ATTACHMENT THEORY, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND THE LIMITS OF REASON

Marsha Aileen Hewitt
Trinity College, University of Toronto.

Draft only: please do not cite without permission.

> *The child…is taught that his security in life depends on his parents…loving him and on their being able to believe that he loves them.*
>
> –Sigmund Freud

Freud's critique of religion is widely rejected by many contemporary psychoanalytic thinkers as overly hostile to religion, largely unappreciative of its positive benefits to religious believers, and generally inadequate in evaluating its importance in mental health (Rizzuto: 1979; Meissner: 1984). Against Freud, current psychoanalytic theories of religion tend to focus on the healing and integrating powers of religious beliefs, practices and narratives (Black: 2006; Spezzano & Gargiulo: 1997; Aron: 2005). However, Freud does not categorically deny the psychological value of religious faith in some cases, as he acknowledges in his study of the Wolf Man (Standard Edition 17: 114-115). In order to appreciate the full sophistication and continued relevance of Freud's critique of religion, it is necessary to distinguish his more speculative anthropological works, such as *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) from his more strictly philosophical and psychoanalytic *The Future of an Illusion* (1927). It is especially with respect to this text that Morgan Rempel's observation, "Freud explored the interplay of religious life and psychological life with more insight than perhaps any thinker before or since" (1997, 215) most accurately applies. In reconsidering the relevance of the insights and implications of *The Future of an Illusion* (*FI*), it is possible to reinterpret Freud's theory of religion as anticipating later developments in the study of religion from the perspective of attachment theory and evolutionary psychology. Although the application of attachment theory to religious belief and behaviour is a field of study that is still developing, many of its most fundamental conclusions to date bear out Freud's interpretation of what he referred to as the universal, "deep psychic need" of human beings for a relationship with supernatural being(s) which for him constituted the very emotional structure of *homo religiosus*.

In *FI*, Freud describes this "deep psychic need" of religious longing as rooted in the individual's terror and sense of utter vulnerability in the face of the "superior powers of nature, of Fate, which threaten him". Motivated by "the strongest practical interest," (SE, 21: 16) man desires "consolation," which he finds in the 'knowledge' that the often hostile forces that surround him are located in supernatural/superhuman beings that may at least be placated by certain human actions, thereby divesting them "of a part of their power" (17). The most interesting aspect of Freud's analysis of the 'religious impulse' and which is most promising for this discussion is his recognition of the longing for god(s) as located in the longing and desire of the infant for a strong

protector-father. The developing individual, he writes, "creates for himself the gods whom he dreads, whom he seeks to propitiate, and whom he nevertheless entrusts with his own protection. Thus his longing for a father is a motive identical with his need for protection against the consequences of his human weakness. The defense against childish helplessness is what lends its characteristic features to the adult's reaction to the helplessness which *he* has to acknowledge—a reaction which is precisely the formation of religion" (24). Moreover, especially in the monotheistic religions, the individual recovers his earlier infantile sense of "intimacy and intensity" of his relationship to his father, along with a sense of being loved and cherished (19). Infantile feelings of helplessness underlie development into adulthood and are contributing factors to the adult's sense of religiosity and religious identity. In other words, the attachment system that is a part of evolutionary development coalesces into an emotional template that becomes established in the child's earliest relationships with his/her caregivers, and also underlies and organizes all subsequent relationships over the life span, including one's relationship with god(s).

In the 1935 *Postscript* of his *Autobiographical Study*, Freud referred to his "negative valuation" of religion in *FI*. He writes, "Later, I found a formula which did better justice to it: while granting that its power lies in the truth which it contains, I showed that that truth was not a *material* but a *historical* truth" (SE 20: 72). What Freud is referring to here is his theory of the primal horde, (the originary act, countlessly repeated (re-enacted?) of patricide, where the rebellious sons slay the father, devour him and eventually deify him. Freud speculates that the Egyptian Moses suffered a similar fate. Although these quasi-anthropological theories were roundly rejected in his own lifetime, Freud nonetheless insisted on their "historical truth", in which the "idea of a single god…signified the revival of an experience in the primaeval ages of the human family which had long vanished from men's conscious memory" and which had "left behind …in the human mind some permanent traces" (SE 23: 131; 129). According to Rachel Blass, by "historical truth," Freud is not referring to objective, historical facts as much as a "special kind of impression in the mind of a past reality. Its origin is in the real world; real events left the impression. But the impression is not identical to the real world, to actual events…Something from the outside was registered in our minds at a time when it was impossible for us to create an accurate image of it, or to understand it in a way that is accurate in terms of our present understanding of reality. It is this historical truth, buried in the depths of our minds…that explains the believer's acceptance of religious ideas" (2006: 36-7).

