

The Still Small Voice: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Guilt and Conscience. London, Karnac, 2013.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Moral Ambiguity of Psychoanalysis

For decades what Freud (1933a) himself regarded as “the preferred field of work for psychoanalysis,” namely “The problems which the unconscious sense of guilt has opened up, its connections with morality, education, crime and delinquency ...” (p. 61), has been neglected in favour of a preoccupation with narcissism, shame, self, relatedness and, most recently, the neurological foundations of mind. But recently issues concerning the superego, guilt and conscience appear to be returning from repression. No doubt this “comeback” amounts to a reflection in psychoanalysis of a shift in the wider culture: the “culture of narcissism” (Lasch 1979) got us into hot water. What three decades ago Rangell (1980) described in *The Mind of Watergate* as the “syndrome of the compromise of integrity” led eventually to the 2008 crisis of “casino capitalism.” It is time we began re-thinking the psychoanalytic theory of morality.

As early as my doctoral research (Carveth, 1977) I was struggling with what I saw as the grossly inadequate psychoanalytic position with respect to moral questions. In this connection, I remember being struck by Abram Kardiner’s (1977, pp. 107-109) account, in *My Analysis with Freud: Reminiscences*, of one of his first clinical encounters after qualifying as a psychoanalyst and hanging out his shingle. A man presented with a work inhibition that he sought to have cured by analysis. It turned out he was a hit man, a professional killer, who was suddenly and inexplicably having trouble performing his job. After a few sessions in which both patient and analyst recognised the mutual threat they constituted to one another, the man did not return, leaving Kardiner wondering whether or not he had “cured” him.

Kardiner’s case raises a range of significant issues that psychoanalysts, with few exceptions, have sought to evade. The patient came with a psychological problem, an inhibition of function. In the traditional view, the psychoanalyst, like the physician, abstains from moral judgement and employs his expertise in the service of relief of the patient’s “inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety” (Freud, 1926d). So in a case like this, does the analyst get on with the job and help the patient overcome his neurotic inhibition against killing? If not, why not? If the analyst declines to help in this instance, is he or she now, like the patient, suffering neurotic inhibition? Is the analyst suffering from an unresolved moralistic countertransference? Does he or she require more

analysis, especially of his or her superego? Or could it be that the idea of psychoanalysis as a scientific, technical, ethically neutral or “value-free” enterprise amounts to a cover story disguising the fact that, in reality, despite its avowed commitment to honesty and to putting everything into words, psychoanalysis practices an ethic it simply refuses to preach?

Half a century before the invention of psychoanalysis, in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), and other works, Søren Kierkegaard advanced a view of emotional disturbance in which issues of morality and guilt are central. As Barrett (1958) explains, for Kierkegaard:

The condition we call a sickness in certain people is, at its centre, a form of sinfulness. We are in the habit nowadays of labelling morally deficient people as sick, mentally sick, or neurotic. ... But the closer we get to any neurotic the more we are assailed by the sheer human perverseness, the wilfulness, of his attitude. If he is a friend, we can up to a point deal with him as an object who does not function well, but only up to a point; beyond that if a personal relationship exists between us we have to deal with him as a subject, and as such we must find him morally perverse or wilfully disagreeable; and we have to make these moral judgments to his face if the friendship is to retain its human content, and not disappear into a purely clinical relation. *At the centre of the sickness of the psyche is a sickness of the spirit.* Contemporary psychoanalysis will have eventually to reckon with this Kierkegaardian point of view (p. 170; my emphasis).

Though Freud himself possessed “the mind of a moralist” (Rieff, 1959)—to Pfister he wrote that “on the whole I have not found much of the ‘good’ in people” and that “Most of them are in my experience riff-raff” (letter cited by Jones, 1961, p. 445), while to Putnam he commented on “The unworthiness of human beings, even of analysts” (letter cited by Jones, 1961, p. 433)—in marked contrast to Kierkegaard, he sought to “de-moralise” therapeutic discourse. The founder of psychoanalysis did not believe that immorality is at the root of neurosis, or that its cure renders people morally improved. “Why,” he asks, “should analysed people be altogether better than others? Analysis makes for unity, but not necessarily for goodness” (letter to Putnam cited by Jones, 1961, p. 433). The patient was to be viewed not as a morally troubled soul in need of redemption, but as a victim of an “illness,” albeit one caused less by biological factors than by conflicting unconscious psychological forces and mechanisms in need of readjustment through becoming conscious.

In psychiatry de-moralisation has been more consistent than in psychoanalysis; patients have been viewed as victims of illnesses rather than moral agents implicated in their own suffering. The psychoanalytic position on this question has been ambiguous. On one hand, in keeping with Freud's psychic determinism, patients have at times been depicted as pawns of unconscious forces and the compulsion to repeat, though ego psychology (Hartmann, 1939) attempted to resist such reductionism. On the other hand, psychoanalysis reveals the degree to which patients are the unconscious agents of their suffering. Whereas Freud (1917) attributed much of the resistance to psychoanalysis to the challenge it constitutes to the notion of free will ("But human megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from the psychological research of the present time which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in its mind" [p. 284]), Schafer (1976) drew attention to a complementary truth: that the resistance to psychoanalysis has as much or more to do with its widening, rather than shrinking, the range of human responsibility, its revelation that "People ... are far more creators and stand much closer to their gods than they can bear to recognise" (p. 153). Schafer asks:

What, after all, did Freud show in the *Studies on Hysteria* ... but that a neurotic symptom is something a person *does* rather than *has* or has inflicted on him or her? It is a frightening truth that people make their own mental symptoms. It is an unwelcome insight that if neurosis is a disease at all, it is not like any other disease. It is an arrangement or a creation, an expression of many of an individual's most basic categories of understanding and vital interests. ... Consequently, the widespread rejection of psychoanalysis may be understood as a species of disclaimed action. It is a way of asserting: "Do not tell us how much we do and how much more we could do. Allow us our illusions of ignorance, passivity, and helplessness. We dare not acknowledge that we *are* masters in our own house" (pp. 153-4).

