Religious humanists do not entertain crudely anthropomorphic notions of God, anti-sexual moral codes, gender stereotyping, or apocalyptic and otherworldly mindsets. The afterlife is not a salient feature of their meaning systems, and many do not believe in any kind of individual survival after death. The faith of many religious humanists consists of a mystical appreciation of the unity of all things, which they have in common with thinkers such as Plato, Spinoza, and Einstein. This distinguishes them sharply from fundamentalists, who tend to embrace dichotomous and individualistic thinking, culminating in an eternal rift between the saved and the damned at the end of history (Strozier et al, 2010). Religious humanists generally embrace spiritual values such as non-violence and love, and frequently define God as the epitome of love.

As with all social typologies, the one we propose here is a continuum and not a dichotomy. "Fundamentalists" and "Humanists" are what Max Weber called "ideal types," and particular religious communities and individuals are complex composites that range across the entire continuum and are rarely situated at either of the poles. This complexity can be seen in the different meanings attached to the word "love." Those close to the fundamentalist pole may reject altogether the notion that "God is Love," while those closer to the center may qualify it by saying that God is also strict and demanding. When talking about love, fundamentalists frequently use the term "tough love" as a euphemism for punitive parenting.

Christian theologian Donald Capps (1995) describes this mindset and the use of religious ideas and biblical injunctions to legitimize punitive parenting. He expresses eloquently the painful relational trauma that corporal punishment creates for children and the resulting lifelong wounds to self-esteem. Capps also mobilizes the biblical tradition as a resource for healing the "mutilated soul" of adult survivors of childhood religious abuse. (For a summary of Capp's work, see Benson, 2016). By contrast with fundamentalists, when Capps and other humanists say that "God is Love," they typically have in mind something like what Eric Fromm or Martin Buber meant by the term. Benson (2016) discusses this fundamentalist-humanist continuum using examples from American Protestantism, and traces divergent images of God to associated parenting norms.

JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES: FROM METAPHYSICS TO AFFECTIVE NEUROSCIENCE

C. G. Jung's Analytical Psychology, and his ideas about the nature of religion and the problem of death in particular, are inextricably bound up with his theory of the collective unconscious and its archetypes. According to this theory, the unconscious as Freud understood it—the contents of the individual's mind repressed over the course of his or her lifetime—rests on a much broader, deeper, and older foundation of unconscious content. Jung called the former the personal unconscious and the latter the collective unconscious.

Jung noted that recurring, apparently universal symbolic types appeared both in the world's mythologies and in the dreams of modern people of all cultures. These include, for example, the Anima and the Great Mother, two distinct personifications of the archetypal feminine. Other archetypes include the Hero, the Trickster, and a geometrical symbol of wholeness called the mandala, which appears as a circle enclosed in a square (or a square inscribed in a circle).[2] For Jung, the process of individuation can best be understood in terms of the ego's evolving relationship with these universal structures of the human mind, not only in terms of the psychodynamics of the personal unconscious.

While this conceptual framework seemed satisfactory and compelling to Jung and his followers, the collective unconscious and its archetypes have seemed like extraneous metaphysical baggage to their critics. Jung had talked about archetypes as somehow related to humanity's several million-year prehistory; did this mean they were a product of natural selection? He was silent on this question, as was Eric Neumann in his 1949 Jungian classic *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Walters, 1994). Failing to

relate their theory of archetypes to natural history or evolutionary biology, were the Jungians left with a notion of eternal entities like Plato's Forms? If so, how could Jung's claims to be advancing psychology as an empirical science be taken seriously?

A breakthrough in addressing this dilemma was Anthony Stevens' 1982 book *Archetype: A Natural History of the Self*. Stevens reinterpreted Jung's archetypes as hard-wired neural structures similar to the "innate releasing mechanisms" that Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen proposed to explain stereotyped behavior in birds. Viewed in this way, archetypes could be understood as products of natural selection and investigated rigorously using the tools of ethology, anthropology, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience.

Stevens' work meshed nicely with the emerging fields of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, as developed further by Buss (1994), Pinker (2002), Geary (2005) and others. According to one influential formulation (Barkow et al, 1992), evolutionary psychologists refute what they call the Standard Social Science Model (SSSM), which construes the human neonate as essentially a "blank slate" whose subsequent cognitive and personality development is entirely determined by environmental input and social interaction. They viewed the SSSM as closely related to behaviorism and a 100% "nurture" position in the nature-nurture debate.

