



Psychoanalysis, Values and Politics

by Robert M. Young

At the denouement of one of my favourite old films — 'Hombre' — a thoroughly bad man who has been thwarted in an attempt to steal a lot of money, which had in turn been stolen from Indians on a reservation by an even worse man, is facing an Apache Indian who had been adopted by a white man but returned to the Indians, and who has no use for white men's ways. He has been led, much against his inclinations, to attempt to save the wife of the man who starved the Indians. She is just as bad as her husband and is being held hostage by the men who want to steal the money. What has led Hombre to do it is the altruism of a good woman. If she—a client state, as it were — will risk her life for an unworthy woman, he will risk his. It is his code. As Hombre (Paul Newman) bluffs Richard Boone, and as his bluff is called, and as they square off for certain mutual destruction and as the back-up system fails because the hostage is in the line of fire, Richard Boone says, with a perfect amalgam of world-weariness and sheer delicious anticipation, 'Well now, what do you suppose hell is going to look like?' Both die. Hombre: machismo, able to see through white folks' cant, but noble, a reluctant brave at the service of damsels in distress, knowing that he will almost certainly die. Doing right.

The women—one utterly corrupt and opportunistic but elegant, staying with the only man she has; the other, shop-worn (her former lover was the sheriff, who went bad and is now one of the robbers), but standing for decency and insisting on helping another human being, however undeserving.

The usurpacious Indian agent—who sold the meat intended for the people on the reservation in order to line his own pockets and ensure a comfortable retirement for himself and his stoical wife.

The thoroughly evil man, as cynical on behalf of evil as Hombre is on behalf of self-sufficiency, and ready to die for his greed. We have here a Manichean world-view of pure, perfectly split, good and evil.

Two bad, two good, one irredeemable, and the surrounding bit-players. The story is mythic, noble, weapons everywhere. When Hombre dies, the money is to be taken back to the Indians. Frontier justice served by horrid means. Evil as Other. The on-lookers—terrorised, unable to think.

Only the black and white knights are able to function within a restricted—utterly restricted but self-imposed—range of options. 'Mutually assured (destruction)', you might say, by their mythic roles.

Another image that comes to mind is that of the intrepid country boy pilot, Slim Pickins, in 'Dr. Strangelove' — his CRO decoding machine damaged by a missile so that it doesn't receive the recall code, astride the bomb that stuck in the bomb bay. A dedicated member of the Strategic Air Command, having overcome all obstacles, doing

his duty with good ole boy enthusiasm. When the bomb breaks free, he is still astride, and we see him on the ultimate bull rider's rodeo trip, swatting its flank with his Stetson, shouting 'eeeeaaaahhh' and 'whopee'. The final moment, as the nuclear devices begin to go off all round the world, is one of languid beauty to the strains of 'We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when...'

Myths, like the unconscious, know only extremes and over-simplifications. Throughout both films, what the Other was really up to, was the source of fearful, persecuted fantasy. The Other was up to no good, and one could be sure it would seek out the beleaguered goodies. Projective mechanisms need — evoke — the identification of the Other in order to complete the disavowal of one's own split off and disavowed parts.

Consider one more anecdote and one more image before I change my mode of discourse. I have a friend (actually an intermittent friend) of some talent and eminence, who emigrated to Australia. He claimed, quite straightforwardly, that he did so to escape the bomb. I forbore for some months before telling him that the early warning stations that would probably be knocked out first were in Australia. No matter, because the bomb was as much inside, if not more so, as outside.