Despite rejection of free will in favour of strict determinism in psychoanalytic metapsychology, the clinical psychology of psychoanalysis reveals patients as the unconscious agents and creators of their emotional "illnesses," however much they may also be victims of the circumstances to which such "illnesses" are a response. In pointing this out, Schafer was in no way seeking to replace a one-sided determinism with an equally one-sided voluntarism, but simply drawing our attention to the fact that we tend to err in two directions: at times excessively *claiming*

responsibility and, at other times, excessively *disclaiming* it. Like Sartre (1943; 1960), he recognized that human beings are both subjects and objects.

While never denying the reality of emotional or psychological disturbance and suffering, nor the validity of psychoanalysis as therapy, the claim that someone is “mentally ill,” like the claim that an economy is “sick,” could for the psychoanalyst Thomas Szasz (1961) never be more than a metaphor. Where so-called “mental illness” can be shown to have an organic or neurochemical cause, then it is physical not mental illness. The latter term is reserved for conditions psychiatry *wants* to believe are illnesses but cannot prove to be so in any literal sense. It may *look* like “illness” in certain respects, but it is not illness unless its physiological, biological, anatomical, neurological or neurochemical causes are discovered, in which case it is physical not mental illness. In Szasz’s view, and in mine, psychoanalysts are metaphorical “doctors” treating metaphorical “sicknesses” of the soul. If I continue to refer to my analysands as “patients” it is not because I consider them to be suffering from a literal illness, but because the term “patient” shares with the term “passion” the common Latin root *patiens*, from the verb *pati*, meaning “to suffer.” Patients are sufferers. Those of us who seek to work with them therapeutically share a commitment, if not a “calling,” that transcends the professional or business element and cash nexus conveyed, to my ear at least, by the term “client.”

While psychoanalysis has been ambiguous with respect to the question of the causation of emotional disturbance and the degree to which patients are the victims or the agents of their suffering or both, it has, at least manifestly, shared the psychiatric attitude toward treatment, viewing it as a technical rather than a moral enterprise. The goal of psychoanalytic therapy was to render unconscious forces conscious and to thereby enhance the patient’s freedom to choose, but the resulting choice, for good or ill, was the patient’s business, not the analyst’s. In other words, the goal was to make people freer and saner, not necessarily better. (I leave it to the ambitious philosopher to attempt to reconcile the psychoanalytic commitment to expanding patients’ freedom with Freudian psychic determinism). Rieff (1961) describes the psychoanalytic “counter-ideal of health” as follows:

The chaotic id and the “rigid” superego are the areas of psychic vulnerability; the ego, having flexibility and craft, is Freud’s category of resolution. Where conscience, or an ideal, has divided personality against itself in constraints of its own devising, the therapeutic task is to help the ego move from mere defensiveness on to the offensive in an effort to achieve a new

integrity. But this integration of self is no harbinger of goodness. It is possible to become more sound of mind and yet less good—in fact, worse. To be a complete man, self-united and controlled, states that counter-ideal of health in the name of which the old constraining ideals of devotion and self-sacrifice are rejected (pp. 64-65).

One reason for the hostility toward psychoanalysis on the part of certain religious traditions is that they took seriously the, in my view false, claims that psychoanalytic therapy is not about helping people to be good, but only to become more rational and sane, and that “it is possible to become more sound of mind and yet less good—in fact, worse.”

Let it be clear that I am in no way arguing that therapists should moralise with their patients or seek to indoctrinate or convert them in one way or another. On this point I am a traditionalist. Except in extreme circumstances where the patient constitutes a danger to himself or others, it is the analyst's responsibility to abstain from acting-out his or her countertransference in such ways, independent of whether such countertransference derives from the analyst's superego, or from what I distinguish as his or her conscience. But what I do claim is that it is not possible for a person to become sane (“of sound mind; not mad” [*O.E.D.*]) without at the same time becoming morally improved. This is because a person's immorality is always known to and disapproved by conscience, and sometimes also punished by the superego (even where the superego is the instigator of the immorality, a not uncommon situation as I will argue). When it is unconscious, bad conscience cannot promote positive change and reparation. In this circumstance the unconscious superego seizes the opportunity to inflict punishment, generating emotional disturbance, however obscure its manifestations and effects may be.

Although analysts may be reluctant to admit it, no patient is genuinely helped by psychoanalysis who does not in the process become morally improved, for it is necessary to become morally improved in order to overcome neuroses, character and personality disorders and the suffering they entail. The churches misunderstood psychoanalysis because psychoanalysis misunderstood, or at least misrepresented, itself. The exceptional circumstances mentioned above, where the patient constitutes a danger to himself or others, are circumstances that force the analyst to “come out of the closet” as it were and acknowledge and act upon the moral values that undergird the entire therapeutic enterprise, but that are normally hidden behind a mask of moral neutrality, unless and until the patient forces our hand. The fact that there may be good, pragmatic, clinical reasons for wearing such a mask, at least for a time, should not be allowed to

blind us to the fact that it is a mask. In “the scientific self-misunderstanding of metapsychology,” Habermas (1971, chapter 11) discusses Freud’s misrecognition of psychoanalysis as a natural science rather than an interpretive, hermeneutic enterprise (I personally believe like other human or social sciences it contains elements of both). A related element of this self-misunderstanding is the failure of psychoanalysis to grasp, or at least acknowledge, the inherently moral dimension of its practice. The Kleinians have been far closer than the Freudians to recognising this, but even they have been reluctant to make it explicit.

