Psychology as Religion

The Cult of Self-Worship

Paul C. Vitz

SECOND EDITION

About This Book

This book is for the reader interested in a critique of contemporary psychology—the reader who knows, perhaps only intuitively, that psychology has become more a sentiment than a science and is now part of the problem of modern life rather than part of its resolution. The varied criticisms offered here are scientific, philosophical, ethical, economic, social, and, finally, religious; their purpose is to provide arguments and concepts that allow the reader to begin the process of placing today's psychology in a much smaller, less corrosive, but ultimately more accurate and more helpful perspective than that which presently prevails.

The first edition of this work—*Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*—came out in 1977 and seems to have been the first book-length critique of the self-worshiping and narcissistic character of so much modern psychology. While it was in press, Tom Wolfe's famous "Me Decade" article appeared.[1] In 1978 Christopher Lasch's best-selling book *The Culture of Narcissism* was published. Lasch brilliantly documented the pervasive egoism and narcissism in modern American society, much of it derived from psychology and other "helping professions." A little later, David G. Myers published his book *The Inflated Self* (1981), which discussed the widespread human tendency—and illusion—to see things as reliably favorable to the self. Success is our achievement; failure is the fault of someone else, or the environment, or bad luck, etc. In 1983, two psychologists, Michael and Lise Wallach, published a systematic critique of all the major theories of psychology since Freud. Their book, *Psychology's Sanction for Selfishness: The Error of Egoism*

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1. Tom Wolfe, "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening," *New York*, 23 Aug. 1976, pp. 26-40.

in Theory and Therapy, showed that all modern psychological theories of human motivation and personality assume that reward for the self (i.e., egoism) is the *only* functional ethical principle. In short, psychology's deep commitment to narcissism, egoism, self-worship, the individual, isolated self—or, as I call it, "selfism"—has been thoroughly demonstrated.[2]

Along with these books came a raft of more general criticisms of psychology, especially psychotherapy. These critiques often ignored the problems of the self to focus on many other weaknesses of psychology. Strong secular criticisms came from Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy* (1978), Martin L. Gross, *The Psychological Society* (1978), and Bernie Zilbergeld's *The Shrinking of America* (1983). The secular attack on psychology in general has continued unabated through *Psychobabble* (1979) to *Freudian Fraud* (1991). This now powerful critical tradition was begun by Philip Rieff's still well-known *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966).[3]

Meanwhile, Christian critics of psychology also went into high gear. Martin and Deidre Bobgan's *The Psychological Way/The Spiritual Way* (1978) represented an all-out rejection of psychology for Christians. A more scholarly but still very effective critique came from Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1982). W. Kirk Kilpatrick waded in with two popular and insightful critical treatments: *Psychological Seduction* (1982) and *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1985). Sometimes too extreme but usually cogent was Dave Hunt's and T. A. McMahon's best-selling *The Seduction of Christianity* (1985). Don S. Browning came out with *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* (1987), an outstanding and scholarly critical analysis of the ethical and philosophical assumptions made by the major modern psychologies. And religious critiques of psychology are still coming out—for example, Os Guinness

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2. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978); David G. Myers, *The Inflated Self* (New York: Seabury, 1981); Michael Wallach and Lise Wallach, *Psychology's Sanction for Selfishness: The Error of Egoism in Theory and Therapy* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1983).

3. Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy: Mental Healing as Religion, Rhetoric, and Repression* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978); Martin L. Gross, *The Psychological Society* (New York: Random House, 1978); Bernie Zilbergeld, *The Shrinking of America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1983); Richard D. Rosen, *Psychobabble* (New York: Avon, 1979); Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); E. Fuller Torrey, *Freudian Fraud* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

and John Seel, *No God but God* (1992). The granddaddy of these Christian critiques is probably Jay Adams's *Competent to Counsel* (1972).[4]

In many ways, then, much has happened to our understanding of psychology since 1977. And yet little has actually changed in how psychology functions in our society, or how it is taught in our colleges and universities. Psychology is probably less talked about in the popular media and somewhat less popular than in the mid-1970s. But we are still very much what Rieff called a "therapeutic society." Self-actualization, self-fulfillment, etc., are standard explanations for the purpose of everything from college education to life itself. Countless Christians worry more about losing their self-esteem than about losing their souls.

In university psychology departments, hundreds of thousands of students every year still take courses in which the books and critical analyses cited above are almost never, if ever, mentioned. Far from being concerned with scholarly and intellectual debate, our psychology departments and their courses focus on supporting the profession, keeping student enrollment up and faculty morale high. Hence there is a need for a new and revised edition of *Psychology as Religion* to make many of the same points as the first edition, but taking into consideration work that has appeared since the book first appeared.

