

Quantum Psychoanalysis: Essays on Physics, Mind, and Analysis Today (Book Review)

Author: Gargiulo, Gerald J.

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“To make a discovery is not necessarily the same as to understand a discovery” Abraham Pais

Two years and four months after the birth of Sigmund Freud in Freiberg, Max Karl Ernst Ludwig Planck was born about 600 miles northwest. So began the lives of two of the most influential minds of the 20th century. The revelations resulting from the work of these men who never met, has changed the way that humans come to know themselves and their physical world forever.

In his new book, *Quantum Psychoanalysis: Essays on Physics, Mind, and Analysis Today*, Dr. Gerald J. Gargiulo boldly explores the implications of post-Newtonian quantum physics theory upon psychoanalytic theory and the practice of psychoanalysis. Gargiulo deftly approaches his explication of theoretical concepts in the conquistador spirit of Dr. Freud. Reading Gargiulo’s new book provides the reader with the experience of entering the brave new world of quantum psychoanalysis. Gargiulo writes as a guide who has spent his intellectual life open to alternative views of the physical, and psychological world within which we dwell.

A brief review of Gargiulo’s body of work reveals that he is a thinker with an enormous depth of knowledge and experience. Having studied with Theodore Reik, taught theology at Manhattan College, and received his doctorate in philosophy and psychoanalysis from the Foundation House in Oxford, Dr. Gargiulo has opened a door beyond which exploration of quantum physics as the dynamic force within psychoanalytic discovery is not only a possibility, but also an exciting and new path.

A review of the essays in Gargiulo’s book provokes important questions regarding the theory and practice of psychoanalysis as we enter the 21st century, one-hundred years after the publication of the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*.

In the first essay, *Ontology and Metaphor: Reflections on the Unconscious*, Gargiulo encourages the reader to conceptualize the unconscious within the parameters of quantum theory. He asks what the mysteries highlighted by quantum theory inform us about psychoanalytic theory. Based on the uncertainty principle first described by Werner Heisenberg, Gargiulo posits that the unconscious is [therefore] created by interpretation; saying the unconscious exists is akin to saying 'red' exists. Rather than understanding the unconscious existing as a statement about an object, quantum theory helps us understand the unconscious as a statement about a form of representation that occurs within the analytic moment.

Gargiulo's book is challenging and at times perplexing when attempting to integrate seemingly disparate theory derived from physics and psychoanalysis. This leads to the question of what certain quantum theoretical concepts lead to in their application in psychoanalysis. In accordance with the concept of quantum entanglement, the quantum state of each particle cannot be described independently of the others, even when the particles are separated by a large distance-instead, a quantum state must be described for the system. As Gargiulo points out in his essay, *The Psychoanalytic Unconscious in a Quantum World*, this important principle within quantum theory has significant implications in psychoanalytic theory: for example, that the standard locational dichotomies such as inside/outside and subject/object break down when understood in this frame. While reading Gargiulo's essays, it is comforting and unnerving that he relates his struggle to understand the applied consequences of quantum theory in the psychoanalytic realm. As he states, "The full import of what this means is probably beyond our human capacity to understand". (p. 41)

Gargiulo wonders "Nevertheless we can still ask if it is possible to have a comprehensive and applicable theory we can use as a flashlight, as it were, which can help avoid error and find truth?" (p. 45) In quantum theory, the observer and the observed are inextricably connected. How one observes affects and determines what is observed. It is not simply a matter of seeing what you look for but moreover, what you see is affected by the act of observation. In the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum theory, systems generally do not have definite properties prior to being measured. In this way, as Gargiulo reminds us, "we can no longer speak of the observer and the observed in any functionally separate way". (p.46) If we know and recognize

that a proton only exists when observed, this leads us to understand that the predictive world of traditional psychoanalytic theory must become a post-Newtonian probabilistic world.

These are questions indicative of the compelling thoughts and confusions that occur to the reader of *Quantum Psychoanalysis: Essays on Physics, Mind, and Analysis Today*. While the primary content regarding quantum theory and psychoanalysis is encapsulated within Section I: Quantum Psychoanalysis, Gargiulo offers two additional sections which highlight important issues regarding psychoanalytic theory and the resultant questions central to contemporary psychoanalysis. The experience of reading Gargiulo's essays is an immersive personal hermeneutic expedition, as one attempts to comprehend and organize the inherent complexities of the quantum world into the familiarly complicated world of psychoanalytic theory and practice.

At first read, it may appear to the reader that these two additional sections are somehow unrelated to the central thesis of the book: that psychoanalysis can and should endeavor to become aligned with quantum theory. However, a closer read demonstrates that the initial exposition of the connections and questions posed by a quantum informed perspective of psychoanalysis alters the material being perceived. It refines the core of psychoanalytic theory and the challenges faced in contemporary psychoanalysis. In his final essay *Psychoanalysis Today: The Long History of Storytelling*, it becomes apparent that Gargiulo has been telling a story of his quest to continually apprehend and refine the field of play that is psychoanalysis. Recognizing that quantum physics has altered reality and our experience of one's self in the world, we must continue to explore what the story has for us.

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