If we reformulate and reconceptualize these memory traces and "impressions" that are embedded in the deepest recesses of the mind in terms of attachment theory, then the experience being described *may* well refer to that profound yearning and wishing for the love and protection of a strong caretaker that is encoded in the human being's drive for survival, which is a feature of evolutionary development. This is what underlies the wishes and longings for a supernatural, protective deity which takes on a variety of expressive forms shaped and directed by specific cultural contexts. This does not mean that infants experience this longing consciously but rather that it is an unformulated, deeply felt and inherent need for attachment, a "universal need to form close affectional bonds" (Fonagy, 2002: 36). Freud writes, "A child's emotional impulses are intensely and inexhaustibly deep to a degree quite other than those of an adult; only religious

ecstasy can bring them back. A rapture of devotion to god was thus the first reaction to the return of the great father" (SE 23: 134). As to the question of the "material truth" of the existence of god(s), Freud was clear that he gave it no credence: "Only human reality lies at the foundation of his explanation of our experiences and tendencies" (Blass, 39).

The enduring relevance of Freud's psychology of religion lies not in his theory of the primal horde, the originary patricide or his speculations about Moses but rather in his critical analysis of the internal nature religious need that may now be more fully understood in terms of the attachment system as manifested in the relations between the infant and his caregiver(s), and the infant's felt need for love, protection and intimacy. In this paper I will reconceptualize Freud's notion of the "historical truth" or memory trace at the core of the "oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind" (SE 21: 30) for "protection through love" sought in the relationship with the father primarily in terms of attachment psychological theory. Freud's description of the child's need to cling to the powerful protecting father arising out of the former's experience of helpless vulnerability may be theorized as the activation of the attachment system which is integral to human psychological organization and physical survival. Attachment and evolutionary theories lend support to Freud's view not only that the longings and wishes for the powerful father are the "oldest, strongest and most urgent" but they are also universal. However, what Freud was unable to do was differentiate the *types* of attachment relationships between powerful caregivers and infants that attachment theories have identified, so that for him, "[a]mbivalence is {an inevitable} part of the essence of the relation to the father" (SE 23: 134) which necessarily derives from his speculations about the patricidal act of the primal horde. Although he did recognize the positive influence of religion in the form of sublimation (Wolfman) what he could not theorize adequately was a secure attachment relationship with the father/god(s) that was not necessarily driven by terror and feelings of endangered helplessness. In this sense Freud collapses and conflates all forms of religiosity with what is now known as 'insecure' attachment. Yet Freud is much closer to attachment theory in his argument that religion cannot provide a valid source of knowledge about the world or reality and that religious explanations of phenomena undermine the human capacity for autonomous thought and agency. Contemporary attachment theory argues that the capacity for critical, autonomous thought is related to the quality and type of attachment relationships, which at least implies that religious belief *per se* does not necessarily interfere with or undermine the capacity to think for oneself.

