# SCIENTIFIC PSYCHOPATHOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS ISSUES

During the last few years it has become more and more apparent that there exists a considerable tension between traditional religious thought and certain assertions on the part of social sciences and psychology, which have been influenced to a great extent by psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis was born out of psychopathology, and both sociology and psychopathology joined hands to make friends with one another and with anthropology. The result has been the almost emphatic assertion that psychopathology and social sciences have become scientific disciplines, or that they have been more influenced by the scientific method than by philosophy.

The conversion (if I may use this term here, rather conditionally) of social sciences and psychology to the scientific method has done an immeasurable amount of good. No one would deny the revolutionary and far-reaching contributions that have been made by psychopathology during the last fifty years. No one would question the new breadth and depth of our knowledge of man, which we owe to psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology. At the same time, there is sufficient evidence of a conflict between religion and those trends or systems of sociology and psychology which claim the distinction of being scientific.

However, despite the very loudness and intensity of the voices, I would make bold to state from the very outset that this conflict is only a conflict between men who use either religion or science as a weapon of attack or defense.

Freud's official attitude toward religion is well known. His book *The Future of an Illusion* ends with a positive denial that there can be any knowledge outside science: "Science is no illusion. But it would be an illusion to suppose that we could get anywhere else what it cannot give us."[1]

Editor's Note.—This paper was read before a joint meeting of the Washington Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychoanalytic Society in Washington, D. C., November 13, 1952. It is published here in slightly abridged form. The author is an outstanding practicing psychoanalyst; consultant in research and psychotherapy, Butler Hospital, Providence; associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the College of Medicine, State University of New York; chairman, Section on Historical and Cultural Medicine, New York Academy of Medicine; chairman, Consulting Delegation to the United Nations, representing the International Criminological Society. In addition to numerous technical papers, his publications include *A History of Medical Psychology* (with George W. Henry; New York: Norton, 1941); *Mind, Medicine and Man* (New York: Harcourt, 1943); *Sigmund Freud, His Exploration of the Mind of Man* (New York and London: Scribner's, 1951).

[1] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: Horace Liveright and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1928), p. 98.

Yet the same Freud asserts: "One would like to count oneself among the believers, in order to admonish the philosophers who try to preserve the God of religion by substituting for him an impersonal, shadowy, abstract principle, and to say: 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.' "[2] It is almost self-evident that Freud was far from having solved the problem for himself. There is no reason to expect a solution of this problem from Freud; he was imbued with the faith that only scientific knowledge is true knowledge, and yet in his scientific work he relied upon myths, sagas, folklore, dreams, fantasies, the greatest and the humblest flights of human imagination. In other words, Freud stood in his own way, so to speak, since he elevated to the majesty of final causes the psychological mechanisms which he was privileged to discover.

In this respect Freud was a typical example of the scientist who confuses the mechanics of natural phenomena with the causation and purpose of natural phenomena. Someone aptly called this attitude the elevation of science to the level of unshakable dogma; it is scientism, not scientific. Yet even Freud, who gave himself fully to scientism, does offer a suggestion in numerous passages of his writings that he was not entirely unaware of his own inner struggle between dogmatic scientism and that something which is beyond conventional science. It is important in this respect not to forget that it was Freud who elevated the most unscientific of all the tools, human intuition, to the dignity of a keen instrument for investigation of human psychology.

W. T. Stace is inclined to believe that the conflict between science and religion was established and deepened by the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. He thinks that naturalism sought to establish itself as a dogma and consequently aligned itself against religion with all the power of conviction which the formulation of natural laws offers. This is quite true, but only to the extent that the scientist would insist that there is no truth outside science. ". . . No scientific argument—by which I mean an argument drawn from the phenomena of nature—can ever have the slightest tendency either to prove or to disprove the existence of God, in short . . . science is irrelevant to religion."[3]

This point of view is not new. However, it is not complete; it fails to give us a synthesis of that which religion and science have to offer, each in its respective way. This point of view, taken without further ado, might even

[2] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1930), p. 24.

