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(Letter to the Editor)

While appreciating that Fr. Meissner found much that he was in sympathy with in his reading of *Soul on the Couch* (see vol.46, # 4 pp.1307-1310), his criticisms that most of the articles were post modern in thought, relational or exclusively self-psychological, or that basic analytic concepts were simply abandoned, were more than puzzling.

As an attempt to see areas of unity between spirituality, both Eastern and Western, and psychoanalytic thought, many of the authors attempted to present a broader understanding of some traditional analytic concepts. Intrinsic to giving a broader meaning to any concept is, of course, the recognition that human language is ultimately metaphorical. This is, obviously, no denial of objective reality - just the recognition that it is interpretable. Human ingenuity finds new aspects of the world through new interpretations. Freud's genius was in taking everyday slips of the tongue and/or everyday dreams and interpreting a meaning hidden beneath the obvious. In his various models of the mind, from the topographical to the structural, was Freud himself not struggling to find models for the complexity of the self and self-understanding?

In view of this, it is puzzling that Fr. Meissner warns the reader against what he characterizes as the text's polemic promoting postmodern thought and/or subjectivist relativism. These terms are introduced as if some betrayal of (contemporary) psychoanalysis was at play. As one of the editors, I am not aware of any overwhelming self-psychological or post modern apologetic, notwithstanding the fact that it is listed in the relational series of the Analytic Press.

What Fr. Meissner objects to is the attempt to reformulate an understanding of such terms as the unconscious, mind, and/or the "I." Both Greifinger and I speak of the self or the "I" as Illusory – that is, not a reality that can be thought of in terms of substance. It is, rather, a term that has to be understood in the total cultural/psychological/historical context of being human. The same can be said of the concept of mind that I presented, following the thoughts of D.W. Winnicott and Marcia Cavell, as possibly having more applicability to man's cultural/linguistic achievements than to his personal singularity. (This does not deny individual

memory, imagination and thinking.) ~~Similarly with my thoughts on the unconscious which Fr. Meissner reads as my dismissal of the unconscious.~~ *Similarly with my thoughts on the unconscious, also misreads my understanding of the unconscious.*

I wrote was that interpretation creates the unconscious for us. I was not arguing for or against the ontological reality of the unconscious because such an approach, for me at least, is close to the scholastic proofs for the existence of God. Freud gave us an interpretative science, not a philosophy interested in arguing for or against ontological essences.

Many of the articles addressed issues raised by Buddhism which was as much of concern to the authors as was traditional Judaism and Christianity.

When discussing Western spirituality, however, the focus in my article and others was on the mystical tradition, particularly articulated by Meister Eckardt, the thirteenth century mystic and philosopher. Eckardt emphasized the immanence, the all encompassing presence, rather than the transcendence, the absolute otherness, of what we humans call the Divine. Fr. Meissner, given his background would certainly be familiar with this tradition, although perhaps not sympathetic with it. In view of this, it is difficult to understand his cursory dismissal of such an approach as “subjectivistic” verging on “psychologizing.”

Spirituality, East and West, attempts to aid an individual *in experiencing* what we call God, or in some traditions, the ground luminosity. Theological arguments or proofs were not a concern of those contributing to the text. Winnicott reminds us health is not the absence of neurosis but the capacity to experience life creatively and with a sense of personal presence. Thus his prayer, profoundly spiritual, *Oh God, may I be alive when I die.* A possibility, paradoxically, when the “I” is no longer a primary focus or a concern, when the self is no longer narcissistically encapsulated but responsive, self-forgetful and contributing to the world.

As psychoanalysts we are dedicated to helping people be “alive,” and if some analysts can achieve that with alternate psychoanalytic models – the result is what matters. The text, in its overall contributions, does not attempt to pre-empt or to argue against alternate psychoanalytic models, despite Meissner’s characterization of it as assuming “*a position as an exclusive and exclusionary paradigm, overriding all other analytic views.*” Many contributors did not employ

a classical drive model, some even mentioned that we can still learn from Ferenczi. How does one conclude from this that *all* other views have been dismissed? If anything, the text argues for an appreciation of pluralism in our attempts to understand spirituality, religious commitment and psychoanalytic thought. And pluralism is not an accommodation to the many, but a rather belated awareness that no one, no theory or theology, can preempt the truth. Pluralism, which is not an anything-goes relativism, can help keep us honest, a goal sacred to spiritual traditions and to psychoanalysis.

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Suzuki, d. (1957) *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. In: *Meister Eckhart, Mystic and Philosopher*, by R. Schurmann. Bloomington: Indiana State University Press, 1978.

Winnicott, D.W. (1949) Mind and its relation to the psyche-soma. In: *Collected Papers*. New York: Basic Books, 1958, pp243-254.

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