

# Features

## Religion and Issues in Psychiatry

Salvation (*salūs, ūtis*, (f) — health/deliverance) is a key term in Western religious traditions; in Christianity, 'saving' is regarded essentially as a 'soul' matter. But what is the soul but the *psyche/psukhē* (f), the very Breath of existence? If salvation is the business of religion, what then is psychiatry all about? Seemingly not about the restoration of Breath itself; and several of our contributions to this issue of the REVIEW would come to the same conclusion about some official versions of 'religious' salvation. We have become very confused about this. Is a 'mental disorder' (as variously defined by those who are experts in mental 'order') a metaphor for sickness of soul? Or is 'sin' a mental disorder? The priests of soul and the priests of mind dispense their largesse in very different domains, and well might we ask what if anything, religion has to do with psychiatry in this late part of the century.

Our four contributors in their different ways approach the contradictions and connect the estranged kingdoms (churches?) by examining one or other of the aspects of myth. Each one makes a plea for action in terms of a paradigm - change of mind and understanding which requires us to wrestle anew with the meaning of Psyche, and the demons which extinguish her Breath and in so doing, deny us deliverance.

— *The Editor*

## Metasearch — Notes on Psychiatry and Religion

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*Melbourne*

These notes are reflections prompted by a recent return to general hospital psychiatry, after a lengthy period in a solo, largely psychotherapeutic practice. Psychiatry offers opportunity for prolonged reflection on questions of mind and body, and the nature of healing; the hospital in question is a large institution run by a Christian order. Earlier experience of general hospital psychiatry had not been particularly rewarding and I

wondered why, late in professional life, I should want to once again engage in institutional work. The reasons have become clearer and lead me to offer these lines.

The central question is: what would it mean, what form might be given to, a project whose aim was research into psychiatry-religion? A moment's reflection suggests that today these are virtually non-intersecting conceptual domains.

Certainly, both engage in a pastoral function, caring for the ill; in psychiatry this is substantially a secular activity, whereas the pastoral care and indeed healing and the care of the ill and dying have traditionally been sacred callings.

A chronic frustration begins to emerge. Why is it that questions of a spiritual nature, of religious issues are excluded *a priori* from the considerations of most psychiatrists and psychologists? If not excluded, then patronized as evidence of neurotic arrest in the developmental process. Consideration of soul, of psyche, has all but disappeared from psychiatry, except for those who have an interest in Jung. (This applies also to the Church). But even more importantly - how has it come about that psychiatry in particular, and medicine in general, has had little to say of significance on the great and urgent issues of our time, questions of pervasive global injustice, gross inequality in the distribution of the world's resources, institutionalized violence associated with the very economic infrastructure of Western society, and now, the ecological crisis? Psychiatry denies a role in these greater issues by reference to "human nature" as innately aggressive and self-centered (the Freudian-Neo Darwinian update of the doctrine of original sin), or by reference to a deterministic doctrine of despair, a rigid biological determinism, a new flat-earthism, not the world in a grain of sand but God as enzyme ("the selfish gene").

The Church for its part, at least in the Western World, seems to be trapped in a time-warp. With some significant exceptions, a predominantly male clergy is trapped in an anthropomorphism, a preoccupation with personalistic issues of sin (sexual morality) and, as with biological psychiatry, a reductionism, this time upward, away from earth and soul and the feminine, into an otherworldly spirituality. The Church significantly has had little to offer regarding the environmental crisis and, in my opinion,

has singularly failed to challenge the reductionist, analytic world view that has become a dominant feature in contemporary psychiatry. Historically, this view appears to have its roots in an either-or dualism, spirit (sacred), matter (profane).

One might ask — what would constitute basic research in the religious domain, in our society? Surely not psychological or sociological investigation using current conceptual tools, for that would be question-begging of the worst sort. The lesser can never contain or explain the greater.

Both institutions, psychiatric and religious, exemplify male hierarchical power structures. It is as if, in the fallout of the encounter of science and religion (exemplified in the Darwin-Paley clash, to which we will shortly return) tacit agreement was reached, a resolution of an age-old demarcation dispute regarding the structures of knowledge (authority). Matter, the earth, the physical realm was the unquestioned domain of the physical scientists. Ethical questions, the meaning of life — if any — and death, were increasingly left to a sclerotic religious establishment, which continued to expound a now less-than-convincing system of moral values often couched in terms of revelation arising 2000-3500 years in the past.

## A World View

Before proceeding to the Darwin-Paley encounter, mention should be made of the question of a world view. Following Kant, Jung wrote of the archetypal structures whereby we see; those deep structures of consciousness that organize our perception at a most basic level. (There is much evidence today that we are in the terminal stages of an age of *senex* consciousness, now in its negative form as secular existential despair.) Modern biological research reinforces this general idea i.e. perception is an active process; our deep

beliefs act as a lens or filter through which we experience the world. By our beliefs, we construct a world which we may then describe as an objective reality. This applies with greatest force in the interpersonal domain, individual and collective.

The Chilean biologist, Humberto Maturana suggests two possible explanatory modes: first, those where the status of being an observer is a given, the observer as a detached being who somehow stands outside the phenomena to be explained (the objective observer), a position which accords with the metaphysical realist position which has dominated Western thinking since Plato. These modes of explanation Maturana calls transcendental ontologies. The alternative, described as a constitutive ontology is that explanatory mode wherein the observer in his/her "bodyhood" is seen to be an integral part of the explanatory process. In this latter situation, there are no absolute, unquestionable truths ("the truth"), but parallel alternatives, each constituted by an observer/community at a specific time. Lest this be seen to lead to mere moral relativism, it should be pointed out that a constitutive ontological explanatory mode gives rise to alternative worlds which may be more or less desirable. The crucial point here is: by our mode of being, our ethical being, our mode of relating to one another and to the wider whole, we bring forth a world. This is a central point in these notes, to which I shall return.

## Darwin and Paley

i) *Issues in the Encounter*: The Darwin-Paley differences exemplify a paradigm clash that had developed over centuries, and which continues. I believe it is a serious mistake to see one or other view as having "triumphed". Both theories, creationist and Darwinist, embody what I suggest are complementary principles. Our current dilemma, our stasis both in

psychiatry and religion arises, I believe, from a failure to be sufficiently radical in pushing each of the core principles here towards its outer (asymptotic) limits. Paley's world view included meaning and purpose and design, and an extrinsic designer/creator. Paley's protest at a deeper level related to a threatened loss of meaning in life, to loss of a sense of awe, to loss of a sense of order and, most importantly, to loss of a sense of gratitude which related to our sacred origins.

