

INNER MIND/ OUTER MIND AND THE QUEST FOR AN “I”

Spirituality Revisited

In this short essay I would like to suggest that some of the fundamental concerns of traditional Western spirituality can be understood as addressing not only the search for the “hidden God” but the need to experience, as well as to delimit, the autonomous “I.” Psychoanalysis, it can be argued, stands in the tradition of Western spirituality in its inquiry into personal meaning and in its efforts to achieve reconciliation.* Although analysis does not hold the promise of a salvation in a distant heaven, it does offer a more present, if less comprehensive, form of salvation, one which psychoanalysts have been slow to talk about since it entails a redefinition of mind, culture and the notion of the “I.”

Long before psychoanalysis spoke of the need for an object, or of object constancy, Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth century theologian mystic, spoke of “internality as externality,” meaning that individuals are not separate monads, figuratively speaking, but interconnected, by our very nature, to all that is. His idea was that to know oneself was to know the world and to know the world is to know oneself. Speaking in the Christian religious symbols of his day, Eckhart

* To understand the past, (an essential task of psychoanalysis), is ultimately to forgive the past; more specifically, in Eric Erikson's thoughts, maturation is evidenced by a capacity to will the inevitable that has happened to us.

went on to indicate that the self was destined to incarnate God. He taught that the Christian belief of God's incarnation in Jesus was not meant as a singular event to be worshipped but rather as an exemplar event to learn from; an educational event, so to speak. What this "learning" might mean will be the subject of this essay. Eckhart's theology, in the tradition of what is categorized as negative theology, was one of a radical immanence, that is, he eschewed a God over against man, a God who is spoken of as utterly transcendent. He was impatient with any "dogmatic" that attempted to capture the "holy" awe of life within human language. Thus he could write, in the thirteenth century, *God, rid me of God*. That there is a bridge between Eckhart's theology and Buddhist thought is, as D. Suzuki has observed, rather clear. Today, reflecting Western categories, we might speak of the fact that all life is to be valued, a manifestation, in Alfred North Whitehead's thought, of an overriding creative life principle. Further, to speak of our individual capacity to be alive, to be the breath of life, as it were, is to speak of man's soul. And, as Bruno Bettelheim has reminded us, Freud himself had no difficulty in speaking of man's soul.

Actually psychoanalysis, in its commitment to resolving projection(s) and in its desire to help people live in the present, free of the troubling past and the elusive future, would have little difficulty in embracing many of Eckhart's thoughts. Admittedly his optimism about finding the "living God" within the world and us would have to be read on more than a linear, fundamentalist level. Historically, following the work of the twentieth century theologian and scriptural

scholar Rudolph Bultmann, we would have to “demythologize” this concept in order, paradoxically, to find a truer i.e., latent meaning. But this is not as foreign as it might at first appear since any translator is, ultimately, a demythologizer. And psychoanalysts are translators - - midwives of meaning. It is also in this sense that I spoke of them as heirs to Western spiritual tradition. That is, at their best, they are Virgilian guides to wandering Dantes ferreting out what is true from what is no longer true, what is real from what is no longer real, and what is realizable from what is no longer so. They are physicians, not of the body, but of culture and mind, of word and symbol. Although such psychoanalytic interpretative readings of man’s meanings and values are clearly culture bound and intellect limited, they reflect both scientific and spiritual pursuits. Scientific, in limiting the range of inquiry with an openness to alternate viewpoints and formulations; spiritual, in the desire to know the truth of a given life beyond the recurrent distortions and reactions that cloud such knowing.

In order to explore what Eckhart thoughts entails when he speaks of imitating God rather than of worshipping him, we have to understand the “problem” of the autonomous “I.” That is, we have to rethink some of our basic concepts about the psyche.

One such re-conceptualization entails understanding that consciousness is not something that adheres in a thing we call mind. Winnicott’s perceptive (1946) article on *Psyche-Soma* established that rather well. Winnicott states that mind as a localizable thing does not exist; always interested in context, he speaks about

mental activity (as) a special case of the functioning of the psyche-soma.

Winnicott comes back to this issue, although not explicitly, when he writes of the transitional space of childhood being the seedbed of culture. In writing of the child's developmental stages of me/not me experiences, with the early m/other/environment he is laying the foundation for man's capacity to play with the world and thus to create culture. Mind, then, is clearly an achievement, it is not a given; consciousness is a prerequisite for the experience of mind, but it is not co-equal. Consequently we can say that to speak of culture is to speak of mind, and to speak of culture is necessarily to speak of a gestalt: no culture without different people, and implicit in that, no notion of self except within a particular social context. If mind comes to be in the works of our hands so also does our sense of self. In our culture our "I" experience reflects a collective presumption.