Attachment Theory

The "etic" methodology of most attachment research and theories means that the theories and assessments developed in a particular culture are applied cross-culturally in order to test for universal rather than more narrowly culture-specific validity (van Ijzendoorn and Sagi, 1999, 714). An important reason for taking the etic approach (as distinguished from an "emic" one, that seeks to understand behaviour and development that are specific to a particular culture from within that culture's own frame of reference) derives from the ethological foundations of attachment theory developed by John Bowlby (1978), who argued that the formation of the attachment relations between an infant and its caregiver is the outcome of evolution, in which "inclusive fitness" is

facilitated by an "innate bias to become attached to a conspecific" (714). Attachment theory conceptualizes the existence of a "primary, biosocial behavioral system" within infants designed by evolution to maintain proximity between the infant and its mother. According to Bowlby, the basic elements of the attachment system are active throughout the lifespan and shape it (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990: 316). The central concept of attachment theory is that this bias to become attached to a conspecific is universal in infants, "*regardless of their specific cultural niche*" (714, italics added). Although the universality thesis does not negate the importance of culture-specific influences, the evolutionary perspective on attachment theory argues that "attachment bonds will be established in any known culture, regardless of child-rearing arrangements or family constellations" (714).

There are four "core hypotheses" of attachment theory for which there is strong cross-cultural evidence, according to van Ijzendoorn and Sagi. First, the **universal hypothesis**, that states all infants become attached to specific caregiver(s); statistically, the majority of infants in western countries are classed as securely attached, meaning that in stressful circumstances, they will settle more easily when comforted than insecurely attached infants. This is the **normativity hypothesis.** Here we must consider the nature of the comforting response by the mother to an infant's expressions of distress. An infant's development as securely attached depends upon the "sensitive and prompt responses" to the infants' "attachment signals" on the part of the mother; this is referred to as the **sensitivity hypothesis**. Finally, and most crucially from a mental-health perspective, a securely attached infant develops the capacity for affect regulation, which in turn allows for the development of cognitive and reflective competence and "satisfactory relationships" with others (714-715). This is referred to as the **competency hypothesis**. These findings are also supported by the research and clinical work of psychoanalytically-oriented attachment theorists such as Peter Fonagy and Mary Target (2001; 2002). The main conclusion of all attachment research is that the self exists only in the context of the other. The "development of the self is tantamount to the aggregation of experiences of self in relationships" (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, Target ; 2002, 40), so that certain repeated and largely invariant experiences of self-other relationships from the earliest stages of infancy become "abstracted" over time, forming "internal representational mental models" or internal working models of self and self/other interactions. These internalized representations of self and self-other experiences organize interpersonal relationships over the lifespan; the quality of these relational internal working models derived from the individual's attachment relationships will have a significant impact on his/her capacity for affect regulation and cognitive reflectiveness.

Attachment theory provides a robust empirically based theoretical framework and analytical tool that is necessary to an adequate psychology of religion; as it happens, attachment theory confirms Freud's early insights into the psychodynamics of religious beliefs and ideas in several important respects . In order to explain why large numbers of people in all cultures throughout history have religious beliefs that coalesce around some sort of supernatural/superhuman figure, there needs to be a plausible, empirically-based theory of human motivation in general (Kirkpatrick, 2005, 13) that will help account for it. Attachment theory implicitly recognizes and elaborates Freud's description of the psychic need for a relationship with a powerful deity that is indeed

rooted in the "oldest" wishes of humanity, because it derives from an evolutionarily developed system that is crucial to the survival of infants, and not only in the human species. Originating in the empirical studies of John Bowlby (1978), attachment theory states that infants seek comfort and security from their closest attachment figures (usually the mother) when in any form of distress. If their signals for soothing are responded to adequately, the child is reassured and if this pattern of signal and response is repeated to the extent that the child comes to expect it most of the time, the child will in all likelihood develop a secure internal attachment organization. If the infant's signals for comfort and reassurance are misread, ignored or neglected over a sustained period, the child will develop a form of insecure attachment which will impair both his ability to form stable attachments to others throughout his life and inhibit his capacity for affect regulation. A securely attached infant is likely to direct social behaviour to a variety of discriminated figures in his life, whereas a weakly attached child will tend to focus social behaviour on one figure. Such a person, when faced with life-crises such as loss of relationships or an inability to develop and sustain satisfactory ones, may well turn to a god for a sense of intimacy, support and protection he cannot experience in the world. Attachment research strongly supports the thesis that there are significant correlations between the different attachment categories of interpersonal relationships and experienced attachment to god(s) (Kirkpatrick, 2005; 1999; Granqvist, 2006).