And my image is this. It derives from Jonathan Schell's classic, *Fate of the Earth*, spelling out the consequences of nuclear war all down the line. He dwelled at length on the bees being blinded by a nuclear flash. I commend the passage to you if you don't know it. It helps us to understand the extremely delicate texture of nature, and what would happen if such an essential link was cut. I thought of it quite recently as a friend took me through the utterly moving beauty of Queen Ann Rose Garden in Regent's Park—bed upon bed of sheer variety—co-operation between men and women and nature to increase the plenitude of beauty and the celebration of colour; Roses are like that to attract bees, to get them to spread pollen—a very mundane purpose, which has this glorious by-product, just as human reproduction—getting sperm and egg together—has given us such an outpouring of fashion, decoration, much of culture, subtle forms of erogenous pleasure and sensuality.

The nuclear flash would blind the bees so that they could not find the flowers or do the dance to tell others, and a department of nature would simply grind to a halt. Similarly, one dose of radiation and fall-out and human reproduction would yield a multitude of mutant teratogenic monsters. The pollutions of local wars are not global, but there are no less distressing. Horrible. So horrible that it is almost impossible to think. The problem is not, pace Robert Jay Lifton, numbed consciousness or psychic numbing. Rather, as Joel Kovel said in his book, *Against the State of Nuclear Terror*, terrorised, a state of terror going on now. Not a threat but a reality operating in our lives. This state prevents thinking, and puts walled-off rationalisations in its place.

There is a town in Texas in which most of the inhabitants earn their living by making nuclear warheads. That's what pays their mortgages. They don't think 'horror'. They think 'steady employment'. It's also a state in which Edward Teller's technical solution to the problem of how to detonate the H-bomb could be called 'beautiful' by Robert Oppenheimer because of the aesthetisation of science and technology.

What has all this to do with psychoanalysis? I want to juxtapose the evocative language I have used so far with the problem—the huge problem—of how to think psychoanalytically about such matters. Why is it so hard? I think the answer lies in some deep (conceptually deep) issues about the modern worldview. Hence my title: 'Psychoanalysis, Values And Politics'. I think that unless we can learn to think differently about thinking, we can't think—much less act—with respect to nuclear weapons and power and war and virulent nationalism and racism. The title evokes for me the whole area of the social representation of reality and of modes of thinking as the mediation between the weapons and the forms of negative behaviour, on the one hand, and the inner world, on the other. It is to that I wish to address myself.

I shall concentrate on psychoanalysis as science *vis-a-vis* values and *vis-a-vis* politics. Politics is only values in action, values harnessed to power, policies, resources, administration. It brings about hegemony, or the organisation of consent, without the overt use of force and without the real relations of power becoming evident. We think of ourselves in our practices as abstinent with respect to the values and politics of our patients or clients. We are 'professionals' seeking to help them sort out their values and priorities — to live and work more nearly effectively. Abstinent though we are all supposed to be, we all have problems with respect to horrid values, for example, fascism, sadism, perversions, child abuse, and other things that hurt people. We tend to pathologise them, to side-step morality by tacit appeal to medical, biological or—latterly—cybernetic or systems theory models. All of these have the feature of bracketing out values or, more accurately, obscuring, naturalising, submerging them in a framework of consensual values, Using terms like 'normal', 'adaptive', 'homeostatic', 'stable'.

What we are dealing with here is the deepest level of the modern world view. We hear about it in different guises — the separation of fact from value, the substance of knowledge from its context, of objective from subjective, of 'what' questions from 'why' questions, of material or physiological from mental or psychodynamic, of mechanisms from purposes. It was not always so. Ancient, Mediaeval and Renaissance Western philosophy (to say nothing of Islamic and Eastern world views) did not construct the relationship between the external and the internal and the mediation of the social, in this way at all. I'll sketch in for a moment what it was like before purposes and values were bracketed out and when they were still seen as integral to how one thinks. I am suggesting that part of the problem for thinking about psychoanalysis, values and politics is that we tend to think of ourselves either as professionals or scientists or both, and in doing so partake of the supposed disinterestedness of the professional and its parent concept, the scientism of the scientist. I think that we have to overcome these ways of thinking or we will forever remain extremely uncomfortable about trying to be morally and politically concerned and active.

