

Article

Between Religion and Psychotherapy: Responses to Violence in a Secular Age

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Abstract: The aim of my article is to present and critique two different approaches to the problem of violence. On the one hand, I will discuss the religious standpoint present in the deliberations of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. On the other hand, I will examine the secular concept of ethically-oriented psychoanalysis by the American psychiatrist, Robert Drozek. Both thinkers, as I will show, take an exclusivist position towards the question of the moral transformation of human beings. According to Taylor, only a religious perspective, based on the recognition of a transcendent good, is capable of liberating man from the drive towards violence. In his opinion, the secular approach represented by various forms of psychotherapy is insufficient in this respect, because it eschews moral–spiritual language. Drozek, on the other hand, believes that it is psychoanalysis and not religion that can be healing for us. In this paper I will argue for an inclusive position, according to which both religion and ethically-oriented psychoanalysis have transformative potential. I will try to show that the exclusivism of Taylor and Drozek is not tenable, and that the religious and secular perspectives they represent need not be seen as being in opposition to each other.

Keywords: religion; modernity; violence; psychotherapy



Citation: Barnat, Damian. 2022.

Between Religion and Psychotherapy: Responses to Violence in a Secular Age. *Religions* 13: 860. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090860>

Academic Editors: Michael Staudigl, Olga Louchakova-Schwartz, Jason Alvis and Arjan Braam

Received: 16 June 2022

Accepted: 8 September 2022

Published: 15 September 2022

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1. Introduction

Religion and psychoanalysis have long remained in a relationship of mutual distrust and hostility (Black 2006; Blass 2006; Rubin 2006; Prusak 2010). Since its emergence, psychoanalysis has discredited religion or ignored it altogether. This antipathy was largely determined by the authority of Sigmund Freud. In his book *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud (1927) described religion as a phenomenon similar to a “childhood neurosis”, whose main function is to satisfy the need for security. Laying the foundations for later secularisation theories, Freud (1927) simultaneously expressed the hope that “mankind will surmount this neurotic phase, just as so many children grow out of their similar neurosis” (p. 53). As a result of the development of rationalism and science, religion was, thus, ultimately to become a matter of the past. The reductionist view of religion was continued by Freud’s heirs. Discussing the attitude towards religion that prevailed among the first and second generation of Freud’s followers, Jeffrey Rubin (2006) writes the following: “Helene Deutsch considered her treatment of a nun less than a complete cure because she couldn’t convert her. And Otto Fenichel maintained that every successful psychoanalysis results in the termination of religious belief” (p. 133). Thus, religion was an obstacle to mental health, a manifestation of a pathology that must be dispensed with.

Things were no different in the religious camp. Representatives of the Catholic Church strenuously defended the belief that the care of the soul is the exclusive domain of the clergy. Psychoanalysis in this view is not only useless, but also harmful. By rejecting the truth contained in spiritual reality, psychologists and psychoanalysts operate with an illusory vision of the human condition. By pointing out the threats arising from the psychologization of life and cultural phenomena, the Catholic Church has discouraged the faithful from using the services of self-proclaimed priests, and has sought to thwart the spread of Freud’s ideas (Prusak 2010, pp. 227–28).

In the second half of the 20th century, the relationship between psychoanalysis and religion slowly warmed. As far as the Catholic Church was concerned, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was a watershed moment in this respect. As a result of the recognition of the autonomy of the science, psychology and psychotherapy ceased to be treated unequivocally badly and began to appear as fields that could be useful for theological considerations (Prusak 2010, p. 231). Regarding psychoanalysis, on the other hand, David Black (2006) notes that, in the late 1970s, new concepts emerged that challenge the Freudian understanding of religion. Black (2006) mentions here in particular the work of Hans Loewald and Ana-Maria Rizzuto (pp. 12–13). According to Rachel Blass, subsequent authors (Michael Eigen, James Jones, Sudhir Kakar, and William Meissner) go a step further and entirely re-evaluate Freud's position. In their view, as Blass (2006) notes, religion appears as "healthy development, an expression of a kind of achievement—emotional, moral, spiritual and cultural—that could be expected to emerge through a successful psychoanalytic process" (p. 23). Today, there is an increased interest in the importance of religion and spirituality for the individual condition, which is linked to the emergence of a post-secular paradigm (McLennan 2010; Staudigl and Alvis 2016).

Although the antipathies between psychoanalysis and religion have weakened considerably today, with many authors advocating a mutual dialogue between the two fields, traces of the old battle mood can still be found in some approaches. In this context, the views of two authors, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2007, 2011) and the American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Robert Drozek (2018, 2019), are extremely interesting. Both argue that overcoming the drive to violence can only be achieved through a profound moral transformation. Both also take an exclusivist stance on this issue, that is, they believe that there is only one path to achieve this transformation. What differs between them, however, is the understanding of this path. Taylor questions the transformative potential of secular concepts, including various forms of psychotherapy, and argues that only through religion, e.g., Christianity, can we liberate ourselves from destructive and violent desires. Drozek, on the other hand, believes that the only effective remedy for violence is offered not by religion, but by psychoanalysis. The reason for this, in his opinion, is that only psychoanalysis is able to reach into the unconscious, the hidden layers of our self, and in this way bring about a thorough and lasting transformation of our life attitudes.

Here, therefore, we have two mutually exclusive positions. However, the choice of these authors' conceptions as the subject of my analysis has a further justification. It turns out that these approaches are characterised by a certain internal tension. As far as Taylor is concerned, he is an advocate of moral–spiritual pluralism. He argues that the various secular visions of "human fullness" that emerged during the Enlightenment, e.g., referring to the concept of dignity, do not represent a spiritual aberration, but are full-fledged concepts in relation to religion that underpinned new forms of moral experience (Taylor 2007, p. 251). If so, it is difficult to understand why he privileges a religious perspective when considering the problem of violence. Drozek, on the other hand, criticises the tendency present in psychoanalysis to frame the therapeutic process in ethically neutral terms. He advocates the necessity of conceptualising psychoanalysis with moral notions. Accordingly, he presents a theory of ethically-oriented psychoanalysis in which the moral is an integral component of it. However, given that psychoanalysis' reluctance towards moral values stemmed from its antipathy towards religion (Drozek 2018, p. 541), one would expect that Drozek's openness to ethics would also entail an openness to religious content. It seems, therefore, that he stops halfway, as it were, and is unable to recognise that deep transformation can also have at its core a religious experience.

