

Psyche, Self and Soul: Rethinking Psychoanalysis, the Self and Spirituality.

By Gerald J. Gargiulo London: Whurr Publishers, 149 pp.

Review by: Paul Cooper

The writing *Psyche, Self and Soul* is in the first person: Gargiulo's personal, informal style exemplifies a refreshing, growing trend in contemporary psychoanalytic writing. While the author's arguments are intelligently, even passionately developed, the text leaves considerable room for the reader's imagination. In this respect Gargiulo's text becomes both performative and informative. Performative, inasmuch as it evokes in the reader the experience the author describes as deriving from apophysis which suggests denying or disclaiming. This style of discourse apparently was prevalent among Western mystics, such as Meister Eckhart, who influenced the author. Sells (1994) describes this form of discourse as a "language of unsaying."

The text presented as here is also informative inasmuch as Gargiulo's narrative provides a generous sharing of information and experience, skillfully delivered in a manner that does not oversaturate psychic space. In these diverse ways, the text integrates important features that reflect the distinction between mystical and scientific models, which becomes apparent immediately. However, considering that his writing marks a culminating point of widely ranging ideas spanning 35 years, it is clear that Gargiulo is a pioneer. This becomes further evident in his forthright comments from the outset, such as the observations that psychoanalysis is an art and that psychoanalysts are born, not made.

While many themes are elaborated, one major theme centers on the lived and breathed relationship between psychoanalysis and the spirit. Gargiulo identifies the experiential emphasis of mystical traditions and of psychoanalysis as a major connecting point between these two "disciplines that attempt to explore internality" (p. xv). There has been much written on the relationship between psychoanalysis and spiritual disciplines, centering on the issue of internal awareness, as, for example, in discussions of how specific forms of Hindu and Buddhist meditation might enhance the psychoanalyst's ability to maintain sustained attention. However, a unique feature of this book centers on the individual's capacity for internal awareness, simultaneously addressing both psyche and spirit. The explication here at once becomes a pragmatic, lived, played, in-the-moment spirituality and implies a transcendence that is fully grounded in imminence or impending factors, "rooted in Mother Earth and not the heavens above" (p. xvi). I believe that understanding this relationship between transcendence and imminence is critical to any fruitful, theoretically and operationally sound conversation between spiritual traditions and psychoanalysis.

The issue of metaphor provides a case in point. In elaborating the interplay of what might evolve out of both traditions, Gargiulo keeps a firm eye on the uses and the misuses of metaphor. He presents a clear and cogent description of how any wisdom tradition can easily become subject to reification processes. In the case of psychoanalysis, the available metaphors transform into an intuitive model that can become monolithic and that can pragmatically deaden the open, creative spaces engender a "playful intelligence," as Gargiulo asserts (p. 3). He writes: "To be able to play with language is to understand metaphor rather than concreteness" (p. 17). In this context Gargiulo asks whether or not one can be sensitized to the play of mystery and to the mystery of play, within an empty, co-created space of infinite possibility. He writes: "Whenever analysts or readers forget however, that psychoanalysis is a creation and not a discovery and that metaphors are its scaffolding, the limitations of psychoanalysis also become evident" (p. 23). Gargiulo then proceeds to explicate options for acknowledging such limitations and offers alternative strategies for thinking about psychoanalysis which he argues will push its edges in creative directions.

Psyche, Self and Soul then presented text becomes a language not simply of discovery from a finite universe, mandated by the limitations of a positivist scientific model, but also a source and an expression of creative evolutions within an infinite universe. Thus a circular process is engendered in which "both analyst and patient are forging new meanings and consequently finding and relating to a new world" (p. 16).

Gargiulo deftly uses language in a way that induced in me the specific suspiciousness he seems to be discussing. I found myself wondering if this was not just a manipulation of language that can potentially strip away meaning by reducing clever phrase, and becoming cliché. The reader will find that Gargiulo a careful and sensitive unpacking of ideas, with clarity and depth, revealing novel, well-thought out alternatives to thinking creatively, critically, and honestly about the subject matter. For example, the

idea of “belief in the unconscious” (p. 6) is not reduced or reified: The more fundamental and broad-based question then becomes “Can we believe in anything?”

From my perspective, I hear Gargiulo asking can we together wonder creatively; or do we get trapped in the obfuscating, limiting beliefs centered on metaphor that become reified into limiting dogma? In this regard, Gargiulo clearly embraces a truth-based perspective, without negating a knowledge-based perspective. He thus confronts the dogmatic, overprivileging, and exclusivity of the scientific model. Thus there is potential in a psychoanalysis envisioned in the text as striking a balance between discovery in a limited, elemental universe, and the potential for creativity in an infinite universe; this Gargiulo describes poetically as “the mist of infinite possibility.” Such possibilities are left open for the reader to explore.

Reference

Sells, M. (1994). *Mystical languages of unsaying*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Article Citation

Cooper, P. (2006). *Psyche, Self and Soul: Rethinking Psychoanalysis, the Self and Spirituality*. By Gerald J. Gargiulo London: Whurr Publishers, 149 pp.. *Psychoanal. Rev.*, 93:682-684