Although the "bias in infants to become attached" is universal, the *forms* of attachment behaviour will vary cross-culturally (van Ijzendoorn and Sagi). Thus, in a culture where strong displays of emotion are discouraged (Geertz: 1973) infants may develop an avoidant[1] attachment pattern; although the pattern may be classed as avoidant, it may be normative for a particular culture (van Ijzendoorn and Sagi: 714). Similarly, perceived relationships with god(s) and ways of expressing them are culture-specific, but that they are manifestations of the attachment system common to all human beings is a universal phenomenon (Kirkpatrick, 2005: 79). Christian theologian Gordon Kaufman describes "the idea of God [as] the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment-figure," whereas anthropologist Evans-Pritchard writes of the Nuer people of the southern Egyptian Sudan that, "the believer, who has communicated with his god, is not merely a man…he is a man who is *stronger*. He feels within him more force, either to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them. It is as though he were raised above the miseries of the world…" (cited in Kirkpatrick, 68). Kirkpatrick points out that in Islam, the root of the Arabic word for faith, "amn" means "to be secure, trust and entrust," (92) which also implies that God is experienced as an attachment figure from whom believers derive a sense of intimacy and reassuring security. Individuals whose early attachment relationships were unreliable either through neglect or general

---

[1] Fonagy et al describe avoidant expressions of attachment as indicated with infants who appear undisturbed by a separation from the mother/caregiver and who do not seek proximity with her upon being reunited and who may not appear to prefer her to strangers. By contrast, a securely attached infant become anxious in the presence of strangers and tend to avoid them, they are upset when separated from their mother/caregiver and readily seek contact with her upon being reunited, show reassurance in being reconnected with her, and return to their play (2002: 38).

emotional non-responsiveness and who continue to experience fraught relationships are more likely to need god(s) as a form of emotional compensation and aid in dealing with distress (Granqvist, 1998). Kirkpatrick found that the highest rates of religious conversion, especially sudden conversion, occurred with people who had "insecure parental attachments," and that glossolalics had experienced a clear anxiety crisis just prior to their tongue-speaking, in which they had felt worthless and powerless (2005: 1999). Thus the religiousness of insecurely attached individuals tends to be a compensation for troubled childhood relationships, whereas the religiousness of securely attached people is more likely to have originated in their social context, often corresponding to the level of religiousness in their parents (Granqvist, 1998: 363). For instance, securely attached children whose parents were non-religious tend to be agnostic adults.

If Kirkpatrick and others are correct in their findings that the origins of religious ideas and beliefs in a supernatural being are rooted in early attachment experience and that their internal representations of self are also interconnected with their views and expectations of others and of god(s); if Fonagy and his fellow researchers are correct in theorizing that the capacity for reflective, critical thought that is able to imagine a multiplicity of perspectives and mental states besides one's own is also a feature of the quality of early attachment relationships and the capacity for affect regulation that emerges from them, then there are serious implications for thinking about individual religious identity, the plurality of religious experience, and religious pluralism in complex, diverse societies. It is rare, if nonexistent, that theories of religious pluralism, questions of the role of religion in a democratic, 'secular' or 'post-secular' public sphere and political life are ever addressed with the insights of attachment theory and evolutionary psychology in mind. Although Freud could see little positive value in religion because of the religion/superstition and science/enlightenment binary in which he cast his critique, he nonetheless rightly feared the unquestioning, blind adherence to religious beliefs and the anxiety-ridden, desperate clinging to an all-powerful deity that provided the illusion of a safe haven not only against the forces of nature but the responsibility to understand them through scientific knowledge as a real threat to human development and autonomy. Freud was well aware of the destructive social consequences of this form of religious identity (SE 21: 35).