Freud (1933a) argued that psychoanalysis has no other *Weltanschauung* than that of science itself and is only interested in “submission to the truth and rejection of illusions” (p. 182). While acknowledging that in practical life the making of *ultimate* value judgements is unavoidable, these are left to the liberty and responsibility of the individual. In this view, psychoanalysis is committed only to a *penultimate* “ethic of honesty” (Rieff, 1959, ch. 9), restricting itself to helping analysands transcend self-deception. But the idea that psychoanalysis has no ethic other than that of honesty is not honest. At best it is an illusion, hopefully without a future. For, like it or not, “Where id was there ego shall be” (Freud, 1933a, p. 79) is a moral imperative requiring far more than replacing illusion with truth: it enjoins us to transcend impulsive action and, instead, develop ego strength, prudence, discretion and rational self-mastery. Developing ego where id was “is a work of culture—not unlike the draining of the *Zuider Zee*” (p. 80); sublimation of primitive drive is encouraged. But overcoming our illusions, developing self-control, sublimating our drives—this is still not enough. In addition, we must transcend narcissism in favour of object love, we must bind *Thanatos* with *Eros*, and we must overcome the harsh, primitive superego that is a “pure culture of the death instinct” (Freud, 1923b, p. 52) if we are to avoid self-destruction. In these and other ways the Freudian ethic far exceeds the demand for self-knowledge. While others fail to practice what they preach, psychoanalysts refuse to preach what they practice.

Four decades have now passed since Karl Menninger (1973) asked *Whatever Became of Sin?* In so doing he drew attention to a de-moralising trend in psychiatry and psychoanalysis mirroring that of the wider culture. Increasingly, it seems, we have come to reject Cassius’s conviction that “the fault ... lies not in our stars, but in ourselves” (*Julius Caesar*, 1.2) in favour of that proto-narcissist Lear’s protestation that we are “more sinned against than sinning” (*King Lear*, 3.2). Such de-moralisation, such guilt evasion, is only to be expected in the culture of narcissism. If, as the old saying has it, the superego is soluble in alcohol, then in narcissism it seems it may be liquidated altogether. But this is merely an appearance, for when the anaesthetic wears off the superego takes its sadistic revenge—it may even have cunningly instigated the whole process

precisely to be able to do so. As Britton (2003) points out, the narcissistic disorders are grounded in evasion of what Bion (1959, p. 313) called the ego-destructive superego; but in my view they also entail flight from conscience conceived as a fourth structure of the mind distinct from id, ego and superego. Narcissistic preoccupation with our grandiosity or inferiority, or each in turn in cyclothymic or bipolar oscillation, is characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein, 1946) where splitting (idealisation/devaluation) reigns. But self-obsession, of either form, precludes genuine concern for the other. While viewing the self as all-good obviously prevents any admission of wrongdoing, a sweeping judgment of the self as all-bad entails an obvious distortion that removes any realistic focus upon the *particular* sins of which we may be guilty.

Might it have been easier to bear guilt back in the days when the Judeo-Christian doctrine of the Fall of Man, of our intrinsic moral imperfection, was widely accepted, or when the need for capitalist accumulation made self-restraint a virtue, than in late capitalist consumer societies promoting oral-narcissistic regression and instinctual release rather than repression? Today the idea of moral imperfection as an intrinsic feature of being human—"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (*Romans 3:23 KJV*)—is widely rejected (*viz.* the letter to the editor cited in chapter two from a woman who was not a sinner). It is worth noting that moral imperfection precludes being perfectly bad as much as it precludes being perfectly good. I expect it has always been difficult to consciously bear guilt and not evade it by attacking either the self or others. When our narcissism renders conscious moral suffering (depressive or reparative guilt) intolerable, the superego exacts its pound of flesh either through unconsciously constructed forms of self-torment (persecutory guilt and shame) or by scapegoating others unto whom one's guilt is projected. That is, when reconciliation with conscience is refused, the ego-destructive superego has a field day, however unconsciously. I will argue that the only viable escape from the clutches of the superego is reconciliation with conscience.

Prior to the 1960s, psychoanalysts viewed superego analysis as central to the analytic process, for it was widely agreed that the dynamics of guilt and self-punishment play a crucial role in both psychopathology and cure. Some analysts never lost sight of such fundamental Freudian and Kleinian insights, implicitly agreeing with Rangell's (1974, 1976, 1980, 1997) view that, in addition to the ego-id conflicts resulting in neurosis, there are the ubiquitous ego-superego conflicts that frequently result in what Rangell called the "syndrome of the compromise of integrity" and that I think of as "the psychopathy of everyday life." But I think it is fair to say that many of the newer psychoanalytic theories that came to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s ("coincidentally" with the emergence of the culture of narcissism and the rise of neo-liberalism or market fundamentalism)—the types of object-relational theory and relational psychoanalysis that

draw on those parts of Winnicott's (1960a, 1962) multifarious thinking that stress "ego-relatedness" and on Kohut's (1978) "self psychology" that is so congruent with this—tended to downplay intrapsychic conflict among superego, ego, and id in favour of an emphasis upon trauma, deprivation, abuse, and neglect by caretakers, that is, the ways in which we are more injured than injurious.

By the late 1950s, Sandler (1960) had already noticed that in the indexing of cases at the Hampstead clinic there was a "tendency to veer away from the conceptualisation of material in superego terms"; he was wondering why "therapists have preferred to sort their clinical material in terms of object relationships, ego activities, and the transference, rather than in terms of the participation of the superego" (p. 129). Two decades later, Arlow (1982) observed that "superego function has been shunted to one side by the current preoccupation with the persistence of the regressive reactivation of archaic idealisations" (p. 230) and that "the concept superego itself rarely appears as the central topic of a clinical or theoretical contribution" (p. 229). Wurmser (1988) referred to the superego as the "sleeping giant" of contemporary psychoanalysis. While the giant slept, having been anaesthetised in both society at large and the psychoanalytic thinking it encouraged, Thatcher, Reagan, Milton Friedman, Friedrich von Hayek, Ayn Rand, Alan Greenspan, and a host of others, laid the foundations for the dismantlement of the welfare state and, with the avid assistance of the banksters and fraudsters of Wall Street and "the City," prepared the ground for the economic crisis of 2007-8. In my view narcissistic self-indulgence, however rationalised as libertarianism or individualism, inevitably leads to pain, if not in the short then in the long run.