Indeed, it seems to me no accident that nuclear weapons and the War on Terror are the only issue on which psychoanalysis and psychotherapists have 'gone public'. The reason for doing so, which seems to me to make it an acceptable thing to do for nominally professional people, is that these are seen as a universal issues for all of humankind, rather than particular or sectarian ones. They are, of course, apparently

universal causes, but I do not think that we can work on their behalf without getting our hands dirty in the kinds of politics that we see ourselves as standing above.

In the rest of this essay, it will be my purpose to link problems of the philosophy of science and the philosophy of nature in the modern world view, with this difficult question of thinking politically and in terms of values as psychotherapists. Why delve so far into the past? Because these huge splits in our world view bear directly on our work as psychotherapists and on the problem — which we all feel—of finding a way to think about values and politics at work and in our roles in our profession and in the wider world.

I have heard psychoanalysts and psychotherapists—some with significant backgrounds in social and political work (I'm thinking of an eminent feminist on the one hand and a Trotskyist on the other)—say that they cannot take public stands on controversial issues because of their patients ('not in front of the children'). Moreover I have personally experienced—at a talk I gave at the Institute of Psychoanalysis some years ago—a timidity about discussing ideological and political issues. The man who took me for a drink afterwards said that there was much reticence about holding or being seen to hold political views, for the understandable reason that the meeting was not just one of the Applied Section, but also a cattle market for a referral network. To offend might mean to risk one's livelihood. I was told that one woman broke the taboo, but what she did was interestingly described as 'taking manifest content seriously', and I was also told that she was a South African Communist.

The tone implied that she would thereby be forgiven as an eccentric. This is the sort of thing I mean about 'professionalism'. It is represented as abstinence and disinterestedness, but there are deeper, baser motives involved. As Anton Obholzer, then head of the Tavistock Clinic, observed at a conference on Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, older and younger analysts and therapists do involve themselves deeply in political and sectarian controversies inside their organisations controversies of a very vehement and often personal sort. It's uncomfortable—very much so—but they manage. He suggests that this makes nonsense of the argument that one should be abstinent in public. This, however, leaves unaddressed the questions of how we deal with such matters in the consulting room on the one hand and which matters not to be abstinent about in public.

The psychoanalytic literature is largely silent about nuclear issues. But it is almost equally silent about racism, class, colonialism, virulent nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, pornography. There is a large body of writings on literature itself—belles lettres—safe. There is some writing on film, most of it Lacanian. There is also much on patriarchy because of the women's movement, but little of that has been written from an object relations point of view until very recently. The mainstream is largely silent about controversial public issues So it is worth looking for a moment at the roots of our world view and its relations with nuclear issues, war and other aspects of values and politics. The problem, as I've said, is that values are split off, bracketed. They don't go away; they go underground or become tacit.

Put philosophically—to expand a bit on what I wrote earlier about mind and body, purposes and mechanisms—our dualistic and reductionist world view split off

the concepts of use, value, purpose, goal—the 'what for'— from the mechanisms and the laws of nature — the formal, energetic and material aspects. I won't go into the features of Aristotelian explanation and the changes that occurred in moving from the Aristotelian framework to the modern one. I do want, however, to note that the earlier framework has important resonances with modern ecological, organismic and holistic views, that I'll mention toward the end.

This is no small matter, nor was it merely an esoteric exercise in seventeenth century philosophy. The great names of the scientific revolution were at it, by which I mean reconceptualising our worldview, for over a century. They were great names, by the way, in both philosophy and science, because they were not then split but were called natural philosophy. Indeed, the terms 'physicist' and 'scientist' were not coined until the nineteenth century. I am thinking of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Hobbes, Descartes, Newton, Locke. They laid the metaphysical foundations of our world view.

