

Ontology and Metaphor: Reflections on the Unconscious, and the ‘I’ in the Therapeutic Setting

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This article discusses various conceptualizations of the dynamic and the generic/descriptive unconscious. Studying the generic/descriptive unconscious, the author offers analogues from the field of quantum physics as models for understanding the concept as a statement about being. The author proposes understanding the dynamic unconscious as being created by interpretations. Critiques are offered for any reading of the unconscious, dynamic or generic, whenever any substantive reality is implied. Additionally, the ‘I’ is discussed as an “imaginative cultural construct”; its relation to community, in its formation and functions, is delineated. The implications for therapy are presented in light of the therapeutic relationship between psychoanalysis and spirituality – both understood in terms of the here and now of an individual’s life.

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If the entire cosmos were scaled down to the size of earth, the part accessible to us would be much smaller than a grain of sand.

– Brian Greene (2005, p. 285)

Freud, like any man who does not sacrifice the complexity of life to the deceptive simplicity of rigid concepts, has said a good many contradictory things.

– Hans W. Loewald (1980, p. 255)

While Freud was a graceful and evocative writer as well as a penetrating thinker, his use of certain metaphors has left some confusion in his psychoanalytic legacy as to how to conceptualize the unconscious. Although Freud clearly spoke of the unconscious in terms of psychic systems, he also employed some metaphorical images that suggest conceptualizing the unconscious as if it were a thing in itself – another mind, an unconscious mind. While metaphors generally aid human understanding, there is a danger of concretizing an analogy rather than allowing it to simply evoke deeper understanding. To speak about psychoanalysts, for example, as being similar to archeologists in uncovering what has been hidden or buried, locked away in a timeless vault, as it were, evokes the image of an unconscious (both generic/descriptive and dynamic) as an existent reality in itself. After 1923 Freud rarely, if ever, refers to what he spoke of in his topographical model as the generic/descriptive unconscious. His focus, as well as the focus of

most analysts today, was the *dynamic unconscious*, an unconscious that is basically a postulate for understanding symptoms, dreams and various parapraxes. In this article I would like to propose a new way of speaking about the dynamic unconscious, not simply the observation that one can only speak of an unconscious within the context of consciousness, but also, and more importantly, that the dynamic unconscious is *created by interpretation*. Before developing this thesis I will briefly summarize some of the critiques of the generally accepted notion of unconscious.

Philosophical Critiques

David Archard, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others have noted a tendency in psychoanalytic discourse to confuse masterful metaphorical modes of discourse with existent realities. Archard notes that we are predisposed to think that the use of the noun “unconscious” must automatically signify an existent ontological object, that is, a person, place, or thing. He (1984) writes: “Where the Freudians are mistaken is when they speak of an ‘unconscious mind’ to which elements like those in question belong and when they employ a causal language to explain their relation to current behavior...the coherent use of the adjective ‘unconscious’ does not necessitate the introduction of the noun” (p. 125). Charles Elder (1994) of the University of Chicago, in trying to “define” what one means by the

unconscious, writes that “to say ‘the unconscious exists’ is similar to the statement ‘Red exists’ in this respect: that while it looks as if it were a statement about the ‘object,’ it actually tells us something about our form of representation, that is, what kinds of descriptions are possible,” (p. 45). Wittgenstein, as we know, in his *Lecture, Cambridge 1932–1935*, offers his judgment that the psychoanalytic use of the unconscious confuses causes and reasons. Explicating Wittgenstein’s position, the French philosopher Jacques Bouveresse (1995) writes: “At certain moments the working of the unconscious is described as obeying objective laws of the purely mechanical type, at others the unconscious is invested with psychological properties similar to those of its owner, and credited with an intentional and intelligent behavior that seems appropriate only to a conscious agent” (p. 38). What these authors are addressing is the danger of conceptualizing the unconscious outside of the framework of consciousness, as well as speaking of it as if it were an ontological reality in itself, as if, as Bouveresse suggests, there were an unconscious subject actuating the unconscious wish.¹

Meaning and Metaphor

¹ Paulo Sandler (2004), in a recent article in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, asserts: “real analysis has to do with the underlying unconscious, which is not logical. It is timeless as are free associations and dreams, messengers of the unconscious” (p. 1492). “Messages from some timeless place” is precisely the type of formulation, when speaking of unconscious processes, which I believe is misleading. The allure of thinking about the generic unconscious and frequently the repressed unconscious as if it were a substantive entity, with its own intentionality, still haunts psychoanalytic thinking.