Darwin and his successors believed they had shown the world to be without meaning, the consequence of mere chance and necessity, all to be explained in natural (this world, intrinsic) terms. There is no need for gratitude here, nor for a worshipful attitude in life, no evidence in this reality that might suggest a sacred totality. Paley talked of being; eternal, unchanging; Darwin pointed to becoming, change, evolution, and to a mechanism of natural selection.

ii) *Science and Religion*: At a deeper level, the paradigm extension referred to is from form to process, from substance to patterning. Psychiatry as science, for the most part, in modern forms, confines questions of process to biochemical and neurophysiological considerations - albeit by use of a mechanistic methodology of a steam-engine, Newtonian-cartesian type with little or no consideration of Einsteinian-quantum mechanical issues, nor of process as in nonamics (chaos theory) or higher order systems theory. British empiricism has succeeded in exporting, as part of a package deal, the English caste system which enables the clinician/consultant/observer/psychiatrist to occupy the position of transcendent observer, somehow above and external to the system (patient, nurse), a position delightfully parodied in the television series, *The Singing Detective*. Furthermore, accountability is confused with counting - the Reign of Quantity.

The parallel process in the theological domain is the conception of a creator deity

who is totally other, totally external to the created system, a system created some time in the past. This "otherness" requires the existence of a specialist group of consultant interpreters, intermediaries, a male clergy.

We turn once again to Paley and Darwin as somehow metaphoric of our dilemma. Paley emphasized a sacred source with a correlative human attitude of grateful remembering. Secular psychiatry reduces questions of meaning to origins in the mother-infant, child-family experience — or to biochemical causal explanation. Scientific materialism allows of no possibility of mind external to the bio-physiology of the human nervous system. Psychotherapy in this mode has a secular existential core, the myth of the hero, resignation in quiet, manly despair in the face of a meaningless universe, resignation to the 'fact' of basic human depravity and selfishness. This is, politically, accommodation to the Western materialist status quo, biological determinism and pathological infant-parent relationships as explanation of life. (There are, of course, Christian psychiatrists and a few, a very few, psychiatrists who have some knowledge of the writings of Karl Marx and their relevance for human behaviour). Above all, in psychodynamic theory there exists no "space" for the idea of transpersonal i.e. higher order levels of awareness. It is only recently, in the field of family therapy (largely non-psychiatric at present) that issues of systemic process are addressed.

iii) *Evolution beyond Darwin*: The essential shift that re-emerged with Darwin was the idea of the world as process, the ancient notion of the world as flux (Heraclitus). To explore the wider significance of this idea, one must turn to modern cosmology, to the space-time conceptions of Einstein, and to modern quantum mechanics. We now know that we live in an evolutionary universe; life, this planet, our solar system as once-only, time-directional and evolving. Furthermore, there are powerful

suggestions that this is a participatory universe. Following the conceptions of Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry, the 'human' is that development in the evolutionary process whereby the creative mystery becomes self-aware. Furthermore, because this is a totally evolving universe, natural selection operates not only in biological forms, but in the ecology of ideas. Bronze Age forms of religious awareness and the correlative hierarchical male power structures with emphasis on personal sin and redemption no longer inform a viable spiritual awareness for this time; moreover, the conception of humans as having dominion over the natural world, to use and exploit, is no longer tenable, nor is the notion of endless material progress. Sin, as has been remarked, is now structural, built into the very institutional fabric of our society. This applies particularly to our economic world view but it also has relevance for the Church as an institution whose ultimate stand is the preservation of the institution *per se*.

To turn to the original question — research into psychiatry. There is, I believe, a most urgent need to re-vision the very basis of our approach to these questions. The position of specialist/authority/objective observer is no longer life-supporting, let alone life-enhancing. In psychiatry, the enterprise of psychotherapy must be seen as a co-creative adventure, therapist and patient engaged in a struggle to free one another. There are, ultimately, no chiefs and Indians, only travellers on the Way. One cannot free oneself; one can only be freed by endeavouring to free others, where the other's liberation is the end sought after.

It has been said that war is too important to be left to the generals. In similar vein, spiritual-religious issues are now too important to be left to churchly authority. The religious traditions of our species, the collective wisdom encoded in our great religions must be subject to urgent revisioning, to be wrought in forms that

will have empowering significance for the great numbers of the presently disillusioned and disenfranchized.

Likewise the grossly narrowed vision of our present psychiatric awareness is in urgent need of opening to sacred awareness, medicine once more a sacred calling, not an enterprise centered on power and privilege.

The issues raised in these brief notes reflect what I perceive to be a most urgent, indeed crucial issue of this time; that is, the need for a new way of seeing, a planetary vision; psychiatry, medicine, religion, and with this, a sacred economics, as part of a profound awakening. Psychiatry at an individual level helps many whose malaise is a product of the very world view that underlies our secular psychiatry. There are neither the resources nor is there the time to make the necessary changes in Western consciousness using our current, obsolete conceptual tools, let alone to enable such help to be offered to the vast numbers of the world's underprivileged. Again, a religious consciousness that claims particular privilege for half the species - the men, is scarcely a basis on which to build a global ecological awareness in

universal fairness, justice and equality.

## Conclusion

These notes may suggest an impossible idealism but it is against the current consciousness of despair and alienation that these issues are raised. Practically, these reflections are part of a continuing dialogue, wherein a small group of people including the writer are seeking to establish an organizational structure that will follow some of these ideas, both in discussion/ seminars, and in various experiential modes - meditative, shamanic visionary exploration, collective dream groups, always in contact with human suffering as that woundedness which leads to the healing we all seek. Our modest enterprise aims to form a horizontal network, small, semi-independent groups of interested individuals. Our general hospitals seem to be a good place to start this enterprise.

The spirit which informs these and similar explorations is captured in Christopher Fry's lines, lines which came to my attention via the generosity of Brother David Steindl-Rast.

*Dark and cold we may be, but this  
is no winter now. The frozen misery of  
centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;  
the thunder is the thunder of the flocs the  
thaw, the flood, the upstart spring.  
Thank God our time is now when wrong  
comes up to face us everywhere,  
never to leave us till we take  
the longest stride of soul men ever took.  
Affairs are now soul size,  
the enterprise  
is exploration into God.*

# The Contemporary Search for a Healing Myth

Lawrence Browne

*Queensland*

One of the advantages of falling under the old Chinese curse of being born in interesting times — in these ones at least — is the unparalleled opportunity one has of witnessing all manner of psychological and religious experiment, both authentic and fraudulent. Not that it is always easy to distinguish between the two, nor the shades in between, constantly showered and pummelled as we are on all sides by invective, sweet-talk, propaganda and intellectual self-righteousness. The search for the "New Age" is an excellent example of this. How easy it is to put the boot into bug-eyed crystal dreamers limping their way through life with armfuls of affirmations and karmically-oriented cosmology full of misplaced concreteness and wishful thinking. And no doubt the boot is often quite justified, particularly as regards the posterior of those New Age luminaries who are raking in the bucks at a positively fierce pace. One need only cite the example of Kevin Ryerson (of Shirley MacLaine fame), in many ways a sober and conscientious exponent of the New Age myth, who apparently charges US\$1,000 for a half-hour counselling session.

