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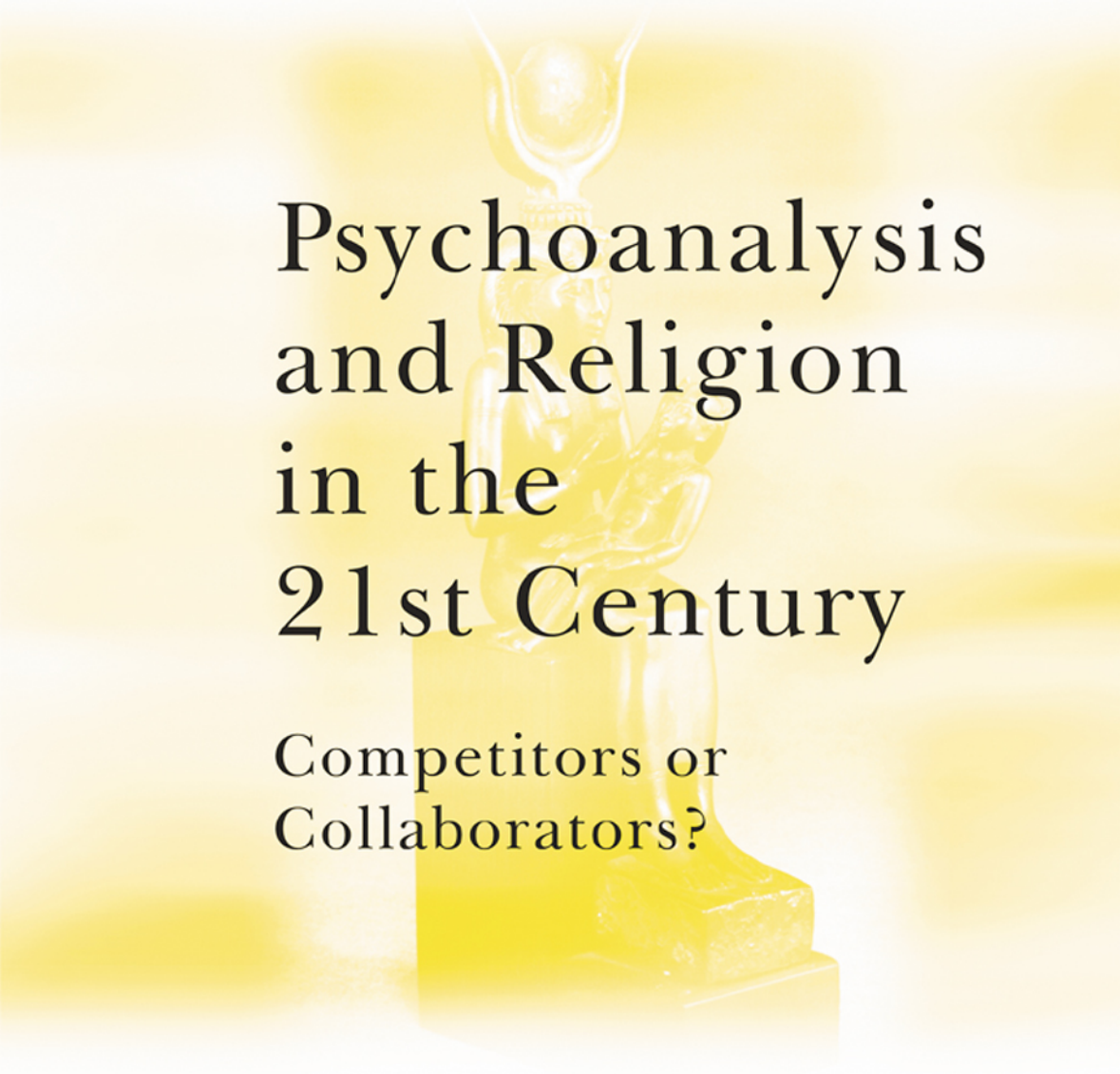

Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century

Competitors or Collaborators?

Edited by

David M. Black

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS, LONDON

Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century

Freud described religion as the universal obsessional neurosis, and uncompromisingly rejected it in favour of 'science'. Ever since, there has been the assumption that psychoanalysts are hostile to religion. Yet, from the beginning, individual analysts have questioned Freud's blanket rejection of religion.

In this book, David M. Black brings together contributors from a wide range of schools and movements to discuss the issues. They bring a fresh perspective to the subject of religion and psychoanalysis, answering vital questions such as:

- How do religious stories carry (or distort) psychological truth?
- How do religions 'work', psychologically?
- What is the nature of religious experience?
- Are there parallels between psychoanalysis and particular religious traditions?

Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century will be of great interest to psychoanalysts, psychoanalytic therapists, psychodynamic counsellors, and anyone interested in the issues surrounding psychoanalysis, religion, theology and spirituality.

David M. Black is a Fellow of the Institute of Psychoanalysis, London, and works as a psychoanalyst in private practice and teaches on a number of professional trainings. He has published widely on psychoanalysis in relation to religion, consciousness and values.

Contributors: David M. Black, Rachel B. Blass, Rodney Bomford, Ronald Britton, Malcom Cunningham, M. Fakhry Davids, Mark Epstein, Stephen Frosh, Francis Grier, David Millar, Michael Parsons, Jeffrey B. Rubin, Neville Symington, Kenneth Wright

THE NEW LIBRARY OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

General Editor Dana Birksted-Breen

The New Library of Psychoanalysis was launched in 1987 in association with the Institute of Psychoanalysis, London. It took over from the International Psychoanalytical Library, which published many of the early translations of the works of Freud and the writings of most of the leading British and Continental psychoanalysts.

The purpose of the New Library of Psychoanalysis is to facilitate a greater and more widespread appreciation of psychoanalysis and to provide a forum for increasing mutual understanding between psychoanalysts and those working in other disciplines such as the social sciences, medicine, philosophy, history, linguistics, literature and the arts. It aims to represent different trends both in British psychoanalysis and in psychoanalysis generally. The New Library of Psychoanalysis is well placed to make available to the English-speaking world psychoanalytic writings from other European countries and to increase the interchange of ideas between British and American psychoanalysts.

The Institute, together with the British Psychoanalytical Society, runs a low-fee psychoanalytic clinic, organizes lectures and scientific events concerned with psychoanalysis and publishes the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. It also runs the only UK training course in psychoanalysis which leads to membership of the International Psychoanalytical Association – the body which preserves internationally agreed standards of training, of professional entry, and of professional ethics and practice for psychoanalysis as initiated and developed by Sigmund Freud. Distinguished members of the Institute have included Michael Balint, Wilfred Bion, Ronald Fairbairn, Anna Freud, Ernest Jones, Melanie Klein, John Rickman and Donald Winnicott.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2006
by Routledge
27 Church Road, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 2FA

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Typeset in Bembo by
Keystroke, Jacaranda Lodge, Wolverhampton
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall
Paperback cover design by Sandra Heath

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Psychoanalysis and religion in the twenty-first century : competitors or
collaborators? / editor, David M. Black.
p. cm. – (The new library of psychoanalysis)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-415-37943-1 (hbk) – ISBN 0-415-37944-X (pbk)
1. Psychoanalysis and religion. I. Black, David M. II. Title.
III. Series: New library of psychoanalysis (Unnumbered)
BF175.4.R44P786 2006
201'.6150195--dc22
2006006453

ISBN13: 9–78–0–415–37943–1
ISBN13: 9–78–0–415–37944–X

ISBN10: 0–415–37943–1
ISBN10: 0–415–37944–X

The subjectivist in morals, when his moral feelings are at war with the facts about him, is always free to seek harmony by toning down the sensitiveness of the feeling . . . Truckling, compromise, time-serving, capitulations of conscience, are conventionally opprobrious names for what, if successfully carried out, would be on his principles by far the easiest and most praiseworthy mode of bringing about that harmony between inner and outer relations which is all that he means by good. The absolute moralist, on the other hand, when his interests clash with the world, is not free to gain harmony by sacrificing the ideal interests . . . Resistance then, poverty, martyrdom if need be, tragedy in a word – such are the solemn feasts of his inward faith . . . Any question is full of meaning to which, as here, contrary answers lead to contrary behavior.

William James

In most interesting subjects we do not want a decision procedure because we want to pursue a deeper level of understanding than that represented by our current questions and the methods we have for answering them.

Thomas Nagel

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dana Birksted-Breen, General Editor of the New Library of Psychoanalysis, whose idea this book first was, and whose generous interest and invariably prompt emails helped greatly to keep the project moving forward over nearly five years. I am grateful too to all the authors, who worked hard to produce their contributions and have been impressively tolerant of my amateurish attempts to edit them. Special thanks to Rachel B. Blass, Ronald Britton, Mark Epstein and Michael Parsons, who first presented their papers at a conference at the British Psychoanalytical Society in June 2003; those papers became the nucleus of the present book.