As the title suggests, it will be argued that psychology has become a religion: a secular cult of the self. By this I mean an intensely held worldview, a philosophy of life or ideology. More specifically, contemporary psychology is a form of secular humanism based on the rejection of God and the worship of the self. A good deal of what follows by way of criticism, however, does not presuppose a religious orientation, and devotees of humanistic psychology (e.g., of such concepts as self-actual-

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4. Martin Bobgan and Deidre Bobgan, *The Psychological Way/The Spiritual Way: Are Christianity and Psychotherapy Compatible?* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1978); Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice: A Christian Looks at the Changing Face of Psychology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982); William Kirk Kilpatrick, *Psychological Seduction: The Failure of Modern Psychology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982); William Kirk Kilpatrick, *The Emperor's New Clothes* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985); D. Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity: Spiritual Discernment in the Last Days* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985); Don Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Os Guinness and John Seel, *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago: Moody, 1992); Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972).

ization) are challenged to confront a psychologist's criticism of their widely accepted wisdom.

The major critical orientation of this book is Christian. This will be made most explicit in the later chapters. Christianity, like all traditional religions, has a great deal at stake in this discussion. It may be noted that in those cases in which critical arguments are based on Christian theology, my conclusion is usually identical with or close to that which could be made by other theistic religions. The present work is offered in a spirit of cooperation with other faiths, particularly Judaism, in the common struggle against the influence of today's psychology.

Specifically, I shall argue for five theses:

1. Psychology as religion exists, and it exists in strength throughout the United States.
2. Psychology as religion can be criticized on many grounds quite independent of religion.
3. Psychology as religion is deeply anti-Christian.
4. Psychology as religion is extensively supported by schools, universities, and social programs that are financed by taxes collected from millions of Christians. This use of tax money to support what has become a secular ideology raises grave political and legal issues.
5. Psychology as religion has for years been destroying individuals, families, and communities. But in recent years the destructive logic of this secular system is beginning to be understood, and as more and more people discover the emptiness of self-worship Christianity is presented with a major historical opportunity to provide meaning and life.

I make no apology for the intensity of some of my criticism. The issues involved are still only beginning to be acknowledged, and in any case they are very serious. The time has more than come for Christian academics and intellectuals to speak out publicly in defense of the faith, regardless of the professional risk and isolation this may entail. Many of us are in strategic positions to observe and analyze anti-Christian trends in society that escape the theologians, who are often so secularized in today's seminaries that they would be the last to notice.

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Here a few autobiographical words are in order.[5] Much of the subsequent analysis comes directly out of my personal experience as a student and as an academic psychologist during the last thirty-five years. I was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan from 1953 to 1957, a psychology major for the last three years. At college I followed a familiar script by rebelling against my nominally Christian upbringing. (This probably happens in high school now.) I read Bertrand Russell, announced that I was an atheist, and took instant pride in my "hard-won" independence. The only disappointment was that my announcement of it was met by others with what can best be described as a yawn.

My vague, superficial Christianity had been such weak stuff that its rejection had less psychological importance than, say, breaking up with my girlfriend. In consequence, my period of active hostility to Christianity was quite brief: a few months (appropriately enough) in my sophomore year. After this began a long agnostic indifference to religion. It was a time I devoted fully to becoming a psychologist by concentrating on my graduate (1957-62) and post-graduate (1964-65) studies at Stanford University. Here I majored in the subjects of motivation and personality, which included learning and teaching the views of the self-theorists.

In graduate school, religion was treated as a pathetic anachronism. Occasionally a person's religious beliefs were "measured" in personality tests. The common interpretation was that people holding traditional religious views were fascist-authoritarian types. There was also some interest in religion on the part of social psychologists who wanted to study exotic belief systems. My contacts with the disciplines of anthropology and sociology suggested that similar attitudes were typical of people in these fields.

A year or so after I received my doctorate, my interests began to shift to experimental psychology, particularly the topics of perception, cognition, and aesthetics. This shift of interest was partly occasioned by a growing awareness that I found much humanistic personality theory intellectually confused and rather silly. Many of the arguments presented here first occurred to me in the mid-1960s. I still remember moments in

5. For more detailed autobiographical material see Paul C. Vitz, "A Christian Odyssey," in *Spiritual Journeys*, ed. R. Baram (Boston: St. Paul, 1987), pp. 379-99; Vitz, "My Life — So Far," in *Storying Ourselves: A Narrative Perspective on Christians in Psychology*, ed. D. J. Lee (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

the middle of class lectures when I suddenly became aware that I was saying things I didn't really believe. To discover you are teaching as a reasonable approximation to scientific truth something that you no longer think is true is disconcerting, to put it mildly.

This critical suspicion continued to grow. By 1968 or so I was no longer willing to teach graduate or undergraduate courses that required me to cover the self-theorists. There things might have remained except for two unexpected events. One was the development of a nationwide mass enthusiasm for the humanistic self-theories at about the same time that I was moving away from them. The other was my conversion to Christianity. There is nothing dramatic to report about the latter — no sudden rebirth or other mystical experience — just a great deal of intense emotional turbulence associated with the collapse of my secular ideals accompanied by a quietly growing change of heart and mind. This process seems to have started sometime in 1972, and at some point since then I discovered I was a Christian — a very poor one to be sure, but still my life had been turned around. The noteworthy aspect about this is that it happened to a totally unprepared, recalcitrant, secularized psychologist who thought that the only natural direction of change was exactly in the opposite direction. There were certainly no available models for it in psychology. Becoming a Christian provided me with a dramatically different view of psychology as well as a strong motivation for developing some of the critical analysis I had begun several years earlier.