2. Charles Taylor's View on Religion and the Moral Transformation

Taylor does not propose a broad conception of violence (Kennedy 2011). This is partly because the Christian hermeneutic of violence he proposes escapes a theoretical framework. This does not mean, however, that he ignores methodological issues altogether.

As a staunch critic of naturalism, Taylor remains skeptical of those models of violence that see it as a phenomenon entirely derivative of human biological endowment. This view, which Taylor refers to as “biological”, ignores the realm of cultural meanings and conceives of violence as an adaptive mechanism that has evolved through the evolutionary struggle for survival. According to Taylor, a scientific explanation of violence based on the biological may contain important insights, but it will always be only partial because it fails to give an account of the diverse cultural manifestations of violence (Taylor 2011, p. 190). As such, Taylor advocates an approach that he describes as “metabiological”. This involves articulating and analyzing the various cultural meanings of violence. In this view, violence is a phenomenon that is always already “culturally interpreted” (Arbuckle 2004, p. XIII). Taylor’s standpoint fits into the framework of phenomenological analyses of violence. As Michael Staudigl notes, “Phenomenologically speaking (...) a *pure* experience of violence does not exist; nevertheless, the different levels of experience and the layers of meaning that are formed in experience are of a fundamental significance for our understanding of violence” (Staudigl 2014, p. 2).

According to Taylor, the hermeneutics of violence plays an important role in the study of the phenomenon of “categorical violence”, namely that which is closely related to the cultural matrices through which we divide people into certain groups. Indeed, crucial to the phenomenon of categorical violence, the division into “us” and “them” is always based on certain cultural meanings. Citing the research of Gilligan (1996), Taylor argues that the metabiological approach is also important in analyses of individual violence. Indeed, as Gilligan (2003) shows, violence is associated with culturally conditioned meanings of the experience of shame, humiliation, guilt, or respect.

According to Taylor, a human being is an entity that can be defined as *homo religiosus* (Taylor 2007, p. 639; Taylor 1999, p. 28) Drawing on this nineteenth-century notion (see Alles 2005, p. 4109), Taylor points out that the quest for transcendence defines human nature. Nicholas Smith (2002) aptly observes that, in Taylor’s conception, the desire to go beyond life is one of the “anthropological constants”, i.e., structural features of the human subject (p. 235). As Taylor (1999) writes, “human beings have an ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life” (p. 27). This bent towards something beyond—apart from striving for love of some otherworldly good—also manifests itself in a “fascination with death and violence” (p. 28). Contemporary Western culture, however, is dominated by the atrophy of transcendence. This phenomenon is closely related to the spread of the Enlightenment “exclusive humanism”, i.e., a family of moral conceptions that reject any goals beyond human flourishing (Taylor 2007, pp. 221–69). It is necessary to add here that an advocate of exclusive humanism need not be an atheist. The former, unlike the latter, need not reject the existence of God. Exclusive humanism refers essentially to the moral sphere and consists in defining the highest human aspirations and abilities without invoking God. Exclusive humanism understood thusly is close to what Étienne Gilson called “practical atheism”, which consists in leading a life as if there were no God. This distinction is highly relevant to a diagnosis of modernity. Although declared atheism is not a very common position, many people, even those who declare themselves believers, could be described as practical atheists. Leszek Kołakowski (1984) spoke in a similar way, who understood secularization of contemporary culture as “widespread indifference to faith” (p. 169).

Secular humanism seeks to rehabilitate human nature and criticizes traditional religion for suppressing our ordinary desires. Thus, the main goal of the “metaphysical primacy of life” (rejection of transcendent goals) is to prevent religious violence and secure “practical primacy of life” (affirmation of ordinary human goods). In this view, as Taylor (2004) claims, the desire for transcendence is seen as a threat to the “modern moral order”; an order which is created by the mutual cooperation of equal individuals to achieve temporal goods (prosperity, security, and well-being).

Drawing on Rieff’s (1966) celebrated book *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, Taylor argues that it is in this context, i.e., within the process of acquitting human

nature, that the therapeutic turn characteristic of secular culture must be placed. According to Taylor, this turn consists in the replacement of the categories of religious tradition (sin, evil, and conversion) that were used to describe the human condition with modern concepts, such as disease, pathology, and therapy. Taylor claims that as a consequence, the “triumph of therapeutic” changes the way we understand our predicament. While the spiritual Christian perspective is reflected in the phrase “we are all to blame”, the basic assumption of the therapeutic outlook expresses the idea that “no one is to blame” (Taylor 2007, p. 709).

Taylor claims that the concept of sin, unlike disease, is based on human freedom and, thus, includes some form of responsibility and dignity. From this perspective the experience of the fall and its consequences (anxiety, confusion, violence, and aggression) not only tells us something important about ourselves but is also a necessary condition for conversion. On the other hand, in therapeutic outlook, these experiences are often referred to as pathology—something that has no intrinsic value, something that does not contain any ethical substance and, therefore, cannot constitute a basis for a moral transformation. Within the therapeutic view, even in the humanistic approach, as Taylor (2007) writes, “the original fall is entirely in the nature of compulsions, or modes of imprisonment” (p. 619). The recognition of the nature of the diseases translates itself into how it should be treated. As Taylor notes, “We are just to be dealt with, manipulated into health” (p. 620) by analysts. Thus, although it might seem that the triumph of therapy strengthens human dignity, in fact it badly undermines it.