In referring to the displacement of psychoanalytic focus from intrapsychic conflict to issues of trauma, deprivation, abuse and neglect by caretakers there is no intention to deny the significance of such factors in generating emotional disturbance. But one of the ways in which trauma, deprivation, abuse and neglect are damaging is that they cause the victim to become a hateful and sadistic agent toward the self and others. Such reactive hate, envy, and destructiveness, however understandable in terms of the conditions that elicit them, lead either to guilt, or if guilt is unbearable, to an unconscious need for punishment that takes the form of the self-sabotaging and self-tormenting behaviours inflicted by Freud's sadistic superego or Fairbairn's (1944) "internal saboteur." Psychoanalysis cannot eradicate past trauma and deprivation, but it can help patients understand how their responses to them have been destructive and assist them in finding better ways of coping. But the Freudian and Kleinian approaches that focused on such interior conflict, on issues of "crime and punishment," have in some quarters been marginalised over the past four decades. As Horowitz (2005) pointed out,

"All patients (and each of us) have had private theories of pathogenesis of neurosis and for the most part these theories have been about trauma at the hands of parents. It is still difficult to demonstrate to patients or students the role of conflict in neurosogenesis" (p. 2).

One of the few major psychoanalytic writers to explicitly move against the de-moralising trend was Erik Erikson (1950, 1968). His formulation of the psychoanalytic theory of development as a process in which successful transcendence of the conflict and crisis at each epigenetic stage results in the development of a particular *virtue* (hope, will, purpose, competency, fidelity, love, caring, wisdom) threatened to undermine the positivistic and medical facade that psychoanalysis had adopted to disguise its ethical existentialism. Burston (2007) points out that Erikson's left-wing critics (Berman, 1975; Roazen, 1976) viewed such talk of virtues as a regressive attempt to reintroduce a pre-psychoanalytic moralism into a discipline that, in their opinion, it had transcended. My view is that, on the contrary, Erikson's work entailed a forthright admission of what psychoanalysis has always intrinsically been despite its ongoing attempts to deny it. In criticising Erikson for making manifest the underlying ethic of psychoanalysis, such critics display their own commitment to a positivistic de-moralising façade for both psychoanalysis and socialism, both of which are grounded in a moral ethic, though so-called "scientific" socialists, with a few brilliant exceptions such as Eagleton (2009, 2010), have been as ashamed as psychoanalysts to admit this.

Back to Kardiner's case: imagine the analyst overcoming his scruples and proceeding to treat the patient. What if through the ministrations of such an (unscrupulous) analyst the hit man's inhibition was cured? Given his "new integrity," would he then be a "complete man, self-united and controlled"? Can a professional killer ever really be a "complete" man, let alone have "integrity"? Can one really become saner without becoming better? Are neuroses, character disorders and even certain types of psychoses really separate from and unrelated to a person's moral or immoral life? Is an intelligent and successful psychopath really sane? If not, why not? And in what, if any, sense can a psychopath really be "successful"? These are some of the issues addressed in the course of this book.

The evasion of such questions by psychoanalysis not only leaves us unable to account for our uneasiness regarding the idea of curing inhibited killers but also with the problem of moral relativism. For Freud (1923b, 1930a), conscience is a function of the superego which is grounded in aggression toward the oedipal rivals turned back against the ego, plus the internalisation of cultural values *via* introjection of the parental superegos, in addition to other socialisation and

group pressures (Freud, 1921c). While id aggression turned against the ego forms its core, the superego “represents more than anything the cultural past” (Freud, 1940a, p. 205). Though recognizing the superego as to a considerable degree a social derivative, psychoanalysts have shown little concern over the consequence that one’s superego will, like Huck’s, inevitably reflect the values of the milieu in which socialization occurred—i.e., its racism, sexism, etc. Freud and subsequent psychoanalysts have for the most part evaded the problem of the immorality of the *normal* superego. Where superego immorality is addressed at all, it is thought to be due to the internalization of the antisocial values of a deviant familial or social milieu, or to superego *lacunae* arising from a failure to properly internalize “normal” values. In this way the immorality of normal values and the normal superego have been evaded and the superego preserved as a largely prosocial force opposing the immorality arising from the id.

Psychoanalysis has located the roots of immorality and the antisocial in man in the id, not the superego. Uniquely human forms of destructiveness unknown in animal life have been projected onto the beasts and identified with the animal in man—when in reality animals are seldom beastly, at least not in the ways humans often are. There is no need to deny the existence of antisocial impulses in the id or their acting-out in destructive ways in order to recognize that the destructiveness enacted by id-driven criminals and psychopaths amounts to nothing compared to that accomplished by superego-driven ideologists, “do-gooders” who employ technical rationality and ego function to organize mass murder, nor to be aware of the more subtle forms of “soul murder” (Shengold, 1989) inflicted by the superego in everyday life. This failure to comprehend the uniqueness of human destructiveness and its roots in the superego and ego in addition to the id is perhaps the greatest failure of psychoanalysis as a human science.

Freud was not much concerned to reject the form and content of one superego in favour of another; for instance, to distinguish and devalue a racist or sexist superego as opposed to one less loaded with such cultural garbage. Rieff writes: “Freud insisted we that we ‘keep firmly to the ... separation of the ego from an observing, critical, punishing agency;’ in other words that we preserve reason from what he considered the tyranny of moral principles embodied in the superego” (p. 63). Freud (1933a) argues that “Our best hope for the future is that intellect—the scientific spirit, reason—may in process of time establish a dictatorship in the mental life of man. The nature of reason is a guarantee that afterwards it will not fail to give man’s emotional impulses and what is determined by them the position they deserve” (p. 170). Do we know of many reasonable dictatorships? A pretty good description of the pathological narcissist or severe psychopath is a personality characterised by ego dominance and a dictatorship of the intellect.