This is where things stood — with regard to my "biography" — when I first wrote this book more than fifteen years ago. Its publication contributed to many important changes in my life that have happened since. Most importantly, it put me in contact with a small but highly significant number of Christians, some of whom were psychologists, and others in different disciplines, who were also struggling with many of the problems that preoccupied me. Their response and support have been deeply appreciated and have done much to keep me in contact with a rich and increasingly innovative Christian intellectual community. The fact that I became a Catholic in 1979 has broadened my intellectual contacts still further. And much to my eternal gratitude, my Catholicism has not interfered with my friendship and sense of alliance with many Protestants, especially evangelicals. We are all in the same struggle, and we know it.

One other major change since the first edition has been my recent

attempts to develop a type of positive "Christian psychology." This includes work on a narrative model of counseling; my book on Sigmund Freud, with Jesus as the anti-Oedipus; and the use of psychoanalytic concepts to support the notion of original sin.[6] Although I do think that important aspects of psychology can be effectively baptized, it is still difficult to distinguish what can be safely incorporated from what cannot. The problem is complicated still further by strong secular attacks on the basic legitimacy of psychology both as a therapeutic and as an explanatory discipline. In addition, recent decades have seen an enormous increase in the biological understanding and control of behavior, while on the other hand New Age spirituality has made it clear to many who would not listen to a Christian critique that secular psychology's interpretation of religion, and dismissal of the spiritual life, was grossly mistaken. Psychology has been losing much intellectual ground both to biology and to spirituality over the last twenty years or so. In short, psychology is no longer a young "science"; it is now a mature discipline, and it is becoming less self-confident and imperialistic than it was not so long ago.

Nevertheless, the hostility of most psychologists to Christianity is still very real. For years I was part of that sentiment; today it continues to surround me. It is a curious hostility, for psychologists are rarely consciously aware of it. Their lack of awareness is due mostly to sheer ignorance of what Christianity is — for that matter, of what any religion is. The universities are so deeply secularized that most academics can no longer articulate why they are opposed to Christianity. They merely assume that for all rational people the question of being a Christian was settled — negatively — at some time in the past.

There is one interesting difference in this hostility that has arisen since the mid-1970s. In the years since then, it has become obvious that, throughout the world, religion is alive and well. The energy of Islam is perhaps the clearest example. But the importance of Catholicism for Poland and of Eastern Orthodoxy for the fall of Soviet Communism are

6. Paul C. Vitz, "Narrative and Counseling, Part 1: From Analysis of the Past to Stories about It," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 20 (1992): 11-19; Vitz, "Narrative and Counseling, Part 2: From Stories of the Past to Stories for the Future," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 20 (1992): 20-27; Vitz, *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious* (New York: Guilford Press, 1988; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Vitz, "A Christian Theory of Personality," in *Man and Mind,* ed. T. Burke (Hillsdale, MI: Hillsdale College Press, 1987), pp. 199-222.

commonly recognized. In the United States, the so-called Religious Right and the abortion issue have made it obvious that Christianity is not some secularized, totally irrelevant religion. In Israel and around the world, Orthodox Judaism and Hasidic life show remarkable vigor. Meanwhile, liberal Christianity and liberal Judaism both continue to decay. And what about that important political "religion," Socialism? Well, it has simply collapsed. Academics isolated from religious reality in their secular towers today look at religion with more anxiety and less smug indifference than they did in 1977. But the hostility and ignorance remain.

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Finally, it is important to identify certain psychologies that will be explicitly excluded from our discussion. First, experimental psychology — the study of sensation, perception, cognition, memory, problem solving, and related questions — is not included. This kind of psychology, primarily found in universities and research centers, is a branch of natural science composed of various amounts of biology, physics, mathematics, and so forth. Second, the theory or philosophy of psychology known as behaviorism (the best-known example is probably that of B. F. Skinner) is not treated here, since it has little in common with humanistic self-psychology, and criticism of it would carry our discussion quite far afield. There already has been criticism of behaviorism, to which I have little to add.[7] Similarly, the therapeutic offspring of behaviorism known as behavior modification is excluded, since its techniques and principles are part of experimental psychology and its philosophy part of behaviorism.

A third omission is psychoanalysis, since much of self-psychology is a reaction against the more complex, unconscious, "pessimistic," conservative, and disciplined Freudian theories and methods. To criticize psychoanalysis with any thoroughness would require technical discussion of much material that is unrelated to the self. This would lengthen the present discussion greatly and blur its major focus.

When I first wrote this book, I did not include transpersonal psychology, since it was very new and it was hard to know what it might

7. For example, see Rodger K. Bufford, *The Human Reflex: Behavioral Psychology in Biblical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

become. But in this revised and expanded edition, I have devoted Chapter 9 to a critique of transpersonal psychology and to New Age spirituality, focusing on their psychological premises.

