Psychoanalysis and Religion

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How is the relationship between psychoanalysis and religion to be examined? It might seem that the best approach would be to study what each of them has to say about the human condition. We might compare religion and psychoanalysis as two theories about the human estate, two competing claims to truth. But there would be something abstract about treating them in this way. Psychoanalysis is a special kind of science and art, and religion comprises a way of life as well as a set of beliefs of a special kind. In many ways the two are incommensurate. I propose therefore to join the issue of religion and psychoanalysis in a more concrete way by asking how the psychoanalyst can be related to the religious beliefs of his patient. The issue of psychoanalysis and religion arises in its sharpest form in the interaction between analyst and patient, and some dimensions of this interaction may be relevant to the issue itself. The interaction between therapist and patient is not a mere occasion that lets the question be raised, something that could be discarded when the two elements, religion and psychoanalysis, come to the center of our discussion. The situation in which this problem arises is part of the phenomenology of the problem and part of a possible resolution.

I will examine the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis by commenting on the work of Hans W. Loewald, who has provided both an authoritative interpretation of the writings of Freud and a favorable view of the place of religion in psychoanalytic theory (Loewald 1978, 1980). My essay will discuss two topics: first, how the analyst can be related to the opinions of his patient, and how the patient can be related to the opinions of the analyst—in other words, how analyst
and patient can quote one another—and, second, how the object of religious dispositions and beliefs, how “the divine,” is to be understood. A third part will be devoted to bringing these two themes together. In developing these issues I will draw extensively on the principles of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology.

Loewald mentions two features of psychoanalysis as a science. The first is that the essence of psychoanalysis is interpretation. Its task is to interpret whatever the patient makes known to the analyst and whatever can be deduced from what the patient makes known; its task is to interpret such things in terms of personal motivation (1980, 103). A second feature of psychoanalysis is that the patient, the “object” of the science, is also able to enter into the investigative process: “there is no other field of scientific activity where the order of organizing potential is the same in the ‘object’ and the ‘investigator.’” Loewald goes on to describe psychoanalysis as “calling forth the investigator in the one investigated” (could Oedipus himself be described by a better phrase?). The object of study in psychoanalysis is not just a target; the object is called upon to express a self-understanding and hence to interpret himself and his behavior, to enter into interactions with the analyst, into transference relationships, and eventually to reinterpret himself and his actions in the light of what the analyst has said and done. Loewald, in “On the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis,” says, “If an [analyst’s] interpretation of unconscious meaning is timely, the words by which this meaning is expressed are recognizable to the patient as expressions of what he experiences” (1980, 238). The words spoken by the analyst “organize for him [the patient] what was previously less organized and thus give him the distance from himself that enables him to understand, to see, to put into words and to ‘handle’ what was previously not visible, understandable, speakable, tangible” (238–39). The patient is able to assimilate “the organizing understanding which the analyst provides” (239). Patient and analyst must interpret each other. This dialogical process, which has been described as such by Stanley Leavy (1980), is based upon the ability of the patient and the analyst to quote each other. Even to begin the process, the analyst must be able to understand, and hence to quote, what the analysand says, and the patient, in order to bring the process to its end, must be able to share in the understanding of the analyst. The interpretative nature of psychoanalysis thus depends on the possibility of quotations.

A further refinement is necessary “Possibility” can be taken in many senses. In one sense, we could investigate those conditions that render an individual psychologically capable of quoting someone else: we might ask whether this or that person has the detachment to cite someone else fairly, whether he has the acumen and linguistic resources to do so, whether this or that quotation is accurate, and the like. This sort of study of quotation presupposes that quotation as such is possible. It presupposes the ontology of quotation. Our discussion will move into the more philosophical issue of the ontology of quotation. We will examine how quotation as such occurs, how it differentiates itself from other modes of thought, awareness, and being, and how it occurs in the special context of the psychoanalytic relationship. The study of psychoanalytic quotation will shed light on the special form of intentionality at work in psychoanalysis.

