

Review

The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology. By VIKTOR E. FRANKL. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975. 161 pages. \$6.95.

This little monograph is a reissue in English of a book first published by Viktor E. Frankl in 1947. Frankl is of course the Viennese psychiatrist who received a good deal of interest from the American theological community during the sixties. Characterizing Freudian analysis as interested in the "will to pleasure" and Adlerian analysis as concerned with the "will to power," Frankl views his logotherapy, the third Viennese school of analysis, as focused instead on the "will to meaning." Critical analysts of Frankl and logotherapy for the most part do not share Frankl's appraisal of himself as a depth psychologist ranking with Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and Carl G. Jung in stature. Indeed a close examination of his criticisms of the work of these men does not lead one to the conclusion that Frankl has been able to arrive at a very sophisticated grasp of the schools which he so much wants to overshadow.

A careful reading of his best known writings, including *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959) and *The Doctor and the Soul* (1965), provides a basis for understanding why Frankl and logotherapy appear to be waning in influence. His categories blur distinctions and elude definition. The entire system is intriguing at first glance, but sustained analysis reveals it to be speculative, difficult to test or validate, and shot through with overgeneralization and exaggeration. Why then did the system receive such a positive response from American religionists? One obvious answer is that religionists were hungry for validation in the eyes of "legitimate, secular, humanistic, scientific" culture and that Frankl's sanction of a vague religiousness was reassuring. A number of major Protestant seminaries brought Frankl to America to hear him extol the reality of meaning, the value of religion, and the necessity of a transpersonal commitment as essential to self-actualization. Without doubt Frankl has a compelling personal story to tell and is an entertaining lecturer and raconteur. Still, the early popularity of Frankl and his system witnesses more to the religious crisis of middle-class America than to the profundity and promise of logotherapy.

The book under review is a good representative of the Frankl corpus. Indeed Frankl calls it the most organized and systematized of all his books. The book is divided into two parts: the first half being the early lectures on the "unconscious God" and the last half a review of and commentary on recent research and publications on logotherapy. The basic thesis of the former is that there is "a religious sense deeply rooted in each and every man's unconscious depths" (p. 11). Often repressed in modern culture, this unconscious religiousness may break through into consciousness in unexpected ways. Frankl reports that his awareness of this phenomenon was deepened through the existential analysis of dreams. In a chapter on this topic he relates a number of dreams which he deems expressive of the "spiritual unconscious."

[*Zygon*, vol. 14, no. 1 (March 1979.)

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It is, however, the existential analysis of conscience which he offers as a key to unconscious spirituality. Conscience for Frankl is prelogical, irrational, and grounded in intuition. It reaches down into the unconscious depths of the person and is a referent to transcendence. Not just referring to transcendence, it originates in transcendence and is thereby irreducible (p. 56). We should be clear, however, that Frankl does not intend any religious connotation to the word "spiritual." The spiritual is "what is human in man" (p. 23). Frankl then is merely asserting here that the human individual transcends the "facticity" of biological and psychological givens—that human responsibility "reaches down into an unconscious ground" (p. 61).

In his chapter "Unconscious Religiousness" Frankl adds his assertion of the reality of a "transcendent unconsciousness." By this he means that phenomenological investigation reveals that the human unconscious always stands in "an intentional relation to transcendence" and that the intentional referent of such an unconscious relation may be called "God." Thus his concept of an unconscious God "refers to man's hidden relation to a God who himself is hidden" (p. 62).

Obviously aware that his chosen topic will remind us of the work of Jung, Frankl differentiates his position from that of Jung in two basic ways. First, unconscious religiousness is personal, not impersonal and/or archetypal; and second, it is existential, not instinctual—the result of decisions and not drives. Unconscious religiousness "stems from the personal center of the individual man rather than an impersonal pool of images shared by mankind" (p. 65).

If this book encourages scholarly reflection on the repression of the religious which is symptomatic of the modern ethos, then its publication will be justified. Considered in itself, the book promises far more than it delivers—and we have not learned much about *homo religiosus*. Frankl and other theorists of similar stance have drunk so deeply from the now-depleted wells of the Enlightenment that they are unable to relate to the strange world of the religious—conscious or unconscious. When we have progressed further in our understanding of the religiousness of the human psyche, we will find that we have returned again and again to the visions of the archaic psyche as portrayed by Freud and Jung—that Frankl's existential analysis was a cul-de-sac.

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