In this classic version of evolutionary psychology (Barkow et al, 1992), the human brain was decisively shaped by natural selection operating on cognitive/behavioral algorithms or modules. The environment in which this evolution occurred—what John Bowlby called the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness (EEA)—lasted from 2.6 to .3 million (300,000) years ago—from the beginning of the Pleistocene epoch to the emergence of anatomically modern humans (homo sapiens).

Algorithms that were adaptive in this environment—such as those facilitating acquisition of food, mating, parent/child attachment, and effective responses to predators—would have conferred survival advantages in these domains of activity for those possessing them. In this way, according to evolutionary psychology, the modern human brain came to incorporate a repertoire of "domain-specific" cognitive-behavioral algorithms that equipped humans to effectively navigate the kinds of recurring opportunities and threats that occurred in the Pleistocene. Walters (1994), building on Stevens (1982), interpreted the Jungian archetypes as algorithms of this sort.

The foregoing version of evolutionary psychology is not consistent with what is now known about the human brain and its evolution, and in particular with plasticity of the neocortex (Ellis and Solms, 2018), that is, with an absence of hard-wired structures in the neocortex. Domain-specific cog-

nitive-behavioral algorithms cannot be entirely encoded in genes (Ellis and Solms, 2017) and therefore cannot be products of natural selection. Karmiloff-Smith (1995) showed how cognitive-behavioral modules are constructed in the early years of childhood.

This is not to say that the neonate brain is a "blank slate," a notion that was always a straw man in the context of modern neuroscience. Rather, it appears that the brain's genetically programmed systems are those involving sensory-motor and affective functions (Panksepp, 1994; Ellis and Solms, 2018), not specific cognitive-behavioral domains represented in the neocortex. The kind of neural modules that Jung and the Jungians call archetypes are perhaps best understood as emergent outcomes arising from interaction between the above-mentioned innate systems and the infant's nurturing environment (Becker and Neuberg, 2019).

Conceptualizing the Jungian archetypes as emergent outcomes of nature-nurture interaction (Becker and Neuberg, 2019) puts Analytical Psychology on a solid scientific foundation. The genetic sources of the archetypes are the general sensory-motor and affective modules of the brain. Their environmental sources, which account for their domain-specific character, are the experiences of birth, attachment, social interaction, and the awareness of death that shape the psyches of every individual.

Given this scientifically viable interpretation of the collective unconscious and its archetypes, what light does Jungian theory shed specifically on the nature of religion and the problem of death? Here we build on Erich Neumann's 1949 classic, *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic.* Neumann (1949/1990) proposed a psychosocial typology distinguishing between the "Old Ethic" and the "New Ethic." By the former, he meant the authoritarian cult, whether of a tribal shaman, a great religious seer such as Jesus or Muhammad, or a modern political dictator or would-be dictator.[3]

In an authoritarian cult of the Old Ethic, the leader's personal experience of a higher reality and charismatic communication of that vision to his devotees form the basis of the community. The devotees' own experience of the higher reality is mediated or validated by the leader, his teachings, and his duly authorized delegates. By contrast, under the New Ethic, the leader empowers his or her followers to experience the higher reality for themselves. Neumann viewed the psychoanalytic and depth psychology movements as exemplary of the New Ethic.

Neumann's psychosocial types are not a dichotomy but form a continuum. Some religious communities are more authoritarian than others and may be located on different points of the continuum at different times in their histories. Gautama Buddha and Adi Shankara, by teaching their devo-

tees the practice of meditation, were arguably as much practitioners of the New Ethic as was C.G. Jung, Neumann's preferred exemplar of this type. While organized Christianity and Islam ossified into Old Ethic authoritarianism for most of their histories, to take another example, it should not be assumed that Jesus and Muhammad were themselves practitioners of the Old Ethic. The operative principle in the New Ethic is that leaders promote the individuation of their adherents, while the Old Ethic was predicated on a merging of the adherent's subjectivity into that of the leader.

Neumann further distinguished the Old and New Ethics by reference to the archetype of the Self, the basis of the above-mentioned "higher reality," denoted variously as God, Brahman, Allah, or, in its modern scientific embodiment, the laws of nature that account for the order found in our observable universe. If all the other archetypes are analogous to gods and goddesses in a pantheon, the Self is the supreme deity.