But on reflection all this is not too different from the much more accepted — if not always respected — traditional religions. They too, both Eastern and Western, are armed with affirmations, are implicitly karmically-orientated, and sport cosmologies replete with misplaced concreteness and wishful thinking. In any case, how many people are really capable of distinguishing symbolic from literal interpretations, particularly when it comes to their most sacred and cherished beliefs?

How many Christians, or those with leanings towards Christianity, could wholeheartedly go along with the following clearly very reasonable interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus from Joseph Campbell:

We know that Jesus could not have ascended to heaven because there is no physical heaven anywhere in the universe. Even ascending at the speed of light, Jesus would still be in this galaxy. Astronomy and physics have simply eliminated that as a literal, physical possibility. But if you read "Jesus ascended to heaven" in terms of its metaphoric connotation, you see that he has gone inward — not into outer space but into inward space, to the place from which all being comes, into the consciousness that is the source of all things, the kingdom of heaven within. The images are outward, but their reflection is inward. The point is that we should go with him by going inward. It is a metaphor of returning to the source, alpha and omega, of leaving the fixation on the body behind and going to the body's dynamic source. (The Power of Myth, 1988).

Campbell's life was dedicated to the exploration and understanding of mythology, both in itself and for its relevance to contemporary society, and his writings have much to offer us. It is patently obvious that one of the great vacuums and searches of twentieth century civilization is for an encompassing myth that is genuinely able to provide direction and meaning for our lives. The New Age is simply one attempt at this, as is the search for an interdisciplinary paradigm that encompasses every aspect of human endeavour, the full spectrum of experience and discovery. The fact that at least ten of the founders of modern physics — Plank, Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Pauli, Schroedinger, De Broglie, Jeans, Eddington

and Oppenheimer — all subscribed to a mystical understanding of the universe, is highly significant in terms of this search, and perhaps the following statement by Wolfgang Pauli most clearly captures the real spirit of our time:

I consider the ambition of overcoming opposites, including also a synthesis embracing both rational understanding and the mystical experience of unity, to be the mythos, spoken or unspoken, of this day and age.

There are, of course, a lot of casualties of twentieth century civilization, with many people suffering from severe emotional and personal problems. This does not only refer to the one percent of our population who have been diagnosed as schizophrenic, nor to those with cancer or who are in great physical pain, but to the many more who are psychologically afflicted in one way or another.

Conventional methods and explanations have failed to satisfy so many of these people, and there are not inconsiderable numbers whose search for meaning and balance — and indeed love — have taken them through an assortment of therapeutic and religious solutions. The ever-increasing popularity of the holistic health movement, which includes a lot of New Age ideas and has many and varied expressions, is evidence of this.

Therapies, like cosmological explanations, vary in their efficiency and reasonableness. Naturally there will be frauds and charlatans, but that is all grist for the mill, part of the heaving of humanity as it attempts to find a higher level of integration from which it can operate successfully. One map — or perhaps myth — that I have personally found very useful, is that of developmentalism, that combination of biology and psychology pioneered by Piaget and now the focus for exploration for quite a number of theorists and researchers. One of these is James Fowler, whose study of 'faith stages' (not necessarily religious) is extremely

interesting. His scheme, wherein a human being progresses from one faith stage to the next, for example from 'Mythical-Literal' (stage 2) to 'Synthetic-Conventional' (stage 3), provides a compelling metaphor for the journey through life. A person at the 'Mythical-Literal' stage — and one would include children here as part of their natural development, as well as adults 'stuck' in intransigent fundamentalist attitudes — would hopefully be able to shift to the 'Synthetic-Conventional' stage, in which faith revolves around conformity and the acceptance of social norms. This stage is seen particularly in teenagers, for whom the need to fit in with their peer group is of paramount importance. "Keeping up with the Jones's" would also be a symptom of stage 3.

With early adulthood comes Fowler's next stage: 'Individuative-Reflective', where the individual goes through a period of soul-searching and identity consolidation. A person at this stage, usually fairly young though not necessarily so, has thought through important issues and has come to his or her own conclusions about life, the universe and everything. Someone who, after serious reflection, comes to certain political or religious conclusions would be operating at this stage. However, it is not usually until at least the mid-thirties that, according to Fowler, some people begin to progress to the 'Paradoxical-Consolidative' stage (though now Fowler uses the term 'Conjunctive' faith for stage 5). It is only now that the individual is capable of seeing beyond the paradoxes and contradictions of different belief systems and discerning an underlying unity. It is at this stage that religious symbolism can genuinely be understood as metaphor. The giving way of previously solidly held beliefs and attitudes to a far more flexible framework is something that occurs in the shift from stage 4 to stage 5. And this often occurs at around the time of the mid-life crisis, in which, according to Jungian

psychology, the formerly outward-looking individual is forced to take stock of his or her inner life. And 'fate' will drag those who do not come willingly, hence the heightened level of anxiety and depression in some people as they journey through 'midolscence'.

Fowler does postulate a stage 6: 'Universalising' faith, where the individual's consciousness is actually grounded in a universal sense of being, transcending the split between understanding and experience that still exists at stage 5. Fowler is of the opinion that few reach this stage, citing Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King as examples, despite their personal inconsistencies. Other theorists also postulate such higher 'trans-rational' stages, comparable to contemplative and meditative states described in both Eastern and Western mystical literature. A great deal on this subject has been written by transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber who emphasises that a comprehensive framework or paradigm would need to take all levels of consciousness into consideration and that pathological problems can occur at any of these levels, whether they be pre-rational, rational or trans-rational. Therapeutic intervention must, he argues, be stage specific, for if a conventionally-minded doctor or psychiatrist interprets a patient's very real struggle to integrate a higher level of consciousness with their rational understanding as some sort of infantile regression or borderline neurosis and treats it accordingly, then that individual's chance for authentic personal growth may well be thwarted. This is why pioneering psychiatrists such as R.D. Laing have railed so strongly against the establishment.