[3] W. T. Stace, *Religion and the Modern Mind* (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1952), p. 76.

suggest that we return to the Cartesian dichotomy in which the "natural" man would be considered an autonomous machine and the spiritual one a being apart. This dichotomy proved untenable to many, even in the days of Descartes, and it appears even more untenable to those who, whether they be religious or naturalists, take the human individual as an indivisible whole which cannot be cleaved into parts by subtleties of formal logical arguments.

Contemporary psychology does not visualize the individual as an arithmetical sum of various parts, but rather as a unified synthesis of all the ingredients which seem to make up man. In accordance with modern psychology, man is not made up of animal part and human part; man is both human *and* animal, rational *and* irrational, material *and* spiritual, he is one and all of those things at one and the same time. He is always confronted by the great problem which is most simply denoted as the problem of making a choice—a choice of being at any given practical moment an animal or a human being, a material or spiritual agent, a logical or paralogical mind.

All this presents more and more complicated problems, which cannot be solved either by being purely scientific or purely religious. As Stace puts it: "The key to the solution of this problem lies in the consideration that men's minds do not usually work in the way that logicians say they should."[4] This is really the crux of the problem, and we ought to dwell on this in greater detail, if possible. The suggestion that human minds do not necessarily or always, or perhaps ever, function in accordance with the precepts laid down by the logicians is one with which the contemporary psychopathologist will not find it difficult to agree, since he knows that affective factors more unconscious than conscious dominate our thinking more than it appears and more than we are willing to admit.

The problem then appears to be a psychological one. It is a problem of uncovering the manner of our confusion on the question of science and religion. I do not think that the present-day confusion can be easily cleared up yet. So many emotions, passions, insecurities, and intolerances activate our contentions on the subject that all one can do is to proceed with caution and diffidence and humble hope.

Embarking cautiously on this path of search, I would remind you first of all of the words of Liston Pope, who so aptly and concisely summarized the situation of the contemporary mind: "Scientism, not to be confused with science itself, is the faith that science is the only way to truth or knowledge and that science provides the only hope for man's salvation. Scientism is the dogma of science. Science the Searcher is transformed by Scientism into

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Science the Savior." And further: "Science the Servant will become Science the Master of mankind; having learned to control the physical world, it will learn to control human relations as well and to release the mind and spirit of man from all bondage except to science itself." And further still: "When science is made into a religion, becoming an object of worship and a system of ultimate truth, it invariably becomes a bad religion, teaching man to worship the achievement of the human mind. By the same token, it becomes bad science and tends to harden into a dogma."[5]

Here we have again a telling allusion to the fact that science, when it is permitted to develop into scientism, leads to the worship of the human mind. This is another way of saying that the center of attention and interest becomes not truth, universal or particular, not knowledge of man or God, but rather a self-contained preoccupation with the adoration of the human mind—a psychological condition of utmost importance from the standpoint of modern psychology. In its most direct form it is narcissism, and in its consequences it does not even lead to self-knowledge. Still less would it lead to a synthesis, the demand for which becomes louder and louder as our contemplation of human problems deepens.

Thus we are again led a step closer to the recognition that the problem we are dealing with is a psychological one. Its origins are not in scientific logic or truth or in theological or religious truth. Rather it is a problem of the psychological functioning of man. This functioning must be understood, if man's mind is not to stand in man's own way and thus prevent him from understanding that which he can and ought to understand clearly.

Let us observe that the intensity of the apparent conflict between science and religion seems to be fed cooperatively by science and religion in a very singular way. The scientist, as was pointed out, tends to try to answer questions of ultimate truth and ultimate knowledge. However, these are not scientific questions at all. As Etienne Gilson so well puts it, they are religious questions:

> If they [the scientists] don't ask religious questions, scientists will never be offered religious answers. Nor will these religious answers ever pretend to be scientific ones. Religious wisdom tells us that in the beginning God created heaven and earth, but it does not pretend to give us any scientific account of the progressive formation of the world. As Thomas Aquinas aptly says, precisely about this very text, there were things which Moses could not express to an ignorant people without using images which they could understand.[6]

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[5] Liston Pope, "Christianity and the Social Sciences," in *Christianity in an Age of Science* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, n.d.), pp. 24–25.