Kardiner's hit man probably consulted him because the dictatorship of his intellect was breaking down.

A good deal of the difficulty psychoanalysis has had with moral issues arises from its rationalism. Though Jewish, Freud's philosophic orientation was far more Hellenistic than Hebraic. From Plato he acquired the idea that kings should be philosophers and philosophers kings—for Freud such philosopher-kings being those well-analysed folks who, in keeping with Nietzsche's ethic, have earned the right to master others by first mastering themselves. From Plato, Freud also derives the metaphor of the rider and the horse: ego (Plato's "reason") should constitute the rider dominating both id (Plato's "appetites") and superego ("spirit"). The problem is that today few philosophers defend the Platonic notion of the intellectual apprehension of the form of the good; most agree that whatever other good things reason and science, the intellect and the rational ego, can give us, they cannot provide moral guidance. We cannot in logic deduce an *ought* from an *is*. Science is *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. If the rational ego establishes dominance over id and superego, from whence will the ego-dominated personality derive moral direction? If the answer is from the pleasure and reality principles, we encounter yet again the problem of the intelligent, reality-oriented, enlightened hedonist, prudentially calculating gain over loss, and out for number one. Far from considering such pleasure- and reality-oriented personalities to be paragons of mental health, both traditional and most contemporary psychoanalytic perspectives would diagnose them as suffering from narcissistic personality disorder because of their relative inability to transcend narcissism in favour of object love.

In distinguishing and valorising "object love" in which we actually recognise the other as *other*, from "narcissistic love" in which the other merely stands for the self we are, or were, or wish to be, Freud (1914) incorporates a moral value into a manifestly de-moralising psychoanalysis under the guise of the purely clinical sounding term "narcissism." We have seen that psychoanalysis has an ambiguous position on the question of freedom and determinism. Here we witness yet another of the key ambiguities characterising psychoanalytic theory. While presenting itself as a positivist, de-moralised, scientific/medical discourse, psychoanalysis is at the same time committed to an ethic of love, which it attempts to disguise by equating the capacity to love as "health" and the inability or unwillingness to love as "pathological narcissism." Heinz Kohut (1979) wanted to substitute the term "self disorder" for "pathological narcissism" because he rejected what he saw as the hidden Judeo-Christian ethic of love contained in the "health and maturity morality" (p. 12) of the Freudians. He was certainly correct that psychoanalysts were disguising a morality behind a façade of pseudo-objective medical and psychological terminology, but he was no more capable than Freud of presenting a de-moralised psychology: his notion of

therapeutic advance from “archaic” to “higher forms and transformations of narcissism” is just another language in which to describe a pilgrim’s moral progress, albeit one less demanding of self-dispossession in favour of the other than was Freud’s (1914) for whom: “A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love” (p. 84).

It is worth noting Freud’s need to justify his ethic of love on utilitarian grounds: he does not just say it is better to love than to hate, only that we will “fall ill” if we fail to love, hence it is in our interest to love. Freud insists on clinging to his rationalism and hedonism: the enlightened hedonist chooses love over hate, not because love is intrinsically better than hate, but only because loving will in the long run lead to greater happiness. This way of putting it is consistent with the idea that human beings are fundamentally self-seeking and if they choose the good it is only because it is in their interest to do so, not because of any primary drive toward it. Likewise, for Freud, the infant has no primary drive to form an attachment to the nurturer (still most often the mother), but only learns to value her as a necessary means to the end of drive-discharge, an idea discredited by Bowlby (1969-80) and others who have established attachment as a primary (unlearned) rather than secondary (learned) drive. Observers such as Harold Searles (1975) have pointed out that infants will put their own needs and development on the back burner and entirely devote themselves to attempting to cure their depressed or anxious mothers—not merely out of a need to get her to straighten up and fly right so as to provide the mothering they need (the utilitarian explanation), or a need to make reparation for aggressive feelings and phantasies toward her (the Kleinian explanation), but also out of sheer dumb love and the simple desire to make her happy. But even while asserting our need to transcend narcissism in favour of object love, for Freud the others we love remain “objects” of drive gratification, means to an end not ends in themselves. Yet, despite its need to justify it on utilitarian grounds, the fact remains that psychoanalysis is grounded in an ethic, even though it has usually been ashamed to “speak its name”: it is an ethic of life and love (*Eros/Agape/Caritas*) that opposes hate, evil and death (*Thanatos*).

For Freud (1933a, lecture 31) the superego subsumes “the functions of self-observation, of conscience and of [maintaining] the ideal” (p. 65). Having subsumed both conscience and the ego ideal into the superego, the latter is the only judge and there is no other judge to judge it, no higher court of moral appeal. We can only describe superegos with different content, ones that are racist and sexist and ones that are less so, right-wing and left-wing ones, harsh and critical or more loving and forgiving ones. But to move beyond description and to prefer one type of superego to another is itself a superego judgement and traditional psychoanalysis, manifestly

committed to a de-moralising positivism, has been unwilling to overtly advocate any moral principle that would justify such judgement. While clinically preferring a forgiving superego to a harshly critical one, psychoanalysts have for the most part sought to maintain a façade of moral neutrality, leaving their commitment to an ethic of love and forgiveness largely unspoken. Owing to his positivism Freud no doubt felt he lacked any defensible grounds upon which to justify the psychoanalytic ethic of love and, owing to his personal distaste for both Judaism and Christianity, he no doubt felt embarrassed advocating their ethic. After the breakdown in 1914 of his first dualistic drive theory (sexual vs. self-preservative drives), for six years he was forced to endure an instinctual monism of love (though a subordinate dualism remained in which libido was divided between self and other). In 1920, with palpable relief, following his Greek philosophical precursor Empedocles he abandoned such “monotheism” for the twin “deities,” *Eros* and *Thanatos*, perpetually struggling for dominance in the human psyche.