Taylor argues, therefore, that the lack of moral–spiritual hermeneutics in the therapeutic action places it outside the realm of ethics. As he writes, “ethical transformation involves engaging both the will and the vision of the agent. It is beyond the reach of a therapy designed to cure an agent who doesn’t endorse his deviancy” (p. 619).

Criticizing secular conceptions of moral transformation, Taylor, who follows René Girard (1984) here, speculates that, “the only way to escape fully the draw towards violence lies somewhere in the turn to transcendence, that is, through the full-hearted love of some good beyond life” (Taylor 2007, p. 639). In order to comprehend what Taylor claims here, I need to introduce the distinction he makes between three categories, namely “life goods”, “constitutive goods”, and “moral sources” (Taylor 1989, pp. 92–93). By life goods, Taylor understands the following: motives, goals, and ideals that we consider particularly valuable and worth pursuing. Taking into account the modern society, one can mention here, for instance, counteracting violence, and a reduction in suffering. When speaking of constitutive goods, Taylor means certain features of reality (human reason or human will, nature, and God or some other supernatural entity) that determine the value of life goods. It is only in relation to constitutive goods that life goods are justified and grounded. The constitutive goods also function as moral sources. Thanks to them, we gain strength and motivation to meet the requirements of life goods.

In Taylor’s opinion we need a vision of a transcendent constitutive good in order to realize fully the modernity’s life goods. This vision, according to Taylor, can be found in Christianity. Turning to the God’s grace and mercy allows us to achieve a self-renouncing stance and to reorient ourselves to the destructive impulses embodied in our nature. Commenting on Taylor’s views, Andre Cloots, Stijn Latré, and Guido Vanheeswijck (Cloots et al. 2015) note the following:

According to both Girard and Taylor, Christianity has a specific conception of transcendence that sets it apart from pre-axial religion—with its emphasis on the whimsicality of transcendence—and from modernity which promotes an exclusive humanism and absolute immanence. Christianity distinctively presents itself in an incarnated vision of transcendence that not only links transcendence to immanence indissolubly, but also separates transcendence from its potentially chaotic manifestations. Christianity can therefore never fully coincide with the violent and whimsical transcendence of pre-axial religion, nor realize itself exhaustively in immanent, concrete reality. The Christian God is transcendent and

immanent at the same time: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The incarnated God of Christianity embodies agapeic transcendence. Of course Taylor is well aware that the historical record of Christianity does not always live up to this ideal of agape; Christianity has also fallen prey to violent tendencies. Nevertheless Taylor emphasizes that Christianity, by the moral deepening of its vision of transcendence, contains in principle an antidote to violence. (p. 968)

Taylor position is based on the assumption that secular constitutive goods (the faculties of human subject) are too weak to be a remedy for violence (Taylor 1989, pp. 517–18). According to him, human affirmation of life is significantly imperfect and, as such, constantly exposed to derailment and falling into its opposite—the affirmation of death and violence. In other words, in his view, the metaphysical primacy of life that underlies various forms of secular humanism threatens the practical primacy of life. If it is true that we are *homo religiosus*, then without affirmation of some otherworldly good, our striving for transcendence will take the form of destruction.

Taylor finds confirmation of his thesis in the fact that exclusive humanism generates resistance and leads to the emergence of various anti-humanist concepts, which he refers to collectively as “the immanent counter-Enlightenment” (Taylor 2007, pp. 636–38). This current opposes both the Enlightenment’s “secular religion of life” and belief in God. Taylor identifies Friedrich Nietzsche as the leading representative of this current, who rejects not only the Christian notion of a transcendent God, but also the moral ideals of the Enlightenment—universal charity and benevolence. Although Nietzsche’s philosophy expresses an affirmation of life (“will to power”), it does not, as Taylor argues, manifest the metaphysical primacy of life. This is because, according to Nietzsche, the affirmation of life must also take into account its dark side, demonstrated in the infliction of suffering, death, and destruction. Therefore, the consequence of the full approval of life is its annihilation or transgression. It is this thread of Nietzsche’s philosophy that makes Taylor see in it a similarity to religious concepts that emphasise going beyond life. At the same time, Taylor notes that Nietzsche’s work has strongly influenced twentieth-century anti-humanist thinkers, such as Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, who in different ways took up the theme of the negation of life.

Immanent counter-Enlightenment transcends life, but not as theistic humanism does through the recognition of a higher good, but through “a fascination with the negation of life, with death and suffering” (Taylor 1999, p. 28). Although immanent counter-Enlightenment is an anti-religious movement, it resembles the dissatisfaction of religious concepts with the metaphysical primacy of life. The attraction of death and violence is evident not only in the work of elite representatives, but also in collective attitudes. The history of the 20th century is all too instructive in this regard. Despite the essentially universal acceptance of Enlightenment ideals, death and violence—no matter how much we want to hide it—are still something that attracts us. According to Taylor, this testifies to our inability to rely solely on the category of human flourishing.

Taylor (2007) paints a picture of secular culture as a three-way battle whose participants are as follows: Enlightenment humanists, neo-Nietzscheanists, and believers in transcendence (p. 636). Of course, each of the positions is internally differentiated. As far as the faith camp is concerned, Taylor distinguishes between the proponents of modernity—in which he places himself—and its conservative critics, who advocate a return to an earlier vision of reality. According to Taylor, the emergence of human rights would not be possible without a break with the institutions and practices of the Christian world. Consequently, he rules out a return to earlier versions of theism present in the Age of Faith (p. 637). The picture of secular culture presented by Taylor as a tripartite battle translates into his consideration of violence. Each position not only offers a different vision of “human fullness”, but also interprets the phenomenon of violence in different ways (Arcamone 2015).