Religious Pluralism, Mentalization, and the Limits of Reason

Fonagy's concept of mentalization locates the capacity for mature interpersonal relationships, successful affect regulation and cognitive competencies in the individual's earliest attachment experiences. Children who repeatedly experience adequate and attuned responses to their signals of distress, discomfort or playful contact are free to invest their developing psychic energies in affect regulation and in building sustainable, mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships both within and beyond the family. Securely attached children become adults capable of regulating and containing their internal affective states and distinguishing between their internal fantasies and expectations and the external world and the people in it. Children who do not develop in this way due to environmental conditions (trauma, neglect, instability, unreliable caregiving) are impaired in their capacity to think, despite that they may be highly

intelligent and successful in certain areas of their lives. Their capacity for strategic thought may be well developed, along with a stunted capacity for reflective, critical reason which is necessary for intersubjective reciprocal recognition, where one is able to entertain a multiplicity of perspectives toward reality. Children who have experienced sustained neglect, trauma or abuse not only in the family but in social contexts characterized by violence, poverty, hopelessness and despair withdraw their psychic energies from all but the immediate environment in order to survive and this may occur through dissociative processes, which result in varying degrees of ego fragmentation and cognitive and emotional confusion. Mature forms of mentalization allow the individual to distinguish between internal emotions and mental states, the minds of others and interpersonal events. The experience of having a mind capable of mentalizing is not a "genetic given" but a structure that evolves through emotional development sustained by caregivers capable of mirroring, containing, and holding the child's affective states so that the child learns to regulate and understand them. In other words, the quality of an individual's earliest attachment relationships lays the foundation for the development of mentalization which is both a cognitive and affective developmental process (Fonagy and Target, 2003). Neuroscientific research confirms that the quality of attachment relationships, which is part of the interaction of the developing child and her/his environment has an impact on brain development. In cases where the child has suffered sustained trauma and neglect, brain development may well be impaired (Schore, 2003, especially ch. 4).

Critical social theorists who address questions concerning the role of religion in public political life and how to integrate the demands for recognition (Honneth, 1995) from a variety of religious groups within the normative framework of a constitutional, liberal democratic society would do well to take the findings of attachment theory along with its implications for the psychology of religion into account. Although a number of critical and social theorists struggle with the issue of the role of religion in the political and public spheres (Audi, 1993; Casanova, 2001; Swaine, 2006; Rawls, 1997; Rorty, 2003), I will confine my remarks to Jürgen Habermas, whose recent work addresses themes of religion in the public sphere, religious identity, religious pluralism and fundamentalism with respect to liberal constitutional democracies. He also draws upon a number of those theorists concerned with religion and politics. At the heart of Habermas's theories of communicative ethics and discursive democracy is the idea that all actors in liberal constitutional democracies must be willing to take the perspectives of others in debates concerning which norms and values will govern social, political and public relations (2004: 7; 2006: 4). What Habermas and many other critical theorists fail to ask is, what kind of mind is required to do this, and how does it come into being? Habermas acknowledges that religiosity is integral to the believer's sense of self, to his/her emotional life and psychological organization, an important element of the individual's 'psychic energy': "true belief…is…a source of energy that the person who has a faith taps performatively and thus nurtures his or her entire life" (2006: 8). Despite this recognition, Habermas does not seem to conclude that rational reflection and reasoned discourse is insufficient if the emotional capacity for it is not there, meaning it is not a mere matter of intelligence or adeptness at strategic thinking, but the ability to consider a multiplicity of perspectives without succumbing to uncontainable anxiety in the face of them that too often results in taking refuge in a rigid, 'psychic retreat' of

intolerance and exclusion that undermines the possibility of a "reciprocity of expectations among citizens…[that] distinguishes a community integrated by constitutional values from a community segmented along the dividing lines of competing world views" (13).