Most of the contributions are published here for the first time. I am grateful, however, to the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, for permission to reprint Rachel B. Blass's article, and to Karnac, for permission to use Ronald Britton's chapter (a variant of which appeared in *Sex, Death and the Super-ego*). I am also grateful to Dilip Chitre, translator of *Says Tuka: Selected Poems of Tukaram* (Penguin India and Sontheimer Cultural Association), for permission to use the poems quoted in Francis Grier's chapter; to Faber & Faber for permission to use lines from 'Autobiography' in *Collected Poems* by Louis MacNeice in Kenneth Wright's chapter and also for 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird', in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* by Wallace Stevens in Mark Epstein's chapter.

References to Freud's works (SE) are to the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated under the general editorship of James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press.

D.M.B.

INTRODUCTION

David M. Black

This book is entitled *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century*, that is, in the second century of the existence of psychoanalysis. In this introduction, I shall attempt to sketch something of the broad currents of thought which flowed into and through the first psychoanalytic century, in which psychoanalysts for the most part either ignored or disparaged religion, and which now makes up the background to our present, very different, situation. Although the detail of the history is complex and entangled, perhaps some larger lines can be glimpsed with reasonable accuracy.

The metaphysical questions to which religions provide an answer have traditionally been summarised as 'God, freedom and immortality'. Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century wrote a series of 'Antinomies' (1929) demonstrating persuasively that there were irrefutable arguments in favour of all three of these things; he then, no less persuasively, demonstrated that there were equally irrefutable arguments against them. It seemed that philosophy could not settle the questions of religion.

In the century following Kant, the century of Charles Darwin and the formative years of Sigmund Freud, the prestige of religion among educated people shrank at extraordinary speed. The theory of evolution, so long in being formulated and yet, once formulated, so simple as to seem virtually self-evident, left religion without a leg to stand on in the new, compellingly successful, industrial and scientific landscape. Man himself, who in the 'Abrahamic' religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) was God's last and most treasured creation, bearer if he lived his life rightly of a unique and sublime destiny, now showed up in the new understanding as just another player in the evolutionary lottery. Man had done well so far, but only because, as it happened, he was well able to adapt to recent planetary conditions. Change the temperature of the oceans or the composition of the atmosphere by a few percentage points, and man would be

replaced by lichens or beetles. The survival of the fittest, as Darwinians never tired of pointing out, didn't mean the best; it just meant those who happened to fit the environment. The new science knew nothing of any hierarchy of values.

This was not true, of course, when it came to assess its own achievement. Freud was 3 when Darwin published *The Origin of Species* (1859); the scientific world he entered as a teenager was awestruck at Darwin's achievement. All through the 1880s, while Freud was in his twenties and early thirties, working as a laboratory scientist and then gradually entering the field of neurology, Friedrich Nietzsche was pouring forth his astonishing flood of publications, ending with his tragic collapse into madness in 1889. Nietzsche's perception, *God is dead; everything is permitted!*, led to his essentially manic fantasy of an *Übermensch*, a 'superman', who would be heroically joyful and defiant despite the essential futility of life in the godless, post-Darwinian universe. More often, the implications of Darwin's insight caused religious thinkers to feel profound anxiety, a state of mind movingly conveyed, for example, in Tennyson's great elegiac poem *In Memoriam*.

When, from his mid-thirties onward, Freud invented psychoanalysis, he continually tested his hypotheses against the Darwinian question: how is *this* (whatever it might be: sadism, masochism, homosexuality, grief, depression, suicide, war) – how is *this* compatible with evolution? What part might it play in rendering the species fit for survival, or of what useful function might it be a distortion?

A great deal of Freud's thought is illuminated when one remains aware of this fundamental biological preoccupation (which he often verbalises, but not always). The huge importance of sex in Freud's theory, for example, is not just some cultural reaction to the manners of late-nineteenth-century Vienna; it springs from Freud's ever-present awareness that sexual selection is how a species – any species – comes into being. Sexual intercourse will not happen, and the next generation will not grow to sexual maturity, unless individual organisms preserve themselves. Sex and self-preservation, therefore, were the two fundamental drives in Freud's first attempt to formulate drive-theory. (Later, his attempts to understand narcissism, mourning and the 'death drive' made his picture very much more complex.)

One of the complicating factors that increasingly preoccupied Freud was guilt, the spontaneously arising deep pain we can feel about the way we have treated others (our 'objects' in psychoanalytic language). In his later writings, Freud comments wonderingly on the power that guilt can have in human life, even when invisible to the onlooker and unconscious even to the person. The self-reproaches of melancholics, which can drive them to suicide (so puzzling to a Darwinian), or the fate of some people to be 'wrecked by success', or to refuse all help, including psychoanalytic help, because success fills them with such unbearable guilt that they can't or won't take advantage of it – things of this kind, the 'deadly power of unconscious morality' (Alvarez 1992), make up

resistances which can be insuperable even by the most patient and skilful psychoanalyst.