One final group is excluded, namely, those psychologists who recognize, respect, and respond to genuine religious issues in the lives of their patients. This group is not large, nor is it easily categorized. It includes psychologists who are personally committed to a religion, who integrate their faith, when appropriate, into therapy. But it also includes secular psychologists whose insights lead them to reject the contemporary religion of psychology as a superficial substitute for something genuine and a corruption of the important but limited function of psychotherapy. It is this group of psychologists who provide a basis for the hope that a strong, honest partnership may eventually develop between psychology and religion.

In spite of these exclusions, a large amount of modern psychology remains. In fact, most psychologists practicing today have been strongly affected by humanistic self-theories. Many American psychoanalysts have accepted so much of self-psychology that it is difficult to identify them as Freudian at all. Likewise, behavior modification therapists frequently espouse various self-actualizing or self-esteem philosophies in their own lives and as part of their professional ethic. Educational psychology has long been saturated with concepts like "self-esteem" and "self-actualization." In short, America's eclectic tradition has meant that almost every form of psychology today comes with a large dose of the theories criticized here.

1. *Major Theorists*

I shall begin by documenting the strong religious nature of much of today's psychology. This chapter presents, in brief form, the relevant theoretical positions of Carl Jung—the originator of much self-psychology—and then the positions of more recent self-theorists: Erich Fromm, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Rollo May (May being important primarily as a representative of existential psychology). The popularization of these and other self-theorists will be described briefly and critiqued in the next chapter. More detailed criticisms of the common assumptions of the self-theory position will be taken up in later chapters.

Jung, Fromm, Rogers, Maslow, and May have been selected as the most influential self-theorists. Other psychologists have contributed to self-theory, but in general they have not been as completely committed to the concept of the self. The psychoanalytic ego-psychologists, for example, with their notions of the conflict-free ego sphere and ego mechanisms of defense, which were developed in the 1930s and 1940s by Heinz Hartmann and Anna Freud and others, are not pure self-psychologists, since they remained committed to much of traditional Freudian theory.[1] Emphasis on the self is present but is not very strong in the works of famous earlier deviants from orthodox Freudianism such as Rank, Adler, and Horney. Nevertheless, to the extent that these theorists whom we have omitted do emphasize the self (for example, Adler with his notion of the creative self, and Horney with her concern

1. See Heinz Hartmann, "Psychoanalysis and the Concept of Health," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 20 (1939): 308-21; Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (London: Hogarth, 1942); Ernst Kris, "Ego Psychology and Interpretation in Psychoanalytic Therapy," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 20 (1951).

for self-realization), their ideas and impact are similar to those we present below.[2]

CARL JUNG

Jung was born in Switzerland in 1875. His father was a pastor in the Swiss Reformed Church, and he rebelled against his father and his father's religion. Jung obtained a medical degree in 1900 and then specialized in psychiatry. A short time later he met Sigmund Freud, and they had a few years of collaboration, followed by a serious and permanent break. Jung was critical of Freud's extreme emphasis on sexuality; he was also much less interested in psychopathology and more concerned with people's spiritual needs.

Indeed, Jung was quite aware of the religious nature of psychotherapy, and the theological cast of much of his writing is apparent. For example, *An Answer to Job*[3] is an extensive, but heterodox, exercise in scriptural interpretation. Jung's explicit awareness of the religious issue is stated when he writes: "Patients force the psychotherapist into the role of priest, and expect and demand that he shall free them from distress. That is why we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which strictly speaking belong to the Theologian."[4]

Jung's psychology—unlike Freud's—provided positive, synthetic concepts that could serve as a conscious goal not only for therapy but also for life as a whole. Jung responded far more to the patient's demand for general relief from distress than did Freud.[5] Jung's positive answer

2. For examples of these theorists' emphasis on the self, see A. Adler, "The Fundamental Views of Individual Psychology," *International Journal of Individual Psychology* 1 (1935): 5-8; K. Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle toward Self-realization* (New York: Norton, 1950).

3. Carl Jung, *An Answer to Job*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954).

4. Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933), p. 278.

5. Freud was quite aware of the religious character of Jungian and Adlerian psychology, whence derives much of the psychology used in selfism. Freud made a sharp distinction between religion and psychoanalysis, and he claimed that analysts "cannot guide patients in their synthesis; we can by analytic work only prepare them for it." And he declared: "We do not seek to bring him [the patient] relief by receiving him into the catholic, protestant or socialist community." Freud saw the Adlerians as "buffoons . . .

to the patient's basic religious needs is summarized by Jacobi, a prominent student of his:

> Jungian psychotherapy is . . . a *Heilsweg*, in the twofold sense of the German word: a way of healing and a way of salvation. It has the power to cure. . . . in addition it knows the way and has the means to lead the individual to his 'salvation,' to the knowledge and fulfillment of his personality, which have always been the aim of spiritual striving. Jung's system of thought can be explained theoretically only up to a certain point; to understand it fully one must have experienced or, better still, 'suffered' its living action in oneself. Apart from its medical aspect, Jungian psychotherapy is thus a system of education and spiritual guidance.[6]