One approach to resolving the tendency to concretize the unconscious is to appreciate the metaphorical reality of psychoanalytic concepts. In order to evaluate my thesis that the unconscious is created by interpretation, I would like to briefly comment on the function of metaphors. A particularly productive approach is expressed by Henrik Enckell (2001) when he writes, “a metaphor is not a rhetorical ornament but an instrument; it says nothing that can be said “directly”; instead, it expresses something that cannot be captured in any other way. It does this by means of a visible medium and a task in which new semantic connections are woven” (p. 236). Speaking to the use of metaphors within psychoanalysis I (1998) noted, “a metaphor is, as we know, that which evokes something else – a use of analogy to promote a depth of meaning and emotional resonance, as when we speak, for example, of the evening of life. Just as a metaphor points to something else, locates the center of meaning somewhere else, we must remember that ultimately there is not, nor can there be, one definitive center of meaning. By the very nature of our capacity to use metaphor, we are guaranteed continuous new meanings” (p. 416). Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis (1973) also highlight the role of metaphors when they speak, for example, of “cathexis” and state that it “does no more than express an analogy between

psychical operations and the working of a nervous apparatus conceived of in terms of [electrical] energy” (p. 63).²

With the introduction of the structural model (id, ego, superego), which Freud used to classify psychological conflict, we can appreciate the terms unconscious, preconscious, and/or consciousness as adjectival or adverbial modifiers. Freud himself makes it abundantly clear that this structural model is precisely that – a theoretical model, metaphors for the elusive mind. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923/1961), Freud limits the use of the term unconscious to the dynamic unconscious; the generic/descriptive unconscious recedes. Freud writes, “We restrict the term unconscious to the dynamically unconscious repressed” (p. 15). In view of this definition, Freud would have no difficulty, I believe, with the following statement by the phenomenologist, Henri Ey (1978), “We must remind psychoanalysis of what the intoxication of discovery has caused it to forget of its first fundamental intuitions: there is no Unconscious without the structure of consciousness” (p. 329).

Situating Interpretation

² In reference to “energy,” Richard Feynman (1999) writes, “...energy is a very subtle concept. It is very, very difficult to get right. What I mean by that is that it is not easy to understand energy well enough to use it right, so that you deduce something correctly using the energy idea... It would be equally well to say that ‘God makes it move’...” (pp. 178–179). Therefore, my preference for speaking of such terms as metaphors.

In this article I hope to clarify the normative, that is, the creative, role of interpretation when speaking of the dynamic unconscious, and I am hopeful that such a discussion should help clarify Ey's statement. Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, I return to Freud's topographical model, to his generic/descriptive unconscious, and propose a reading of it as applicable not primarily to individuals under the rubric of primal phantasies and/or primal repression, but rather as an insight into the nature of reality, that is, as a statement about being.

My reading of the dynamic unconscious as *created by interpretation* not only does away with many of the criticisms of speaking about the unconscious as if it were a noun, but also of conceptualizing the analyst's role as that of discoverer and/or uncoverer. My reading of the generic/descriptive unconscious employs metaphors that come from quantum physics rather than the more mystical imagery some analytic writers employ when speaking about such an unconscious. My use of certain quantum physics concepts, however, goes beyond an attempt to reconceptualize the generic/descriptive unconscious. As applicable to both the dynamic as well as the generic/descriptive unconscious, many of the

findings and metaphors that quantum physics employs can, I believe, deepen our appreciation of psychoanalytic experiences.³

Freud had no desire to be a philosophical disciple of Plato; he wanted to establish a scientific, not a new philosophical, perspective.⁴ Yet in situating humanity within a new interpretative context he offered a new philosophical framework, a framework of radical personal inquiry. I will return to the discussion of the dynamic unconscious shortly, but for now we can note that in positing a generic/descriptive unconscious Freud offered, I believe, a reading of what many thinkers, from the medieval Meister Eckhart to the twentieth-century Martin Heidegger have referred to as *the ground of being*. Although Freud's generic/descriptive unconscious is primarily conceptualized in terms of the individual, it is possible to free it from such a limitation. Quantum mechanics theories, employed throughout this paper, can widen our lens and deepen our sense of appreciation for this ground of being, the ground of existence that can be understood as both supporting yet transcending each individual, a dimension of experience that is not directly knowable. Quantum mechanics offers the postulate of "a mist of infinite

³ Although I employ quantum mechanics models in my discussion, I am aware that contemporary neuroscience is providing an alternate approach to understanding the unconscious (and the nonconscious); see, for example, the work of Antonio Damasio (2003) as well as Mark Solms (2003).