Like all archetypes, when the Self is activated, it can be brought into consciousness or projected onto outer reality in a manner analogous to complexes of the personal unconscious. When the Self and other archetypes are projected, God and the gods are then encountered as external entities existing over and above human beings. The withdrawal of these projections and recognition of the archetypes as constitutive elements of one's own mind, according to Neumann, is the process that supports individuation and psychological integration. Projection of the archetypes is thus associated with the Old Ethic, while individuation and withdrawal of the projection are associated with the New Ethic.

The specific content of archetypal symbolism varies from culture to culture. The ancient Greeks, for example, envisioned the archetype of the Self as Zeus, the Anima in her various manifestations as Athena, Aphrodite and other goddesses, the Hero as Achilles and Odysseus, etc. With Christianity, the Self is envisioned as the biblical God, and other archetypes as Jesus Christ, Satan, the Virgin Mary, demons, and angels. Medieval Christianity replaced the cult of the Greek and Roman heroes with the cult of the saints. In today's scientific civilization, the Self becomes the impersonal laws of nature, and the biblical creation myth is replaced with the Big Bang Theory. In the neoliberal capitalist (market fundamentalist) variant of modernity, deities such as the Almighty Dollar, the Free Market, and the Evil Government populate the pantheon (Quiggin, 2010), while the Hero archetype is personified by cultural and political celebrities (D'Agostino, 2021).

Finally, in Analytical Psychology, Death itself is an archetype. When Death appears in dreams, myths, and religious lore, Jungians interpret it as a symbol of transformation. Some phase or construct in the psyche is coming

to an end and something new is emerging in its place. This interpretation of the meaning of death is consistent with reality as currently understood by astrophysics and ecological science. The chemical elements of our bodies were created long ago in stars, strewn across the galaxy in great explosions when the stars died, and coalesced to form our solar system, the earth, and ourselves. When a living thing dies, its body decomposes into nutrients that will become new plants and animals. Similarly, when a person dies, the life they lived continues in the ways they have touched the lives of others, for better and worse.

Like other archetypes, Death as a symbolic construct can be experienced consciously or projected onto external reality. In traditional societies, someone projecting this archetype would typically envision death as a transportation of the self from one's time and place on earth to an otherworldly realm of some kind. In modern societies, such projection may take the form of envisioning some future state of medical science in which longevity has been extended indefinitely. Unlike the afterlife, however, this modern version of symbolic immortality provides little comfort to anyone who dies before medical science reaches the promised land. In any case, the only real solution to the problem of death is withdrawing the projection, which means accepting one's own mortality while also recognizing that one's unique life arises from and returns to its source in nature and human community.

RELIGION AND DEATH: A UNIFIED PERSPECTIVE

To bring the foregoing disparate inquiries into a coherent conceptual framework, we will need to step back and view the subject matter of religion and death in two broader contexts. The first is humanity's current historical situation—that of a global capitalist civilization groping for pathways to a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future. The second context is the natural history of humanity—the several million-year biological evolution that created homo sapiens from hominin ancestors, and more recent cultural and behavioral evolution since the advent of anatomical modernity around 300,000 years ago.[4]

From the dawn of behavioral modernity (40,000 to 50,000 years ago) until the emergence of industrial capitalism in eighteenth century Europe, humans went from being foragers to farmers. Despite the great diversity of these behaviorally modern but pre-capitalist cultures, it appears they were all alike in one fundamental respect. The common denominator, we surmise, is a traditionally religious view of reality. According to this view, there is an eternal cosmic order that subsumes nature, human society, and

a divine realm of some kind (Campbell, 1988). The capitalist and scientific revolutions upended this cosmic order and ushered in our own era of accelerating transformation—social-cultural, technological, and political-economic (Polanyi, 1944/2001).

The Bible of this new and dynamic civilization was Adam Smith's 1776 book *The Wealth of Nations*. In the emerging world Smith outlined, social order would be based no longer upon religious obligation but henceforth on possessive individualism.[5] Innumerable individuals freely pursuing their own personal gain, he wrote, would be guided by the Invisible Hand of market rationality to advance the happiness of all. The road to this materialist utopia passed through the industrial revolution, which imposed horrendous hardships on the common people of Europe and now of the whole world. But images of the freedom and prosperity promised by capitalism have been kept alive by mass media, beginning with the print periodicals of Smith's own day, and culminating in radio, television, and the internet in the Twentieth Century.

