

## Commentary

Before religion collapsed into morality and dogma – with the threat of exclusion from either the community or from some life hereafter, it was meant to pull people out of the cave of their narcissistic self preoccupation by evoking awe and mystery and offering some rational for the events which befell them. Pantheism, despite the bad name given to it in the Judaeo/Christian traditions, (sky-god religions) was an attempt to recognize, and in some cases to placate, the various vital forces in the world that evoke awe and mystery. The mystical traditions, in both Judaism and Christianity, reflect such awe, mystery and vitality. Within the Christian tradition mysticism is known as negative or apophatic theology. Such a theology, which goes back centuries, has little, if anything, to do with fear and even less with any “definition” of what the word God might possibly mean. While I appreciated and learned a good deal from Arnie Richards’ discussion of “Freud’s Jewish Identity,” I think he concludes with an understandable but nevertheless one-sided definition of “religion” i.e., as exclusively based on fear.

Freud’s commitment to the secular intellectual life, as Arnie unfolds it, helps us understand Freud’s fierce reaction to religious loyalty oaths, under the rubric of dogma or exclusionary ritual. I do not believe we need Dr.Meissner’s conjectures, re Freud’s childhood, to explain it. Finally, I believe that the history of anti-Semitism, in the West, has its roots more in early Christian simplistic theology, in

catering to the new non-Jewish converts and to political power as well as the ever present need to project the bad self (i.e., the non-believing self) than it does to the theoretical possibility of killing the primal father and/or Moses.

Psychoanalysis has many meeting points, as I have discussed in other publications, with some of the goals of apophatic theology. In its best moments it avoids dogma and enables patients to be real and to appreciate the joy and the awe of life. In resolving narcissism it enables sensible compassion and justice to have a seedbed. So perhaps psychoanalysis has not so much repudiate religion as much as it has secularized its best insights and made them available for everyman; along with lifting the pain that ignorance, defense and transference condemn one to. Thanks Arnie for keeping this topic alive....Jerry Gargiulo

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