[6] Etienne Gilson, "Religious Wisdom and Scientific Knowledge," in *Christianity in an Age of Science*, p. 21; cf. *Summa theologica*, I, q. 66, a. 1, ad 1m.

One could hardly find a more authoritative and more lucid statement than the above. For Gilson is a profound scholar, a great student of Thomas Aquinas, and a man of an immense philosophical perspective which is as great as his lucidity and intellectual tolerance. He calls our attention to the changing conceptions of the universe from Newton through Einstein to de Broglie and Heisenberg. He is impressed with the "decreasing longevity" of the various scientific conceptions of the universe. The system of Ptolemy lived fourteen centuries; the Copernican system lasted only three centuries; that of Einstein less than a quarter of a century, to be replaced by the newer conceptions of Heisenberg and other contributors to microphysics. Gilson concludes that, while the progress of science continues at a steady pace, "... the fact remains that, by reason of its accelerated progress, modern science is exhibiting an always decreasing stability."[7] As for the scientists themselves:

> Confronted with their own amazing discoveries, they entertain no doubt about their truth, but they are beginning to wonder about their very possibility. "What is most incomprehensible about nature," Einstein says, "is its comprehensibility." As to Louis de Broglie, in one of the most remarkable chapters of his book on physics and microphysics, he makes this almost identical remark: "What is most marvelous about the progress of science, is that it has revealed to us a certain concordance between our thought and things, a certain possibility for us to grasp, through the resources of our intelligence and the rules of our reason, the deep seated relations that obtain between phenomena. We do not wonder enough about the fact that some scientific knowledge is possible."[8]

Gilson comments: "This remarkable statement clearly shows that nothing equals the ignorance of modern philosophers in matters of science, except the ignorance of modern scientists in matters of philosophy."[9] And he explains: "The question of the possibility of science is not itself a scientific question. Any attempt to answer it in a scientific way results in a vicious circle, since a scientific demonstration of the possibility of science implies the existence of science whose possibility it tries to demonstrate."[10]

Let us then agree with Gilson in the only possible conclusion:

> Since the only way for us to account for the intelligibility of the world is to resort to a cause whose nature and operation made it to be, and to be intelligible, the answer to the problem must needs be found in the crowning part of metaphysics, that is, in that part of it which deals with the first principle and the highest cause. If there is such a cause, its name is God. In short, the only discipline that

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[7] Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 17. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 18. [9] *Loc. cit.*
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

can answer this question is divinity, or theology. Now I quite agree that, to many scientists, philosophical or theological answers do not sound serious. But this is beside the point; for indeed it would not be serious to give metaphysical or theological answers to scientific questions; but the question asked by these scientists is not a scientific one; science never worries about its own possibility: were science not possible it could not exist; that is all. What is now happening is that on the basis of their scientific knowledge some scientists are beginning to ask metaphysical and theological questions. And they are welcome to do it; but if they do, they will have to look for metaphysical and theological answers.[11]

In other words, science keeps on attempting to give scientific answers to theological and metaphysical questions, and in doing so it does not even notice that it strays from the path of science. One wonders why. I have repeatedly asked this question on these pages, in one way or another. Let us now attempt a tentative answer. First of all, let us recall what was said about the ever-changing conception of the universe from Ptolemy to de Broglie. As Gilson put it: "Like the Patriarchs of the Old Testament, they seem to obey a law of diminishing longevity."[12] The whole aspect of physical determinism and scientific previsibility has changed. We live more and more in a world of "innumerable elementary indeterminations." This means, says Gilson, "that the strictly determined mechanical world of dialectical materialism, which Marxists still mistake for the world of science, died twenty-five years ago. They don't seem to know it yet."[13] They don't seem to know it yet because scientists who misconceive their explanation of the mechanics of a phenomenon for an ultimate explanation of the phenomenon itself, cannot give up their mistaken metaphysical position without giving up that worship of the human mind of which mention was made above.