⁴ Henri Ey (1978) postulates that Freud was describing "an unconscious structure of being" (p. 307), an interpretation that I agree with; my use of quantum mechanics analogues is meant to elucidate such an argument.

possibilities,” – a world of probability waves, of everything and nothing, so to speak. I use the model of “a mist of infinite possibilities” analogously in my discussion of the generic/descriptive unconscious.

Philosophers and mystics throughout the ages have alluded to a depth beneath the appearances with which we live. With the advent of quantum physics we have a scientific yet nevertheless elusive read on what we call reality. Its cosmological theories and findings not only address the history and structure of the cosmos, they support such philosophical inquiries as the nature of reality, the possibility and limits of knowledge, and offer a scientific appreciation of process, mystery, and awe. By the term mystery “I mean an awareness of an ever-receding, yet simultaneously inviting, horizon to one’s knowledge” (Gargiulo 2004, p. 25). Wisdom, a perennial goal of both philosophy and psychoanalysis, is, of course, a result of how an individual integrates such findings.

Quantum Mechanics Models

I would like to briefly situate my use of some quantum physics concepts and give a very brief overview of some of its major contributors. One of its primary exponents is Dr. John Wheeler, of Princeton University, who speaks of the micro world that supports our macro world as *a mist of infinite possibilities, a jittery foam of probabilities*. Expanding on such a state of

affairs, Werner Heisenberg writes: “Everything observed is a selection from a plenitude of possibilities and [consequently] a limitation on what is possible in the future” (as quoted in Beller, 1999, p. 67). The micro world of possibilities, which quantum mechanics studies, offers many odd phenomena for our reflection: a world, for example, where light can be experienced as a wave and/or as a particle; where what is referred to as the probability wave function means accepting such a strange concept as “non-locality,” referred to as “quantum entanglement” – meaning, in simplified terms, that distance does not seem to exist. Although not universally accepted, John Wheeler also proposes what he calls the *anthropic principle*, a theory that gives human existence and consciousness a primary role in the very formation of the universe; a consciousness, however, that is as much a part of and product of the cosmos as is the experience of gravity.⁵ Whether the anthropic principle will be validated or not is, obviously, not within our purview. What is clear, however, is that quantum physics offers a deeply mysterious interpretation of what we experience as reality.

The physicist and writer Brian Greene (2004) offers a few examples of some quantum mysteries; speaking of John Wheeler’s *delayed choice* experiment, he notes: “The experiment brushes up against an eerily odd-

⁵ See Harrison (1981): “The anthropic principle asserts that the universe is the way it is because we are here” (p. 287).

sounding question: Does the past depend on the future?" (p. 186). Richard Feynman, one of the twentieth century's most noted physicists, has termed the phrase "*sum over Histories*" (see Hawking, 1988, p. 134 et seq.) to indicate that a proton takes every possible course. Feynman, both seriously and humorously, warns the reader against trying to understand quantum mechanics (i.e., in this case, how a proton takes every course, even backward in time). The concept of reality itself, usually the domain of philosophers, is, as the noted quantum physicist Edwin Schrödinger observes, a necessary but merely operational construct. Mara Beller (1999), commenting on Schrödinger's convictions, writes, "...the concept of reality as such, as it objectively exists independent of all human observers, is indefensible, if not downright meaningless.... Still, the concept of reality, Schrödinger held, is as indispensable in science as it is in everyday life" (p. 282). Quantum physics attempts to provide not only a scientifically viable model of the world, but it does so with an open-endedness, so to speak, that, I believe, mirrors psychoanalytic experience.

Before returning to a discussion of the dynamic unconscious, I would summarize my understanding of the generic/descriptive unconscious by noting that the unconscious of the world that we arise from is the unconscious of infinite possibilities, the micro world of probabilities, which

is, as noted, always in process and never a thing. A mist of infinite possibilities is the sea in which we live, a sea that births the world just as it births us. From a micro perspective, reality is realized probability waves; from the macro perspective, reality is experienced as discreet objects. Locked within the macro world, we prejudice our perspective as the truth.⁶

The Dynamic Unconscious

Having offered an alternate read on what psychoanalysis speaks of as the generic/descriptive unconscious, I would like to turn now to Freud's conceptualization of the dynamic unconscious. Freud focused on how human beings turn away from and seemingly ignore certain thoughts, feelings, phantasies and/or memories. He employed the concept of repression to describe such human maneuvers and thereby posited a *dynamic unconscious*; such a term follows, logically, once one employs the term repression. Freud offered a new way of making sense of experience, new metaphors for interpreting reality. Hysterical symptoms went from being puzzlements to being metaphors for conflicting thoughts, feelings, and memories. The same is true of the psychoneuroses, and while much of borderline behavior is a reenactment of interpersonal experiences, such behavior is, nevertheless, open to a metaphorical reading as well.