One of the characteristics of higher-level mentation is that it permits many persons to possess the same meaning. No matter how private our own appropriation of a meaning may be, the core of the meaning, the sense, can be achieved by many. That is what permits agreement, but it also permits disagreement and confusion; people may think they are each formulating the same sense when in fact they are not. The publicness of meaning was recognized in antiquity and was forcefully restated in our time by Edmund Husserl in the critique of psychologism that he made, in 1900, in his Logical Investigations (1970, 90–224). Sameness of sense is made thematic in quotation, when we restate as the same what someone else says or thinks, and restate it precisely as having been stated or thought by that other person.

Although the core of meaning between quoted and quotter can be the same, there can be several perspectives, each formally different from the other, from which we can possess the one meaning. There can be several formally different voices that can each state one and the same sense. Let us consider the patient, the analysand, as the fundamental voice, as voice; then an ordinary interlocutor with that person would count as voice, which speaks from perspective, an ordinary observer of the conversation between the person and his interlocutor, a third party who simply watches and listens, would count as voice. The analysand is voice, spoken from perspective. Finally we can distinguish voice, and perspective: this is what we could call the voice and perspective of the philosopher. His stance is to reflect on the voices and perspectives of all the others, and also to think of the world and the things in it as they show up in the perspectives of all the others, as they are spoken about and disclosed by all the other voices. Of special
importance for our concerns is the fact that the philosopher also reflects upon the interaction between patient and analyst, and he examines this interaction formally as a process of manifestation; he does not serve as a superior analyst who might give the original analyst tips on improving his technique. The philosophical perspective is to analyze the process of disclosure as such, and to consider the participants formally as agents and datives of manifestation. The present essay is done from perspective, and is written and read in voice,

There is nothing to prevent one and the same person from working in more than one of these perspectives: the analyst may become a simple interlocutor for a moment ("Will you be able to take the subway home?"), or he can reflect philosophically on what he is doing as an analyst. But although the same person may speak in different voices, he should be careful not to blend and confuse what he says in one voice with what he says in another. A distorting fusion of horizons would result and perplexing ambiguities would follow; such overlaps provide the soil for category mistakes.

Before we determine more fully the nature of the psychoanalytical voice, let us amplify somewhat voice, the voice of the analysand. This voice is by definition a fragmented one. Some of what it says is spoken by the person who has come for analysis, but some of what it says is spoken by voices that have become entangled with the voice of that person: the voice of his father or mother, for example, or his own childhood voice as responding to his father or mother. The mixing of voices yields incoherences of speech and action. Things are taken and stated by this person in ways that are not in keeping either with what they are or with what he is. The analysand comes to the analyst to gain the ability to untangle these voices: to become able to speak in his own voice and merely to quote the voices that ought not to be his own, to become free either to appropriate them as his own or to dissociate himself from them. In his present state he is so entangled with them that he cannot quote, appropriate, or deny them. He has no distance from them, no distance to the someone talking in him who really isn't he himself. The patient has not sufficiently grown out of the early stages in which there is not enough "I" to make a difference between what I say and what you or they say. The analyst helps voice, distinguish between his own appropriating voice, voice, and the voice he wishes either to confirm or negate, voice.

The task of the analyst is to help the analysand make these distinctions. The analyst can help him do so because he, the analyst, can hear levels of voices that the ordinary interlocutors and observers cannot hear; the analyst can hear these voices in the patient because he has heard them in himself through his own analysis, and because, through his training, he has acquired categories with which to name the many and various voices working through one speaker. He has disentangled voice, and voice, in himself and is free to hear similar voices in the patient and thus to help the patient to acquire his own voice. He can regress with the patient to lower levels of mentation, but can at the same time keep the higher levels intact and so, as Loewald often says, remain ahead of the patient much as the parent remains ahead of the child and helps the child to come to terms with the world (Loewald 1980, 93, 229-30).