On the other of the coin, New Age therapies and seminars which promise their own brand of higher level synthesis could well also be undermining genuine growth by encouraging a group-orientated therapeutic belief structure that, while

espousing high-sounding concepts and ideals, in reality encourages an undermining of rationality and a regression into pre-rational forms of magical and mythical-literal thinking. Thus one would want to counsel those in search of the healing touch and worldview that puts it all into perspective to take care and to exercise their discrimination — and if they have none, to develop it. At the same time, however, it is worth noting the sage advice of Joseph Campbell. He urges us to "follow our bliss" if we are to live authentic and meaningful lives, and I would suggest that if there is a healing myth that can satisfy the yearning of humanity for wholeness and fulfilment it would include the injunction to follow our bliss:

If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Wherever you are — if you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time.

In following our bliss we might well come to realize what Pauli considered to be an essential ingredient in the mythos of our day and age — "a synthesis embracing both rational understanding and the mystical experience of unity." And if a picture is worth a thousand words, perhaps the mythos itself — "the ambition of overcoming opposites" — has come to be encapsulated in what Campbell considered to be the mythical image *par excellence* for our era, the breathtaking photograph of earth from outer space. As early as 1948 Frederick Hoyle said, "Once a photograph of the earth taken from the outside is available . . . a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose." Campbell again:

The only myth that is going to be worth thinking about in the immediate future is one that is talking about the planet, not the city, not these people, but the planet, and everybody on it. And what it will have to deal with will be exactly what all myths have dealt with — the

maturation of the individual, from dependency through adulthood, through maturity, and then to the exit; and then how to relate to this society and how to relate this society to the world of nature and the cosmos. That's what the myths have all talked about, and what this one's got to talk about.

Because of the technological power of our age, perhaps the story this emerging myth must tell will be clothed in scientific garb so that we might readily believe — so that it can speak to us, as it were. Science has already acknowledged the inter-relationship and interdependence of all life in its development of systems theory, which Gregory Bateson described as "the biggest bite out of the Tree of Knowledge in two thousand years". James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, which conjures the image of the planet as a living being, is a direct result of systems thinking, as is the crucially important science of ecology. And science has already provided us with a map, as myths have always done, of the journey through life of the individual, and how he or she can proceed towards wholeness and fulfilment, both personally and as part of humanity.

That map is developmentalism. It is not yet complete and there are still adjustments to be made and agreements to be arrived at, but much of the spadework has been done by such theorists as Piaget, Maslow, Erikson, Kohlberg, Loevinger, Fowler and Wilber. Their research has a lot to offer us, and a comprehensive synthesis of their ideas and findings, and those of other theorists as well as of traditional

wisdom, would be timely, especially if accessible to the general public. For example, in the area of health, psychotherapist Frances Vaughan distinguishes five levels of consciousness that need to be addressed in the healing of the whole person: physical, emotional, mental, existential and spiritual. Although each of these levels can be dealt with independently, a genuinely holistic approach to health tries to encourage well-being on all of them.

Thus there need be no real conflict between, say, Freudian psychotherapy and the practice of Zen Buddhism, since they are operating at different levels of consciousness: Freud dealing with deep-seated repression occurring mainly at the emotional level, and Zen with existential and spiritual insight. The full spectrum of the developmental paradigm reaches from the primal unconsciousness of the infant to the possible superconsciousness of a Buddha or Christ, and within this framework all forms of knowledge and all states of consciousness, trans-rational as well as pre-rational, can theoretically be included. From a developmental perspective one can see where logic ends and higher forms of rational insight begin, and envisage how a synthesis between rationality and mysticism might take shape. Developmentalism is able to map the processes of personal growth, both for individuals and for societies, and this certainly seems a necessary ingredient in any healing myth that is likely to emerge.



# Psychiatry as Profane Myth

## With special reference to Chelmsford

Anne Musgrave

*Sydney*

Between 1963 and the suicide of Dr Harry Bailey in 1985, 28 patients — the majority of them women — died at Chelmsford private psychiatric hospital, Pennant Hills, NSW. Methods used to treat patients included barbiturate induced comas — euphemised as “deep-sleep therapy” — electric shock “therapy” and so-called “corrective” brain surgery.

A Gulag on our own doorstep. Black magic. How *should* we respond?

An unfashionable word, ‘should’. Before I became a mature-age student at Sydney University my natural response to Chelmsford would have been a normative response. Such things should not happen. Experimentation with human beings was unequivocally ‘bad’. I would have been energized to express these moral feelings of indignation. I would have maintained that this was an essentially *human* response. I would have entered into a vigorous dialogue with other human beings and having pooled our feelings of moral outrage and reached a consensus, the logical outcome would have been *action*. For what is moral belief worth if it is not cashed out in action?

Academia, however, has handed me a new kit of tools with which to examine human activities. The discipline of psychology taught me to distance myself from other human beings; how to reduce people to ‘data’; turn them into the ‘objects’ of my studies; to reduce people to pencil dots plotted on a graph which divided the ‘normal’ from ‘abnormal’. (Was not the exercise I was engaged in abnormal??). In second year we progressed from stats to rats. Black magic.

Studying Traditional and Modern philosophy was a curiously de-humanising process, too. In three years I failed to encounter a single female lecturer. Was I to assume that my own sex was cerebrally impaired? Or should I be questioning the philosophical foundations that had thrown up such a curiously unbalanced ‘norm’? Another curious state of affairs was that anyone who had started the ethics course with the audacity to believe that she or she could distinguish ‘the Good’ from ‘the Bad’ was speedily divested of such a pernicious belief and left dog-paddling along with everyone else in a sea of moral relativism. Then there was Structuralism. Instead of being reduced to cold data, human beings were obliterated as individuals. History became a blind process without a subject. Human beings became lifeless puppets, strings pulled by mechanisms of which all but the High Priest Structuralist remained ignorant. Our will to make ethical decisions had been abolished. I learned to study texts with complete disregard for the person who had written them. Black magic.

What has this to do with Chelmsford? Could it be that you and I are not as distanced from the events at Chelmsford as we would like to think; that when one starts to examine the profane mythologies which fed into Chelmsford it is some of *our own* most cherished mythologies that are reflected back in the mirror? The mythology might have taken on grotesque form. But even in a distorting fair ground mirror do we not recognize the semblance of ourselves?

It would be comforting to explain away Chelmsford mythology as stemming from the aberrations of some self-appointed Satanic high priest, Dr Harry Bailey, whose charisma and magnetism – whose “almost hypnotic power” (Sydney Morning Herald, August 6, 1988) – created an oasis of suffering. But who elevated the psychiatrist to the position of modern ‘Sky Father’? We did: those of us who unquestioningly accept the contemporary *Zeitgeist*.