Today moral relativism has been relativised and philosophers and social scientists widely recognize a universal moral standard beyond or beneath all cultural variations and constructions: the ethic of reciprocity (do not do to others what you do not want them doing to you) that Kant (1785) elaborated as the categorical imperative—“Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (p. 30). Here is the basis of both conscience and the conscientious critique of the superego. Without it, critics of the superego, such as Alexander (1925), Ferenczi (1928 [1927]) and, more recently, Britton (2003), have been forced to appeal to reason against the superego’s moralism. They call for the ego, the seat of rationality in the psyche, to judge the superego. But reason is not up to the task, for while it is capable of judgement in matters of fact, it is incapable of moral judgement. Even the deeper sort of *thinking* envisaged by Bion (1962) is incapable of providing moral direction, unless such “thinking” is defined so broadly as to include what Rousseau (1774) called “pity” or fellow-feeling, in which case one is forced to wonder why it is called thinking instead of feeling. Like Alexander, Ferenczi and Britton, I believe the ego needs to be empowered to resist the ego-destructive superego; but it cannot hope to replace it as the moral centre of the personality: that is the job of conscience. From conscience we derive the moral guidance and strength to expose the immorality of the superego and, with the help of the ego, to grow up, emancipate ourselves from and overcome it.

Over time Freud came increasingly to emphasise the harshness and punitiveness of the superego; hence his wish to maintain and strengthen the ego which, due to his rationalism, he believed (incorrectly in my view) capable of providing sufficient guidance. Clinical psychoanalytic

critique of the sadistic superego—which Eagleton (2009) associates with “the Satanic or super-egoic image of God” (p. 21)—in favour of one that is more loving and forgiving began soon after Freud (1923b) introduced the concept of the superego (Alexander, 1925; Ferenczi, 1928 [1927]; Strachey, 1934). According to Strachey’s (1934) theory of the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis, superego modification occurs due, among other factors, to the patient’s projection of the punitive superego onto the analyst, only to discover the projection is contradicted by the analyst’s far more understanding and forgiving stance. It has not commonly been recognised that Strachey’s theory requires the patient to be able to perceive the analyst’s real (hopefully loving rather than sadistic) attitudes, a requirement not easily reconciled with the idea of the analyst as a mirror or a surgeon (Freud 1912b), or even with the requirement that analysts should strive not to reveal their countertransference. I am in no way seeking to justify indiscriminate countertransference confessions, nor implying that encountering the analyst’s love is the sole or sufficient basis of the cure, only pointing out that Strachey’s theory of the cure depends on patients being able to perceive and encounter enough of the analyst’s reality as a person to counteract their distorting superego projections. In any case, the idea that analysts *could* hide their countertransference from the patient is hard to reconcile with Freud’s (1905e) belief that “He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore” (pp. 76-77). Of course, Freud had the patient in mind, but analysts, no matter how “well analysed,” remain human and, hence, “leak.” And it is a good thing they do; otherwise there would be nothing to contradict patients’ projections. There is no intrinsic contradiction between Gray’s (1994) emphasis on the importance of analytic neutrality in order to be able to analyze the analysand’s defensive resort to both morally threatening and morally soothing superego images as resistance and Freud’s own formulation of the overall goal of analysis as the therapeutic deconstruction of the superego, a formulation cited by Gray himself (p. 115). Freud (1940a) writes of the superego-driven negative therapeutic reaction: “In warding off this resistance we are obliged to restrict ourselves to making it conscious and attempting to bring about the slow demolition of the hostile super-ego” (p. 180).

Strachey’s work implicitly devalues the harsh in favour of the more forgiving superego and offers a theory of superego modification. For Alexander (1925), “The super-ego ... is an anachronism in the mind. It has lagged behind the rapid development of civilized conditions, in the sense that its automatic, inflexible mode of function causes the mental system continually to come into conflict with the outer world” (p. 25). The therapeutic task, he writes, “is carried out by limiting the sphere of activity of the automatically-functioning super-ego, and transferring its role to the

conscious ego" (p. 25). Two years later, Ferenczi (1928 [1927]) went further: "Only a complete dissolution of the super-ego can bring about a radical cure" (p. 100). But because, like Freud, most psychoanalysts have identified conscience with the superego, unlike Freud and Ferenczi they have feared its demolition would be tantamount to the promotion of psychopathy. Hence they have called, with Strachey, for its modification and maturation (Jacobson, 1964; Kernberg, 1976; Schafer, 1960; Gray, 1994; Britton, 2004) rather than its replacement by conscience. While few psychoanalysts have gone as far as Ferenczi and defined the goal of psychoanalysis as *elimination of the superego* (viewing conscience, *contra* Freud, as a separate psychic function altogether), most have shared Strachey's implicit devaluation of the harsh superego and his conception of the analytic cure as involving, among other things, substantial superego modification or modulation, a development conceived most often as advance beyond an archaic or pathological superego toward a more mature or healthy one. The use of terms such as "archaic" *vs.* "mature," and "pathological" *vs.* "healthy," obscures once again what is really a moral judgement defining love and forgiveness as superior to hate and retribution.

But while writers such as Alexander, Ferenczi and Strachey accepted Freud's view of the superego's sadism and therefore sought to either radically modify it or eliminate it altogether as a bad internal persecutory object, Schafer (1960), reacting against Freud's own focus upon its sadism, advanced the idea of a "loving and beloved superego" that he constructed from small hints and suggestions appearing here and there in Freud's writings but that Freud himself had notably not allowed to alter his overall view. Admitting that "Freud was not prepared to pursue to its end the line of thought leading to a loving and beloved superego or to integrate such a conception with his decisive treatment of the criticizing and feared superego" (Schafer, 1960, p. 163), Schafer nevertheless proceeded to do the job for him. Subsequent readers of Schafer's paper, no doubt aided by wish-fulfilment, seem to have thought the paper revealed that Freud himself recognized a more benign in addition to the sadistic superego, when what the paper truly revealed was what Schafer and others *wished* had been Freud's view of the superego, not the superego he actually gave us.