Let us contrast the voice of the analyst, voice, with other voices we have distinguished. The voices of the ordinary interlocutor and of the observer, voice, and voice, both have their own point of view on the world. Things seem to them to be in a certain way. Both these voices will agree with voice, in some respects and disagree in others; when they disagree, they will take the propositions of voice, as mere opinions and as false ones. They will say that the person is simply wrong in what he says. The voice, of the analyst is different in that the analyst does not, as analyst and formally speaking, have an alternative view of the world. He works into and stays within the perspective, of voice, he takes seriously everything that is stated by the patient's voice and does not reject anything as merely a false opinion.

On the other hand, the analyst does not simply absorb the world of the patient; he sustains a special kind of detachment and exercises a special kind of quotation: not the kind exercised by voice, and voice, the kind that merely tests the opinion to see whether it is true or not, but a new kind, one that listens to what is said in order to find out who is speaking and to bring the presence and power and source of that voice to the attention of the patient. The analyst hears more than is said. What is said is treated as a clue to who is saying it. The analyst is to discover the truth in the falsity of what the patient says, he is to discover the past event that is being repeated even as the patient thinks he is involved only with what is going on now. And when the termination of analysis occurs, the patient should have come to distinguish his own voice from the others that had been speaking in him, but the analyst also changes from living within the perspective of the patient to being an ordinary interlocutor or observer, to speaking in voice, and in voice, in regard to the patient. Indeed, it is interesting to raise the question of when it is that the analyst shifts from voice, to voice, even during the time of analysis, the analyst cannot stop being
someone who has his own view of how things are, someone who can say that what the analyses claims is not the case, someone who gradually "leads" the patient to himself and to the way things are.

In discussing the voices engaged in psychoanalysis, I have understated the affective dimension in this distinctive human relationship. Although psychoanalysis involves conversation and dialogue, its core lies in the transference that occurs between patient and analyst. This transference is substantially preverbal. The verbal dimension is essential to transference, but it lies on the surface. Transference is the reworking of affective attitudes and interactions that have been internalized by the patient; in analysis the patient is to reexternalize these interactions and attitudes, to direct them toward the analyst, who will respond in such a way as to help the patient to untangle appropriate and inappropriate feelings (Loewald 1980, 259–60, 309–11, 335) If in his early years the patient was, say, held in contempt by significant persons, and if he internalized this interaction and now holds himself in contempt, the transference allows him to reestablish the original interactions externally, to rework them and to make the crucial emotional distinctions, those that will allow him to react with appropriate feelings to new situations instead of blindly and persistently repeating the interactions of the past. The preverbal affective attitudes and interactions have to be reeducated; the analyst, the new object for the feelings, does not react in the way "the other person" used to act and react. The untangling that is done in regard to voice_in is primarily an affective untangling; the voice_in is in question is a voice pervaded with affectivity. As Loewald puts it, "narrative is drawn into the context of transference dramatization, into the force-field of re-enactment" (1980, 366).

There is something like quotation, something analogous to verbal citation, in the transference relationship and in the analyst's reaction to it. The analyst has to "catch" and reflect a feeling in the way he feels, much as a listener must capture and return someone else's opinion in the words that he, the listener, uses. The patient, as time goes on, may become able to pick up the feeling at a distance himself, to feel the feeling as though quoted, then feel it as to be either appropriated or denied. Thus there is a preverbal, affective dialogue in psychoanalysis, and the verbal exchanges and quotations draw their substance from it. The affective exchanges set the stage for the "timely" verbal intervention; they establish when the moment to determine something by words has arrived, when the time for the appropriate intervention and distinction has come. The words are there for the affectivity.