For Habermas, if religious and non-religious people and communities are to forge relationships and participate together in public life in ways that transcend mere tolerance they must engage in a 'learning process' that requires each to see the truth content of the other's world view. This learning process involves a mutual translation of the norms and values of each that can be discursively and rationally supported in ways that make sense to everyone. Non-religious persons must be able to see the 'intuitive' truth content contained in religious doctrines, while religious persons must put forth their views in ways that make sense in a world that makes clear distinctions between faith and knowledge, which is a key feature of liberal democracies. In recognizing that they live in a religiously pluralistic world, religious citizens must, among other things, "connect the egalitarian individualism and universalism of modern law and morality with the premises of their comprehensive doctrines," which is a form of "hermeneutic self-reflection" that must take place within the religious traditions themselves (14). There are at least two important questions here that Habermas fails to address. One is posed by John Rawls, which asks how religious people can "endorse a constitutional regime even when their comprehensive doctrines may not prosper under it, and indeed may decline?" (cited in Habermas: 6) The other question, posed from the perspective of attachment theory, would ask how is it psychically possible for people to abandon or betray a profound felt relationship with a god who they perceive loves and protects them, and who may be their only source of a sense of safety and worthiness? Certainly for those individuals and communities that may be classed as fundamentalist or militant, the aim is to transform the world in line with god(s)'s perceived wishes, because this is the way to ensure god(s)'s love and support.

When Habermas talks about the 'learning processes' required for religious and nonreligious people to engage in a discursive process consciously aimed at mutual understanding, he acknowledges that these involve "complex mentalities" (18), that allow individuals to accept and comfortably comprehend a multiplicity of perspectives while maintaining his own, where his sense of a stable self is not imperiled. He argues that religious people must be able to "become reflective" (18) while secular people must accept the legitimacy of religiously based discourse and worldviews within the public sphere and consider that they may hold important truths that when liberated from their doctrinal forms have much to contribute to post-secular, liberal constitutional democratic ways of life (10). Religious people must consider their own faith "reflexively from the outside and relate it to secular views," and Habermas believes this is possible without "having to split their identity into a public and private part the moment they participate in public discourses" (10). He also maintains that in a religiously pluralistic society, religious communities must relinquish their claims to ultimacy in their definitions of reality, and that the very existence of religious pluralism 'forces' religious doctrines to "reflect on their own relations to the environment of the liberal state and secularized society" (2004: 11). But the fact of religious pluralism and a (post)secular society that insists on the division of faith and knowledge (as did Freud)—however it might value religious insights—can cut two ways, resulting in a struggle against the

larger society on the part of a particular religious community that is waged in the name of god(s). For this Habermas has no answer, nor does he really address it, because for him the issue of religious pluralism does not seriously involve the issue of *the plurality of religious experiences,* especially those that reject the very demands that Habermas outlines as requisite on believers as conditional for an integrated constitutional state. For example, what of those growing numbers of fundamentalist, militant or "strong" religious believers for whom any normative or political accommodation to the facts of religious pluralism, modern science, positive law and 'profane' morality (2006: 13) would be considered a betrayal of the most important and compelling relationship in their lives, their bond with god(s)?

For example, in her comparative study of religious militancy, Jessica Stern quotes from a letter written to her by a young woman who worked closely with the Laskar Jihad group: "don't ever think that we're afraid of death in defending our religion. Even death is our goal to reach the true glory. Victory in this world is God's promise for us in our every war…This is our call…we're just seeking for a bigger love from Him" (2003: 83). Besides the fact that, as expressed by this woman and others who have been involved in acts of religiously-motivated violence a part of the desire to win god's love is a factor in such actions, even more significant is that in winning god's love and favour, one may experience feelings of safety and protection from harm. In a series of interviews conducted by Nasra Hassan between 1996-1999 with nearly 250 Palestinians who supported 'suicide' missions or tried to participate in them, one respondent described feelings of "floating, swimming, in the feeling we were about to enter eternity…[a]ll martyrdom operations, if done for Allah's sake, hurt less than a gnat's bite!" (2001: 37) Other recruits for suicide missions described their only goal as winning "Allah's satisfaction" by dying in his cause (39). In writing of the mind states of religious militants he interviewed, Mark Juergensmeyer observed that their experience of their personal relationship with god provides "an anchor in a harbour of calm" (2003: 227). Fundamentalist militancy is strongly concerned with defending "their sacred symbols" and desanctifying "those of secular communities and other religious ones" (Rappaport, 456). Religious longings for god(s) love and protection are powerful emotional antidotes for people who cannot rely on human others for security, whether because of impaired family relationships or chaotic and threatening conditions in the larger environment, such as poverty, conflict and the dislocations of rapid change. A compelling attraction for those who embrace religious militancy is the inner transformation through the experience of god's unconditional love (Stein: 2003) of unbearable disruptive feelings such as uncertainty, fear, anxiety, shame and rage. "Rage turns to conviction," writes Stern, and people "enter a kind of spiritual trance, where the world is divided neatly between good and evil, victim and oppressor. Uncertainty and ambivalence…are banished. There is no room for the other side's point of view…They believe that God is on their side" (2003: 282).