According to Taylor, proponents of exclusive humanism seek the eradication of violence at all costs and see it only in negative terms, that is, as a spiritually meaningless threat to the modern order of mutual benefit. By opposing traditional religion, Enlight-

enlightenment humanism rejects the concept of the depravity of human nature, the original sin. Consequently, it redefines ordinary human desires in such a way that it excludes from this category the desire for violence, etc., and leaves only those desires that serve to build an order based on a harmony of interests. In a therapeutic perspective, the latter group of desires is referred to as “normal”, while the former is seen as “pathological”. Taylor (2007) writes the following:

To declare the disciplines of civilized life (...) as “normal” (...) is to class the various resistances to these disciplines: the impulses to violence, aggression, domination; and/or those to wild sexual licence, as mere pathology or under-development. These are simply to be extirpated, removed by therapy, re-education or the threat of force. They do not reflect any essential human fulfillments, even in a distorted form, from which people might indeed be induced to depart through moral transformation, but which cannot simply be repressed without depriving them of what for them are important ends, constituent of their lives as human beings. (p. 633)

The theme of opposition to the civilized order emerges as part of an “immanent counter-enlightenment”. In this view, Taylor argues, there is a “rehabilitation of violence” as something that springs from the depths of our being and constitutes a valuable form of human self-fulfillment. From this perspective, the concept of natural human innocence appears as a stifling hypocrisy. For the desire for violence is a deeply rooted part of our nature. It cannot, therefore, be discarded, but must instead be celebrated. The affirmation of our nature requires going beyond the narrow and limiting requirements of the rational order. Violence here acquires a metaphysical, numinous meaning. Through it, our lives are enriched with a deeper, spiritual dimension.

What, then, does the problem of violence look like from the perspective of the position taken by Taylor? Taylor reinterprets the Christian tradition and seeks to dislodge it from the old “juridical-penal” model, which over-emphasized the sinfulness of human nature, condemned the flesh, and overlooked the importance of ordinary desires (Rundell 2014, p. 210). In Taylor’s view, Christianity, despite the ills it faces, offers a vision of profound moral transformation, something that is absent from both exclusive humanism and immanent counter-Enlightenment. As Taylor (2007) writes, “Christianity looks to a much fuller transformation of human life, such that it becomes possible to conceive of transfiguring even the most purblind, self-absorbed and violent” (p. 643).

Unlike the proponents of Enlightenment humanism, Taylor sees a spiritual, metaphysical dimension to violence. In his view, the pursuit of violence is not a pathology, something to be discarded at all costs. In this aspect, Taylor would agree with the neo-Nietzscheans. However, unlike them, and in line with secular humanism, Taylor accepts the basic achievements of modernity and distances himself from the position calling for the glorification of violence. Thus, when it comes to desires emanating from the darker side of our nature, Taylor believes that, instead of denying or giving vent to them, they need to be transformed. As Taylor (2007) writes, “What has to be transformed are the desires themselves” (p. 646).

Taylor’s propounded vision of Christian transformation is based on the recognition of the ambivalence of human nature, that is, the conviction that good and evil are intimately connected. This means that the bad must be incorporated into the process of spiritual growth. We cannot, therefore, simply get rid of evil desires, because in doing so we will miss the opportunity for spiritual transformation. Violent desires are an important point of reference in the healing process. They tell us something important about our condition and point us in the direction in which we are to go. This does not mean, however, that we are to pay homage to them. To illustrate the idea of the ambivalence of human nature, Taylor (2007) cites the biblical parable of the wheat and the tares (p. 646). According to this parable, what is good is fused with what is bad to such an extent that the removal of the latter will damage the former.

In Taylor’s view, Christian transformation is closely linked to the bodily dimension. He argues against an understanding of Christianity through the lens of Platonism and, thus,

in a way that involves a rejection of the bodily. As Taylor (2007) notes, “In the Christian perspective (...) agape is itself bound up with compassion, which is itself incarnate as bodily desire” (p. 644). Taylor points out that in the New Testament the Greek word *splangnizesthai* is used to denote “compassion”, indicating the deeply fleshly dimension of this sensation (p. 741). According to Taylor, agape is born first and foremost not “in the head” but “in the guts”. Moreover, it is only possible through God’s love for man, culminating precisely in incarnation.

It is important to add here that the vision of Christian transformation advocated by Taylor is not a solution that could take on a universal form. Following Ivan Illich (2004), Taylor argues that the way of life called for by the Gospel cannot be codified and institutionalized. He expresses no less hope that, despite secularization processes, the Christian path is still open to both individuals and communities. Of course, Taylor’s approach also includes various institutional arrangements to protect victims and to minimize damage.

3. Robert Drozek’s Conception of Ethical Psychoanalysis

Robert Drozek (2018, 2019) notices that, since its inception, psychoanalysis has been characterized by a strong tendency to treat the nature of the therapeutic process as ethically indifferent. A perfect example is the conception of Freud, who defined psychoanalysis as an endeavor that is essentially ethically neutral (Drozek 2018). Among the reasons for the reluctance of psychoanalysis towards ethics one can mention the following: striving for objectivity, the postulate of the therapist’s impartiality, perceiving ethical requirements as suppressing human needs, and interpreting ethics as a form of religion. Although the tendency to situate psychoanalysis outside the sphere of ethics is still strong today, ethically-oriented models of psychoanalysis have emerged in recent years within the “relational paradigm”, that consisted, among other things, of the transition from a monological to dialogical understanding of the mind. Drozek (2018) speaks here of an ethically intersubjective model of psychoanalysis in which he places his theory.

Before discussing Drozek’s theory, one should ask how he describes ethics. By ethics, Drozek understands both our obligations to others and ourselves, and the perception of our desires, motivations, goals, and actions through the prism of their worth. Thus, in his view, ethics is “inherently evaluative” and goes beyond “appropriate code of conducts” (Drozek 2018, p. 540). I believe that Drozek’s views on ethics fit within the framework of Taylor’s approach to this issue. Taylor (1989) distinguishes three areas of the “moral thinking”, as follows: (a) “our sense of respect for and obligations to others”; (b) “our understandings of what makes a full life”; (c) a “range of notions concerned with dignity” (pp. 14–15). These areas are underpinned by what Taylor (1989) calls “strong evaluation” (pp. 29–30), that is, the human ability to assess certain things in virtue of their worth, regardless of our desires or preferences.