⁶ Einstein offers a corrective for such a prejudice. See Brian Greene (2000) pp. 28–30 for an exceptionally clear, non-mathematical exposition of relativity.

What psychoanalysis designates as the conscious and the *dynamic* unconscious ultimately should not be separated; such terms describe different aspects of the same phenomenon. Ey (1978) writes “...the Unconscious can be grasped in its being only as a mode of conscious being: as a relation of container to contained” (p. 329). Note, also, the following from Zvi Lothane (1992): “Fantasies exist because perceptions exist: one is a necessary prerequisite of the other, or else we would never be able to remember a dream, let alone go through an analysis, or the examined life” (p. 31).

There is a long history in human reflection on self-understanding, from the Buddhist notion of right mind to the many western spiritual traditions focusing on what was labeled *the discernment of spirits*, that is, an analysis of an individual’s actions and motives by a spiritual advisor, an evaluation of an individual’s state of consciousness. Psychoanalysis, for its part, speaks of defenses. Similar to the language of quantum physics, Freud created a terminology that enabled those using it to ask different questions about psychological states. When one asks different questions one gets different answers. Psychoanalysis offers the notion of repression, in all its defensive manifestations, and the return of the repressed, in all its symptom descriptions, as explanatory concepts for the universal human tendency to

turn away from self-knowledge, a self-knowledge that Freud maintained the patient was actually aware of. Recall his somewhat wry observation that at the end of an analysis, patients frequently proclaim that what they had discovered, they really knew all along. Despite Freud's frequent and somewhat misleading reliance on natural science analogues and his use of archeological metaphors, psychoanalysis is about categorization and interpretation, about meaning; it is not about empirical discoveries of ontological realities, nor should it be – it is a science of metaphors grappling with human subjectivity.

Elder (1994), as mentioned above, gives a Wittgensteinian reading of psychoanalysis. He writes: "Psychoanalysis has to do with motives, not causes, it is not an observational or hypothetico-deductive science but a hermeneutic one; it is not predictive but interpretive" (p. 82). One consequence of such an approach, Elder makes clear, is that "the concept of the unconscious [can only be understood as that which] defines the interval between the manifest and the latent senses of things" (p. 71). Ey (1978) similarly speaks to this when he notes: "For to say that something escapes consciousness is to make it present itself to consciousness in such a manner that it is both present and absent – as a text to be decoded" (p. 325). To speak of manifest and latent meanings is to say that language is not linear.

This, obviously, is another way of stating that meaning is not linear; meaning is multidimensional. Manifest and latent readings are just two of the most obvious examples of alternate meanings. Freud, in Elder's analysis, arrived at his theories of the (dynamic) unconscious by way of *inferred meaning*: for example, something is causing a person's actions, something is at the root of his or her phantasies, and something is fueling his or her dreams. Inferred meaning was Freud's justification for positing a dynamic unconscious.⁷ But as is obvious, upon reflection, *inferred meaning is interpreted meaning*. Freud felt that he was able to read the unconscious, as it expressed itself in dreams and symptoms, because he had discovered its language – primary process.⁸

If inferred meaning is interpreted meaning, then we have an operative approach for understanding my (2004) thesis that “the unconscious is created by interpretation” (p. 11). There is a clear paradox here: what is repressed is unknown – it is derivatively deciphered, but nevertheless unknown; it is only known through interpretation. Psychoanalytic

⁷ “As a psychic phenomenon, unconscious fantasy is solely the result of inference” (Ruzzuto, 2004).

⁸ Freud delineated two modes of thinking, primary process and secondary process, and used such a distinction to differentiate conscious from unconscious systems. Pinchus Noy (1969) has shown that primary process thinking cannot be confined to the “language” of the unconscious; rather, primary process and secondary process thinking can be appreciated as operational modalities of consciousness. “As the secondary process has to detach itself in the course of development from personal meanings and become more and more objective, the primary process has to improve its ability to deal with these personal meanings, i.e., become more and more subjective. So, each one has to develop in a different direction – but of course to the same degree” (p. 176b).