In modern capitalist societies, it is hard for people to think about death organically and holistically as a phase in the continuity of life. Through the lens of possessive individualism, persons are regarded as separate and isolated monads measured according to their monetary net worth, rather than participants in an ongoing cosmic and social drama. The ego is viewed as the ultimate reality, and loss of the ego at death the ultimate annihilation.

Meanwhile, religion did not simply disappear, but took on novel forms. One was the new religion of possessive individualism itself, promoted by Freud's nephew Edward Bernays and other inventors of mass advertising (Curtis, 2002). The 20th Century also saw the rise of totalitarian civil religions, notably fascism and communism, and of religious fundamentalisms. Terror Management Theory sheds light on all these developments. It tells us that threats to one's meaning system exacerbate death anxiety, which in turn causes a person to cling even more fiercely to his or her cherished beliefs.

The rise of mass communications made such challenges to people's meaning systems chronic and routine (D'Agostino and Benson, 2021). The new medium of motion pictures, for example, became a cultural battlefield between racist films like The Birth of a Nation (1915) and Gone With The Wind (1939), and Charlie Chaplain's work celebrating social equality. While a mortal conflict between communist and fascist propaganda was raging in Europe, the United States saw a culture war between rural fundamentalists and urban secularists, which erupted in the 1925 Scopes Trial and continues until today.

By the turn of the third millennium CE, global corporations were allied with U.S. military hegemony and were deploying sexualized advertisements and other content promoting a consumerist lifestyle (Curtis, 2002), undermining traditional religions around the world (Sacks, 2003) as capitalism had previously threatened rural Protestantism in the United States. This "clash of civilizations" was the context in which fundamentalist jihadis staged globally televised attacks in 2001, striking the World Trade Center—a symbol of transnational capitalism—and the Pentagon, a symbol of U.S. military hegemony. The George W. Bush Administration responded to these attacks—which were both potent death reminders and forceful challenges to cherished American immortality systems—with a nationalistic War on Terror that escalated both the death imagery and the clash of civilizations. While the Obama Administration dialed back this militant foreign policy, America's first Black president became an intolerable challenge to the country's millions of white supremacists, opening a new, domestic front in the culture wars.

For religious fundamentalists and other adherents of authoritarian cults, the possessive individualism of capitalist culture is supplemented by or replaced with distinctive worldviews having archaic elements. Examples include the belief that God will destroy the entire world except for a faithful "remnant" of believers, who will enjoy permanent happiness in Heaven (Strozier et al, 2010).

The prevalence and tenacity of such cults suggests that possessive individualism cannot satisfy our species' deep-rooted need for community. Humans are social beings and will create and seek out novel forms of community if the dominant culture fails to meet their needs. As indicated earlier in this article, individuals suffering from low self-esteem may be especially attracted to the forms of community offered by religious fundamentalisms and other authoritarian cults. But the underlying problem is the large-scale failure of possessive individualism to provide authentic community, not just some people's personality deficiencies.

This brings us to the second context in which we need to understand religion and the symbolic construction of death—the biological, cultural, and behavioral evolution of homo sapiens. King (2017) argues that religion developed as a means to construct social meaning in groups and to increase group cohesion. Identification with one's group may be viewed as a generalization of mother/child attachment, which is more basic than fear of individual, eventual death, as discussed previously. Accordingly, the imperative to be a good and valued member of one's community is common to all religions, while the doctrine of an afterlife or "salvation" is not. Studies have

found that being part of a community (religious, political, workplace, or other) helps people cope with trauma (Bond, 2015). Jonathan Haidt (2012) identifies moral foundations that share a social and not survival focus. These include care/harm (developed out of child-rearing); fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion (developed out of reciprocal altruism); and sanctity/degradation (developed out of hygiene).