Drozek proposes his own version of ethically intersubjective psychoanalysis. In his view, the therapeutic process is based on the concept of dignity understood as the recognition of the unconditional value of people. The root of dignity is of a phenomenological nature and derives from the fundamental human experience through which we discover ourselves as free creatures. Freedom for Drozek is an often-unarticulated sense that our life and our identity are always to some extent dependent on us and that is why we bear responsibility for ourselves. According to Drozek (2019), the sense of freedom is entrenched in the very “structure of human consciousness” (p. 98). This means that it is independent of the psychological conditioning of the subject. In other words, Drozek says that even people with severe personality disorders have access to the experience of freedom. In this approach, pathology acquires an ethical character and cannot be reduced to a mere dehumanizing mechanism. As Drozek claims, “human experience is not, nor can it ever be, ethically neutral. This applies even to so-called ‘pathological’ processes that, on their face, seem to contradict the dignity of Self or Other” (Drozek 2019, p. 110).

Drozek notes that, during the therapeutic process, both the patient and the therapist often unconsciously operate with various “valuational patterns” that stem from their life

experiences. As the therapy progresses, its participants begin to increasingly value themselves in a conditional way, thus, making their own or another person's worth dependent on the presence or absence of certain features. For example, the therapist may see himself as worthless because he is unable to help the patient. By defending himself against this feeling, he blames the patient, seeing him as a bad person. On the other hand, the patient may make his sense of worth dependent on the therapist's ability to meet his needs. This dynamics leads to an impasse, that is, a situation of "ethical failure" in which the "capacity for mutual respect is diminished" (Drozek 2019, p. 115). Thus, while the impasse is about both parties wanting to keep their hands clean and putting the blame on the other, the way out of the impasse is to recognize that I and you are both to blame. In this process, "self-disclosure of the analyst" (p. 116) becomes the key. By becoming aware of the "valuational patterns" that have captured the dyad, the therapist begins to assimilate them and communicates them to the patient. As a result, the therapist begins to value the patient and himself "under wider range of conditions"—he no longer makes his sense of worth dependent on his ability to help the patient and, thus, is ready to value the patient, even when he does not want to accept his help.

Drozek claims that this step on the part of the therapist translates into the patient's sense of security and will "liberate him to do the same". Thus, breaking the deadlock is "the starting point for the mutual exploration of the bidirectional valuational patterns that have come to grip the dyad" (Drozek 2019, p. 116). According to Drozek, this stage of the therapeutic process is an ethical variant of the state described by Philip Bromberg (1998) as "standing in spaces". The essential feature of this state is that the therapist and the patient experience themselves and the other party in an axiologically ambivalent way. In this experience, the good mixes with the bad. As Drozek (2018) notes, there is a shift here from "exclusive worthlessness ('I am a piece of shit, and you are bad for not rescuing me from that feeling') to inclusive worthlessness ('We are both pieces of shit, but we also might have value and worth anyway') (p. 549). The emergence of inclusive worthlessness is, from the point of view of the therapeutic process, an optimal state. The dialectical balancing between good and bad enables the patient to face his own weaknesses and opens him up to change.

As a result, the patient gradually becomes aware of the valuational schemes that underlie his behavior. He also gains insight into their origin. Eventually, he learns to value himself and the therapist in a less conditional way. The results developed in therapy slowly go beyond the dyad and shape the patient's relationship with other people.

In order to illustrate how the intersubjective model of ethical psychoanalysis looks in practice, I will refer to the case of Drozek's (2018, 2019) patient Fred. He is a 50-year-old man who is unable to find his way in the world. Fred is divorced, has two children with whom he does not keep in touch, and is also unemployed and has also struggled with homelessness in the past. Fred sees himself as a victim of an "unfair world", and he is convinced of his innocence and attributes all the blame for his failures to others. His attitude means that he often behaves in a passive-aggressive way, which prevents him from forming healthy relationships. He expects above all approval and pity from his therapist. These expectations give rise to Drozek's sense of being useful. He notices that Fred, through anger and aggression towards others, escapes responsibility and maintains his sense of self-worth.

Despite his initial progress in therapy, Fred still falls into old ruts and is stuck in false ideas about himself and others. This impasse situation, Drozek reports, triggers his desire to punish Fred and inflict physical pain on him. He writes:

Sitting across from my patient Fred, I was overwhelmed by a powerful desire to strike him repeatedly across the face. (...) While I was no stranger to countertransference feelings of anger and frustration with my patients, I had never before experienced the urge to impact a patient in a specifically physical way. And yet I did not feel worried I would act on the impulse. It felt simultaneously "mine" and "not mine," intense yet strangely divorced from action. (Drozek 2018, p. 538)

This moment of “ethical failure” marks a turning point in the therapy. Drozek gradually elevates his desire to a conscious level and begins to realize that his impulse to hit Fred was intended to punish him for his selfishness and make him see through it. On the other hand, Drozek sees his impulse as a defense mechanism designed to protect him from feeling his own worthlessness as a result of his helplessness in the face of Fred’s behavior.

As Drozek becomes more settled with his emotions, he begins to communicate them to Fred. This kind of opening up on the part of the therapist makes the relationship with Fred deepen and become more authentic. Fred begins to perceive him in a more complex way, and this translates into him gradually becoming open himself and sharing previously suppressed emotions. At this stage, Drozek describes the range of conditions against which he has judged Fred and himself up to now widens. Fred’s egoism is no longer explicitly condemned, nor is his powerlessness. Overcoming the impasse leads to a situation of “standing in spaces”, i.e., recognizing both the bad and the good.