interpretation knits together disparate strands to form a new meaningful whole; a whole that is not arbitrarily offered but rather is based upon a patient's historical/psychological/transferential realities.⁹ Interpretation is different from explanation.¹⁰ Explanation has to do with elaboration; an elaboration can be a more or less detailed response to the manifest content of a dream, a symptom, or a parapraxis. Interpretation structures what is unknown by giving it form. Therefore we can say, within such a framework, that an unconscious *without* interpretation has no meaning, *similar to* the quantum mechanics finding that an electron has no location, or velocity, before any measurement is taken. Commenting on this quantum physics finding, Brian Greene (2005) quotes John Wheeler, who writes, "no elementary phenomenon is a phenomenon until it is an observed phenomenon" (p. 534), meaning, as I understand him, that it makes no sense to speak of it until it is observed. When either an analyst or a patient gives form to dreams, transferences, or symptoms (i.e., to that which has been repressed or split off from awareness), he or she is creating. This is *similar to* a quantum physicist designing an experiment in which the parameters are set, and light, for example, will evidence itself as either a particle or a wave. An analyst, consequently, is not like a neutral archeologist discovering and

⁹ "Interpretation always implies an ideology . . ." (Hirsch, 1978, p. 91). Stated more prosaically, any analyst should be able to acknowledge where he or she is coming from.

¹⁰ I am indebted to Edwards (2004, p. 121) for highlighting this distinction.

dusting off a newfound artifact, or like a concerned but personally uninvolved surgeon; rather, he or she is an active contributor (the interpenetration of observer and observed) to what is eventually brought forth.

We do not know what was repressed; we know what is interpreted. It is the failure to recognize this that has led, I believe, to all too many unending analyses; as if the search for the repressed takes precedence over the creating of personal meaning – a personal meaning organized by interpretation. A patient communicates with words, or with silence, and an analyst listens; an analyst communicates with words, or with silence, and a patient listens; meaning comes to be from such a complex dialogue. And as noted, before a patient communicates, and/or before an analyst interprets, there is no dynamic or repressed unconscious worth speaking of.

Neither analyst nor patient recovers repressed memories, phantasies, or feelings in their *pristine innocence*, as if there is a place where things are stored away and lose their connection with time. Time travel to the past, as far as we know, is not possible; neither dreams nor free association, nor any psychological processes are exempt from this apparent structure of nature. To speak of the unconscious as a psychological system as timeless is, I believe, poetic imagery. Even to speak of the generic or descriptive

unconscious as a structure of being, as I have suggested in discussing the mist of infinite possibilities, a jittery foam of probabilities, does not imply relinquishing the concept of time. Freud's analogy of archeological finds, buried within the timeless sands of the unconscious awaiting discovery, is poetic but misleading. The past, in its historical actuality, is gone; the reconstructed, that is, recounted past, the interpreted past, is all we have.

Analyst and patient, as we have observed, in their respective emotional/cognitive/linguistic developmental complexity, give birth to whatever memories or fantasies come forth from their dialogue. This is also true of whatever reality a human being arrives at *internally*; it is the product of the emotional/cognitive/linguistic complexity he or she has achieved. That is, out of the ongoing growth and integration of life experiences, individuals progressively create the found world (to follow Winnicott's [1965, p. 91] line of thought). We create the world we live in by the lived interpretations we make about ourselves and about others. Clinical interpretations arise out of the interchange between analyst and patient, an interchange that is grounded in the totality of who the participants are. Interpretations need not have the precise fit Freud advocates or the exactitude Edward Glover (1958, pp. 130, 379, 380) requires. Interpretations based on meaning types and structural relationships, to echo Rubovits-Seitz

(2003, pp. 493–515), guarantee the needed objectivity. (Such a position is sustainable notwithstanding that the concept of objective reality, although necessary, is ultimately an operational construct.)

Concurrent with an analyst's intellectual/cultural development and level of personal integration, he or she should have a rationale for his or her clinical responses; responses, for example, which should be based on a patient's history, symptoms, present life situation, and/or transferences. To do away with such criteria would be to collapse clinical interpretations into counter-transference acting out. But to forget an analyst's role in creating what he or she interprets, informed by their capacity for intuition, their personal maturation and their level of intellectual development is a flight back to a Newtonian psychology; that is, a belief in the discrete objectivity of the observer and observed. Quantum physics, as mentioned, speaks to this issue by stating that the questions one poses determine the answers given. What we call reality is an unlimited canvas; an unlimited canvas which is as large as we can comprehend, yet as small as a grain of sand, as Brian Greene reminds us.