The process of Jungian movement on this path is, Jacobi continues, "both ethically and intellectually an extremely difficult task, which can be successfully performed only by the fortunate few, those elected and favored by grace."[7] The last stage, really a process, on the Jungian path of individuation is called self-realization. This goal of self-realization or self-actualization is at heart a gnostic one, in which the commandment "Know and express thyself" has replaced the Judeo-Christian commandment "Love God and others." (In many respects, all modern psychology of whatever theoretical persuasion, because of the emphasis on special, somewhat esoteric knowledge, can be interpreted as part of a vast gnostic heresy.)[8]

Very briefly, this process of self-realization involves (1) the patient's discovery and understanding of the archetypes (i.e., structures and desires) in his or her collective and personal unconscious and (2) the interpretation and expression of these archetypes in the patient's life. In

who published books about the meaning of life[!]." Ernest Kris, "Some Vicissitudes of Insight in Psychoanalysis," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 37 (Nov.-Dec. 1956): 453; Sigmund Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1950), p. 256; Ernest L. Freud, ed., *Letters of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1960), p. 401.

6. J. Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung*, 8th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 60.

7. Jacobi, *Psychology of C. G. Jung*, p. 127.

8. For the basic gnostic character (i.e., emphasizing knowledge as salvation) of modernism, including psychology, see, e.g., Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Regnery, 1968). For the gnostic character of transpersonal psychology, see below, Chapter 9.

any case, the Jungian model simply assumes that the goal of life is self-realization. As a goal or purpose of life, self-actualization cannot be scientifically justified; it is based on unexamined philosophical and moral assumptions.

Much Jungian psychology is not explicitly focused on individuation (self-realization) but is concerned with the symbolic interpretation of the patient's dreams, writings, drawings, etc. Here Jung's analysis is focused on the collective and personal unconscious of the patient and on archetypes and other concepts. Jung acknowledges the patient's basic religious concerns, and Jungian psychology is directly applied to the expression of the patient's archetypal religious motives—for example, in dreams about the wise old man (a God archetype), dreams about rebirth, and so on. Jung's discovery of the psychology of religious symbols is important, but there is with all this focusing on one's inner life a real danger of substituting the psychological experience of one's religious unconscious for genuine religious experience that comes through a transcendent God who acts in history. Those who make this mistake have truly treated psychology as religion.[9]

ERICH FROMM

Erich Fromm was born in 1900, educated at Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and Munich, received psychoanalytic training in Berlin, and came to the United States in 1933. He lived in the United States and Mexico for much of the rest of his life. Fromm was originally a Freudian psychoanalyst, but he broke from this tradition in the 1930s. Fromm rejected Freud's emphasis on the biological nature of humankind, especially disputing Freud's inclusion of aggression (the death instinct) as a basic part of human nature. Freud gave aggression the same importance as sex (the life instinct), while Fromm, in contrast, emphasized society as the major determinant of human personality. In particular, Fromm described human nature as intrinsically and naturally good and attributed anything bad—evil—to society, especially when society causes the self to deny

its own potential for growth and expression. Except for the unconscious influence of society, Fromm came to neglect the traditional psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious—for instance, dreams.

In spite of his break with the Freudian tradition, Fromm remained deeply influenced by Freud, often citing or criticizing him. He shared Freud's penchant for characterizing cultural belief systems and those who believe them in terms of psychological types, such as the "exploitative" and "marketing" character types of capitalist society or the "authoritative" and "regressive" beliefs characterizing the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.[10] The following remarks are typical of Fromm:

> A spirit of pride and optimism has distinguished Western culture in the last few centuries. . . . Man's pride has been justified. By virtue of his reason he has built a material world the reality of which surpasses even the dreams and visions of fairy tales and utopias. He harnesses physical energies which will enable the human race to secure the material conditions necessary for a dignified and productive existence, and although many of his goals have not yet been attained there is hardly any doubt that they are within reach and that *the problem of production*—which was the problem in the past—is, in principle, solved.[11]

Elsewhere in the same book he speaks in the same optimistic vein of human character:

> I shall attempt to show that the character structure of the mature and integrated personality, the productive character, constitutes the source and basis of "virtue," and that "vice," in the last analysis, is indifference to one's own self and self-mutilation. Not self-renunciation nor selfishness but the affirmation of his truly human self, are the supreme values of humanistic ethics. If man is to have confidence in values, he must know himself and the capacity of his nature for goodness and productiveness.[12]

9. See R. Hostie, *Religion and the Psychology of Jung,* trans. G. R. Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1957). For a detailed discussion of Jung's religious assumptions, etc., see D. S. Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

10. See E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1941); Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1955). Also relevant are Fromm's *You Shall Be as Gods* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966) and *The Sane Society* (New York: Rinehart, 1955).

11. Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself* (New York: Rinehart, 1947); quoted from the Fawcett Premier Book edition (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, n.d.), pp. 13-14; italics in original.