I should make a refinement concerning the ontology of quotation, whether verbal or emotional. Because of certain philosophical presuppositions, but also because of natural inclinations, we are very much tempted to think that when we quote someone else, we take over into our own awareness some sort of "mental representation" that exists in that person's psychic world. Loewald himself is aware of this misunderstanding regarding "mental contents" and he criticizes it; he writes, "I also question the by now common equation of self and self-representation, or of object and object representation, due to confused thinking in regard to the term "mental representation"" (1980, 351). When we say we think this or that, what we mean is that we believe the world shows up in a certain way; when we quote someone else, we state that the world appears to him in such and such a way, and we may either agree or disagree with that proposal. Even when we emotionally "quote" others, when we feel what they feel, as felt by them, we do not merely perceive one of their feelings or sympathize with their mental states; rather, we let certain things appear to us as charged emotionally, but as being so charged for the other persons. What people are trying to get at when they speak of mental contents or mental representations is not some sort of mental thing, but the way things and persons in the world seem to be. Thus when the analyst quotes the patient, he is not trying to discover what mental contents the patient has but trying to discover how the world appears to the patient, how the patient believes the world to be. Thinking is always articulation of some part of the world, thinking is always "outside"; even feeling is always a presentation of something worldly; and quotation is articulation of part of the world as it is proposed or articulated or felt by someone else. Quotation is an articulation to the second degree; it is not a peek inside, not a peek at someone's mental screen (Sokolowski 1979).

If the analyst's ordinary voice, is always in the background when he engages his professional voice_in analysis, the opposite is also true: when the analyst becomes involved in ordinary transactions, his professional voice_in and perspective, cannot be expected to disappear altogether. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1971) has commented about this in his debate with Habermas. Gadamer criticizes the attempt to introduce a new sort of art and science similar to psychoanalysis, an "emancipating reflection" (257), that would try to remove impediments to public communication and free society from ideological constraints. He claims that ordinary public discourse has its own hermeneutic integrity and that claims made in it should be answered on their own
terms Suppose there is a political disagreement and one of the speakers heatedly, even angrily, presents an argument for a particular course of action; this person has a right to be answered with political arguments, not with a psychological analysis of the causes of his anger (260). To blindside the speaker, to turn from the terms of the argument to an analysis of his voice, (in effect, to turn his voice, into a voice), is to destroy the integrity of public discussion; the intrusion of psychoanalytical expertise is "an upsetting factor," a Störungsfaktor in normal social exchanges (259). Gadamer admits that the technical ability of the analyst is bound to assert itself; even in ordinary conversations, the analyst will notice certain things. Speaking in voice, to an analyst is like writing a letter to a graphologist; you are "delivered over to him" even if you do not intend to address his analytical ability (259). But both the analyst and the graphologist must respect the content of the normal message and respond to it on its own terms. When they notice what is hidden to everyone else, they themselves must not become blind to what everyone else sees, the manifest content of what is being stated.

This brings us to the case of religion and the way quotations can take place in regard to religious language. What voice does the analyst use when quoting and discussing religious belief? And what is the content of religious expression?

II

The third chapter of Loewald's book Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual is entitled, "Comments on Religious Experience." Loewald begins this chapter by reminding us of Freud's negative view of religion. Freud thought that religion was "an illusion to be given up as we are able to overcome our childish needs for all-powerful parents" (Loewald 1978, 57). Freud's interpretation of religion was challenged by his friend Romain Rolland, who claimed that the experiential root of religion was an underlying feeling of being at one with the entire world. Freud said that he himself did not experience this sensation, which Rolland called an "oceanic feeling" or a "sensation of eternity," but he claimed that if it was experienced by some people, it might well be explained psychoanalytically as derived from the primary narcissistic stage in which the child has not yet developed ego boundaries between himself and his mother and between himself and the world (59–60, 68). But Freud says Loewald, "did not pursue his basic hunches, and under the weight of his authority religion in psychoanalysis has been largely considered a sign of man's mental immaturity" (57).