Knowledge and Reality

If the findings of quantum mechanics continue to sustain their validity, they will significantly affect some basic philosophical premises upon which

psychoanalysis, as well as other humanistic disciplines, have relied. One such premise, in the area of epistemology, is the correspondence theory of truth. Such a theory is generally understood as the equation of the objective object and the intellect's understanding of such an object. Quantum physics, although applied to the micro world, ultimately challenges many of the assumptions of the objective macro world. Mara Beller, as noted above, spoke of Schrödinger's distrust of the concept of reality as such, as if it had objective meaning independent of all human observers.¹¹ Note the paradox, however: without an operational acceptance of reality, such a leading quantum physics theoretician would not have postulated this conclusion. Obviously such a position affects our understanding of interpretations and reconstructions in psychoanalysis; it highlights that the past, and even the present, are interpreted experiences. If the normative value of the correspondence theory of truth has to be reevaluated in view of what we now understand of the structure of reality, that does not reduce each individual to his or her own universe, so to speak. Normative personal truth arises within community, as Marcea Cavell (1988) has emphasized. By community, in the present context, I mean the experience of the historical and ongoing

¹¹ None of which is meant to suggest collapsing the experienced world into a Kantian a priori world of "being just the subjective conditions of the possibility of perceptual experience," to quote Stolorow (2005, p. 99). Space and time, for example, are ever-present explorations for most quantum physicists, as realities in themselves.

actualization of possibilities, for both the collective and the individual, that is, with the total inter-dependence of all we experience. (This is particularly exemplified in the experience and complex growth of language.) In some profound way truth has to find each individual in order to be personally meaningful, rather than coercive. “Self-recognition,” as Ricoeur (1974, p.185) reminds us, is such a truth.

The temptation of Gnostic knowledge, that is, of the one who knows the true meaning of things and imparts such knowledge to an eager student, has done its damage within psychoanalysis as much as within religious history. Such narcissism of knowledge prefers the experience of the knowing self rather than the unknowing self, the ever-evolving self. Francois Roustang (1982/1983) has focused on the danger of an analyst presenting himself or herself as the knowing other. He has helped the psychoanalytic world appreciate that such a stance undermines the goal of autonomy that is one of the essential aspects of psychoanalysis (Gargiulo, 1989). In order to achieve a sustainable egalitarian ending to any analysis, it is essential for an analyst to relinquish any claim to arcane or Gnostic knowledge. Analysis lessens the coercion of the past and, as it does so, it prepares one to be found by the present.

What an analyst brings to analysis is personal competence in helping a patient to find his or her voice. Out of such an experience the slow creation of personal meaning occurs – another reading of what I mean by finding the present. Within this context it is better, Winnicott reminds us, for a patient to arrive at a seemingly half-correct interpretation on his or her own, than for an analyst to give a person what he or she assumes to be the correct interpretation. Each individual in analysis must come to terms with the arbitrariness of history (the fact that one does not choose one's family); the inevitability of time (one cannot go back and relive one's childhood); and the need to appreciate and respond to others (given the reality of our mutual interdependence), even those who may have hurt them. From such a perspective it is possible to speak of a patient experiencing a new history, since to understand the past from a new perspective is to recreate it. In this task of finding the present, of creating personal meaning, analyst and patient work together – they find together and they create together. Any appreciation of the unconscious and its role in this process has to be understood within this context.

Understanding the 'I'

I would like to turn, now, to the question of the 'I' and its possible substantive – that is, ontological – or non-substantive existence. In a prior

publication, I (2004) have spoken of “the ‘I’ as an imaginative/cultural construct” (p. 35), a phrase that was meant to indicate the historical and communal aspect of this identifying term. Most contemporary western thinkers are familiar with the Buddhist conviction that the ‘I’ is an illusion; it is *maya* – a non-existent reality. If one means by that that the ‘I’ has no ontological reality in itself, I would, without hesitation, agree. Nevertheless we are aware of experiencing an ‘I.’ While such experience is understandable, I would like to suggest that it is rooted in the familial and cultural naming rituals of infancy and childhood. Human beings are identified and called not solely by the parenting environment, but by a parenting environment that is a conduit for the larger society. From such a naming process we progressively build an internal imaginative construct of an ‘I,’ and as this is achieved, one identifies, that is, names, oneself as a locus within the world and in dialogue with it. That it may have been the world’s dialogue with an individual, by way of one’s parents, which initiated one’s own perception of oneself as an ‘I’ is, too often, overlooked. Each of us is a self as a consequence of our biological, psychological, and historical individuation; each of us is an ‘I’ by force of familial/cultural imprinting. There is extensive psychoanalytic literature delineating the self, self-systems, etc., as well as numerous discussions of the meaning of the ‘I.’

Peter Medawar (1982), the English biologist/theoretician, speaks of the many 'I's that we are, the various 'I's that we experience ourselves as. The 'I' that is the focus of this discussion is the encapsulated sense of individuated autonomy, which experiences itself as the locus of narcissistic needs and desires. My critique addresses understanding such a locus as if it were a reality in itself, rather than the consequence of developmental, communal, always in process, experiences.

