

Psychoanalytic Education Center of the Carolinas
101 Cloister Court, Suite A Chapel Hill, NC 27514
(919) 490-3212 admin@ncanalysis.org
www.ncanalysis.org

Syllabus and Reading List

Spring 2010

A Psychoanalytic Perspective on the Practice of Religious Faith

Instructor – Steve Bennett, PhD

- 1st Week** What is this thing people call religion? Religion through the eyes of psychoanalysis.
- “The Future of an Illusion” –Freud’s view of religious faith. The nature of his argument, and the modernist context of his perspective.
 - Psychoanalysis within different philosophical contexts. The shift within psychoanalysis from Freud, to Winnicott, to Hoffman and Bromberg, to Fonagy.
- 2nd Week** What is psychoanalysis? Psychoanalysis through the eyes of history and philosophy. The broader historical context for the dialogue between psychoanalysis and religion.
- The tradition of the historical study of religion. Different views and the problem of reductionism. Psychoanalysis as reflecting and developing modernist assumptions. Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Phenomenology.
 - “Beyond Illusion: psychoanalysis and the question of religious truth,” by Rachel B. Blass. Chapter one in Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century, Competitors or Collaborators? edited by David M. Black. The assertion for ordinary believers is that their faith is “true.” It is important to consider what motivates both scientists and religious believers in their quests for truth.
- 3rd Week** The limits of philosophical and critical thought. The linguistic turn. Wittgenstein.
- Optional reading: “The Spiritual Dimension,” Cottingham.
 - Application of linguistics to cultural analysis. Saussure, Levi Strauss, Geertz. Langue and parole. The reasonableness of a psychoanalytic critique of spirituality separate but not apart from theological reflection.
 - “A simple question,” by Rodney Bomford. Chapter fourteen in Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century, Competitors or Collaborators? edited by David M. Black. An argument for God and different levels of discourse. Both Christianity and psychoanalysis are seen as seeking an understanding of life as a totality.
- 4th Week** The possibility of a positive psychoanalytic view of spirituality.
- “Ways of Transformation,” by Michael Parsons. Chapter six in Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century, Competitors or Collaborators? edited by David M. Black. How one engages or disengages questions of faith is the concern of psychoanalysis.
 - Introduction to Winnicott’s notion of transitional space. Spirituality occupies an intermediate area of experience that is neither entirely subjective nor entirely objective.

5th Week The use of religious objects.

- a. Winnicott, "The use of an object." Often Winnicott's work is referenced for a particular explanation of "religious experience." Our focus will be on the interaction between cognitive and affective development and its effect on the psychological "construction" of the Other.
- b. Optional reading: Michel Eigen, "The area of faith in Winnicott, Lacan, and Bion."
- c. Optional reading: Emmanuel Ghent, "Masochism, submission, and surrender – masochism as a perversion of surrender."

6th Week Contemporary psychoanalytic integrations of the philosophy of mind, neuroscience, and developmental psychology, and their implications for a critique of spiritual practice.

- a. Introduction to Fonagy's work. The developmental levels of mentalization.
- b. Target and Fonagy, "Playing With Reality: II. The Development of Psychic Reality from a Theoretical Perspective."
- c. Fonagy and Target, "Playing With Reality: I. Theory of Mind and the Normal Development of Psychic Reality."

7th Week The possibility of a psychoanalytic critique of the maturity of spiritual practice.

- a. Bennett, "A Mentalized Faith."
- b. Optional reading: "A Christmas Story," by David Miller. Chapter five in Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century, Competitors or Collaborators? edited by David M. Black. The difficulty of achieving the depressive position. A Christmas Carol as picture of a Kleinian psychic retreat. Omnipotence, magic, and escape from reality.
- c. Development of the capacity for symbolic thought. Errors in interpreting religious functioning when therapists fail to distinguish the individual from the group. The difference between private and performative spiritual acts.

8th Week The characteristics and function of a mature, mentalizing spirituality.

- a. The value of spiritual play and pretend mode.
- b. Characteristics of mature faith.
- c. Student presentations.

Required Texts:

Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century, Competitors or Collaborators?, edited by David M. Black. London and New York: Routledge. In "The New Library of Psychoanalysis, general editor: Dana Birksted-Breen." 2006. 278 pages. ISBN13: 9-78-0-415-37944-X (paperback).

Required Articles:

Bennett, S. (2009). A mentalized faith. Unpublished presentation to the N.C. Psychoanalytic Society, December, 2009. Article will be supplied by the instructor.

Eigen, M. (1981). The area of faith in Winnicott, Lacan and Bion. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 62, 413-433.

Fonagy, P. and Target, M. (1996). Playing With Reality: I. Theory of Mind and the Normal Development of Psychic Reality. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 77: 217-233

Freud, S. (1927) "The Future of an Illusion," *Standard Edition*, in Volume 21.

Ghent, E., M.D. (1990). Masochism, submission, surrender -- Masochism as a perversion of surrender. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 36, 108-136.

Target, M. and Fonagy, P. (1996). Playing With Reality: II. The Development of Psychic Reality from a Theoretical Perspective. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 77: 459-479

Winnicott, D. W. (1969). The Use of an Object. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 50: 711-716

Optional Readings:

Cottingham, J. The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value, Cambridge: University Press, 2005. 186 pages.

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Eight Theories of Religion, by Daniel L. Pals, second edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006 (or you might want to refer to previous editions of this book, titled Seven Theories of Religion).

Some Psychoanalytic texts on religion

Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint, by William Meissner

Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience, by William Meissner

Psychoanalysis and Religion, by Eric Fromm

Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Religion, James Jones

The Crescent and the Couch: Cross-Currents between Islam and Psychoanalysis, by Salman Ahktar

A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis, by Peter Gay

Playing and Reality, D. W. Winnicott

Additional Journal Articles

Fonagy, P., & Target, M. (2007). Playing with reality: IV. A theory of external reality rooted in intersubjectivity. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 88(4), 917-938

Rizzuto, A.-M. (2001). Metaphors of a bodily mind. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 49, 535-568.

Seligman, S., D.M.H. (2007). Mentalization and metaphor, acknowledgment and grief: Forms of transformation in the reflective space. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 17(3), 321-344.