Chelmsford stands as profoundly anti-humanist: a stripping away of the qualities we most value in human beings. From those patients all human dignity, all right to be self-determining was removed. The individual simply did not count. In academia, did I not experience the same process? In each case the dynamic was the *experimental* – a flight from asking the kind of basic ethical questions about everyday human actions that were asked by people in the past. In each case, what was missing was, surely, a *normative* response. A society in which the ordinary individual disengages from taking an ethical stance, and in which our so-called ‘best brains’ seem to take pride in occupying a position of moral neutrality is a society in deep trouble.

Let Chelmsford stand as symbol of what occurs in a society that no longer addresses itself to the moral questions: what do we hold sacred? What *do* we venerate? How do we distinguish between the sacred — that which ought to be revered — and the profane? I am not a Fred Nile suggesting a return to harsh moral absolutes but instead of the cold academic ‘gaze’ isn’t it time we engaged in an open-ended creative dialogue aimed at reaching consensus about what it is about being a human being that we *value*? Is it not through a process of creative interaction between human beings that our own ‘set ideas’ — our own maybe too rigid mythologies — may experience a creative, life-enhancing shift? To ask ultimate questions about what is *valuable* involves reaching for a new normative understanding of our

cosmos and trying to identify what it is we hold to be sacred.

## A Profane Mythology

As has happened in academia, psychiatry has developed its own mode of discourse, intelligible only to the initiated. Like most belief systems that elevate a sky Father posing as the voice of reason (“In the beginning was Logos, the word”), it is those who symbolically represent the natural who bow down. For instance, there is no suggestion of Earth Mother in the archetypal woman of the chemical company advertisements targeted at our ‘mind doctors’. Often the picture is grainy, dark. In an advertisement for Integran in a medical journal the ‘mind’ doctors are told that this sedative will “restore perspective by correcting the disturbed brain chemistry”. Accompanying the words is a picture of a woman, head bowed over a sink full of dirty dishes. As no one understands brain chemistry, the mode of discourse is pure magical hocus pocus posing as science. Women are shown as victims of their own biology.

It is almost as though we are biologically impaired (just as that lack of female lecturers in philosophy left me feeling my sex was cerebrally impaired). *Woman by her very nature* is deemed deficient. The natural must be chemically ‘fixed up’. It is not the same with current attempts to meddle with DNA to produce not designer jeans but designer plants and animals? No other religion has given birth to a high priesthood with such delusions of grandiosity that in order to satisfy their whims, women/plants/animals and even rainfall must be scientifically re-designed.

Chelmsford concentrates the mind on the fact that we are the only civilization in history to have medicalized anguish. For the first time in living history the ordinary fears and worries of ordinary men and women have been drawn within the ever-widening sphere of institutionalized medicine. Minor tranquilisers are not

primarily targetted at those who display obvious symptoms of delusion or psychosis, making them unable to function, but at US — ordinary human beings who go to work, raise children and queue up at the supermarket: people who in every society before our own would have been regarded as normal; people who would have found meaning by reaching out to others and sharing; whose problems would have been addressed within the community.

With bio-chemical idolatry, *communitas* is abolished. Shamanic healing of the troubled soul was a community affair, the healing of the historical Jesus was through touch. Most human activity since the dawn of time has involved creatively building an emotionally, spiritually and *communally* satisfying 'bridge of meaning' between chaotic events in the natural world and our need for security and order in the midst of decay and change. Consider how much of human art, music, poetry, literature has flowed from an anguished someone, somewhere creatively building a 'bridge' between inner subjective experience and the outer world of human beings. The panaceas of modern psychiatry are different. The feelings of the anguished are anaesthetized, masked, blotted out, deadened by an ever burgeoning *smorgasbord* of socially sanctioned bio-chemicals; madness.

Hard day at the office? Marriage on the rocks? HSC looming? No need to reach out to others — to some power greater than one's self — for solace. Take chemical X . . . Ersatz bliss. Magic bullets. Bottled serenity. All the promise of *The Upanishads* released into the bloodstream instantly. Zap. Commune with a chemical god, and the reward is the world's fastest conversion experience. With Librium humankind is Liberated; with Valium, Validated and with Serepax (*Sere*: serenity, *pax*: peace) one is baptised Serene. Nirvana in a nutshell . . . cosmic calm encapsulated in one beguiling tiny, cachou-like pill. The psychiatrist smiles his soothing, priestly

smile. Old Mother Medicare picks up the tab. Society might frown on marijuana, but we freely give our blessing to the kind of major tranquilisers administered by Harry Bailey in the name of science/faith that promises to make the sick psyche whole.

Is it because we are biologically impaired that women in Australia are up to three times more likely than men to receive a script for a mood-altering chemical . . . that women outnumber men 15 to 1 in advertisements for sedatives aimed at doctors by the multi-national drug companies?

Or could it be that we have allowed ourselves to experience the grip of profane mythology? Whether the prevailing mythology dictates that man (and it usually is 'man'!) is a 'little less than the gods' or that as creatures we are 'little more than rats', the myth can only thrive by creating victims because this kind of power defines itself in opposition to the weak. In order to be a winner, you must invent the losers. To set yourself up as Guardian of the Human Norm, you must draw a boundary with those you have deemed 'abnormal' left outside. Once life is dichotomized by those who establish the ruling mythology, the way is clear for that powerful group to establish the norm. One Zeitgeist branded Joan of Arc a witch. Then she became a saint. In Sydney in the 1980s Joan of Arc might well have been considered a suitable case for deep sleep therapy.

"Human beings, including psychologists, construct their cosmological worlds, their explanatory systems, out of beliefs, some of whose origins are contained in metaphor-to-myth transformations." (Sarbin, T. 'The Mythic Nature of Anxiety', *American Psychologist*, 1970). The history of 'mind medicine' shows repeatedly that such metaphors or hypothetical constructs tend to become reified. Gradually, over time, the metaphorical 'as if' understanding is lost. Our gap in knowledge goes unnoticed. What was once reconciling idea

(metaphor) — open, fluid, alive — becomes scientism's 'explanation' — cold, dehumanised and often used to impose meaning as the *only* meaning.