The issue then is not one's attitude toward theology or metaphysics or religion or science itself. The issue is the attitude of man toward his own mind, which is charged with utmost narcissistic cathexes. The theologians, who since the beginning of the Jewish faith and throughout the Christian era have considered the human mind and its power of reason and understanding to be the very essence of man, believed that this power of reason and understanding, which can explore the very depths of nature and man and even reach to the Creator Himself, is man's endowment because he is made in the image of God. This image of God has no anthropomorphic, corporeal, or material meaning. The anthropomorphic idea of God is born out of the limitations of man's narcissism; it is a human creation. Whereas the image of God in man, as traditionally conceived, is a result of an act of divine generosity; it is of divine creation. And for centuries men who were

[11] *Loc. cit.* [12] *Ibid.*, p. 17. [13] *Loc. cit.*

both humble and wise in their self-knowledge understood that they were to worship, not the image, but its Exemplar.

This religious attitude is essentially different from the narcissism which is displayed by scientism toward the human mind. The scientistic orientation is of a special psychological brand, particularly when it concerns social sciences and psychology. For here we deal with man's persistent even though illusory conviction that he alone, by the processes of science and out of the neutral knowledge thus gathered, can reach the knowledge of the ultimate purpose of mankind's living and acquire the power to transform man into that image of man which science in its simple, technical unwisdom and skillful sagacity believes it knows and understands. This is the true difficulty of present-day scientific psychopathology, as it is the difficulty of all kinds of scientism; for, after all, this is a difficulty arising out of the over-estimation of man's own self-contained importance. It is a form of megalomania which is inevitable in all cases of severe narcissism: it is a fantasy of a power and wisdom which do not exist in man. Suffice it to recall the shock experienced by so many atomic scientists after Hiroshima, their moral anguish, and their wish to control the march of their knowledge, lest it become demonic.

Since present-day scientific psychopathology, even more than physics, seeks to take a dominant place in the hierarchy of human endeavors and a leading role in the business of human relations, it is naturally confronted with the grim truth that as a science it possesses no more wisdom or charity than the physicists who split the atom and made the bombs and became stunned by the horror of their handiwork.

The problem is acute, and potentially very dangerous. For, after all, for centuries religion was the one and only human activity which concerned itself with man's relation to God, to eternity, to salvation. It was the only inner spiritual discipline which conceived of, and understood, the deep interdependence among men, the great yearning for a mankind which would become a real brotherhood of men. It cannot surrender these concerns and aspirations to scientific psychology and sociology, because it cannot give up the very essence of what it is, the deep respect and concern for the human person as a person, as a unique creation which is both so very individual and yet so completely one with his brethren and the world as a whole.

That which modern psychology would designate as an unconscious sense of guilt is not sufficient to cover the sense of the individual's responsibility for his fellow men and his sense of communal duty in relation to each living individual. Scientific psychopathology, like any science, is unable to understand this ethico-religious sense of guilt which transcends the usual unconscious mechanisms, producing what Freud called the precipitate of the Oedi-

pus complex and the neurotic sense of guilt. It is unable to understand this sense of guilt even though it may be able to describe the psychological mechanisms of the sense of religious responsibility and of sinfulness. However, as D. R. G. Owen has said, "To expose the psychological or sociological origin of a belief is not at all the same thing as proving it false. To suppose that it is, is to adopt the attitude of Ebenezer Bulver's wife, who when her husband insisted that two sides of a triangle were together greater than the third, replied, 'You only say that because you're a man.' "[14]

Yet how much contention and intolerance burn around the assertion that, as scientific psychopathology and sociology become more and more scientific, a more crying need is felt to recognize that the megalomania of the self-adoring human mind is by no means a sign of its true greatness. Only by the recognition of the value of the individual as a person will this contention be disposed of. It is this, I am sure, that Einstein had in mind when he said that "Science without religion is lame, and religion without science is blind."[15] To avoid this blindness and this lameness, it is necessary to accept the truth of John Donne's trenchant words: "No man is an iland, intire of itselfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the Maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were: any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."[16]