12. Fromm, *Man for Himself,* p. 17.

In this view, a value such as love for one's neighbor is not viewed as a phenomenon transcending man;

> it is something inherent and *radiating from* him. Love is not a higher power which descends upon man nor a duty which is imposed upon him; it is his own power by which he relates himself to the world and makes it truly his.[13]

This of course has consequences for one's idea of what human nature is in itself:

> The position taken by humanistic ethics that man is able to know what is good and to act accordingly on the strength of his natural potentialities and of his reason would be untenable if the dogma of man's innate natural evilness were true.[14]

Fromm's hostility to Christianity is clear in *The Dogma of Christ*, where he argues that belief in God always functions as "the ally of the rulers."[15] (This is a position he must have found difficult to reconcile with the persecution of Christian believers by atheistic rulers in, say, the Soviet Union, Albania, or China; and after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, his claim looks simply stupid.) Fromm claims that Christianity arose from a proletariat class so frustrated in its hopes for political and social change that it turned to salvation in a fantasy world of the supernatural.[16] His own religious position is quite explicit in *You Shall Be as Gods:* the concept of god has evolved to the point that humankind is God, and if the sacred exists, its center is in the self and the selves of others. Fromm's ideal society is humanistic, communitarian socialism, which he presents in considerable detail in *The Sane Society* (1955).

Throughout Fromm's works, his atheism and materialism, his political views, and other values so permeate his psychology that it is hard even to identify those contributions which might reasonably be considered scientific.

13. Fromm, *Man for Himself,* p. 23; italics in original.
14. Fromm, *Man for Himself,* p. 212.
15. Fromm, *Dogma of Christ,* p. 15.
16. Fromm, *Dogma of Christ,* section III, e.g., p. 35.

CARL ROGERS

Carl Rogers, a Midwestern American, was born in 1902. He describes himself as "the middle child in a large, close-knit family where hard work and a highly conservative Protestant Christianity were about equally revered."[17] He was graduated in 1924 from the University of Wisconsin, having switched from agricultural science to preparation for the ministry. He attended Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he was exposed to a liberal philosophical viewpoint regarding religion. After a short visit abroad he broke from Christianity, deciding that he wanted to help humanity without being inhibited by any prior commitment to a fixed set of beliefs whose truth was not obvious to him. He transferred to the Teachers College at Columbia University, where he was influenced by John Dewey's thought, and received the Ph.D. degree in 1928.

From Rogers's varied exposure to different psychological theories he developed his own position, which has become highly influential. We shall omit discussion of his technique of therapy called "non-directive," or "client-centered," and concentrate on his theory of personality and the goals of therapy. The central work for our purposes is *On Becoming a Person.* Here Rogers states the goal of therapy as follows:

> If I can create a relationship characterized on my part: by a genuineness and transparency, *in which I am my real feelings; by a warm acceptance of and prizing of the other person as a separate individual;* by a sensitive ability to see his world and himself as he sees them; then the other individual in the relationship: will experience and understand aspects of himself which previously he has repressed; will find *himself becoming better integrated,* more able to function effectively; will become more similar to the person he would like to be; will be *more self-directing and more self-confident;* will become *more of a person, more unique and more self-expressive;* will be more understanding, more acceptant of others; will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and more comfortably.
>
> I believe this statement holds whether I am speaking of my relationship with a client, with a group of students or staff members, with my family or children. It seems to me that *we have here a general hypothesis*

17. Quoted in Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey, *Introduction to Theories of Personality* (New York: Wiley, 1985), chaps. 4 and 6; this book is the source of biographical information provided here about Rogers, Fromm, and Maslow.

which offers exciting possibilities for the development of creative, adaptive, autonomous persons.[18]

Psychotherapy, once a restricted and specialized activity, is now generalized to all of life's relations. Rogers's writings are much more oriented toward the process of therapy than Fromm's, and he tends to ignore large cultural and historical themes. He interprets therapy as a process of the changing and growing self:

I shall assume that the *client experiences himself as being fully received.* By this I mean that whatever his feelings — fear, despair, insecurity, anger; whatever his mode of expression — silence, gestures, tears, or words; whatever he finds himself being in this moment, *he senses that he is psychologically received, just as he is, by the therapist.*[19]

More explicitly, Rogers describes his theory of therapy as follows:

Individuals move, I began to see, not from a fixity or homeostasis through change to a new fixity, though such a process is indeed possible. But much the more significant continuum is from fixity to changingness, from rigid structure to flow, from stasis to process.[20]

At the first stage of the therapeutic process, the person is fixed, static, completely blocked; he is either unaware of his feelings and emotions or attributes them to objective external circumstances. By the second or third stage (out of seven), we have people described as follows:

"And yet there is the matter of, well, how much do you leave yourself open to marriage, and if your professional vocation is important, and that's the one thing that's really yourself at this point, it does place a limitation on your contact."

In this excerpt the self is such a remote object that this would probably best be classified as being between stages two and three.

There is also expression about the self as a reflected object, existing primarily in others.

There is much expression about or description of feelings and personal meanings not now present.

18. Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), pp. 37-38; italics added.

19. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person,* p. 130; italics added.

20. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person,* p. 131.