These considerations raise the topics of altruism and cooperation, which would be anomalies in nature if evolution is a zero-sum competition of individual organisms. Theories of inclusive fitness (Hamilton, 1964) and group selection (Nowak et al, 2010) were developed to explain these apparent anomalies. However, the atomistic paradigm underlying these theories, which reflects the individualistic zeitgeist of capitalism, is inadequate for understanding biology (Miller, 1978; Capra and Luisi, 2014; Alon, 2019) or even physics (Coopersmith, 2017). In reality, nature consists of interconnected systems and networks, not a free-for-all of individual organisms (Miller, 1978; Capra and Luisi, 2014; Krohne, 2017); altruism and cooperation are thus emergent outcomes of evolution requiring no special explanation (Cazzolla Gatti, 2011).[6]

Ever since anatomical modernity about 300,000 years ago, an enormous and programmable neocortex has enabled humans to far exceed other animals in constructing languages, social structures, technologies, and meaning systems and to transmit them from one generation to the next by way of culture. In light of all this, evolutionary psychologists might need to rethink the notion of genetically inherited behavioral algorithms.

As for the death construct, we hypothesize that it came about in three stages. The earliest is emergence of the human fight-flight system for managing threats, which evolved through natural selection and became encoded genetically as parts of the hypothalamus and limbic system. Here death is cognized as threats to survival, a representation that most animals seem to possess in one form or another.

The second stage is grieving the death of kin, a capacity that humans share with some primates (King, 2017). Ancestor cults, probably the earliest form of religion, may have emerged at this stage. In these cults, dreams were interpreted as encounters with ancestral spirits; belief in an afterlife may have originated in this context.

The third stage in the symbolic construction of death is the individual's awareness of his or her own mortality, which depends upon the uniquely human faculties of autobiographical memory and prospection. These faculties are built up in the neocortex during normal childhood development. Such capacity had certainly evolved by the advent of behavioral modernity

(40,000 to 50,000 years ago), possibly earlier. With the neural capacity for autobiographical memory and prospection, pre-historic humans could cognitively connect the dots between the threat of death at the hands of predators, grief at the death of others, and the prospect of eventual loss of ego due to one's own inherent mortality.

The synthesis of these three elements into a complex representation of death would appear to be a precondition for the denial of death as Ernest Becker (1973) understood it. The elaboration of this death construct to include symbolic immortality as a terror management strategy, and the possible relationship of this development to ancestor cults, are topics that merit further research.

Note, however, that the prospect of one's own eventual death would not by itself be a reason for terror. Indeed, fear can only occur when the hypothalamic-limbic fear/stress system is activated, a system that evolved for managing threats from predators. Fear of one's own mortality thus requires a soft-wired connection of neocortical circuits representing one's unique identity and eventual fate with this more primitive sub-cortical fear system.

In other words, terror management is not a response to anything real, notwithstanding Becker's and the existentialists' assumption to the contrary. Rather, it is the response to a fear-inducing symbolic construction by the human mind/brain regarding the meaning of eventual, individual death. This construction generalizes fear from biological dangers to threats to the ego, which Freud discussed as an element of mental illness. It is predicated on a narrow identification with the ego, a relatively small and individualistic part of the personality, by contrast with the Jungian "Self," which encompasses all aspects of the personality including the collective unconscious, and thereby transcends strict individualism.

To be sure, *all* of human experience is a construction of the mind/brain. But some constructs such as hungry tigers, speeding cars, and fatal diseases represent real things that can kill us prematurely. Our mind/brain is well designed to fear such threats when we encounter them and take corrective action if possible. Death, per se, is not one of these things and therefore not anything to fear.

CLINICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Understanding that archetypes are not entirely encoded in human genes but arise from the nature-nurture interaction clarifies what needs to be researched about the origins of religion and systems of symbolic immortality. The question now is not how archetypes of the Self and of Death might have been adaptive for prehistoric hominins. The question is how and why

archetypes are constructed out of interaction between the child's nurturing environment and her or his brain's developing sensory-motor and affective systems (Becker and Neuberg, 2019). The works of Melanie Klein and other object relations theorists (Kavaler-Adler, 2019) are highly relevant to this question, as is the attachment literature (Fonagy, 2001). At the same time, this Jungian / affective neuroscience question can provide a fruitful direction for research and dialog that spans the often provincial domains of different psychodynamic schools of thought.

The unified perspective on religion and death outlined above subsumes classical Jungian and Freudian approaches to these topics and can provide a more evidence-based approach to clinical practice. That said, Jung's classification of symbols according to underlying archetypes continues to be relevant. For example, the appearance of a monarch or president in a client's dreams may indicate that the archetype of the Self has been activated for some reason in the person's waking life; understanding what this is about can facilitate the client's individuation. If the person at this time is experiencing an identity crisis, for example, recognizing the Self archetype in their dream may empower him or her to feel in charge of their life and navigate the crisis productively. Details about the ruler in the dream and specific associations may be clues to the parts of her or his psyche that can resolve the identity crisis.