Identities that are organized in terms of conformity to the demands of an external authority result in compliance, not growth, and the demands of the other may become internalized as frightful, evil, alien others that must be split off, disavowed or disowned and located in a series of external others experienced as persecuting, humiliating and threatening. Individuals whose caregivers prize obedience over independence and identifications with external agendas over maturation are not able to develop fully the

capacity for mentalization (Fonagy) or complex mentalities (Habermas) that will allow them to rely on their own individual powers of reason and critical discernment mediated in intersubjective relationships with real others where differences in values and worldviews can be resolved in terms of rational justifications in sustained discursive settings. Self-critical, reasoned reflection is impossible when an individual experiences severe internal disruption such as anxiety, shame or rage that the individual is unable to regulate. Affect regulation underlies the capacity for mentalization. Freud understood that religious beliefs in a loving, protector god(s) can function to regulate intolerable affect and resolve overwhelming feelings of uncertainty. But the achievement of affect regulation in this way has a heavy price that bears potentially destructive consequences for religiously pluralistic societies. The turn to god(s) for affect regulation and cognitive support often brings with it the repudiation or relinquishment of agency (Strozier, 1994: 21) and moral responsibility which is replaced with the comfort and consolation derived from submission to the perceived will of god(s).

Religious beliefs relieve human beings of the burden of thinking and making sense of reality for oneself, or of having to hold the uncertainties associated with not knowing and not being able to explain phenomena encountered in the world. In Freud's view, religious beliefs that are motivated by the psychic need for the regulation of intolerable affect are uncritically accepted because "they were already believed by our primal ancestors…we possess proofs which have been handed down to us from those same primaeval times…it is forbidden to raise the question of their authentication at all…We ought to believe because our forefathers believed" (SE 21: 26). The "illusions" and "wishes" expressed in religious beliefs are clearly linked in Freud with unbearable feelings of insecurity, anxiety, isolation, powerlessness and confusion. In terms of contemporary attachment theory, the religiosity described by Freud corresponds to insecurely attached individuals who turn to religion to regulate and contain affects that threaten to overwhelm, fragment or destroy the psychological self. The unknowable is explained, the self acquires a sense of worth and purpose perhaps never felt before in the connection with a loving, protecting god(s). The abysmal helplessness of the infant is for Freud the basis of religion (Preus, 1987: 188). Freud's concept of religion however must be refined to say that it is the abysmal helplessness of the infant who is left largely to his own devices, who does not receive sustained and adequate comfort, solace and support from his caregiver and who therefore experiences the world as a terrifying and threatening place is most closely described in Freud's portrait of the religious believer.

Thus when Habermas writes about the processes whereby modern faith becomes reflexive, that "Only through self-criticism can it stabilize the inclusive attitude that it assumes within a universe of discourse *delimited* by secular knowledge and *shared* with other religions" that involves a "decentred background consciousness of the relativity of one's own standpoint," (in Mendieta, 2002: 150) he can only be referring to individuals (consciously or not) whose emotional organization, self/other representations and capacity for embracing and holding a multiplicity of perspectives are rooted in infantile experiences of secure attachment. A socially derived sense of religiosity may allow some room for the kind of decentredness and negotiability of beliefs and values Habermas argues is requisite to a religiously pluralistic society in the context of liberal constitutional democracies. An emotionally derived sense of religiosity as described by Freud, Kirkpatrick, Grandqvist and others may be much more rigid and impermeable to

reasoned discursive argumentation since so much more is at stake than liberal values, that is, the very survival of the psychological self.

References

Aron, Lewis. (2005), The Tree of Knowledge: Good and Evil. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 15: 681-707.