There is very little acceptance of feelings. For the most part feelings are revealed as something shameful, bad, or abnormal, or unacceptable in other ways.[21]

The fifth stage Rogers describes as follows:

Feelings are expressed freely as in the present.
       "I expect kinda to get a severe rejection — this I expect all the time . . . somehow I guess I even feel it with you. . . . It's hard to talk about because I want to be the best I can possibly be with you."
       Feelings are very close to being fully experienced. They "bubble up," "seep through," in spite of the fear and distrust which the client feels at experiencing them with fullness and immediacy.
       "That kinda came out and I just don't understand it. *(Long pause)* I'm trying to get hold of what that terror is."
       Client is talking about an external event. Suddenly she gets a pained, stricken look.
       Therapist: "What — what's hitting you now?"
       Client: "I don't know. *(She cries)* . . . I must have been getting a little too close to something I didn't want to talk about, or something."[22]

The culmination of Rogerian therapy is the seventh and highest stage, which is summarized as follows:

The process moves from a point of fixity, where all the elements and threads described are separately discernible and separately understandable, to the flowing peak moments of therapy in which all these threads become inseparably woven together. In the new experiencing with immediacy which occurs at such moments, feeling and cognition interpenetrate, self is subjectively present in the experience, volition is simply the subjective following of a harmonious balance of organismic direction. . . . [T]he person becomes a unity of flow, or motion. . . . [H]e has become an integrated process of changingness.[23]

21. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person,* pp. 135-36; italics in original.

22. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person,* pp. 139-40; italics in original.

23. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person,* p. 158.

ABRAHAM MASLOW

Abraham Maslow was born in 1908 and grew up in Brooklyn. He was primarily educated at the University of Wisconsin. He then spent his early professional years in New York City at Columbia Teachers College and Brooklyn College. His independently developed theory of the self is close to Rogers's, but his distinctive concepts deserve mention.

Maslow postulates a hierarchy of human needs. This hierarchy, whose basis is assumed to be innate, requires that needs must be satisfied in a relatively fixed order, starting with basic physiological and safety needs, proceeding to needs for belonging and love, for self-esteem and status, and finally reaching the highest need, the need for self-realization, or self-actualization, as Maslow calls it. This last need is the most distinctively human, although it depends for fulfillment on the prior satisfaction of the lower needs. The person in whom this final need is satisfied is the self-actualized person, an ideal type with the following distinctive characteristics:

(1) efficient perception of reality and comfortableness with it;
(2) acceptance of self and others;
(3) spontaneity;
(4) an autonomous self independent of culture;
(5) creativity (a universal hallmark of the ideal person among self-theorists);
(6) having "peak" experiences, that is, oceanic or mystic experiences (a peak experience is, however, a natural phenomenon, not a supernatural one, according to Maslow);
(7) democratic, egalitarian, and humanitarian character structure and values.[24]

Maslow's description of the essential quality of these self-actualized types is revealing:

A few centuries ago these would all have been described as men who walk in the path of God or as godly men. A few say that they believe in God, but describe this God more as a metaphysical concept than as

24. Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper, 1970), chap. 11.

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a personal figure. If religion is defined only in social-behavioral terms, then these are all religious people, the atheist included. But if more conservatively we use the term religion so as to include and stress the supernatural element and institutional orthodoxy (certainly the more common usage) then our answer must be quite different, for then almost none of them is religious.

[Creativeness] is a universal characteristic of all the people studied or observed. There is no exception. Each one shows in one way or another a special kind of creativeness or originality or inventiveness that has certain peculiar characteristics. . . . For one thing, it is different from the special creativeness of the Mozart type. We may as well face the fact that so-called geniuses display ability that we do not understand. . . . Such talent we have no concern with here since it does not rest upon psychic health or basic satisfaction. The creativeness of the self-actualized man seems rather to be kin to the naive and universal creativeness of unspoiled children.[25]

Maslow names some of these secular saints — Lincoln in his last days, Thomas Jefferson, Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jane Addams, William James, Spinoza, and aspects of Walt Whitman, Thoreau, Beethoven, George Washington Carver, Goethe, Eugene V. Debs, Albert Schweitzer, and so on.[26]

ROLLO MAY AND EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Our last theorist is Rollo May, who is important for us because he exemplifies the influence of existential philosophy on American self-psychology. Born in 1909, he received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Oberlin, a Bachelor of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary, and the Ph.D. at Columbia Teachers College. (Thus his educational background is remarkably similar to that of Rogers and Maslow: all moved from states in the Great Lakes area to New York City and Columbia Teachers College — and in two cases attended Union Seminary across the street.) May's special contribution to self-theory comes from the European influence of existentialism, which he first encountered in his psychotherapeutic studies in Vienna.

25. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, pp. 169-70.
26. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 152.

Existentialism as a philosophy is notoriously hard to characterize rigorously, and existential therapy has the same difficulty. It is, however, possible to isolate some special themes in existential therapy that represent a distinctive strand in the framework of self-theory.

The central concept is probably that of "being there" (*Dasein*), by which is meant the intense fundamental awareness of one's existence. This basic experience is described by a patient of May's, a young woman who reported:

> Then what is left? What is left is this, "I am." This act of contact and acceptance with "I am," once gotten hold of, gave me (what I think was for me the first time) the experience since I am, I have the right to be.
>
> What is this experience like? . . . It is the experience of my own aliveness. . . . It is my saying to Descartes, "I AM, therefore I think, I feel, I do."[27]

This "I am" experience is the basic experience of being, and although it is not itself a solution to a patient's problem, May claims that it is a necessary precondition for successful analysis.