It is in this double context, both of his materialistic post-Darwinian science and of the profoundly intractable psychological difficulties he was encountering, that I think we should see Freud's Stoicism. Freud is often described as a pessimist, but that isn't really correct. Freud was a Stoic. Stoicism in its classical form was a religio-philosophical system which insisted that we should know our emotions accurately, not because that would make us any happier, but because otherwise our emotions would lead us astray and cause us to betray our highest values of Truth and Goodness. Freud's famous statement that 'much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common human unhappiness' (Freud 1895: 305) has the familiar tone of comfortless truth-telling, the refusal to be seduced by consolation, that we find in classic Stoic writers such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. (Later, with the death of his daughter and his cancer of the jaw, Freud had a great deal to be stoical about, but the roots of that disposition were present from much earlier on.)

So Freud's philosophical attitudes can be mapped, to some extent, on a traditional religious cartography. But his general and very influential view of religion was unambiguously negative. Human beings, and particularly 'our wretched, ignorant and down-trodden ancestors' (1927: 33) have always had to find ways to deal with the reality of their helplessness in countless situations in life. We are like children, said Freud, who long for a strong father to protect them, and this wish can be gratified by believing in a powerful God. The institutions of religion are adapted to meet specific, universal fears: we have to make vital decisions, yet never have any certainty about our rightness in doing so – a set of divine commandments allays our anxiety about right and wrong. We suffer grief and terror in the face of death and transience – religion allows us to believe in an afterlife where we will re-meet those we have lost. We feel bitter resentment that our enemies flourish and go unpunished – religion consoles us by assuring us that *their* afterlife will be one of horrible suffering. In short, as Freud demurely remarked, with so many advantages, no wonder religion has been so successful.

But this left Freud with a problem. For one thing, as Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979) has pointed out, he was contradicting his own understanding of the lifelong importance of fathers (he always had less to say about mothers). Moreover, he knew that many people he admired, including the Protestant pastor Oskar Pfister and the French writer and pacifist Romain Rolland, were committed religious believers, and yet by no means the ignorant and morally pusillanimous people who, according to Freud's theory, were likely to be attracted to religion. It was Rolland who responded to Freud's highly critical discussion of religion in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) by saying that Freud had failed to understand the 'oceanic feeling' out of which religion is born. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud mused on Rolland's phrase. He professed himself

to have no awareness of such a feeling: he could only conceive it as a wish for 'the restoration of limitless narcissism' – the 'primary narcissism' which Freud believed to be the condition of the newborn baby.

Freud's failure to find anything to respect in religion is puzzling. In all other departments of life, he upholds the fundamental, powerful developmental insight of psychoanalysis, that what we call mature functioning is continuous with what we call immature, and cannot be cut off from it without impoverishment. When it comes to religion, however, he adopts the stance of the conventional nineteenth-century *paterfamilias*: he subjects 'the infantile' to condemnation and ironic mockery. He seems unable to entertain the thought that religious attitudes, like the other components of human psychology, may have their immature, their pathological, and also their relatively mature modes of expression.

Nevertheless, it's probably unfortunate that Rolland, a follower of the Vedantic Hindu teacher Sri Ramakrishna, should have attempted to persuade Freud by using a phrase (the 'oceanic feeling') so open to misinterpretation. As Malcom Cunningham's contribution in this book shows, Vedanta has far more rational arguments in its favour. Freud's proud contrasting of religion with science (religion is an illusion, 'our science' is no illusion) might well have been better challenged by a more direct enquiry as to the basis of such certainty, a questioning of the objective nature of psychoanalytic observations and of the sharp distinction Freud draws between 'reality' and 'fantasy'. More recent philosophers of science have found this distinction much harder to maintain. In the words of Karl Popper:

> Science does not rest upon solid bedrock. The bold structure of its theories rises, as it were, above a swamp. It is like a building erected on piles. The piles are driven down from above into the swamp, but not down to any natural or 'given' base; and if we stop driving the piles deeper, it is not because we have reached firm ground. We simply stop when we are satisfied that the piles are firm enough to carry the structure, at least for the time being.
>
> (Popper 1959: 93–94)

This picture, of science constructed like a sort of mental Venice, is one that would have appealed to Freud, and in his less authoritarian moods he knew well that science cannot deliver certainty. His thinking would have been subtler and richer if he could have borne some such picture in mind when he was reflecting on the complex relations between science and religion.