Just as Winnicott could write, now rather obviously, that there is no such thing as a baby (without a mothering environment) just so can we say that the self does not exist in itself. The "I" is a cultural/imaginative construct. It is a way our culture attempts to organize experience into meaningful patterns. Lewis Thomas, struggling with similar thoughts, uses the image of looking down on a giant anthill as an analogue of human cultural activity. The self, seen from enough distance, is understandable more as a process within a context than as autonomously individuated. Such a perspective is not easily accepted, particularly in Western political and social experience, named as we are as separate "I's." What our culture conveys and what psychoanalysis has augmented is that self experience

and interiority are synonymous; interiority being experienced as radically distinctive; no wonder western culture gave birth to Descartes, no wonder -- *I think therefore I am*. We have been taught to experience ourselves more as individual/separate human beings than as structurally interrelated and interdependent members of humanity. Obviously I am arguing for a more relational, structurally interdependent understanding of the "I" self than has been operative in traditional psychoanalytic drive theory, or for that matter, political economic theory.

One of the factors that complicates our rethinking the experience of "I" and of "mind" is the fact that psychoanalysis, particularly in America, has spoken of the integration and the resolution of neurotic conflicts in terms of achieving an adequate level of "separation/individuation." With few exceptions, most notably in the philosophical work *The Self In Transformation* by Herbert Fingarette, as well as *Love's Body* by Norman O. Brown, psychoanalytic theory has unreflectedly presumed that an 'individuated' autonomous "I" was not merely an intellectual possibility but as a therapeutic ideal. And psychoanalytic clinical practice followed this belief not only in its everyday therapeutic goals but also most notably in it accenting, and consequently aggravating, the "postulated" difference(s) between patient and analyst. Had we listened more, perhaps, to Sandor Ferenczi, when he spoke of the actual as well as the therapeutically necessary inter-dependence of analyst and patient we might have taken a different route.

Today those demarcations are lessened and with good reasons. For if the “goal” of psychoanalysis, as Freud himself states, is to be able to love and to work we are immediately in the arena of “the other.” Despite all of Freud’s mapping of the inner terrain, his model(s) of mental agencies, his postulating an arcane unconscious and the ego’s hidden defenses, despite all this when Freud speaks of the goal of analysis he is relational and communal. In the case of “love” the other is experienced as more desired than the self, as its fulfillment. Actually were one not capable of loving neither the world or themselves would have emotional reality. In such a scenario a person would merely exist, they would not be alive. This is certainly the thrust of Winnicott’s thought when he observes that therapy can go on for many years under the false assumption that the patient is alive. In the stability of love the individual has an experience that Winnicott characterizes as *an-ongoing-in-being* -- an essential prerequisite for being alive. “Work,” for its part, enables us to interact with the environmental world on many levels. Work supplies an essential “process” identity since it mediates a community’s recognition of personal competence. Love and work are made possible only in community. The overemphasis on intrapsychic phenomena, as if there is a separate self, independent of the self’s self-revelation, has been misleading and dangerous in its consequences; as has the exaggerated notion of personal autonomy. And this is true without our discussing how we are culturally molded, from our very beginnings, by language -- the exact opposite of any solipsistic notion of individuality.

Psychoanalysts name and give voice to the meanings of a self, their own and their patients' and, in doing so, they situate an individual within a particular cultural framework. The analytic place mirrors the family, just as the family mirrors society, in its defining functions for the individual. Twentieth century philosophy has helped us understand that language forms consciousness, just as consciousness forms language. We are formed by the language that is spoken to us; a language that we had no power in creating. We have to be repeatedly called by a name; we have to be repeatedly told we are an "I" for us to be able to organize our experience in these terms. And how we are called by and within our culture commits us to what we are allowed to hear about ourselves and about our world. Nor do we have a choice. This process is neither good nor bad -- it is simply the way we pass on our cultural patterning. But a society, in all its various components, does have an obligation to examine the contact lenses, so to speak, it gives its members so that their vision becomes more expansive not less so. That our particular cultural conditioning makes individuals prone to be experienced as if they are individual products i.e., as essentially unrelated to each other, should not be lost sight of, particularly since such consequences serve a capitalistic economic system rather well. (A life of poverty in most spiritual traditions, by way of contrast, is not a repudiation of work or a masochistic disdain of matter but rather a desire not to be stuck in *thing* consciousness.)

Psychoanalysis looks for the hidden in the obvious, for an alternate meaning behind the manifest meaning. From such a perspective, one would have

expected psychoanalysis to be a radical critique, following Fenichel and some of the early analysts, of society's identifying processes. Why this did not occur has been discussed by Russell Jacoby in *The Repression of Psychoanalysis* and can not detain us here, but the question as to whether psychoanalysis should address the cultural product of the "I" should concern us, even in a preliminary way.