Loewald's own view, rather tentatively developed, is that religion may express not an immature regression, but a wholesome recognition of archaic mentation. He asserts that secondary processes should always be kept in touch with the primary processes that underlie them, at the risk of falling into "the madness of unbridled rationality" (56), and religion may be the expression of the archaic levels of psychic life that remain continuously present in us, no matter how easily we may overlook them. The point is not to allow primary processes to drown the secondary, but to keep access to the wellsprings of the primary process open even during the mature activation of secondary processes; the creative language found, among other places, in authentic religious expression may serve to express the moment at which "the density of the primary process gives way to the discursiveness and articulation of secondary process" (1980, 203). Secondary processes, says Loewald, are not a static state into which we enter, but activities that must be kept continuously alive, activities that must constantly draw nourishment from the primary process: "the range and richness of human life is directly proportional to the mutual responsiveness between these various mental phases and levels" (1978, 61). Freud tended to think of religion as dependent upon a need for an all powerful, "enormously exalted" father who would protect the believer, but on his own admission he could not account for the belief in maternal divinities that seems to have preceded belief in paternal gods (1978, 57; 1980, 8–9).

After observing that Freud spoke particularly of the boundaries between ego and the outer world, Loewald introduces the "equal if not more basic differentiation" in the development of mental life, "that of temporal modes" (1978, 61). The differentiation of past, present, and future is as basic as—perhaps even more basic than—the distinction between internal and external, and certainly both distinctions arise in function of each other. The importance of the temporal modes is emphasized in many passages in Loewald's work (1980, 43–52, 138–47, 149–73). His own treatment of religion, in the chapter we are examining, is developed largely in terms of temporality and eternity.

Loewald says that the idea of eternity should not be confused with that of everlasting duration, which is time projected indefinitely; rather, "in the experience of eternity, time is abolished" (1978, 63). Temporality accompanies secondary forms of mentation, but a glimpse of primary forms would involve the de-articulation of present, past, and
future, in an extreme condensation “The primary process in pure form is, I believe, extant in the experience of eternity” (65). Loewald describes instances in which we might catch such glimpses, moments in which time seems to be surpassed or undercut; in such cases “the secondary, rational form of mentation loses its weight. It is overshadowed or pervaded by the timelessness of the unconscious or primary process” (67). We try to express, in secondary-process categories, these experiences in which we touch the timelessness of the id, and then we speak, for example, of everlasting life after death (67). Loewald insists that such experiences are not simply illusions but “bring us in touch with levels of our being” (69). He observes that psychoanalysis can help formulate a positive sense for the experience of eternity and for the religious expressions to which it leads. This would be of great benefit because, he claims, religious experiences are “aspects of unconscious mentation . . . that in much of modern civilization are more deeply repressed than ‘sexuality’ is today” (74). He calls for a “genuine appropriation” of the forces at work behind the expressions found in religious traditions.

In response to Loewald’s interpretation of religious experience, one might be inclined at first to object that he postulates religion as directed only inwardly, only toward the psychic primary process, whereas religious belief is concerned not only with the psychic but with the worldly as well. But such an objection would not be effective, because Loewald claims that primary process is not “internal” as opposed to “external.” On this most basic level, inner and outer have not yet been differentiated. In the primary process there is neither an ego nor objects, no inside as opposed to outside; there is only the matrix within which boundaries are to be drawn (1980, 127–29, 167, 185). There is nothing in Loewald’s interpretation that would deny the possibility of cosmological divinities.

The primitive unconscious does possess features that are attributed to the gods in pagan religions. It is all-encompassing, and it contains powers that we will forever be unable to master. These powers, furthermore, are not just a spectacle before us; they are causes of our human condition. Somehow or other we come to be because of them, and we remain permanently under their influence. It is not inappropriate for us to respect these causes of our being in a way analogous to the manner in which those who believed in the Homeric gods might have respected the forces that were thought to have brought the human estate, and the world of that human estate, into being. Loewald makes a successful attempt to remythologize the chthonian gods.