At the same time, as Pfister and others pointed out, Freud's attack on religion does accurately identify many of its weaknesses. The withers of few believers will remain entirely unwrung by Freud's criticisms. Religions – perhaps the highly mythological Abrahamic religions in particular – do indeed tempt people into the childish postures Freud described. Coming from a Christian background, I remember my own shock once, imagining the terrifying con-

sequences of a nuclear war, when I realised I was entertaining a secret thought to the effect: 'God won't let it happen'! Such fantasies clearly merit Freud's attack.

Why should we be interested in psychoanalysis-and-religion?

Before I comment, necessarily very briefly, on a few of the later analysts who wrote about religion in the twentieth century, I want to address one question which may be in the reader's mind. Why should we be interested in this topic of psychoanalysis and religion? If we are psychoanalysts, or if we are believers, isn't that enough? What do we gain from the dialogue?

I think there are several answers to these questions, and I shall outline two of them.

First, how are we to understand 'religion'? Psychoanalysis has often spoken about it in the singular, as if individual religions are all cut from some uniform cloth, and what applies to one applies to all. Perhaps that may be true of the Abrahamic religions, with their sacred scriptures, intense beliefs about specific historical events, and powerful, often blood-curdling, moral imperatives; but are these the same sort of thing as Buddhism, for example, where the emphasis is put on experience and understanding, honest doubts are welcome, and moral shortcomings are rather matter-of-factly described as 'hindrances'?

Looking more closely, however, one finds that Buddhism too has had a tendency to evolve mythological expressions, massively so in Tibet, and the Abrahamic religions have also developed deeply thoughtful and experiential mystical schools, such as Sufism in Islam, even despite the terrible dangers of being labelled heretical. This dichotomy of mythic and mystical is a key issue in understanding all the major religions, and it's interesting that it's present also in what I shall suggest are the two seminal contributions made by British psychonalysts which have influenced the religious debate: Winnicott's notion of transitionality relates to the mythic level, Bion's O to the mystical.

The theologian Raimon Panikkar used to speak of 'lethal dichotomies' which tempt the logical mind to annihilate one term in favour of the other. 'Free will' and 'determinism' are one such lethal couple, 'mind' and 'body' are another. If we refuse to view them as flat contradictions, such dichotomies can give rise to 'creative tensions'. The logical mind wants to make a 'lethal dichotomy' out of different levels of discourse: the mythic and the mystical, the empirical and the mythic, and so on. Psychoanalysis, with its patient recognition of the ubiquity in mental functioning of unconscious phantasy, can help to protect religion from this tendency, and with it from the stark alternatives of fundamentalism and total disbelief. In that sense, psychoanalysis has a contribution to make to religion, perhaps one of particular relevance today.

The second answer points to a benefit to psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, given its roots in the biological sciences, is unable to identify an adequate base for the sense of values. Kleinian-Winnicottian object-relations theory confirms that we live in an irreducibly moral universe, but the desire or lack of desire to make reparation to our objects for the damage we have caused them, in internal or external reality, remains a purely affective story. Important as it is, it leaves values as a wholly subjective category. If someone were to decide, like Shakespeare's Richard III, to set aside thoughts of love and be governed by hatred, we might hate him in return, but we would not be able to say he was wrong. (Some of the statements made by terrorists, or by Nazis such as Heinrich Himmler, allow us to see the outcome of such decisions in brutal reality.)[1] It doesn't seem enough to say that our objection to these attitudes is solely a matter of subjective preference, though neither of course can we claim that our values are wholly objective.

I have attempted elsewhere to examine the claims of 'sympathy' (in the sense of an unavoidable involuntary response to affect, not in the sense of 'sympathising') to give a possible base for what is objective in our sense of values (Black 2004). I think this offers a fundamental guideline, but it remains vulnerable to a riposte, perhaps from a Nietzschean superman, who says: 'I choose to despise my sympathetic reaction'. Even the most morally sensitive individuals must of necessity often override their sympathetic responses: ethical decisions are rarely between 'right' and 'wrong', far more often between options that all have something to be said for them.