One important property of being is that it rejects the distinction between the knowing or experiencing subject and the known or experienced object. Instead, the concept of being is a basic part of the existentialist "endeavor to understand man by cutting below the cleavage between subject and object which has bedeviled Western thought and science since shortly after the Renaissance."[28] This condition of being is inseparable from its opposite — the condition of nonbeing or nothingness. Awareness of and confrontation with nonbeing, especially in the form of death, gives rise to the powerful and pervasive emotion of angst (dread or anxiety). Therefore, at the very center of existentialist thought is the common modern condition of pervasive anxiety that is "the experience of the threat of imminent non-being."[29]

This existence takes place in a world or universe characterized as "Being-in-the-world." The three aspects of the existential world are the *Umwelt* (the "world around," the environment), the *Mitwelt* (the "world with" others, our life of social and interpersonal relations), and, most central, the *Eigenwelt* (the "own world," the world of the self and rela-

27. Rollo May, *Existence* (New York: Basic Books, 1958), p. 43.
28. May, *Existence*, p. 11.
29. May, *Existence*, p. 50.

tionship to one's self). Two or all three of these worlds may be experienced at the same time, but taken together they are the only arenas within which our existence takes place.

An important existential concept is "becoming," the process of self-development or fulfilling one's potential. This process unfolds by way of the self's choosing its own course of self-fulfillment. Acts of choice bring the self from initial existence into an actualized self, with a nature or essence created by its choice. Thus, the self first exists (i.e., "I am"), but without any a priori nature or essence. Instead, through acts of choice the self's essence is created. These choices are courageously made in the face of the self's awareness of nonbeing and its experience of angst. Guilt arises through failure to develop the self's potential, through blocking or ignoring one's chance to become one's potential. Transcendence is the name of the important capacity of the existential self to surpass or climb beyond the prior level of self-development. Thus, as self-potential is developed, each new stage is a transcending of the earlier stages; this process often is called "becoming."

Rollo May points out that Carl Rogers, although he never had direct contact with existentialism, developed a therapy with important existential aspects, especially in Rogers's emphases on becoming and on the therapist's direct experience of himself and of the patient.

> I launch myself into the therapeutic relationship having a hypothesis, or a faith, that my liking, my confidence, and my understanding of the other person's inner world, will lead to a significant process of becoming. I enter the relationship not as a scientist, not as a physician who can accurately diagnose and cure, but as a person, entering into a personal relationship. Insofar as I see him only as an object, the client will tend to become only an object.[30]

A final significant point is the claim of existential psychology that a natural science of human beings is not possible. Jean-Paul Sartre expresses this as a refusal "to consider man as capable of being analyzed and reduced to original givens, to determined desires (or drives), supported by the subject as properties [are] by an object."[31]

30. May, *Existence*, p. 82; quoting from Carl Rogers, "Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question," *American Psychologist* 10 (1955): 267-78.
31. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 561.

In summary, existential therapy — like existential philosophy — starts with the isolated self, aware of its basic existence, but confronted by nonexistence and the associated emotion of dread. This self, valued and accepted directly by the therapist, is encouraged, in the face of nonbeing, courageously to develop self-defined decisions that will bring its potential to fulfillment. This transcendent activity, or becoming-through-choosing, also creates the essence of the individual. On the other hand, failure to fulfill self-potential causes guilt. When this process succeeds, an individual who initially had only an existence has now created his or her own essence.

This self-knowledge is arrived at by the patient's learning the meaning of his or her experienced states on their own terms, that is, phenomenologically and not via some "objective" subject-object philosophy, as found in natural science. All of this takes place in a universe that excludes God and is limited to three aspects: the external environment, the social and interpersonal environment, and the self and its relation to itself.

2. Self-Theory for Everybody

Jung, Fromm, Rogers, Maslow, and May were all theoreticians. Their concepts — however influential with intellectuals and students — had to be translated into popular form before they could reach large numbers of people. Some of those who have done this job of translation have pushed the ideas of these theorists to extremes for which they should not be held responsible. Yet it should be borne in mind that the popularizers are primarily professional psychologists or psychiatrists, and their works do represent a legitimate presentation or logical extension of self-theory. Actually the line between "theorist" and "popularizer" cannot be drawn all that precisely. With the exception of Jung, none of the preceding theorists is likely to merit classification as a major thinker. At best, they introduced interesting and useful but limited concepts. At worst, they simply marketed already existing ideas like self-actualization, and a good number of their works are indistinguishable from popularization. I am thinking especially of Rogers's *Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups* and *Becoming Partners: Marriage and Its Alternatives,* both of which are discussed below.

Keep in mind that many of the particular expressions of self-theory, such as those we shall describe, are apt to be very short-lived. Despite their prominence a few years ago, encounter groups, for instance, seem to have all but disappeared. But new forms of popularized self-theory continually arise — for example, today's great concern with self-esteem.

SELF-ESTEEM

Historically speaking, the concept of self-esteem has no clear intellectual origins; no major theorist has made it a central concept. Many psychol-