A sociologist might suggest that whereas Freud himself gave us a late-nineteenth century European father-superego, Schafer gave us that of mid-twentieth century America. If this were so, it would imply social progress: that we were getting a more modulated view of the superego because superegos had become modulated. But is that fact or wish? At the very time Schafer was advancing his view of the superego as more "Pop" than "*Vater*," Kohut was celebrating the passing of "Guilty Man" altogether in our culture. Here we must boldly bring psychoanalytic

thinking to bear and distinguish between what is conscious and what is unconscious. Perhaps due to changes in culture, gender roles, family structure, etc., harsh paternal authority had diminished and, at least on the conscious level, the authoritarian superego along with it. Yet Freud (1930a, pp. 128-129) explained how a severe superego may result from a lenient upbringing, its severity having more to do with the turning of aggression against the ego than with simple internalization of parental behaviour. It may even be possible that the decline in parental authority has led to an increase in the severity of the unconscious superego. In any case, our clinical experience would suggest little decline in the role of the sadistic, tyrannical unconscious superego in psychopathology. Of course, this is a point that one is only in a position to affirm or deny to the extent that in clinical work one still “listens with the third ear” (Reik, 1948) to the unconscious. Those who report the disappearance of Guilty Man in our culture and the absence of the dynamics of guilt and self-punishment in their clinical practices would appear to attest to the absence of the unconscious in their work.

Schafer’s post-Freudian revision of Freud’s theory of the superego has been very influential, even among analysts not usually fond of Freudian revisionism, and for several reasons. First, it compensated to some extent for the lack of any concept of a loving and forgiving conscience with which to offset the harshness of the superego. And second, it did so in the absence of any direct critique of the superego as such. Even today there is strong resistance to anything approaching a radical critique of the superego. Psychoanalysts are all in favour of its modification, its modulation, its transformation from a harsh to a more loving authority—but it remains, after all, in unconscious phantasy, the parent, and good children that we are, we must *honour* parental authority, even *defer* to it out of respect, and certainly not “act-out” our unresolved oedipal aggression by seeking to overthrow it. Even Britton (2003), who possesses a clear understanding of the role of the ego-destructive and envious superego in psychopathology, refrains from conceptualizing the superego as such as a bad internal object which it generally was for Klein and also for Freud in his clinical as distinct from sociological writings. Britton seeks only to liberate the ego-destructive superego from hostile, alien, internal, bad occupying forces rather than disempower or overthrow it altogether—a U.N. style peace-keeping, not a revolutionary operation, nor anything approximating Pastor Bonhoeffer’s (Metaxas, 2010) plot to assassinate the *Führer*.

In calling for the strengthening of the ego and modification of the superego Britton would certainly be joined by mainstream, American psychoanalysis which, likewise, failing to clearly recognise the superego as an intrinsically bad object, seeks only its “maturation,” not its

disempowerment or displacement in favour of conscience. Like Schafer, Britton preserves the notion of a superego that is not ego-destructive. Whereas Klein and in his clinical writings even Freud were fairly unambivalent about the superego as an internal aggressor or persecutor, much subsequent psychoanalysis has retreated from this understanding, maintaining a much more ambiguous attitude toward it. Significantly, Ferenczi who, like Alexander, clearly recognized its destructiveness and called for its elimination was a political as well as a psychoanalytic radical. But mainstream psychoanalysis is anything but radical. It has been in love with the idea of "compromise-formation" and like contemporary liberalism has been only too eager to compromise, Chamberlain-like, with the uncompromising forces of authoritarian reaction (superego) that would destroy the ethic of compromise (i.e., democratic institutions) altogether. While from a democratic point of view it would be both unrealistic and wrong to call for the elimination of those seeking the destruction of democracy, it seems entirely reasonable to suggest that such opponents should not be compromised with but imprisoned and encouraged to mature, behind bars.

Psychoanalytic critique of the superego has focused almost exclusively upon its destructive manifestations in the life of the individual, in self-punishment, self-sabotage, masochism, depression and suicide, and not upon the morally objectionable internalised socio-cultural ideologies of which the superego is comprised and that are reflected even in its normative, let alone its pathological expressions. While the id has been scapegoated and blamed for human destructiveness, the superego has been viewed as a prosocial rather than an antisocial force, despite our awareness of its destructive clinical manifestations. Even when the superego has been seen as destructive, its destructiveness has been attributed to its "pathology," thus sparing the so-called "normal" superego from critique and preserving it as a largely prosocial force. Very little critique has been directed by psychoanalysts toward the racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, childism, possessive individualism, consumerism, commodity fetishism and other ideologies of domination and exploitation that constitute the conventional and normative, yet nonetheless immoral and destructive superego. As Theodor Adorno (1966) pointed out in connection with Ferenczi's call for elimination of the superego, "A critique of the super-ego would have to turn into one of the society that produces the superego; if psychoanalysts stand mute here, they accommodate the ruling norm" (p. 274). Mainstream psychoanalysis has pretty much stood mute here, accommodating the ruling norm.

The crucial contribution of Eli Sagan's (1988) *Freud, Woman and Morality: The Psychology of Good and Evil* is his positing of a conscience, forming in the first year of life through identification

with the nurturer, distinct from Freud's superego forming at the end of the oedipal phase through identification with the aggressor. While Freud enabled us to understand mental conflict between the three structures of the mind—id, ego and superego—Sagan implicitly adds a fourth. It seems the science that Ernst Kris (1938) defined as "*the* psychology of the innermost mental processes of man in conflict" (p. 140) has been unable to properly address one entire dimension of mental conflict: that between the superego and the conscience. To illustrate this, Sagan employs Mark Twain's (1885) description of the battle raging in the mind of Huck Finn, torn between the demand of his racist superego that he turn his runaway slave companion, Jim, in to the authorities and the conflicting demand of his conscience that he protect the friend he loves. Although, in theory at least, in addition to *intersystemic* conflict between id, ego and superego we have recognised *intrasystemic* conflict within each, in reality we have devoted little attention to the latter, especially as it occurs within the superego. In order to begin to grasp mental conflict more adequately, especially moral conflict and "moral injury" (Nash, 2012)—such as the PTSD resulting from committing unconscionable acts at the behest of a superego shaped by familial and military authority—it is, I believe, necessary to recognise a conscience, separate from and frequently in conflict with the superego, as well as with id, ego and external reality.