A possible danger for psychoanalysis, particularly in its clinical application, in conceptualizing the 'I' as a substantive reality can be seen in what I would characterize as an overemphasis on the achievement of separation/individuation. Unfocused, free-hovering attention is a valid mode of understanding oneself and one another because human beings know each other; each of us comes to be within a family, a tribe, and a culture. Each human being, consequently, has permeable edges, so to speak. In some sense we understand each other because we can cross-identify, we can put ourselves in another's shoes. The experience of empathy allows our edges even more permeability. Maturationality has to be understood as recognizing our mutual dependence and basic need to experience cross-identification. When Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth-century philosopher, theologian, and mystic, reminds us that to know oneself is to know the

world, and to know the world is to know oneself, he was indicating an experience of interconnection that cannot be appreciated with a rigid partition between inner and outer, between the 'I' as encapsulated within the individual, and an 'I' that is communally constituted and relating. (Obviously this has nothing to do with a schizophrenic merger – i.e., Mother and I are one.)

Upon completing a personal analysis, an individual should have deepened his or her capacity for empathy, civility, and compassion for their fellow human beings; it is within this framework that one can productively evaluate the achievement of separation/individuation. The ability to experience empathy, to practice civility and to be instructed by compassion is intrinsic to any successful analysis, since these qualities form the basis of our communal interconnection; their presence augments the resolution of distracting narcissism and grounds personal responsibility. Loewald (2000) speaks to this issue when he writes, “All great scientists, I believe, are moved by this passion [for truth]. Our object, being what it is, is the other in ourselves and ourself in the other” (p. 297). The recognition of such interconnection compliments, paradoxically, the alone space of which Winnicott speaks, an alone space that reflects each person's vital depth, a depth that opens each individual to what was spoken to above as the world

of infinite possibilities. A depth that is a foundation for the dignity individuals owe one other; a depth that we can attempt to describe by speaking of it as a ground to all that is, *the unconscious of existence*, so to speak – an unconscious, however, that is not personalized with any ontological subjects.

James Grotstein, (2000) in *Who Is the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream?*, speaks about “the ineffable subject of the unconscious” (p. 127ff). Grotstein’s unconscious is more akin, as I read him, to what I have spoken of as the unconscious of the world – the vital place of infinite possibilities. One can speak, as Grotstein does, however, as long as one understands that the ineffable subject of the unconscious is not a personalized object, that is, not a subject in any recognizable mode. Speaking of the ineffable subject of the unconscious has meaning, I believe, only if such a subject is spoken of as a mirror image, so to speak, of the ‘I’ understood as an imaginative/cultural construct. It has no reality in itself. Otherwise, we would be discussing theological interpretations not psychoanalytic insights, nor, for that matter, quantum mechanics analogues. It is a way of talking about the profound depth out of which the cosmos evolves in a language that has human attributes.

Subjectivity: Inside/Outside

We do not need cosmology, micro and/or macro perspectives, to remind us that the world is incomprehensibly complex: a hundred million galaxies beyond, matched by each object in our world, themselves constituted by a hundred million strings, for example, as in superstring theory. Human beings are part of this universe; consciousness, in all its possible manifestations, is as intrinsic and natural to the world as is the reality of gravity. Any expansion of consciousness, or growth of awareness, is the same type of phenomenon as the ongoing expansion of the galaxies.¹² From such a perspective we can say that any absolute division of internality versus externality is a distinction that, in its deepest reading, is non-existent. Echoing Edwin Schrödinger, we can say that we *operationally* need such a distinction, but that such operability is its only possible meaning. It was Wordsworth (1798/2001) who wrote: “Our meddling intellect/Mis-shapes the beauteous form of things;/We murder to dissect” (p. 832), which, I suggest, is not merely a poetic phrase.

I have no intention of denying that *the identified internal world* has operational processes and that if these are awry, whatever the diagnostic

¹² I do not wish to suggest that every day in every way the world is getting better. I am aware that solidly based theory suggests that low entropy is followed by high entropy and that therefore it was the low entropy, immediately following the big bang, which accounts for the ordered world we live in. For a particularly clear discussion of these issues, see Greene (2005, pp. 168–176).

nomenclature, they need to be addressed. One cannot get beyond the internal/external dichotomy unless internality has reached a level of relatively harmonious complexity that allows an individual to experience him- or herself within a wider framework. The value of such a broader framework is not only that it offers an individual patient a deeper experience of life, but also that it can mold an analyst's attitude to what he or she is hearing and experiencing. That is, it can foster a psychoanalytic attitude that is as comfortable with mystery, which I (2004) have spoken of as the "ever-receding horizon to our knowledge" (p. 25), as it is with discussing internal psychic structures or diagnostic categories. Freud was aware of the need for analysts to have an appreciation of mystery as well as a deep understanding of symbol. He wanted analysts, as evidenced in his *The Question of Lay Analysis* (1926/1961), to understand various cultures and cultural myths; he wanted psychoanalysts to come from such areas of study as literature, poetry, history, religious studies – all subjects that are on friendly terms with our multicultural history as well as the complexities of interpretation.