They wanted to be able to explain nature according to certain abstract principles, suitable for mathematical treatment, and they chose a formal system which—as, Edwin Arthur Burt, a profound philosopher writing about the period, has said—treated the concept of mind as a waste basket, a receptacle for the chips and whittlings of the scientific revolution. When people came to think of mind in more disciplined ways, they cursed their elder scientific brethren for mucking things up, or actually for making them over-tidy. Another philosopher whose work I find most helpful about this is Alfred North Whitehead who said that modern philosophy was ruined by this dualistic thinking, while the scientific aspect became increasingly reductionist and materialist, leaving mind hard to think about.

Much of my own research has been about the history of attempts to think scientifically about the inner world. It's a mess - or perhaps I should say more accurately that it's always done analogically, borrowing concepts from the physical and chemical sciences. Physical atoms get paralleled by sensations or ideas, treated atomistically. The collisions of billiard-ball physics get paralleled by associations—mental impacts and contiguities. Physiological vibrations get paralleled by mental associations. Other rhetorics come from the classification of elements or particles in chemistry or from types or species in biology. For example, bits of the brain in neurophysiology get paralleled by an attempt to classify the functions of the brain—a sort of 'physiologisation' of mind, parcelled out in a latter-day phrenology. But it won't work.

Freud found that out when he tried a tour de force in the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' in 1895, an effort he wanted destroyed, but Marie Bonaparte kept the manuscript. I won't take you through his ingenious scheme, though neurophysiologists have found it fascinating and heuristic. He moved on decisively and wrote in an increasingly psychological way, turning to myth, classical writings and literature. He didn't win a Nobel Prize in biology and medicine. He won the Goethe Prize for literature.

There has been a large and fascinating attempt to carry on this representation of mind in metaphorically physiological terms. I am thinking of the more elaborate schemata developed by ego psychologists who used medical and biological concepts for mind. In particular, Heinz Hartmann, Anna Freud and David Rapaport have attempted

to represent the mind in terms of energies, forces, structures, adaptations, etcall concepts borrowed from physics and biology. Once again, we find a process of naturalisation going on, while the underlying value systems seem to me to be consensual ones, i.e., ones that keep the goals of therapy tacitly adjustive to the existing social order. What I mean is that social and political values get redescribed and attributed to nature.

That makes them seem more legitimate, more 'natural'. Social Darwinism is one example, whereby ruthless competition and even war are rationalised as consequence of the biological concept of 'survival of the fittest'. Just as my story about timidity with respect to ideological issues touched on economic topics, I have no doubt that the vogue of metaphorical physiology within ego psychology has much to do with the historic compromise that psychoanalysis made in America when it was insisted that before becoming analysts they should first be medical doctors. This hegemony has recently been broken by a successful law suit against the medical psychoanalysts, one which was itself brought for reasons to do with the use of the name 'psychoanalyst', so that people could get their treatment paid for by insurance policies. Livelihood again. The lay therapists wanted access to those nice fee scales and won the day by claiming that the hegemony of the medical analysts was 'in restraint of trade'.

I've twice now linked conceptual issues to rather base motives—referral networks. You may find this reductionist—a kind of economic reductionism or economism. In the last instance I'd plead guilty to that but only in the last instance. There's a lot in between—a lot of life mediates between base motives and higher values, but that doesn't mean that basic motives are ever entirely transcended. They continue to operate. All psychotherapists know that. Yet it's easy to deny in our accounts of our motives and interactions, just as it is in our accounts of social phenomena. We rationalize. Indeed, some versions of psychoanalysis imply that we can get free. Even Freud said: 'Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. Its reclamation work like draining the Zuider Zee.' This sounds to me like eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism.

I don't think life, society or mind is like that. I don't think it with respect to philosophy - how we think and explain the world of nature. I don't think it with respect to the world of society. I don't think it with respect to the inner world. I'll speak about each of these in turn.