Among those who control that meaning — psychiatrists, for instance — it becomes a source of power. From metaphor turned in on itself, rendered dead, sterile, explanatory, comes 'might' justified as 'right'; the Russian Gulag, Spanish Inquisition, the high priests of scientism who have, with the flick of a magic wand, converted 'mind' to 'mechanistic brain', reserve for themselves the 'right' to bio-chemically treat the malfunctioning 'machine' with all the tools at their disposal (shock therapy, neurosurgeon's scalpel). The justification is that the high priests are doing us good. Power posing as solution is a magical way of stopping us seeing that power might be the problem.

The word 'anxiety' is a variant of the Middle English 'anguish' which, at a time when the great religious revival was sweeping across Europe, stood for a personal, inner, spiritual craving of the soul for unity with something beyond itself. It was a feeling that creatively 'reached out' for solace (rather than requiring to be bio-chemically 'nipped in the bud'). Anguish had itself been borrowed from the Old French '*anguisse*' which meant the kind of physical choking sensation in the throat that comes from swallowing, say, a fish bone. So the word for observable, physical event was borrowed to denote a state of mind. The link was not a factual, logically consistent connection but an 'as if' analogy — a metaphoric connection. Only with the publication of the second English edition of Freud's *Hemmung, Symptom und Angst* when the opaque German word '*angst*' became 'anxiety' (*The Problem of Anxiety*) did anxiety start to change into a concrete phenomenon — no longer a natural feeling but some dark, looming, 'thing' that people 'get' and experts 'treat'.

Once you reify feelings, reduce them to a quantitative state that can be measured,

objectify them in cold statistics, trap them within the jargon of scientific discourse, then you have effectively closed up your system of meaning. Our 'anguish' becomes the psychiatrists' business. The kind of anguished feelings that Kierkegaard and Pascal dealt with creatively and cathartically by channelling them into human *communication* — shared feelings — are appropriated by the mind doctors and the drug companies with their bio-chemical solutions.

### Toward a New Life-Enhancing Mythology

Perhaps we need to start looking at the natural again for our new metaphors: seeing life in terms of an unfolding (non-dualistic) dynamic (while allowing a true, life-enhancing science to continue examining in good faith the separate parts) Implicate in all mythologies — all paradigms — is a destructive potentiality which occurs when the metaphoric content is lost and instead of the prevailing belief system standing as explanation it is imposed as the only explanation. By that stage, so powerful is the control exerted on the rest of us by the high priests of the prevailing paradigm, that we become almost blinded to the possibility of alternative paradigms. A useful analogy might be that of a sapling which having become a vigorous tree, becomes overburdened by its fruits and begins to die. The tree has become so much a part of our prevailing paradigm that we fail to see (really see) and creatively nourish the new sapling that is springing up. It is only when our creative energies are directed into the new, dynamic mythology that there is a 'shift' into a new order. Collective energies then empower the new mythology.

In drawing a distinction between what I call Thanatos mythology and Gaia mythology I am not imposing a rigid dualism. Implicate within Gaia mythology is the potentiality for Thanatos and *vice*

*versa*. A new humanism, a new ethical sense might flow from recognizing whether we are personally embedded within a world view which is life-enhancing (for self, others, planet) or life-denying.

To make this distinction I draw from ideas expressed in *Finite and Infinite Games* (Penguin, 1986) by James P. Carse, Professor of Religion at New York University.

All structures (symbols, rituals, myths) are in a sense a creative game. In unfolding Gaia mythology, the game is played for the sheer fun of playing. When mythology dissipates into Thanatos, the game is being played for the sake of *winning* the game. Instead of players, there are winners and losers. Gaia mythology reaches out to others with a sense of connectedness. Its symbols are forms that seek to *release* content — open windows, open dialogue, *karuna*. The forms of Thanatos mythology seek to trap, enclose, appropriate content. The signifiers wear uniforms, robes, crowns, wigs. Thanatos mythology is “the gaze . . . passively linked to . . . the endless task of absorbing experience in its entirety and of mastering it.” (Foucault, M, *The Birth of the Clinic*, Arrowsmith, 1973, p 14).

Thanatos mythology marches because the aim is the destination. Gaia mythology dances because meaning lies in the dance itself. Thanatos is imposition; Gaia invitation. Thanatos seeks a closed system of meaning. Gaia delights in a sense of mystery, awe. Not some romantic, idealistic, gnostic sense of mystery, but a truly pragmatic acknowledgement of our humble creatureliness which leaves questions about ultimate potentialities as open questions to be freely explored. Gaia mythology, because it is flexible and fluid carries within it a sense of not being ‘apart from’ but ‘a part of’. Because this is conveyed naturally there is no need for those tools of the trade relied upon by the high priests of Thanatos mythology — jargon discourse, insignia, badges of authority, elitism, ‘old school tie’, sexism,

the psychiatrist’s couch on which the patient is rendered horizontal and vulnerable; all those cold, hard signs of a bleak anti-humanism. Thanatos mythology is power over the ‘other’; Gaia mythology is — just is — powerful.

Can we not between us generate a normative sense of the sacred as being that which nurtures the creative potentialities of life (rather than which closes meaning)? That which embodies our creaturely sense of connectedness and *karuna*? That which acknowledges the *numinous*, not as a spiritual flight from reality but as everyday pragmatic experience (we are essentially *mystified* creatures). That which opens metaphorical windows and engages in questioning, creative dialogue rather than producing explanations and closed-system answers?

In an age currently termed ‘Post Ideological’ and in a State apparently committed to the creed of ‘Running things like a business — it’s all about winning’ (Nick Greiner, Channel 10, August 4), those 28 vulnerable people who died without dignity in Chelmsford Hospital (on my own doorstep) demand of us all an engaged response. Chelmsford seems to stand out as a symbol of our need for some new, normative world view; a new sense of what we hold to be sacred; a new humanism; a new, creative, open-ended way of living our lives so that Thanatos can be dissolved not into some new hard-line ideology but into a new, practical and caring vision. Until then we retain our Thanatos Mythology and the feeling that the world views we currently impose:

... are so much a vehicle for the large insufficiencies of our culture, for our shallow attitude toward death, for our anxieties about feeling, for our reckless improvident responses to our ‘real problems of growth’, for our inability to construct an advanced industrial society which properly regulates consumption, and for our justified fears of the increasingly violent course of history. (S. Sontag, 1983).

Finally, I would point out to those academics who dodge value judgements in

favour of a scientific approach to human beings, (philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists et al), that had the prevailing Zeitgeist been less 'objective, neutral and non judgemental' and had each one of us had confidence in what I believe to be a natural sense of 'right' and 'wrong' — an essential part of our humanness — then we might not have collectively turned a blind eye to the Gulag which was allowed to flourish for years on our doorstep.