For this reason, if we are to get beyond a solely affective, subjective basis for values, a further dimension, to give that basis duration and stability, has to be sought for. This cannot be done by interpreting our objects of conviction as purely 'transitional'; it requires a further step of explicit commitment, conscious 'faith', however that is to be understood. William Meissner, addressing this question later in the century, linked faith to 'the supernatural', a traditional term which can't be used intelligibly in a scientific context. Meissner (1984: 216) spoke of the supernatural as an 'irresolvable point of difference [between psychoanalysis and religion] in that the analytic perspective inherently has nothing to say about it'. But in fact this matter of faith or conviction, its origin, its nature, and its externality to the scientific vision, is of inescapable importance to psychoanalysis, and indeed to science more widely. It is implicit in the sort of philosophical understanding of science represented by my quotation from Karl Popper. Rachel B. Blass, in her chapter, suggests that, by the time he came to write *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud too was becoming aware of a need to account for his convictions, which were passionately held, but not founded on scientifically respectable, empirical observations. Blass addresses this crucial question of religious truth very centrally, and is critical of a widespread tendency among modern psychoanalysts to, in her view, sidestep it.

These arguments, that psychoanalysis can help religion by its insights into the formation and functioning of internal objects, and religion can help psychoanalysis by its understanding of the nature of faith or conviction, point to important ways in which the two disciplines can interrelate. There are many others. As time has gone on, and the scope of psychoanalytic thought has deepened and widened, psychoanalysts have become increasingly aware of the powerfully formative influence of the wider culture (in particular as embodied in language) and of the experience of previous generations. This influence has been especially conspicuous in psychoanalytic work with second- and third-generation survivors of the Holocaust and other episodes of genocide and terrorism. Such work helps us to see that matters of vision (how human life and the universe are 'conceived' or imagined), and the values that flow from such vision, not only crucially affect the individual, but also unconsciously influence the larger issue of transgenerational psychological stability. There are questions here which we are still learning to formulate.

The first generations after Freud: the 1940s and 1950s

The first generations of psychoanalysts, daunted by Freud's authority and submitting too, no doubt, to the Zeitgeist, tended not to question his position on religion. (The fate of Jung did not encourage independence of thought in such matters.) Ironically, while Freud was writing the papers of his final period (say, 1917–1939), two great political systems came into being, based precisely on the rejection of religion and the proclamation, in the one case, of a philosophical materialism, and in the other of a racism based on eugenic ideals derived, however distortedly, from Darwin. The consequences of Communism and Nazism were to preoccupy most of the rest of the twentieth century. In both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, the scientific establishment, with rare exceptions, meekly put its expertise at the disposal of its new masters. Nazism exploded the psychoanalytic profession, and sent large numbers of its Jewish practitioners, including Freud himself, out of central Europe into Britain and the Americas.

Following Freud's death in 1939, some of those psychoanalysts who ventured to stand apart from the mainstream, particularly among the Jews who had escaped to the United States, began to assert a more positive valuation of some aspects of religion. Karen Horney towards the end of her life became intensely interested in Zen Buddhism. Erik Erikson wrote studies of Luther (1959a) and Gandhi (1969) that contain some of the most perceptive pictures of the place of religion, as a powerful sensitising factor in an individual life, that psychoanalysis has to offer. Erikson came from a family in which his mother could not or would not declare unambiguously who his father was; when he moved to the United States he adopted the name Erikson and declared himself his own father (Friedman 1999: 147). Writing of the young Luther, he shows profound

sympathy for a religious young man, defying an all-too-present and forceful father in a somewhat similar passionate search for identity, this time in the complex cultural world of the late Middle Ages. For a modern Jew to understand a medieval Christian monk with such generosity and imagination is truly remarkable, and a great tribute to the flexibility of psychoanalytic thought.

In his age-based schedule of fundamental developmental tasks, Erikson links religion with the earliest stage of all, that in which the baby develops (or fails to develop) 'basic trust' in the world and in himself. Erikson here provides a striking psychological criterion for the value of religion. 'Whosoever says he has religion', says Erikson, 'must derive a faith from it which is transmitted to infants in the form of basic trust; whosoever claims that he does not need religion must derive such basic faith from elsewhere' (1959b: 65). Later he makes a similar point: 'The clinician can only observe that many are proud to be without religion whose children cannot afford their being without it' (1965: 243). This is again the issue of transgenerational psychological stability.