By experiencing himself as good in a situation where he is not projecting evil onto someone else, Fred is able to confront his own fears. He gains access to the unconscious patterns of his behavior and makes himself open to change. At the same time, he relates more and more personally to Drozek, and their relationship gains a dialogical character. The experience Fred has had in therapy gives him a basis for building relationships with others. He stops focusing solely on his sense of hurt. He also learns to see his self-worth outside the pattern of directing aggression towards others. He also communicates his feelings of longing and loneliness. As a result, he values himself and others in a less conditional way (Drozek 2018, p. 552).

Drozek (2019) sees psychoanalysis as the “project of ethical restoration” (p. 258) and as the only way to bring about deep moral transformation and deal with violence. As he writes in the following:

ethical formulation offers one explanation of what makes psychoanalysis such a powerful, unique, and ultimately indispensable method of healing in human life. As traditionally implemented, most other sources of help and support (e.g., religion, political action, community service, case management, cognitive behavioral treatments, support groups, close friendships and family relationships) tend to operate primarily at the level of conscious and reality-based experience, devoting minimal explicit attention to “helping” at the level of the unconscious. In contrast, by employing the dialectic between consciousness and unconsciousness as the primary framework for helping our patients, psychoanalysis is able to apprehend the ways in which we are continuously enacting violence against ourselves and others in the conscious and non-conscious realms. (Drozek 2019, p. 259).

Drozek’s exclusivism about moral transformation comes to the fore here. The distinctiveness of psychoanalysis in relation to other methods of human healing is demonstrated by the fact that it deals with the unconscious. The relationship built up in the course of the therapeutic process between patient and therapist makes it possible to reach the deep layers of our self and, therefore, leads to a lasting and radical transformation of our attitude towards others and ourselves. At the same time, Drozek (2019) expresses the hope that the healing power of psychoanalysis can manifest itself not only at the level of individuals, but also in the broader horizon of societies and institutions.

4. Beyond Exclusivism

I would now like to make a critique of Taylor’s and Drozek’s views and show that the exclusivism they advocate is untenable. In rejecting the exclusivism of Taylor and Drozek, I would like to argue for an inclusive approach to the question of moral transformation. I believe, then, that both religion and psychoanalysis have the resources to bring about a profound moral transformation of the individual that will liberate us from the appeal to violence and destruction. Of course, defining the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis depends on how we understand these fields (Parsons 2006, p. 117). However, with

reference to the concepts of Taylor and Drozek discussed here, I think there is nothing to prevent us from considering ethical psychoanalysis and a spiritual perspective, centred on the notion of agape, as two equally valid paths to achieving moral transformation.

I think that the requirements for moral transformation contained in Taylor's considerations are broadly correct. I agree with him when he criticizes contemporary culture for departing from understanding human beings through spiritual language. We lose something valuable when we want at all costs to view ourselves through ethically neutral language. The spiritual deficiency of contemporary culture emerges clearly in the discussion of violence. We need languages that can articulate what is repressed by secular culture, namely that violence very often draws us in and appears attractive. In this sense, it cannot be seen merely as a spiritual aberration. It is not the result of a shortcoming of reason, nor can it necessarily be linked to religion (see [Cavanaugh 2009](#); [St-Laurent 2019](#)), for it is often a response to the horizontal social imaginaries that stifle us. Taylor is right when he says that exclusive humanism is limiting, and this malaise is often overlooked by its advocates.

Unfortunately, I cannot agree with Taylor's religious exclusivism about moral transformation. On the one hand, I think he is too harsh in his assessment of the secular perspective, and on the other hand he idealizes religion.

First, it is not clear why only theistic constitutive goods should have the power to transform us. It seems that non-theistic constitutive goods can also be capable of this purpose. Taylor himself remains ambiguous on this matter. On the one hand, he advocates the superiority of Judeo-Christian theism over secular moral sources while, on the other hand, he points out that he has no definite evidence for his position ([Taylor 1989](#), pp. 517–18). It is worth pointing out here that many pacifist attitudes or those advocating respect for all beings are based on a view of nature as a moral source, the idea derived from romanticism. [Taylor \(1989\)](#) has written about this on several occasions, pointing, for instance, to the romantic roots of the deep ecology movement (p. 513).

Secondly, one cannot agree with Taylor when he situates various forms of psychotherapy outside the register of the spiritual. [Taylor \(2007\)](#) admittedly distinguishes hard-headed psychoanalysis from humanistic approaches within psychotherapy (pp. 620–21). Moreover, his work *A Secular Age* was written in 2007, well before [Drozek's \(2019\)](#) book was published. Nevertheless, it is hard to resist the impression that Taylor ultimately views psychotherapy as if it cannot, in principle, embrace the assumptions of spiritual hermeneutics. I think Taylor is making a mistake here that he has also made in relation to modern science. [Clifford Geertz \(2000\)](#) has pointed out that Taylor, in criticizing modern science, views it as if it were an ahistorical phenomenon, i.e., he relies on its early development and considers it constitutive of science as such. The same is true of Taylor's consideration of psychotherapy. Taylor seems to commit a *pars pro toto* fallacy here. He takes the critical view of psychoanalysis present in Philipp Rieff's views and, on this basis, judges other currents and variations within the field. As I have tried to show with the example of Drozek's conception, there are conceptualizations of the process of psychotherapy in which moral-spiritual hermeneutics is not an optional extra but constitutes its integral element.