Our tripartite structural theory needs to be expanded into a four-part structural theory. But in recent years, rather than seeking to elaborate structural theory, prominent psychoanalytic theorists, such as Schafer (1976), Brenner (1994, 1998, 2002), and others, have become concerned with the problem of reification of psychoanalytic concepts, such as id, ego, superego, conscience and the very notion of "psychic structure" itself, all of which they view as abstractions referring ultimately to the human actions and compromise-formations of which they are comprised. I agree we must seek to avoid what Whitehead (1925) called "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" or the literalisation of metaphor. I myself have long been a critic of reification of psychoanalytic concepts (Carveth, 1984b); chapter nine of the present book contains my critique of the reification of the concept of *the* psychopath, and chapter ten concerns reification and de-reification in theology. But since all thinking and communicating depends upon metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), I believe we must take care not to extend our critique of reification of abstraction to a condemnation of abstraction *per se*. Philosophers do not prescribe but only analyse what scientists do; we must not allow philosophical strictures to impede scientific creativity and communication. I believe it sometimes serves us to work at the molecular rather than the atomic or subatomic levels of analysis. It is true, to take but one example, that "social structure" is an abstraction referring ultimately to human individuals acting and interacting in patterned ways, yet sociologists have found the concept highly productive in social analysis. Like Freud, who followed Plato closely in this respect, I believe it remains useful to distinguish id

(the passions), ego (reason), and superego (our identifications with the aggressor and socially internalised values and ideologies). But we need to recognize a fourth psychological structure, the conscience, rooted in our early identifications with the nurturer and their later development into an ethic of care and concern. It is one of the purposes of this book to call attention to the need for psychoanalysis to develop this expanded structural theory of the mind.

If conscience has its roots, as Sagan believes, in the infant's earliest and continuing identifications with the nurturer (usually but not necessarily the mother, for fathers and a range of others may do the primary nurturing), following Melanie Klein we locate the earliest roots of the superego in the infant's earliest and continuing identifications with the aggressor. In this view, Freud's punitive superego, which for him formed at the end of the oedipal phase, is a later development of this early identification with the aggressor (the bad, persecutory part-object of Kleinian theory). Similarly, the "loving and beloved superego" (Schafer, 1960) is a later development of the infant's early identification with the nurturer (initially the good, gratifying part-object and later the whole good object), that is, the conscience. The loving superego is the conscience in a more developed form, a conscience that continues to develop throughout the life-span and opposes hate (*Thanatos*) in the name of love (*Eros/Agape/Caritas*). The reason it is important to recognise and properly re-name this loving superego as the conscience is to facilitate the developmental step psychoanalysis has been reluctant to take—namely to see clearly, as Klein and often Freud himself did—the intrinsically pathological and persecutory nature of the superego as such.

These are some of the themes pursued in the course of this work. In the Clinical Realm, chapter two describes the nature and varieties of guilt. Chapter three concerns the distinction between conscience and superego, as well as the whitewashing of the latter and projection of human destructiveness onto a scapegoat, the bestialising of the id in psychoanalytic theory. Chapter four discusses the function of self-punishment, persecutory or punitive guilt inflicted by the superego, as a means of evading or defending against the advance toward the capacity to bear depressive anxiety, concern or reparative guilt, manifestations of conscience. In chapter five such less recognised manifestations of guilt as the old and new hysterias and psychosomatic conditions are viewed as guilt-substitutes and forms of guilt evasion. Chapter six is a study of such hysterical guilt evasion in the case of the psychoanalyst Harry Guntrip. Chapter seven offers two further such case studies, one of which, the case of Mr. E, was contributed by Jean Hantman.

In the Cultural Realm, chapter eight addresses the wider moral problems of modernity from a social evolutionary perspective, including the "postmodern" flight from morality reflected in the

de-moralising discourses of psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis and, more broadly, in the de-moralised political discourse of liberalism (as distinct from “neo-liberalism”) which has so disadvantaged conscience in its struggle against the highly moralised discourse of its reactionary, superego-driven opponents. Sagan employs his concept of “modernity psychosis” to describe the bizarre forms often assumed by “countermodernism,” the “backlash” against the pressures of social conscience. Chapter nine offers a critical discussion of the concepts of psychopathy, evil, and the “death drive,” as well as the conflict between *Eros* and *Thanatos* that constitutes, in Voltaire’s evocative phrase, “a civil war in every soul.” Chapter ten discusses the literalisation and deliteralisation of metaphor in both psychoanalysis and religion and explores some of the theological implications of a revised psychoanalytic theory of human nature in which conscience figures as a distinct structure of the mind, along with id, ego and superego.

We conclude in chapter eleven with an applied psychoanalytic study of the Lyle Kessler play and Alan J. Pakula film, *Orphans*, that wonderfully illustrates both the destructive and the reparative forms of sacrifice: the sacrifice of the other effected through identification with the superego and projective identification of split-off childhood pain into the scapegoat; and the integration and containment of childhood pain that liberates conscience, a healing capacity for sympathetic identification with the suffering of others and creative self-sacrifice on their behalf. As animals burdened with awareness of our finitude (we are all “dead end kids” after all), the only alternative to masochistic submission to death, or attempting to magically evade it by inflicting it upon others, is learning how to integrate dying into our living through creative self-sacrifice. As Eagleton (2010, p. 27) points out, it is through acquiring a capacity for self-dispossession in life that we become finally able to die.

If I had to summarize the essential argument of this book in one sentence it would be this. *It is important not confuse conscience with either God or the superego, for people are often led by the superego and what they take to be God to act unconscionably.*

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