One of the difficulties in the task of correcting the distortions of the overemphasis on the autonomous "I" is related to Freud's theoretical conceptualizations of the early vicissitudes of narcissism. As a point of reference and reflection, Freud speaks of the individual child as possessing both primary and secondary narcissism. Primary narcissism, as a postulate for the life force, holding together and fostering growth is understandable. Secondary narcissism, as the capacity of a young infant to withdraw "libido" from the other and invest it in the self, is more than misleading. It is misleading because there is no "self" except in context of another. Freud assumes what he is trying to prove, namely that the self is "self-contained;" as if there is a separate operational "I" directing the flow, so to speak, of libidinal investment(s). But libidinal investments are always a context experience, i.e., child/mothering-environment. The child can imaginatively pretend that he/she has withdrawn interest from the world, but this results in what Winnicott refers to as split off intellect, that is, mind thought of as located in a thing we call the brain. Without an adequate parental environment supporting the young infant, he or she starts on the road of splitting from that environment with the concurrent illusion that s/he is a separate entity -- and "I" unto him/herself.

It is at this important point of discussion that Winnicott and many of the English object relational theorists observations are particularly applicable. The mothering person is defined by his/her caring for the child's developing physical needs and concurrent language/social/emotional needs. And if that individual mix-up of mutual needs and services goes well enough, both the caretaker and cared for have an experience of being alive in their bodies without experiencing themselves as locked in their heads. Within a positive environmental framework the cultural transmission of the self, as an "I," can be experienced as primarily relational, and interdependent, and not as separate and autonomous. One of the indications that a relational and interdependent self is present is an individual's capacity to experience cross-identification; that ability to put ourselves in another's shoes. Is such an capacity what Winnicott has in mind when he says that were we able to raise children with good enough environmental provision there would be no need to teach them morality - - they would have a natural ethics? We are, to repeat, only an "I" in context. Without this context, our drives cease to be human drives and become merely physical sensations. To love and to work, as Freud knew, means infinitely more than negotiation physical sensations. In this sense we can note that instincts do not have vicissitudes, people do.

Another difficulty in the path of analysts fully appreciating the import of an interdependent and totally relational "I" is the traditional model of the unconscious. With Freud's introduction of the structural model the unconscious went, so to speak, from being a noun to being an adjective; it was, however, still

thought of as “located” in a person -- individually. Although this is an exceptionally complex topic I will offer a few thoughts in line with the general thesis of this essay. We can postulate, as has been done by many thinkers outside the mainstream of analytic theory, that the unconscious is only created, and therefore revealed, by and through interpretations. It has no existence in itself and should not be spoken of as if it has. *It is essentially an interpretative experience and not an ontological one.* Furthermore since mind is a communal experience none of its complexity can be split off from that communality. Basically meaning is as culture bound as is the autonomous “I.” Both are imaginative cultural constructs. The reading of any text, and here I include both dreams and symptoms, is dependent on the cultural framework of the reader. An analyst’s interpretative reading of an unconscious component is primarily one of many possible interpretations. Actually analyst, patient and culture join together to create the “mind” out of which come particular interpretations. Human thoughts and actions are complex because they are capable of alternate meanings; put differently, wo/man is an animal capable of generating and understanding metaphor(s). That we can think metaphorically means that interpretations are potentially endless.

Now we can return to Eckhart’s thought that internality is externality and that spirituality is not necessarily searching for a God we cannot know, but can be equally a capacity to find, unobtrusively in the present, whatever is holy in life. Although Eckhart would postulate a theistic God as the source of that which is holy, such is not necessary in order to understand a spiritual quest. Human life,

Winnicott reminds us, entails more than the resolution of neurotic conflict, it is the capacity to find life interesting and worthwhile by experiencing ourselves as connected with the world, not isolated in our own thinking, creative in our interactions, not simply reactive to our environment. Consequently *internality as externality* means, I believe, that the “I” is better understood as a (necessary ?) individuated referent point within communal experience. Communal (cultural) experiences and individual experiences are inextricably related, so much so that mind does not exist as a locatable thing primarily because it is a process that occurs between people, between self and other, -- as other and as world. Such an approach does no violence to our personal psyche/soma experiences of memory and imagination. It does help us understand, however, that mind resides in all the cultural bridges we have built: language, art, philosophy, religion and psycho-analysis to name a few. Meaning, which is integral to our appreciation of mind, is, as Marcia Cavell has recently noted, inextricable communal. To all appearances the Earth is stable, just as to all appearances we are autonomous “I’s.” Both are false. We walk on bridges; our very coming to be is a bridge experience. And so when Winnicott says that the first thing a patient should be able to do is play, he is talking about getting someone off an illusory island and on to a bridge; getting someone out of the house of mirrors of the “anxious ego” (mind and “I” as pathological isolates) and into the market place of life.