Clinical Practice, Aloneness, and the Spiritual

Resolving the anxious ego, in Herbert Fingarette's (1963) terms, shrinking a distracting narcissism, in less technical language, has been the goal of reflective thinkers throughout the ages. A search for what is real, that

is, for a vital participation in the world, a respect for the unknown, a commitment to respect process over content leads not only to a deeper understanding of psychoanalysis, but also to what I believe we can likewise characterize as the spiritual. Although the term spirituality is being overused, I believe we can speak to humanity's ancient quest for self-awareness in terms of spirituality and thereby recognize a bridge between psychoanalysis and the spiritual that has, for too long, been unrecognized. A spirituality which is commensurate with the best goals of analysis is one that concerns itself with making possible an entryway into the silent depth of the world, enabling an individual to experience awe and respect as he or she progressively experiences life – despite the tragedy we humans repeatedly visit upon each other. A spirituality which we might define, in the footsteps of Erik Erikson (1963), as the pursuit of wisdom as to how to live one's life with integrity. A wisdom, for example, which can sensitize an individual to the illusory nature of the encapsulated narcissistic 'I.' All of which, as mentioned above, is in the service of a lighthearted civility, a lived compassion, and a sensible experience of empathy. The only spirituality, consequently, that I believe is psychoanalytically viable is one grounded in the here and now. Antonio Damasio (2003) speaks to the reality of the spiritual when he writes, "the spiritual is an index of the organizing scheme

behind a life that is well-balanced, well-tempered, and well-intended” (p. 284). I would complement such thoughts by saying that the spiritual fosters a quiet, respectful awe for all existence.

Given the above approach to the spiritual and its relation to psychoanalytic experience, I (2004) have introduced the term “*an everyday transcendence*” (p. 13) to reflect an openness to the mystery of existence, as well as a perception of the dignity that life demands; a transcendence that stands in sharp contrast to finding personal meaning somewhere else than in the here and now of our historical actuality. An experience of an everyday transcendence is made possible by a lessening of the neurotic and borderline clamor that drowns out any appreciation of mystery and of the dignity of life. Whether or not Freud actually wrote, “All that matters is love and work,” it is clear that such a sentiment sums up a great deal of psychoanalytic aspirations. If either patient or analyst is primarily dedicated to work, rather than to personal connection, he or she goes through life limping. There is no question, as Freud reminds us, that love has to be discriminatory; such discrimination, however, does not rule out an awareness of our profound interconnection.

For many years, psychoanalysis has given a reductionistic reading of spirituality, not merely of religious practices; it reflected a failure to

appreciate and differentiate the existential goals behind different spiritual traditions from the particular religious form in which such goals were expressed. All too often psychoanalytic reflection confused mystery with mystification, altruism with masochism. The great spiritual traditions, both east and west, despite whatever shortcomings they entail, have been in search of a deeper experience of life, of a vital sense of interconnectedness. Psychoanalysis has similar goals; only if dialogue occurs between these two traditions will the wheat be separated from the chaff; only with a willingness to hear the other do we hear ourselves. Mystery can hold us as well as knowledge; out of such a place we can love the world, live in it, and make it real. Psychoanalysis focuses on the need to be real by resolving superego intimidation and coercion, ego anxiety and distortions as well as id demandingness. But one must ultimately hold the psyche with open hands, so to speak. It is out of this conviction that I have spoken of the non-substantiality of the 'I' and of the unconscious, of the creation of the dynamic unconscious by way of interpretation. Only by holding the psyche and the 'I' with open hands are both patient and analyst freer to find the alone, quiet space that Winnicott (1965) alludes to; an alone quiet space that is a portal, as both psychoanalysis and the spiritual traditions recognize, to being alive.

Summary

What I have tried to convey in this short discussion of the unconscious and of the 'I' and its relevance to the notion of the spiritual is an approach that not only avoids a reification of such concepts but also promotes a reading of process over content, of mystery over certainty, and of equality over subordination.

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