It is important to know that the revolution in theories of nature of the 16th and 17th centuries occurred as part and parcel of the Protestant revolution and the capitalist revolution. Nature, God and work were all rethought so that the individual could give labour (now skill)—abstract labour power—for a wage. It was a kind of dis-organisation, a disruption of organic community, of organic ways of work and cultivation. I won't pretend to spell out the history of urbanization in relation to waged labour. The division of labour in work led to a fragmentation so that, for example, people who made a part of something might have little sense of the whole. Nowadays, a scientist or computer worker is very unlikely indeed to know the military or industrial application of his or her work. You can't find it out. I have a friend who tried. One is only allowed to know a particular sub-routine. Those of you who know something about these matters will realise that I'm talking about people's estrangement from the final

product, the tools, one's labour power, one's fellow worker, one's common humanity. Call it alienation or modern life: it characterises our whole way of being.

All of these very general features of modern thought and modern society involve, as I said, dis-organization, or dis-integration: parts instead of wholes, splits instead of unities, the paranoid schizoid instead of the depressive position. It is in the fabric. Various critiques have been made by phenomenologists, by idealists, by organicists and holists, by Marxists - all to the effect that this kind of thinking prevents—structurally precludes—our thinking in integrated ways about the relations between the parts and the whole. I once saw a cartoon of wretched people pushing the spokes of a huge wheel which connected to another wheel which sent a shaft through the roof. They were bearded and utterly degraded and bent over. One turned to another and said, 'I hear there's a merry-go-round up there'.

We who strive-to bring coherence to the inner world are up against formidable obstacles, obstacles which define what it is to be a professional, obstacles that reduce the invocation of values and politics to 'bias' or 'polemic' or 'bad technique.' How are we to get round or through this? Here are some germs of thoughts. In *Against the State of Nuclear Terror*, Joel Kovel asks us to think about technocracy, to seek out the missing links between nuclear weapons and a society that obscures the real power relations and economic interests that are being served by what that eminently respectable militarist, Dwight Eisenhower, called in a cautionary speech, 'the military industrial complex'.

If it behooves us to make the connection with respect to the outer world, surely it does so with respect to the inner one and with respect to the connections between them. I'm here to tell you that this is difficult. Everything conspires to preclude and attack the relevant linkages. The echo of Wilfred Bion in that phrase takes me to my last point. A new — fully psychoanalytic—epistemology is building, slowly but surely. Its basis is the fundamental point that the primitive is never transcended. All knowledge, all curiosity, all experience, all craft, all technology, all science and culture, no matter how ostensibly esoteric, are mediated through the experience of the mother's body.. Everything is mediated through a primitive prism with different vertices.

There is a Winnicottian version of this Kleinian point—lying at the heart of epistemology. Winnicott's concepts of transitional objects and transitional phenomena provide an intermediate zone between the inner world and the outer. He says that they are neither subjective nor objective but partake of both. He also considers the child's first such object—a blanket, a cloth, a teddy bear—to be the paradigm for that zone and opening out into all play and culture, including science, and, indeed, psychoanalysis itself.

If we re-organise and re-Integrate the hedonic and evaluative dimensions and project these into the social and cultural worlds, knowing will once again include values and purposes — explicit and connected. I have tried elsewhere to spell out some of the philosophical consequences of the new psychoanalytic organicism. I find that those who have contributed most to the intrapsychic aspects of this epistemology have been very reticent about its direct and overtly political bearings, though there is no doubt about their being anti-establishment. I am thinking, in particular, of Wilfred Bion, Esther

Bick, Martha Harris, Donald Meltzer. I find them silent or naive about institutions. But others, for example, Isabel Menzies Lyth and Bob Hinshelwood, have thought deeply about the institutional bearings, as Bion has in two places - his early book on *Experiences in Groups* and his autobiography, *The Long Weekend*. There are still others who are trying to foster such developments. I am thinking of the work of Michael Rustin, Barry Richards, Karl Figlio and me and our common venture in the annual conference on 'Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere', jointly sponsored by the Polytechnic of East London [later renamed the University of East London] and Free Association Books [later by the journal *Free Associations*].