Herbert Finngarette, as mentioned above, made analysts aware that their task was not so much the resolution of neurotic conflict in itself, but rather the

overcoming of the anxious ego, which then makes possible a sensible living in the now of time and the here of place. To experience our interdependence, familial and cultural, is not only realistic, it resolves the illusion that one has an “I” that is definable in itself. Within such a framework psychoanalysis re-presents a spiritual tradition that has as some of its operational goals an individual’s capacity for communal civility (i.e., cross identification) rather than schizoid isolation, unencumbered personal presence rather than neurotic repetition, love that sees the other as such, not as a mirror, nor a mother and finally work that is done competently but not necessarily self-consciously. Cross identification does not entail obliterating the differences of the here and now of one’s existence. Rather it develops as one is able to recognize the relativity of the autonomous “I”; such recognition fosters a willingness to entertain differences in time, place, and cultural identity. To recognize our commonality with others, via resolving the narcissism(s) of the anxious ego, is, as we have mentioned, a hoped for outcome of the analytic process. Desire, which is integral to our understanding of the “I,” can be understood, as I have noted elsewhere, as transference desire (self-preoccupation) or relationship desire. I can barely touch on this enormously complex topic except to note that psychoanalysis in naming desires, both manifest and latent, provides for its partial integration. Partial because desire, similar to the “I,” is not a solitary experience; it is created and augmented by the culture, familial and social, in which one lives.

T.S.Eliot, in **Little Gidding**, speaking to such issues writes:

This is the use of memory:

For liberation - not less of love but expanding

Of love beyond desire, and so liberation

From the future as well as the past.

Psychoanalysis offers the possibility for a spirituality that is humanly possible rather than religiously necessary; a liberation, as Eliot alludes, which is more of an ongoing task than an accomplishment. A liberation which in experiencing the interconnection of self and other, of past, present, and of necessity then, future, provides for the possibility for the non-conflictual now. Is that the (western) experience of I am who am? Is that the experience of the holy?

Augustine, long before Freud, advocates that one should *love, and what you will, -- do*. Although speaking, in this context, of moral guidance, we can extent Augustine's thought to mean that one should find oneself as a self with, through, and in others -- not solipsisticly, so to speak. In Eckhart's thought, to know the self is to know the other. This has nothing to do with masochistic functioning, which is simply another manifestation of getting caught in the anxious ego.

That psychoanalysis reminds human beings of the normative role of love is particularly well stated in Jonathan Lear's *Love And Its Place In Nature*. As we are listened to, we know that we have a voice; as we are cared for, we know that we can love the world. Consequently the profundity of Winnicott's simply prayer that: *that he be alive when he dies*. It is a prayer, so to speak, that life not un-soul him. And in view of Winnicott's prayer we can say that ... *if a man gains the*

whole world and loses his soul he has nothing is a thought with which most psychoanalysts could agree -- heirs as they are to old tradition.

REFERENCES

- Augustine, St. (1943). *Confessions of St. Augustine*. New York. Sheed and Ward.
- Bettelheim, B. (1983). *Freud and Man's Soul*. New York. Random House.
- Brown, Norman. O. (1966). *Love's Body*. New York. Random House.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. et al. (1961). *Kerygma and Myth*. New York. Harper and Row
- Cavell, Marcia. (1988). "Solipsism And Community." *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*. Vol. 11. No.
- Dupont, Judith (Ed.) (1988). *The Clinical Diary of Sandor Ferenczi*. Cambridge. Harvard University Press.
- Eliot, T.S. (1943). *Four Quartets*. New York. Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Erikson, Erik (1964). *Insight and Responsibility*. New York. W. W. Norton
- Fingarette, Herbert. (1963). *The Self in Transformation*. New York. Harper and Row.
- Gargiulo, Gerald J. (1987) Superman Heroes And The North American Ego Ideal in *Issues In Ego Psychology*. Vol. 10. No. 2
- (1989). Authority, The Self And Psychoanalytic Experience, in *The Psychoanalytic Review*. Vol. 76, No 2.
- Hacker, P.M.S. (1990). *Wittgenstein -- Meaning And Mind*. Vol. 3. Oxford. England. Blackwell.
- Jacoby, Russell (1983) *The Repression of Psychoanalysis*. New York. Basic Books

Jordan, Martin. (1968). *New Shapes of Reality -- Aspects of A.N.Whitehead's Philosophy*. London, George Allen and Unwin LTD.

Lear, Jonathan. (1990). *Love And Its Place In Nature*. New York. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Thomas, Lewis. (1974). *The Lives of a Cell*. New York. Bantam Books, Inc.

Walshe O.C. (Ed.). (1987). *Meister Eckhart. Vol. I, II, III*, Longmead, England. Element Books Ltd.

Winnicott, D.W. (1958). *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*. London. Tavistock Publications.