Of these early, independent-minded psychoanalysts, Erich Fromm came closest to anticipating a thought which has intrigued several more recent analytic thinkers (Grotstein 2000; Eigen 1998), that a 'religious' vision may be the ultimate destination of the road on which psychoanalysis is an important early step. Fromm, a refugee to the United States from Germany, was deeply shocked by the passivity of Catholic and liberal Germans in the face of Nazi oppression; they hadn't condoned it but they had failed to take a positive stand against it. (The similar passive acquiescence of the German scientific establishment likewise awakened another brilliant young scientist, the Hungarian Michael Polanyi (1958), then working in Berlin, to the inescapable centrality of moral issues.) Fromm (1942: 181) thought he found the explanation in the 'state of inner tiredness and resignation, which . . . is characteristic of the individual in the present era even in democratic countries'. He attributed this resignation to the moral corrosions of modern culture, in which true values go unaffirmed, and meaningless desires are fomented by the all-pervading, psychologically informed methods of advertising and the mass media. Such techniques, adopted by the Nazis for their own propaganda, are ubiquitous in the world of capitalism. Pursuit of these over-stimulated desires, said Fromm, leaves one confused, exhausted and dissatisfied – and then irritably vulnerable to the sado-masochistic appeal of authoritarianism.

Fromm ends his most famous book, *Fear of Freedom* (1942), with a call for a new faith: 'a faith', he said, 'that is the strongest the human mind is capable of, the faith in life and in truth, and in freedom as the active and spontaneous realisation of the individual self' (1942: 238). It is hard to dissent from that admirable list of abstractions, but hard too to imagine it persuading anyone onto the barricades. Perhaps recognising this, Fromm, like Horney and many others in the United States, later turned with admiration to a more specific 'faith', namely Buddhism. He was particularly attracted to Zen Buddhism which,

following the defeat of Japan, D.T. Suzuki brought to the west in the 1950s with impressive charm and scholarship. Fromm's 'humanistic psychoanalysis' approved especially of the positive value Buddhism sets on well-being (as opposed to the 'negative' psychoanalytic goal of reducing neurotic misery), and philosophically he approved of its elimination of the split between self and object, which he felt led to 'affective contaminations and false intellectualisations' (Fromm 1960: 108).

Fromm writes with an attractive ardour. Read today, his writing seems to suffer from the rather diffuse idealism and abstraction of his time, but the issues he raised continue to be central in any discussion of psychoanalysis and religion.

New developments in the mainstream: the 1950s and 1960s

In the 1950s and 1960s, mainstream psychoanalysis in Britain and the United States took diverging paths. The Kleinian development in Britain generated huge intellectual energy (not only in designated Kleinians); American psychoanalysis, excessively tied to psychiatry, was slower to free itself from the burden of authoritarian postures. Both traditions were then further liberated by the wider cultural changes of the 1960s, the decline in deference to authority, and the ubiquitous challenge of feminist and postmodern thinkers to authoritarian 'discourses'.

In Britain, Melanie Klein emphasised that 'unconscious phantasy' was the underlying element crucially influencing all mental activity. A loyal Freudian, she attempted to derive all such phantasy from the two great drives of Freud's final period, Eros and the death drive, but she came under pressure from a new and powerful theory, developed especially by the Scottish analyst Ronald Fairbairn, who claimed that the individual was primarily 'object-seeking' – i.e. governed by a wish for certain sorts of human relationship – rather than drive-driven. To a large extent, the power of Klein's thinking derived from her refusal to accept that these two pictures were contradictory. Unconscious phantasy, for her, was shaped both by the drives directly and by internalised experiences with others which had in turn been constructed and modified by the drives and by yet deeper layers of phantasy and earlier levels of experience.

This vigorous theory derived from the revolution Freud had set going in psychoanalysis in his last twenty years (death drive, psychic structure created by identifications, a deepening recognition of splitting mechanisms), but in Klein's hands these various inchoate ideas gradually came together to make up a coherent and powerful narrative. Klein herself was indifferent to religion, but her theory radically undercut Freud's rather crude distinction between 'illusion' and 'our science which is no illusion'. Illusion, now renamed phantasy, could of course be delusive, but it was also seen as the necessary substrate for any richness or meaning that life could have. Freud's recognition of the power of 'unconscious morality' was now unpacked into Klein's much more detailed account of our

repeated attacks on the 'good object', and the importance of remorse, destructiveness, mourning and the wish to make reparation. Such themes, of course, have profound echoes in the preoccupations of mature religions. And although Klein on the whole preferred not to discuss large philosophical themes, her psychological theory was more compatible than Freud's with the sort of modern understanding of science represented by my quotation from Karl Popper.