Audi, Robert. (1993), The Place of Religious Argument in a Free and Democratic Society. *San Diego Law Review*. 30: 677-702.

Black, David M. ed. (2006), *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century: Competitors or Collaborators?* London: Routledge.

Blass, Rachel. (2006), Beyond illusion: psychoanalysis and the question of religious truth. in Black, 23-43.

Bowlby, John. (1971), *Attachment and Loss*. Volume 1. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books.

Casanova, Jose. (1994), *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

---------------- (2001), Religion, the New Millenium, and Globalization. *Sociology of Religion*. 62: 415-441.

Fonagy, Peter. (2001*), Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Other Press.

Fonagy, Peter., Gergely, Gyorgy., Jurist, Elliot L., Target, Mary. (2002), *Affect Regulation, Mentalization, and the Development of the Self*. New York: Other Press.

Fonagy, Peter., Target, Mary. (2003), Psychoanalytic Theories: Perspectives from Developmental Psychology. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Freud, Sigmund, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works. Trans. James Strachey. London: Vintage.

1913. Totem and Taboo. Vol. 13.
1918. From the History of an Infantile Neurosis. Vol. 17.
1925. An Autobiographical Study. Vol. 20.
1927. The Future of an Illusion. Vol. 21.
1939. Moses and Monotheism. Vol. 23.

Geertz, Clifford. (1973), The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Granqvist, Pehr. (1998), Religiousness and Perceived Childhood Attachment: On the Question of Compensation or Correspondence. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 37: 350-367.

---------------- (2006), On the Relation between Secular and Divine Relationships. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. 16: 1-18.

Habermas, Jürgen. (2002), *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, Modernity*. Ed. Eduardo Menieta. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

------------------. (2004), Religious Tolerance—The Pacemaker for Cultural Rights. *Philosophy*. 79: 5-18.

----------------- (2006), Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy*. 14: 1-25.

Hassan, Nasra. (November 19, 2001), An Arsenal of Believers. *The New Yorker*.

Honneth, Axel. (1996), The Struggle for Recognition: the Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. (2003), Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kirkpatrick, Lee A. (1999), Attachment and Religious Representations and Behavior, in *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver, eds. New York: The Guilford Press. 803-822.

------------------- (2005), *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion*. New York: The Guilford Press.

---------------- and Shaver, P.R. (1990), Attachment Theory and Religion: Childhood attachments, religious beliefs, and conversion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 29: 315-334.

Meissner, W.W., S.J., (1984), *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Preus, Samuel J., (1987), *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rapoport, David C., (1993), Comparing Militant Fundamentalist Movements and Groups. *The Fundamentalism Project*. Ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Vol. 3. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Rawls, John. (1997), The Idea of Public Reason Revisited. *The University of Chicago Law Review*. 64: 765-807.

Rempel, Morgan. (1997), Understanding Freud's Philosophy of Religion. *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 5: 215-242.

Rizzuto, A. M. (1979), *The Birth of the Living God*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Rorty, Richard. (2003), Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration. *Journal of Religious Ethics*. 31: 141-149.

Schore, Allan N. (2003), Affect Regulation and the Repair of the Self. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Spezzano, Charles., Gargiulo, Gerald., eds. (1997), Soul on the Couch: Spirituality, Religion and Morality in Contemporary Psychoanalysis. Hillsdale: The Analytic Press.

Stein, Ruth. (2003), Evil as Love and as Liberation: The mind of a Suicidal Religious Terrorist. In *Hating in the First person Plural: Psychoanalytic Essays on Racism, Homophobia, Misogyny, and Terror*. Ed. Donald Moss. New York: Other Press. 281-310.

Stern, Jessica. (2003), Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill. New York: Ecco

Strozier, Charles. (1994), Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Swaine, Lucas. (2006), *The Liberal Conscience: Politics and Principle in a World of Religious Pluralism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

van IJzendoorn, Marinus H., Sagi, Abraham. (1999), Cross-Cultural Patterns of Attachment: Universal and Contextual Dimensions. in *Handbook of Attachment*.