It seems to me, however, that in his difference with Freud, in his criticism of Freud’s tendency to take religion as the wish for and the fear of an all-powerful father, Loewald neglects the role of the forces that were personified and revered as the Olympian gods. It would be difficult to consider Apollo, the god of music, law, prophecy, order, and pattern, as an expression of the id. Apollo is supposed to tame the dark gods of the underworld. That which arises as other to the primary unconscious is also one of the causes of our being, and it is equally unmasterable by our own deliberate efforts. It is true that the establishment of boundaries, and subsequently the establishment of orders and patterns, are achievements that we ourselves must carry out; but the very possibility that such things can be at all is not our achievement. As possibilities they transcend our own powers, and they are as “divine” to us as are the dark and chaotic forces. We can appropriate only what is already given as capable of being appropriated.

Loewald’s interpretation of the meaning of religion, together with the modification I have introduced, allows an analyst to translate the religious beliefs of a patient into the expression of certain basic and irreducible levels of being. Loewald’s interpretation allows the analyst to consider religious beliefs not as delusions but as the expression of something both real and important. It becomes possible for the analyst to “quote” the patient and to quote him with assent, but only after the belief of the patient has been translated into categories that are familiar and acceptable to the analyst, categories that express something positive in psychoanalytic theory. The quotation has to be mediated through a translation, and it is possible that the patient will not recognize the translation as valid. He might think that the translation says something other than the belief he wishes to express.

Such a concern about the accuracy of translation would be less likely to occur if the patient’s idea of the divine were that of a god who is part of the world, as the divine was, say, for the Greek and Roman poets and philosophers. For these thinkers, the gods are and must be part of what is. The gods are the best, most powerful, the most important and most independent, the encompassing parts, the parts that somehow order all the rest, but they could not be except as part of the whole. Loewald’s interpretation of the divine might give another name to such divinities, and it might locate the gods in another kind of part of the whole, but it would not really transform the divine into another kind of being. The translation would not be very different from calling Thor by the name of Jupiter.

The problem of the accuracy of religious translations becomes
more urgent, however, in the case of a patient who believes in the God revealed in biblical religion, the God who created the world and is not merely a part within it. In this sense of the divine, the world is understood as existing not under the sway of ineluctable forces, not just there and fated to be as it is, but as existing through the freedom of the creator. The believer—in this case the patient—also understands himself to have been created, to have been chosen to be. His relationship to God is not taken to be like his relationship to his primary unconscious, nor like his relationship to the ordered patterns that transform the unconscious into secondary forms of mentation.

The Bible, and the religious traditions stemming from the Bible, present not only a recommendation about what our attitudes and behavior should be; they also present something to be understood about the nature of things, about the world, about being. Distinctions are made, and the primary distinction concerns how the divine or the ultimate is to be understood. In biblical religion, the divine or the ultimate is not simply a principle of order or an originating force that is part of the world; it is understood to be distinct from the world, to be creator of the world. The word “creator” has a very exact sense in these traditions; it does not mean merely a “maker” or merely one who brings order into chaos or light into darkness. The creator is understood as being so distinct from everything other to himself that he could have been (or could be) even if the world had not been. Such an understanding is required for the full freedom and generosity of creation; only someone who does not need to give and who does not gain from giving can be so completely generous as the creator is understood to be. And as a correlative to this independence and generosity, the world itself is understood not as simply being there but as having been given being by the creator; and the believer is understood not only as the outcome of natural forces, evolution, and parental generation but also as having been freely given being by God. In this biblical understanding, there is something like freedom and generosity at work in the very being of the created whole.