The point is not that we should instantly produce some cut and dried new ethic as we head toward 2000. But that we should pool our resources and try. A society coerced by some grand idealistic vision is a frightening place for the weak and vulnerable. But then, so too, is a dead sea of moral relativism. I'm not seeking a faith that can move mountains. Mine is a small vision: a world in which a great many of

us 'little people' enter into a new, ongoing creative, inter-active dialogue about what it is that we *value*. Philosophy and psychology filled my head with vast *quantities* of information.

Chelmsford reminds me that it is *quality* of life we should nurture and cherish if we are to experience ourselves as flourishing human beings. Where there's a will there's a way. What scientism and all the other Thanatos mythologies have appropriated is our sense of ourselves as responsible, *willing* human beings. We've handed over our power. It is not the power of the isolated individual unit that I want back but the kind of power that expresses itself through those currently unfashionable Gaia activities; caring, sharing, *communitas*, commitment to a morally improved world and to exploring all the creative potentialities inherent in being a human being.



# Lacan in a Nut(shell)house: Psychiatry and Religion Under One Roof

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It was Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) who showed the way to a linguistic understanding of Freud's thought that has provided interpreters a way to deal with psychiatric cases, as well as literary texts, on the basis of Freudian theory without being subject to the charge of psychological reductionism. The reductionism that classifies a person according to a professional discourse of pathology classifications represents such a misuse of psychoanalysis. Classification of the artist or religious practitioner as neurotic, and the pedantic and unilluminating translation of literary and religious figures into psychological terminology are quite impossible within a Lacanian context.

In like manner, the reductionism that portrays psychiatric hegemony in terms of professionally constructed diagnostic categories is nipped in the bud if the Lacanian view is put. Psychiatry has yet to learn the lessons of Lacan even though some members of French feminist school of psychoanalysis have led the way so far (e.g. Cixous and Kristeva). This is especially the case when psychiatry addresses the religious practitioner, for whom the oral and written traditions of religion constitute the "text" by which that practitioner is constituted.

The Lacanian "*retour à Freud*" is at the same time the introduction of the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure which employs the concept of the linguistic "sign" as a combination of a signifier with what it signifies. The "text" of a religious tradition forms a symbolic order which itself constitutes the "context" of specific

religious practice. Although the sign, as a relationship of signifier to signified, is arbitrary, the signifier is not a material entity chosen to represent some concept but is, indeed, a material entity (pattern of sounds) and a concept bound together, capable of differentiation only in binary opposition to other signs. For Lacan this understanding of the linguistic sign as signifier combined with signified is a relationship of opposition. It is, in Lacan's view, the discovery of Freud that allows us to see the full meaning of this opposition. The signified must submit to the mark of the signifier. Indeed, only in that submission can psychic content (or *le signifiable*) become the signified. In Lacan's picturesque language this becomes the *passion du signifiant*. Language precedes the one who speaks it, and the submission of the signifiable to the mark of the signifier implies that the signifier in its relations with other signifiers in language stamps the signified with those relations.

## The Two Movements of the Unconscious

Freud maintained that the contents of the unconscious operate in accordance with the laws of *Verschiebung* ("displacement") and *Verdichtung* ("condensation"). According to Lacan, these movements of the unconscious correspond exactly to the way in which signifiers move within the realm of discourse: metonymy (=displacement) and metaphor (=condensation). Hence Lacan's famous dictum that "the unconscious is structured

as a language." For Lacan the unconscious is not some primitive level of awareness or place in the psyche where thought is somehow prepared. The unconscious is thought itself, thought with words that somehow are barred from consciousness. This lapse in consciousness is something like a demon that "plays a game with your watchfulness." Lacan's Saussurian interpretation of Freud allows Lacan to claim that all psychoanalysis reveals about the unconscious goes to establish the linguistic structure of the unconscious. The unconscious as a discourse unmarked by consciousness raises the difficulty of the identity of the one whose thoughts such discourse might be. Who, precisely, is thinking the thoughts of the unconscious? Lacan is convinced that general psychology, and with it American and British psychoanalysis, construes this question in a misleading manner. To ask "Who?, as though the answer to the question might produce a marker of a hidden, unified "subject" is to forget that in analytic practice the unconscious reveals itself as a series of interruptions in the flow of conscious discourse. The so-called "Freudian slip" is an example. These interruptions are, as it were, the discourse of an Other. Clearly, the subject whose discourse is second discourse cannot be its subject (the one in control), and, consequently, cannot identify the subject of this other discourse. There are two subjects who speak in the analytic situation, and the confusion of their discourse. their *inter-dit*, which is at the same time an *intra-dit* demonstrates what Lacan refers to with the English word "fading," the fading of the classical, unified subject which psychologists and psychiatrists call the "self" or a person's "identity."

Lacan's study of the emergence of the notion of a unified subject, or "self," belongs to an early stage in his career, in which he observed the experience of the infant from the age of six months to eighteen months who discovers his or her

image in a mirror. For Lacan the image in the mirror presents to the child an organized and unified image which in a sudden moment of recognition shows the child to himself/herself as a unity, as over against the child's own experience of incompleteness and dissolution.

(Somewhat analogous is Melanie Klein's depiction of the difference between the "schizoid-paranoid position" in which the part-objects of the mother, e.g., breast, are introjected, and the "depressive position" in which the mother herself is seen as a whole object, thus implying the existence of a unitary subject and a sense of loss of the mother introject. The "positions" in Kleinian psychoanalysis follow in sequence in the psychodynamic development of very young children.) Thereafter, the child seeks continually to experience himself or herself as such a unified being and in that movement begins to adopt the symbolic order of language in which such representation is possible. This representation, however, is always less than the truth of the child's total experience. As a consequence, the "I" is always something other than the fullness of the person's psychic content. Nevertheless, through the mirror stage, the child is inexorably connected to the world of signification represented by the image in the mirror and later, refined versions of that image. The child is simultaneously both identified with the image and alienated from it. The "I" who speaks is, therefore, something of a mirage, an effect of signifiers.

Since, as has been noted, the two movements of the unconscious correspond to the figures metonymy and metaphor, these figures ought to be expressible in terms of the Saussurian model of the sign that might be written as follows:

Signifier

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signified

or, more simply, S/s. Metonymy is the elision of signifiers in which the original

S/s relation is both maintained and obscured. Lacan's example is that of "thirty sails" for "ships." The new signifier (S) by itself does not bear the full weight of the notion of a fleet of thirty ships. That is to say, in context, the elision between "ships" and "sails" causes the new figure to bear the original signification (S/s).