In my opinion, Drozek's conception meets the criteria of the moral-spiritual perspective outlined by Taylor. When presenting pathology in ethical terms, Drozek combines this concept with human freedom and responsibility (Taylor's notion of the dignity of sin). The fall of man is here a necessary condition for a moral transformation. By pointing to the importance of "ethical failure" and the guilt of both the therapist and the patient ("we are all to blame"), Drozek breaks out of the Enlightenment paradigm of acquitting man. Acknowledging the dialogical dimension of human identity and its unconditional value, Drozek recognizes the importance of moral and spiritual hermeneutics in thinking about the human predicament. Drozek's approach is also based on constitutive good—the experience of freedom and, therefore, responsibility and dignity, grounded in the structure of consciousness. While this is not a theistic constitutive good, it can, I believe, be considered a strong basis for the affirmation of life goods. Although Drozek does not directly analyze the issue of violence, I believe that his considerations fit into the framework of the

metabiological approach represented by Taylor. Indeed, an analysis of the ethical aspects of our behavior and attitudes must be based on cultural meanings. I also think that the application of a cultural approach to violence could enrich his vision of the dynamics of the therapeutic process. Let us return for a moment to the situation he discussed, in which he experienced the desire to slap his patient Fred in the face. Here, on the one hand, we were dealing with a form of scapegoating mechanism (Girard 1986) and, on the other hand, with the pedagogical significance of this form of violence, that is, slapping someone in the face (Staudigl 2013, p. 60).

Third, Taylor idealizes the transformative potential of religion. Taylor's thesis is highly problematic from the perspective of historical evidence. Taylor's position for the superiority of religion over secular humanism has been widely criticized. Many of Taylor's critics point to the fact that historical record of Christianity commands us being very cautious with his standpoint. Quentin Skinner (1994) strongly disagrees with Taylor's proposal. In his opinion, the history of Europe shows all too clearly the disastrous consequences of the Christian religion. According to Skinner, Taylor might be offering "a cure for our ills potentially worse than the disease" (Skinner 1994, pp. 46–47).

Obviously, Taylor is aware that Christianity is responsible for much evil. He also points to the great crimes to which secular ideologies have contributed. He argues, however, that his purpose is not to "score points" (Taylor 1989, p. 518). Responding to Taylor, Nicholas Smith observes, that since both religion and secular humanism run the risk of derailing their projects, it is unclear why religion should be less dangerous here. According to Smith (2002, p. 232), if Taylor wants to convince us, then scoring points is exactly what he needs to do, but such a task seems to be practically impossible.

I agree with Taylor that religious experience contains transformative potential. This is also the position taken by John Hick (2006). Hick draws attention to the ethically ambivalent character of many experiences described as religious. He notes that some of these experiences lead to morally wrong actions. Consequently, he proposes that, in order to distinguish authentic religious experiences from illusions, the pragmatic criterion "by their fruits you shall know them" should be applied. As Hick (2006) writes "the universal criterion of the authenticity of religious experience consists in its moral and spiritual fruits in human life" (p. 51). Religious experience is, thus, supposed to release motivation for universal love, solidarity, compassion, and to cause a shift from one's own self to an attitude of selflessness and sensitivity to the needs of other beings. The problem, however, is that such experiences turn out to be extremely rare and are shared by very few people, to use Max Weber's language, by "religious virtuosi". This does not mean that religion does not have a profound influence on believers. I think this influence should be seen in more moderate terms, namely as spiritual growth combined with a constant struggle against one's own weaknesses.

In view of the transformative potential of religion, I cannot agree with Drozek's position that the only effective way of dealing with the urge to violence is through ethical psychotherapy. In taking a critical view of Drozek's concept, I would like to point out firstly that he fails to recognize the historical contingency of secular concepts and makes an unjustified universalization of Kant's model of moral experience. For many believers, it is the experience of God, and not the "structure of consciousness", that constitutes the basis of freedom and dignity. The believer sees his freedom in the fact that he has been created in the image and likeness of God. However, I think that Drozek's theory can accommodate this kind of religious experience.

Secondly, Drozek's concept seems to be insensitive to the threats posed by the phenomenon of "the immanent counter-Enlightenment" studied by Taylor. Although Drozek seeks to give pathology an ethical dimension, within the framework of his theory, it is difficult to conceptualize evil, which is not so much the result of unconscious processes, but a conscious choice affirming the dark side of life. Of course, I realize that Drozek does not aim to diagnose contemporary culture. However, by arguing for the superiority of psychoanalysis to religion, he takes a position in the debate on the condition of secular cul-

ture. Holding tightly to Kant's model of moral experience, he loses sight of the perspective of transcendence. Additionally, it is the presence of this perspective in Taylor's thought that makes this neo-Nietzschean facet of contemporary culture extremely aptly articulated by him.

Finally, his thesis of the superiority of psychoanalysis to, among others, religion in the matter of moral transformation raises many doubts. Drozek points out that what makes psychoanalysis unique is the fact that it deals with the unconscious and, as such, can lead to a profound transformation of man. The validity of this thesis, however, would require showing that religion is actually powerless here. Unfortunately, Drozek does not address this issue in his reflections. In polemics with Drozek, it may be pointed out that various religious traditions offer an exceptionally rich spectrum of spiritual practices whose aim is the careful examination of one's own inner self, the recognition and analysis of one's own emotions, and, thus, the elevation to the level of consciousness of what at first sight appears invisible. Investigating the question of the effects of various meditation techniques on the unconscious, [Greg Bogart \(1991\)](#) comes to an interesting conclusion. Analyzing various studies and concepts, he argues that "Meditation may (...) permit deepened access to the unconscious. (...) I believe that meditation can make a significant contribution to the deep transformation of personality sought in psychotherapy" (pp. 406–7). In a similar vein is [Jones \(James 2002\)](#), who writes the following:

Religious experiences allow entrance again and again into that transforming psychological space from which renewal and creativity emerge. Rituals, words, stories, and introspective disciplines evoke those transitional psychological spaces, continually reverberating with the affects of past object relations and pregnant with the possibility of future forms of intuition and transformation. (p. 84, quoted in [Starr 2008](#), p. 34)

I would also like to point out that, in this context, the genealogical considerations of [Marcel Gauchet \(1997\)](#), who sees the emergence of the concept of the unconscious as the result of a religious process of "reduction of the other", are very interesting. However, this issue would require a further discussion.