The biblical understanding of God as creator does not arise for the patient as a gradual transformation of his own personal experience. It is presented to him by a religious tradition as a possibility of belief. That tradition itself is understood to be more than just a human achievement, whether individual or social; it is understood to have involved revelation as its specifying element, no matter how much the revelation may have been embedded in the structures of human psychic development. The “translation” of the patient’s beliefs, therefore, must not lose this understanding of God as other not only to the patient and his unconscious but other to the whole created world as well, and as capable of being, in undiminished goodness and greatness, even if there were no world.

In his essay entitled “Internalization and the Superego,” Loewald briefly mentions Christianity as “initiating the greatest intensification of internalization in Western civilization” (1980, 260). He says that the death of Christ represents for the believer the radical loss of “the ultimate love object, which the believer loses as an external object and regains by identification with Him as an ego ideal.” This occurs, Loewald says, in accord with the psychic processes of loss, mourning, and internalization. He calls this event “the death of God as incarnated in Christ.” His remarks are provocative and point the way toward further reflection on psychoanalysis and Christian belief, but I think some refinement needs to be made. The term “the death of God” is misleading, because in Christian belief the Godhead did not die when Christ died. Christ the man died, and this person who died was God, but his divinity did not die. God, as the ultimate object of love, did not die, is not lost, and is not to be mourned. (Loewald’s remarks show the contemporary relevance of the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon, which in A.D. 451 declared that the two natures of Christ, the divine and the human, retain their integrity in the Incarnation, and that the attributes of each nature as such do not become attributes of the other as such; the Godhead as such does not become mortal and does not die, no more than the humanity of Christ becomes eternal or omnipotent.)

I think that the set of relationships and transformations Loewald is getting at in his remarks about the death of Christ are better determined in terms of creation than in terms of redemption. The believer, in his understanding of creation, holds that the entire world, itself included, might not have been, and God would still be in undiminished goodness and perfection. Both the believer and the world are held to exist through God’s unnesssitated choice. The “loss” that is envisioned in this belief is the possible nonbeing of everything except God, not the loss of God. God is understood as that which could not die or be lost in this way. This belief is an understanding of how the world and the things in it can be; it is an intellectual comprehension. It is not presented as one of the affects-object-relations the patient has developed during his life. The patient in question may, of course, cathexis these objects in ways that are not in keeping with what they are understood to be, just as a particular patient may cathexis, say, food
in ways that are not in keeping with what food is as nourishment (as in the case of persons suffering from anorexia). A distortion brought about in a patient's appreciation of an object may be important in the treatment of the patient, but it does not destroy the sense that the object has as it is understood apart from that appropriation. In the case of the biblical understanding of God, the sense is determined by its expression in the Bible itself and in the ecclesial, theological, and spiritual tradition that stems from what is narrated in the Scriptures.

The biblical understanding of God, like all understandings of objects to which we can be related, indicates a pattern of behavior. It implies as a response biblical morality and virtues, such as faith, hope, and charity in the Christian biblical tradition. It also implies a biblical self-understanding on the part of the believer. If a person thinks he has been created by God, that he is known by God, and, in the Christian tradition, that he has been redeemed by the incarnate God, he will see his life and his relations to others in a distinctive light and will feel obliged to act in an appropriate way.

The biblical understanding of God goes beyond the senses of the divine expressed in both the chthonian and the Olympian gods, since the biblical God is not part of the world; nevertheless the biblical understanding does bear some resemblance to these two senses and it could therefore be misinterpreted as one of them. Like the chthonian gods, the biblical God is understood to be an ultimate origin for everything that is subsequently determined, and like the Olympians, he is understood to be a final end or completion of the things that are. Because of these resemblances, and because similarity is often taken for sameness, a writer like Loewald could misinterpret the biblical God in terms more appropriate to a worldly divinity. But the way the creator is an origin and an end is radically different from the way the pagan deities are understood to be sources and causes (Sokolowski 1982).