The melancholy but uplifting truth of these words serves to underscore the singular character of the psychological origin of the conflict between present-day scientific psychopathology and religion. When I say psychological origin, I mean to say that there is no real conflict between these two aspects of truth, science and religion, each of which, in its own specific ways is a revelation of God. I mean: scientism involves man with himself and yet drowns his individuality in statistical averages; but man cannot be abolished, and therefore he cannot help but strive to remain alive. If he strives to save himself by devotion to scientism, he gets dissolved in the freakish light of his delusion of megalomania, and like the schizophrenic who fills his world with delusions he dies while staying physiologically alive. If, on the other hand, he seeks salvation away from life, he again achieves but living perdition, because he who abandons scientism so often throws out

[14] D. R. G. Owen, "Science, Scientism and Religion," in *Christianity in an Age of Science*, p. 13.

[15] Cf. C. A. Coulson, "The Unity of Science and Faith," in *Christianity in an Age of Science*, p. 42.

[16] Quoted by Stace, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

with it science itself, and then his apparently religious views are bound to be distorted, since one cannot accept and submit oneself to the will of God while rejecting one of His greater creations—science, the true knowledge and partial mastery of Nature.

I might seem to have left out of consideration the contentious arguments which are always teeming around such issues as the soul as the psychologist sees it and as religion views it. This I have done deliberately; for it must be clear by now that I cannot admit that the scientific psychologist *qua* psychologist and *qua* scientist is ever able to learn anything about the soul. If he claims to give a scientific description of it, he merely deludes himself by mistaking the manifestations of a phenomenon for the phenomenon itself. If he senses and knows what a human soul is, he perceives it with humble awe and he would never attempt to make a scientific analysis of it, anymore than he would attempt to make a scientific analysis of beauty, or greatness, or sacrifice, or a sense of responsibility.

Perhaps the best way of bringing this long statement to a fitting close is to cite the words of the Lutheran theologian, Paul Tillich, in an essay on "Jewish Influences on Contemporary Christian Theology." He recalls the contributions of the contemporary Jewish religious philosopher Martin Buber, and says that because of scientism (he does not use this word) we get lost as persons and become engulfed in a conflict for which there should be no place in the life and functioning of the contemporary scientific mind. There ought not to be any conflict, if we allow ourselves to understand the nature of what we lose by trying to gain the illusion of complete mastery by means of scientism. For, under influence of the latter, science does become lame, because

> Men become things, living beings become mechanisms, thinking in universals replaces the encounter with individuals. Men are made into objects of calculation and management, of research and test, into means instead of ends. The I-Thou relation, the person-to-person encounter is lost. God himself becomes a moral ideal or a philosophical concept or a being whose existence or non-existence can be argued for. But a God who is an object is not God at all.[17]

These words underscore, more than any other recent statement that I know, the essential inner conflict of contemporary man—a conflict which is mistaken for an objective, true, factual conflict between scientific psychopathology and religion. This conflict is best illustrated by the development of Freud's own thought and psychoanalysis. On one hand the author of

[17] Paul Tillich, "Jewish Influences on Contemporary Christian Theology," *Cross Currents*, II, no. 3 (Spring, 1952), 38.

psychoanalysis wished to remain a biologist, a positivist, a devotee of scientism. On the other he made the greatest contribution toward the rejection of disindividualized scientism; for the method of psychoanalysis is the method of the ever-deepening study and recognition of man as a person, not man merely as a statistical datum. In other words, psychoanalysis, like all the other sciences of man and Nature during the last half-century, reflects the same, almost eternal, and truly tragic conflict between man's striving to become the engineer of a world in which there would be vast populations but not a single self-conscious individual, and man's yearning to preserve his being in complete unity with the One in whose image he was created.

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