Metonymy is also the figure of desire; for Lacan. Or, more exactly, "*le désir de l'homme est une métonomie.*" The mechanics of desire are a result of submission to the order of the signifier. As a biological entity a human being has certain requirements or needs for survival, but within the symbolic order of language these biological needs may only be expressed in language, which is to say that the need is not perceived in its reality as need. Need as the signified is subordinated to the realm of the signifier and is expressed in language as demand of another for the presence or absence of something.

The Other to whom the demand is made is both the supposed repository of satisfaction of the demand and the origin of the language in which it must be articulated. Demand is for recognition; indeed, for what can only be called love, from this Other. There is a basic dissimilarity between the biological need and the symbolic expression of need as demand. That dissimilarity is what for Lacan constitutes "desire". This idea is quite different from any theory of "biological instincts."

Since desire derives from this mismatch between the biological order and the symbolic order, desire can never be "satisfied." Indeed, the apparent satisfaction of desire by realization of its object merely leads to the displacement of desire elsewhere. Desire has to do with a lack, in this case what is lacking between desire and need. Although demand takes place in the symbolic order, this lack is not a part of that order. It may be represented, however, in the symbolic order by signifiers, signifiers of a lack. This means

that desire may be attached to any number of non-specific signifiers which, at the same time, signify a *manque-à-être* ("lack"). These signifiers represent the *objet-petit-a* which has the power to call forth desire. All, however, have the quality of a fantasy of fulfillment. Chief among them, and constitutive of them for Lacan is the phallus. Not a penis, but a phallus, which is a symbolic construct.

The second movement of the unconscious is metaphor, the substitution of one signifier for another. Here Lacan presses the Saussurian algorithm S/s far beyond Saussure. Metaphor for Lacan is the passage of the signifier (S) across the bar (/) to the position of the signified (s). In this instance the new signifier loses its bond to a signified, which role is assumed by the first signifier. The relationship of the old signifier to its signified is contained under the mark of the new signifier. Such is the nature of oral and written "texts" in religions. Lacan can also refer to this as *superimposition des signifiants*. Unlike metonymy which preserves the *barre* (/) of the Saussurian algorithm, metaphor violates the limit of the *barre* by having one signifier become the signified of another signifier.

Metaphor is the operation of the signifiers without regard to signification. Lacan's image is that of piling up of signifiers by having them "cross the bar," the *barre* of the Saussurian algorithm (S/s). The first signifier passes into the unconscious, into the place of the signified and is now itself signified by a new signifier. For example, a person becomes embedded in the "texts" of his/her religious tradition. The process may continue indefinitely and construct a chain of signifiers which leaves the original S/s far back in the unconscious. Metaphor, the process of poetic and religious discourse, is also the process that underlies repression.

Further, metaphor is the process underlying symptom formation in mental illness. A psychiatric symptom is, indeed, a metaphor in which the body or some

bodily function is employed as a signifier for the repressed signifier of a forgotten trauma. All meaning is likewise metaphoric for Lacan. If discourse proceeds from signifier to signifier by metonymy, the "meanings" of these signifiers are established by reference to the signifiers they supplant. Language has no necessary connection with the "real" — this is an implication of the *manque-à-être* ("lack") of signification — and thus language takes its meanings only in relation to its own elements.

### The "Splitting" of the Subject

What of the subject, what many psychologists call the "self," in all of this? As locus of signification, the subject seems an unnecessary complication. In every respect what can be signified submits to the signifiers which are linked to one another through metonymy and metaphor. The subject is constituted in the field of the signifier, in the discourse of the Other, by the very action of discourse. From earliest childhood and before the acquisition of language the infant is already part of a story, a family story called *Oedipus* among other stories. Entrance into the symbolic order already situates the infant so that his/her weaning is not only a change, but a corresponding to need, is a biological reality; but the prohibition and threat are determined within the structure of signification and return to the infant not as need, but as desire. Two subjects operate within language. On the order of the signifier the subject demands love. At the level of needs the subject seeks satisfaction. The difference between the two is what constitutes desire. It also constitutes the *refente* ("cleavage") or, to use Freud's terminology, the *Spaltung* of the subject, which is the split between conscious and unconscious processes.

Nevertheless, the crushing of the demand for love, for the primal demand to be situated within the mother's body, does

not go entirely uncompensated. From the shambles of demand for love emerges "*la puissance de la pure perte*." The Other lacks what is demanded, and the demanding subject can only recognize this lack or *désir de l'Autre*. Desire is also *discours de l'Autre*, where the *de* must be taken in the sense of "discourse about the Other." The desiring subject is thus constituted by the Other, the locus of pure signification and is, indeed, the effect of that signification.

### The Name of the Father

The last important Lacanian concept for understanding the relationship between religion and psychiatry is that of the *nom-du-père*, the Name of the Father, that both regulates and enables desire. The prohibition of symbiosis with the mother, which the symbolic father represents as law, is not a frustration of desire but an enabling of it. Desire, after all, is not a demand for love or a quest for the satisfaction of needs but is a result of the crushing of demand which, paradoxically, allows needs to be met in a dialectic or exchange. Numinous and mystical experiences can be interpreted as signifying this.

The Name of the Father has nothing to do with the prohibitions of one's actual father or even of an imaginary father. The Name of the Father is just that, a name, a signifier that exists only in the symbolic realm. It is the function of this signifier to establish the order of desire by the prohibition of symbiosis. In religious traditions, this implies soteriology. For Lacan the phallus is the privileged signifier of the lack which is thus produced and functions in the unconscious as the signifier of desire. It is the Name of the Father that establishes this place, this primal repression, by which the phallus takes on its role of unconscious signification by prohibiting the child from *being* the phallus, from being the "completion" of the mother. The failure

of the Name of the Father to be installed in the place of unconscious signification is the origin of psychosis according to Lacan. Hence, in the lives of religious practitioners "soteriological anxiety" often appears as psychosis to the psychiatric establishment.

The effect of Lacan's work is to give precedence to the signifiers, to the symbolic order, as constructing the subject or "self." Since the privilege stands with the signifier instead of with the signified, which must submit to the signifier, the possibility of any psychological

reductionism is eliminated. Accordingly, Lacan's understanding of Freud is able to insert Freud back into discussions about psychiatry and religion in a way that would considerably challenge currently used categories of psychiatric diagnostics. Challenged would be the ways in which psychiatrists "misdiagnose" symptoms of neurosis and psychosis during psychiatric interviews, especially when they bear signifiers derived from the symbolic order of religious traditions and the texts that express them.



MISERERE: THE HARD BUSINESS OF LIVING. PRINT, 1922.