Loewald criticizes psychoanalytic theory for its tendency "to understand the very organization of the psychic apparatus in terms of defense" (1980, 27) and for its tendency to see "the relationship between organism and environment, between individual and reality ... as basically antagonistic" (28). He says that psychoanalytic theory has been influenced by modern social estrangements and complexities, and that it has "taken for granted the neurotically distorted experience of reality" (30) that he finds so widespread in contemporary life. Loewald thinks that Freud's misinterpretation of religion as an obsessional neurosis might stem from this modern social context and this overemphasis on defensive reactions (30). He suggests that ego develop-}

ment should not be interpreted primarily in terms of warding off intrusive stimuli and trying to restore a stable state; it should be seen more positively as growth into higher levels of integration achieved through ever greater synthetic functions of the ego. "The ego is an agency which organizes," (44) and new achievements can mean "a gain in its organization and functioning" (74). He says, "With further and higher ego organization, far from getting closer to a state of rest, there is more life" (74; see 176-77, 234).

The biblical understanding of God, together with the self-understanding it proposes for the believer and the form of activity it implies for him, can be interpreted as an opportunity for greater expansion and integration. It can be taken to open a new possibility for development of the ego, even for certain kinds of renunciation, mourning, and internalization. Whether or not it can truly be interpreted in such a positive way depends on two things: on its own intrinsic intelligibility, and on the effect it has on human lives. Thus there are two questions that can be put to the biblical understanding. One is philosophico-theological: Is this an intelligible understanding and not an incoherence? The other is psychological: Has this understanding been lived by persons who are not neurotic, and has it motivated distinctive patterns of behavior, or is it somehow essentially a neurotic or defensive projection?

III

By way of conclusion, I will make only one point concerning the way psychoanalysis might approach these two questions. As we have seen in the citation from Gadamer, both the handwriting expert and the psychoanalyst, when they enter into public discourse, must resist the temptation to overlook the face value of a message and to see primarily what the message reveals about the speaker. This temptation has been especially hard to resist because of the kind of natural science that was introduced by Francis Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, and because of the kind of voice that was associated with this science. The modern scientific tradition considers the rigorous mathematical method of science as the only way of truly describing the world; everything else we are aware of becomes taken as a subjective projection, a mere appearance, a secondary quality. A distinction is then introduced between a physical "outside" and a psychic "inside," between an "outer world" and an "inner world." The only voice with the authority to speak truthfully about the outer world is
the voice, of the one who can master the scientific method. This voice, tells the hard truth about the way things are; the other, nonscientific voices just tell us how things seem.

In this scientific tradition, it becomes plausible for the expert in psychoanalytic method to assume that he has the truth about the psychic and that he can hope to unlock the secret of all its projections, that he might be able to explain why things seem to us as they do, while leaving to the physicist the task of telling the truth about the external world. The Cartesian physicist, moreover, quotes the ordinary opinions of other speakers only with suspicion, taking them as mere opinions (Descartes 1555, 144–49), and the analyst may be inclined to do the same. This is the wrong kind of distance to take toward the statements of others; it is a misleading objectivity, one that emerges from the context set by the unfortunate dichotomy between inner world and outer world, a dichotomy related to what Loewald referred to as “confused thinking in regard to the term, ‘mental representation’.”

To adjust this context and to dissolve this dichotomy, one would need to show how the voice behind scientific method is established and how it is related to the other voices I have talked about in this paper. I will not pursue this discussion now; I will only remark that natural science itself no longer speaks only of things like force and energy but has begun to employ such concepts as “signal,” “representation,” “information,” “computation,” “code,” and “program,” concepts that are now seen to straddle the natural and the psychic (Holenstein 1987), and that natural science has become acutely aware of the role of the observer even in physics; the strong dichotomy between nature and psyche seems to be giving way to a more flexible relationship between the two. As these developments continue, and as they have more and more impact on our general self-understanding, they will provide a less constricting context for determining the place of the psychoanalytical voice, which, as Loewald has so often stated, is a voice of conversational exchange, not simply of detached observation.

References


Notes

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