Leaving somewhat aside the concepts of the authors discussed here, I would now like to outline how the inclusivism postulated here might look in practice, i.e., how the relationship between psychoanalysis (psychotherapy) and religion (pastoral care and spiritual guidance) might look, depending on the specific case. The key here is to recognise the nature of the problem. Of course, this is not always easy. With this in mind, we can somewhat schematically distinguish the following three types of situation: (a) a problem of a psychological nature—therapeutic help; (b) a problem of a spiritual nature—spiritual help; (c) a psycho-spiritual problem—parallel help. It is necessary to add here that the existence of situations (a) and (b) does not constitute a rationale in favor of exclusivism. It does not follow from the fact that in a particular case one should resort to either religion or psychoanalysis for help that, at the cultural level, only one of these options is right for. I would now like to give a little insight into the individual situations. In order to do so, I will refer to the book *Między kozetką a konfesjonalem* ([Jabłońska, and Gawryś 2010](#)), which has the merit of being a collection of contributions from people with different areas of competence, such as psychologists, psychotherapists, theologians, and pastors.

If the problem is of a psychological nature, then secular forms of help should be used. Cases of mental illnesses (depression and neurosis), addictions (to sex, pornography, or violence), and personality disorders require first of all professional help from a psychiatrist or psychotherapist ([Kowalczyk 2010](#), p. 23).

The second type of situation may be encountered when the problem of the person seeking help is related to his or her faith. Someone may, for example, feel lost because of a crisis of faith or be constantly tormented by remorse because of a religious doctrine that is misunderstood. There may also be a case where someone is struggling with remorse due to being in a non-sacramental or homosexual relationship ([Kotowa 2010](#), p. 21). There are also cases of people who explicitly expect an indication of what is right and wrong from

the point of view of a particular religious doctrine. If, in such cases, the penitents do not betray any symptoms of a mental disorder, spiritual guidance or theological consultation can help to sort out discursively some elements of the faith, deepen their understanding of it, and lead them to overcome the crisis (de Barbaro 2010, pp. 11–12).

In some cases, the healing process requires parallel support. Examples of psycho-spiritual problems can be “religious delusions or obsessions with blasphemous content” (de Barbaro 2010, p. 11) Someone may be convinced, for example, that his or her soul has been taken over by demons. There are also cases of believers whose contact with clergy has been traumatic. In such cases, both secular and spiritual forms of help should be reached. There are also situations where patients who have been in therapy for a long time begin to recognize the need for spiritual development (Golczyńska 2010, p. 16).

Although the above examples do not relate directly to the phenomenon of violence, they are nevertheless important from the point of view of its prevention. This is because violence, aggression, or self-aggression are often manifestations of deeper psychological or spiritual problems.

When considering the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis, the existing boundaries between them must not be blurred. Although specific cases are often difficult to define unambiguously, it is necessary to avoid, on the one hand, psychologizing what is spiritual and, on the other hand, spiritualizing what is psychological (Draguła 2010, p. 13). This is because such crossing of boundaries is very dangerous from the point of view of those seeking help.

My considerations are essentially limited to religion and psychoanalysis. However, it seems that other forms of experience, e.g., aesthetic experience (Schiller’s notion of *play*), may also have a transformative nature. At this stage, however, I am not in a position to define specific demarcation criteria to conceptually distinguish transformative experiences from those lacking this feature. I suppose, however, that experiences that lead to moral transformation have at their core a certain vision of the human being and the dynamics of the transformative process.

In order to illustrate what I mean, I would like to refer to sports experiences. This issue deserves attention because some authors take the position that sports experiences, due to their emotional dimension, can be considered as experiences of a religious nature. This position is held, for example, by Eric Bain-Selbo (2008, 2019). I agree that sport can have a meaning-making function in an individual’s life (Barnat 2019). Actively playing sport or supporting a favorite team can give meaning to life. Sport can also carry positive moral implications, such as the ability to accept defeats, respect for rivals, self-discipline, and self-sacrifice (Machoń 2021, p. 203). While these are important things and by no means to be depreciated, they cannot be equated with the consequences of a profound moral transformation, entailing a new way of seeing oneself and the world. Sport, unlike religion and ethically-oriented psychoanalysis, does not have a conception of human nature and its condition in the world and, thus, the conceptual resources that enable a narrative understanding of our lives (Bromberger 1995, p. 311).

To put it another way, sport does not offer a moral diagnosis of the human fall and, therefore, ways to overcome it through moral–spiritual development. It is also important to bear in mind that religious emotions, unlike sporting experiences, do not fundamentally focus on the “here and now”, but capture the narrative dynamics of our life attitude. Hervieu-Léger (Danièle 2000) observes that one of the characteristics of sport, revealed during major sporting events, is the instantaneousness of the production of collective meaning (p. 103). The intensity of experience associated with it is at the root of polarizing divisions (“us”–“them”), often leading to an eruption of violence.

To sum up, in my article I have tried to present two different ways of looking at the problem of violence present in a secular culture. Contrary to both Taylor and Drozek, I argue that the exclusivism they present regarding moral transformation is insufficiently justified and, as such, untenable. On the one hand, I have argued that the requirements of a spiritual perspective outlined by Taylor can be met by Drozek’s secular conception of

ethical psychoanalysis. On the other hand, I have tried to show that Drozek's concept can also open up to religion and recognize religious experience not only as the basis of human dignity and responsibility but also as a foundation for moral transformation.

In the inclusivist approach presented here, religion and ethical psychoanalysis represent two distinct but equal paths that can lead us to moral transformation. These paths may sometimes merge (e.g., in the case of parallel help), they may also intersect (e.g., when a patient is referred from a priest to a psychologist or vice versa), or they may never meet (when a patient has a typically psychological or typically spiritual problem). However, it is not the case that effective transformation, which is a remedy for violence, requires either following the religious path or the psychotherapeutic path.

Funding: This article has been prepared within the research project *Between Secularization and Reform. Religious Rationalism in the Late 17th Century and in the Enlightenment* at the Institute of Philosophy of Jagiellonian University in Kraków, funded by the National Science Centre in Poland, grant no. UMO-2018/31/B/HS1/02050.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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