The archetype of the Shadow has implications for personal as well as social transformation. On the personal level, the construct of Good and Evil has its roots in infancy, where the infant's positive and negative affective states are projected onto the mother (Kavaler-Adler, 2019). Superimposed on these earliest experiences involving attachment are those in later childhood, especially resulting from punitive parenting (Miller, 1986; Greven, 1992; Milburn and Conrad, 2016; Heimlich, 2011). Survivors of punitive parenting typically exhibit repression of rage, which may be projected onto scapegoats (e.g., where white males are enabled to victimize "the other;" D'Agostino, 2019), projected onto others like oneself (e.g. where Black males victimize one another; Taylor, 2018), displaced onto one's own children, or turned onto oneself, as in the case of a female drug addict discussed by Miller (1986). Recovering this unconscious rage and bringing it to consciousness can be central to the healing process for such individuals (D'Agostino, 2019).[7]

At the societal level, displacement of unconscious rage onto political scapegoats is central to the psychology of authoritarianism (Milburn and Conrad, 2016; D'Agostino, 2019). Scapegoats that can represent the punished child are usually vulnerable outgroups, such as Jews in Nazi Germany, Muslims in Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist regime, or Blacks and immi-

grants in the politics of white supremacism in the United States. Those who displace their rage onto scapegoats typically persecute others because they find it too painful to confront the traumatic memories of their own abusive treatment by parents. Related to this syndrome are problems with vulnerability/mourning, which in individuals can indicate a developing Antisocial Personality Disorder.

When political scapegoating and similar displacements are expressed in the consulting room, they can provide important clues to clients' unconscious complexes. For example, idealization of public agencies that use force, notably the military and police, may be clues to the client's experience of corporal punishment in childhood (Milburn and Conrad, 2016). This displacement of introjected feelings of power onto authority figures typically alternates with scapegoating, indicating that the client is oscillating between "identification with the aggressor" and discharging the unconscious rage of the inner punished child (D'Agostino, 2019).

Therapists can also intervene at the societal level by supporting parenting education. For example, parenting classes in schools can help free future generations from attachment disorders and punitive parenting (Kind, 2014). Teaching these classes to boys as well as girls also helps dismantle the intergenerational transmission of gender stereotypes, notably the notion that baby care is woman's work (Miedzian, 2002). Another parenting education initiative is the French magazine PEPS (https://pepsmagazine.com/), which provides a forum for parents to share positive parenting practices and experiences. Other parenting education resources include *The Wonder Weeks* book and website (https://www.thewonderweeks.com/) and The Parenting and Relationship Counseling (PaRC) Foundation (http://www.theparcfoundation.com/).

Freud deserves much credit for starting to describe the multifaceted and complex world of unconscious motivations. Repressed psychic contents that remain unconscious can sabotage a person's life, while these same contents when brought to consciousness can be sources of courage, energy, resilience and creativity. Freudian clinicians have traditionally exercised caution with intervention so that the client has his or her space to develop their own narrative. Jung's theory of archetypes continues to be relevant for clinicians. His appreciation for the unity of life is also needed today more than ever, to safeguard the survival of our species and our planet's biodiversity.

Consistent with Jung's understanding, we need to re-learn a proper reverence for life as a process that began eons before homo sapiens and will continue eons after us. Life is a gift to us, and the appropriate response is gratitude, an emotion that is salutary for humans both individually and col-

lectively (Guengerich, 2020). We need to replace possessive individualism with what Jung called individuation, an ongoing and mutually enriching dialog between the conscious ego and the entire unconscious psyche. With greater wisdom we can create science that understands, and technologies that work with, the intelligence inherent in our own bodies and the planet's biosphere. Humanity can thereby stop intervening in these natural systems in destructive and unsustainable ways, and learn to meet our own needs without diminishing Earth's biodiversity.

As explained in Eric Neumann's psychology of religion, individuation in the Jungian sense is bound up with the withdrawal of archetypal projections. Recognizing and owning the Shadow, for example, can help overcome both individual dysfunction and destructive political polarization and deadly conflicts in society as a whole. Meditation is an important healing modality that can be put into practice by individuals. One effortless form of meditation (Transcendental Meditation), rooted in India's Vedic tradition but not requiring any religious beliefs, has been validated by voluminous peer reviewed research (O'Connell and Bevvino, 2015).