Seen from a British perspective, the crucial changes that gradually caused analytic thinking to become more hospitable to religion were made by two men, Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion, both profoundly influenced by Klein. Winnicott in the 1950s set out to study what, in a resonant phrase, he called 'the substance of illusion'. He introduced his notion of 'transitionality', initially as part of an account of development in infants and toddlers (Winnicott 1958). A 'transitional object' is an object, perhaps a soft toy or a strip of blanket, which for the baby can be the target of any projection he or she currently needs to make. In the baby's mind, the transitional object is neither 'internal', in Klein's sense, nor external, in the ordinary adult sense; its reality is, so to speak, the baby's invention. The possibility of transitional phenomena, said Winnicott, emerges out of the mother's special capacity for relating and adapting to the needs and wishes of her infant. This enables the infant to have 'the illusion that what the infant creates really exists'.

A transitional object is 'created', as Winnicott puts it, by the infant's phantasy; its reality, external to phantasy, can be disregarded and must not be challenged. To ask factual questions about the object – 'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?' – is to annihilate it as a transitional object. To ask if the teddy bear is *really* what the child treats it as – a lovable friend, a safe protector, a bad child to be punished, an unwanted child to be abandoned, etc. – is to make a category mistake. The value of the teddy bear lies in the phantasy that comes to life in its presence; its eventual fate is to be 'decathected' – its function diffuses itself more widely into the child's environment, over which the child is now beginning to have more control, and the transitional object itself drifts into limbo. 'It is not forgotten and it is not mourned.'

Out of this experience with one or more transitional objects, the wider 'transitional space' of play and, increasingly, shared play develops. Once again, play is intensely important, is based in illusion, and cannot be challenged in reality terms without destroying it. Winnicott thought that in these transitional phenomena we see the roots of adult creativity and shared culture – ultimately of all the cultural worlds of art, religion and creative scientific activity (Winnicott 1971). This idea, as we shall see, has influenced many subsequent psychoanalysts concerned with religion (including Kenneth Wright and Mark Epstein in the present volume).

The other British analyst whose theory was to become especially influential in thinking about religion was Wilfred Bion. Perhaps more than any other psychoanalytic thinker, Bion struggled to find an accurate language to describe

the different sorts of operation that take place in the mind. Oppressed by the multitudinous associations which all our ordinary language for mental experience carries, he invented a sort of mathematical notation which would convey in an abstract diagram ('the Grid') the different types and levels of mental event. Artificial as this sounds, Bion used his notation very creatively to get a grasp on how thoughts become 'thinkable' in three domains: in psychoanalytic sessions, in mother–child interaction, and in psychotic functioning.

Like Freud, Bion was influenced by Kant, and he adopted Kant's fundamental belief that 'things-in-themselves' are unknowable: we can only know phenomena, never 'noumena'. To describe unknowable ultimate reality, Bion chose the symbol O, standing for Origin (the point at which the axes of a graph intersect; he was concerned that O should not be read as zero). O, said Bion (1965), can never be attained or put into words, but in our attempts to 'tell the truth' of our experience, whether as patient or as analyst, we are attempting to get closer to O. He sometimes speaks of O as the 'absolute facts' (of an analytic session, for example) (Bion 1965). These absolute facts can to some extent become known if certain 'invariants' are preserved between O and our attempts to represent it.

In this theory, O seems to have moved some way from Kant's 'things-in-themselves', and it's hard to know what to make of Bion's 'invariants' that are somehow present in something unknowable. Perhaps, however, we should embrace this difficulty as a necessary paradox. Seen from a religious angle, Bion appears to be dealing with the same puzzle that religious thinkers struggle with, of having different levels of truth that must (surely?) map on to one another; but how is that possible, if they are really on different levels? The Hindu upanishadic notion of *maya*, a world that is illusory but not exactly unreal, perhaps resonates with the relativised world of truth that Bion's O leaves us inhabiting. (Parallels with Indian thought may not be accidental. Bion was born and spent the first eight years of his life in India. When he died aged 82 he was within two months of returning for the first time to his native country (Bleandonu 1994). In his autobiography, Bion (1982) spoke of the ineradicable pain of his early exile.) Recent psychoanalytic thinkers on religion, particularly those drawn to Indian thought like Jeffrey B. Rubin, Mark Epstein and Malcom Cunningham in this book, have often found in Bion's ideas a valuable point of entry.

There has been no consensus among Bion's commentators on what to make of O. Neville Symington, who speaks of psychoanalysis as a 'spiritual activity', and Michael Eigen, who describes himself as a 'psychoanalytic mystic', have both based themselves in important ways on Bion's ideas; James Grotstein (2000: 290) perhaps goes furthest, believing that when he wrote of O, 'Bion was implying that the immanent "incarnate Godhead" is the thinker of "the (alleged) thoughts without a thinker"' – it being part of Bion's theory that thoughts can arise in our minds prior to the existence of an apparatus with which to think them.