We are trying to develop the properly political dimensions of psychoanalysis, drawing as best we can on recent and profound work about the inner recesses of the inner world. Yet another dimension of these matters which I have found helpful is the concept of 'the 'gang in the mind', developed by Herbert Rosenfeld and other Kleinians, and the notion of 'pathological organisations' used by John Steiner, among others. We have yet to address the bearing of such issues on the consulting room, but I anticipate a flood of illumination when this line of thinking gets connected to the rapidly developing debate over countertransference. People like John Klauber, Margaret Little, Nina Coltart and Kit Bollas are deepening our sense of the 'uses of countertransference'—what Bollas calls 'expressive uses of the countertransference'.

I think it is but a step to connect that perspective to a new view of the possibilities of reintegrative knowing. It is already happening in some tacit ways due to analysts' and therapists' public appearances. There is a feedback loop: the more such people appear in public and the more they take up positions on publicly controverted matters, e.g., the bomb or the Gulf War, the more they get identified with such positions and the more this material gets taken up by patients. It is all grist for the mill but it is a richer grist.

I know that what I am saying now is tantalizing. It is necessary to sketch, because the pictures have not been filled in. On the other hand, the stakes could not be higher, and the task is not a 'toe-in-the-water' one. It is real politics of the kind that the social location of most analysts and therapists will lead them to find alarming. But Anna O was found alarming at the beginning, as well.

I conclude with another classic cinema image, this time from *Chinatown*. Recall that this labyrinthine movie written by Robert Towne, starring Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, John Huston and Diane Ladd, with a demonic cameo part for the director, Roman Polanski. The labyrinth appeared to be about murder over jealousy and then about the water rights surrounding Los Angeles and then about property. Finally, all these things came together in the perfect union and identity of incest with limitless greed for power, property, money, control over water. The rapacious patriarch was exercising his seigniorial rights over all of Los Angeles, over his daughter, over the elderly and over the progeny of his incestuous union. It led to the heart of the system, but as the innocent child of incest screams over her mother's being gratuitously killed, and as the depraved father/grandfather victoriously takes her away, a friend says to the private eye, Jake Gittes, whose nose had been cut with a knife for sticking it into the labyrinth—the friend says to Jake to go home and forget it, 'It's Chinatown': it's inscrutable; it can never be figured out.

But it can be figured out. In that story the union of the breaking of the taboo which provides the basis of civilization, with the rapacious greed of the mega-entrepreneur, we are at the heart of the plot and at the heart of the system. The same uncivilised depravity is at the heart of the nuclear story, of the Gulf War, of racism and of virulent nationalism. They are in here and out there and all through the mediations in the family, the society, the military-industrial complex, the mode of production, virulent splitting, projecting and scapegoating and in the metaphysical foundations of psychoanalysis, philosophy and the philosophy of science. We can't want to be spared the most hard achievement of human ingenuity — nuclear weapons and the poor man's nuclear bomb in chemical and biological warfare — without asking how human ingenuity arrived at those depraved points. It's about being an *hombre*, about strange love, about bees and flowers, and it might be as labyrinthine as Chinatown, but we have to thread the labyrinth or all die, spiritually if not literally.

The author of *Hombre*, Elmore Leonard, wrote forty-five volumes of popular fiction, many of them bestsellers, many made into highly-regarded films. He was the recipient of the Cartier Diamond Dagger Award and the PEN USA Lifetime Achievement Award. If he, a pulp fiction writer, can create a parable that gets all the way to the bottom of the profound issues of meaning and value in human nature and society, surely the rest of us can, too.

I need hardly say that ways I am advocating that we reflect will be of considerable use in ruminating the distressing topics of the Trump era, which might be regarded as an encore to the word of *Chinatown*, with Trump as the *paterfamilias*.

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