Life is a process of change and practicing therapists know that every therapeutic gain also entails loss of some psychic element or configuration that must be given up for growth to occur. Mourning enables us to find meaning in such loss, and the habit of mind that accepts change and mourning prepares us to accept our own eventual biological death. If a person experiences loss as overwhelming or presents with high death anxiety, an inquiry into their meaning systems, or lack of them, is indicated.

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ENDNOTES

1. This role of group identification in terror management presupposes and is superimposed on a more fundamental process of group identification that predates homo sapiens and behavioral modernity. Ethologists beginning with Lorentz and Tinbergen have documented the ways in which individual animals across many

species seek to maintain connection to their group. For primates, attachment to the group may be an extension of attachment to the mother, which Harry Harlow investigated in his classic experiments with rhesus monkey infants (Association for Psychological Science, 2018). This is consistent with Lifton's point that separation/connection is foundational for the symbolic construction of death, but most animals who seek attachment lack autobiographical memory and prospection, so their primitive forms of identification with something larger than themselves cannot be motivated by death anxiety. Such identification would appear to be adaptive for animals, since separation from the mother or group can make them more vulnerable to predators and other dangers. Similarly, Sopolsky (2017) documents the chronic stress effects for humans of feeling marginalized in a group (e.g. having marginal socio-economic status), with potentially severe consequences for survival; in extreme cases, "shunning" can lead to death.

2. The "squaring of the circle" found in mandalas represents a synthesis of opposites, which can only occur when the individual consciously endures and adequately confronts internal conflicts. Jung saw this process as the path to creative solutions, individuation, psychic integration, and wholeness.
3. The reader may be wondering how Neumann's Old Ethic/New Ethic typology relates to the Fundamentalist/Humanist typology presented in the previous section. Our answer is that the two typologies overlap substantially but we are presenting them with somewhat different purposes. We present Neumann's typology by way of summarizing the contribution of classical Jungian thought to the psychology, sociology, and history of religion. Our proposed Fundamentalist/Humanist typology is a tentative classification of existing religious communities with respect to low and high self-esteem of adherents. Each of the two typologies can advance the study of religion in different ways, and will hopefully be superseded by a more elegant conceptual framework grounded in future research.
4. We refer to anatomically modern humans as Homo sapiens. Some research indicates that Neanderthals were a subspecies of Homo sapiens (Smithsonian Institution, 2021), in which case it would be more precise to use the subspecies label "Homo sapiens sapiens."
5. C. B. Macpherson (1962/2011) coined this term to describe a private property oriented political philosophy that arose in 17th Century England; Adam Smith's later version of possessive individualism (though Smith himself does not use this term) articulates more fully the logic of this new way of thinking and provides what is arguably its classical programmatic formulation (Heilbroner, 1953/2000).
6. Theories of inclusive fitness and group selection also assume incorrectly that behavior is generated by algorithms that can be inherited genetically. In reality, organisms do not behave according to fixed algorithms, but generate whatever actions are needed to control certain perceptions (Mansell, 2020; Powers, 1973/2005 and 2008). Robotic models based on Perceptual Control Theory (Young, 2020) may shed light on how simple organisms such as insects can generate complex behaviors. This same PCT approach is being used to model social interaction, including collision avoidance (Powers, 2008), communication, dyadic animal contests, and large-scale conflict and cooperation (Mansell, 2020). D'Agostino (2019; 2023) used Perceptual Control Theory to elucidate unconscious processes of identification and displacement associated with political behavior.
7. Modern Psychoanalysis has developed a model for working through repressed rage, where patients go from discharging overwhelming aggression safely to finally learning to argue in a convincing way to create allies for constructive pursuits. The analyst

plays a psychologically highly active role in this process, because the initial "joining" interventions which get clients to start verbalizing dammed up aggression require the analyst to at least temporarily/partially adopt a mindset where the client's position or attitude, which usually elicits argument, can be accepted, even if it conflicts with the analyst's usual values and elicits disgust or other aversive reactions. In this endeavor, it can be helpful to keep in mind Jung's archetypes, such as the Shadow or the Trickster (Covitz, 1982).

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