

**SEXUAL ADDICTION, SPIRITUALITY AND
CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYSIS:
A Reflection on the Contemporary Pastoral Significance
of Spirituality and Psychoanalysis**

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ABSTRACT

There has long been a tension between psychology and spirituality and the dividing line between them is often hard to pin down. This work is a pastoral reflection and exploration on the relationship between spirituality, sexual addiction and Lacanian Psychoanalysis. Taking as a space of exploration the problem of sexual addiction as being the 'pineal gland' of these two discourses, this paper explores an underused hermeneutical device to aid such an exploration, and that is desire. Desire is integral to both spirituality and Psychoanalysis and in relating desire directly to the problem of sexual addiction an alternative perspective opens up, a perspective that takes directly into account the source of addiction, the human subject. The ramification of such a theoretical exploration is that one begins to understand desire not as something that needs to be stymied or relegated in order for us to thwart addiction in its different forms; rather one understands the possibility that desire needs to be developed and strengthened. Addiction has long been suggested by various discourses to be a disease that stems from rampant erotic inclinations. Contrary to this perspective I argue that sexual addiction stems from a fear of desire, a primary desire that one cannot comprehend. This paper explains that this incomprehension is the same incomprehension we have toward the

gift of grace and the sexual addict is not a person trying desperately to get at "more" but in their activity is trying to get rid of "too much" (Loose 2003:222), an overabundance that cannot be grasped in a world ruled by lack, scarcity and deprivation.

What is sexual addiction and where did it come from?

"...to be an obsessional means to find oneself caught in a mechanism, in a trap increasingly demanding and endless."

Jacques Lacan

"What does it matter how many lovers you have if none of them gives you the universe?"

Jacques Lacan

Patrick Carnes first called attention to the growing problem of sexual addiction over twenty years ago (Earl & Earl 1995: 1). The model Carnes primarily uses in order to define sexual addiction is one borrowed from the well-known twelve step model of alcoholics anonymous. It is through this model that sexual addiction is defined primarily by a lack of control and compulsivity in regard to sexual activity.

A sexual addict on initial inspection is thought to be someone who engages in an abnormal amount of sexual activity, this is not true. A sexual addict, for Carnes, is defined by the significance of sex within their life; it becomes the interpretative lens by which all other relations are defined:

"Within the addictive system, sexual experience becomes the reason for being- the primary relationship for the addict. For the addict the sexual experience is the source of nurturing, focus of energy, and origin of excitement. It is the remedy for pain and anxiety, the reward for success and the means for maintaining emotional balance." (Carnes 2001: 26-27)

A sexual addict may act out once or twice a month, but it is the significance of that aberrant activity over other aspects of an individual's life that defines a sexual addict. Furthermore, the model of addiction implies that withdrawal from an activity, no matter how infrequently spaced within an individual's life, would

result in symptoms similar to those who are dependant on substances (Saddock & Saddock 2008: 325). This idea is also taken up by another pioneer in the treatment of sexual addiction, Dr Mark Laaser. Both use the twelve step model in interpreting a definition of sexual addiction, although Laaser brings a theological element into his definition demonstrating the importance of spirituality in treating an addict (Laaser 2004 126-131).

However, regardless of their secular or spiritual leanings, both have an underlining common theme; the hermeneutical device of the twelve step programme and its terminology of disease in defining addiction. The notion of Alcoholism as being a disease was postulated long before the creation of the Alcoholics Anonymous by Scottish physician Thomas Trotter (1760-1832) (1981:17), even if this was in reference to “drunkenness” and not addiction in the general sense. More specifically, the notion of alcoholism as a disease was eventually introduced to the AA by Dr William Silkworth who likened the compulsion to drink to an allergy (Mitchell 2002: 137). Eventually, this discourse of illness and disease transferred itself to the idea of sexual addiction and this is further ramified by the common notion that addiction can primarily be understood as a disease of the brain in neurological definitions of addiction (Aldridge 2005: 18). Therefore, to consider sexual addiction as an illness that progressively gets worse is no surprise, neither is the idea that sexual “sobriety” is the eventual goal of treatment.

Defining the problem of diseased desire

The notion of addiction as being a disease is not new, it is a terminology that most are familiar with. Nevertheless, the goal of this paper is to critically explore if such a terminology is conducive in treating an addict and if it is theologically correct to suppose that sexual addiction itself is a disease.

Heyman argues that the notion of addiction being a disease stems primarily from two distinct forms of behaviour, those actions that are voluntary and those that are involuntary. Now, if addiction stems from voluntary behaviour then obviously it cannot be thought of as a disease since it stems from a free choice on our behalf (if we take for granted the enlightenment liberal understanding of freedom). On the other hand, if it is deemed to

be an involuntary action then it cannot be thought of existing within the realm of our control. Therefore, if addiction falls into the category of involuntary behaviour then it must be thought of along the same lines as a disease since we cannot willingly control disease. However, one could easily argue that there is much involuntary behaviour that is *not* detrimental to our health, like reactions or blinks and we do not even think to call these involuntary twitches or reactions diseases due to the fact that they are not detrimental to our health. And so, this brings us directly to the central thesis of the disease interpretation of addiction and it can be summed up in this simple maxim “Voluntary behaviour is never self-destructive” (2009: 100).

Science and humanity

Heyman further suggests that western society gives two contradictory accounts concerning such behaviour. One theory suggests the latter liberal notion that people do not engage in voluntarily destructive behaviour. This thesis is postulated by the scientific empirical community and believes that all voluntary choices are made with the belief that they benefit us in some way. The other thesis comes from the arts and humanities and suggests just the opposite, that people most certainly engage in what seems to be voluntary destructive behaviour. Certainly, if these lessons in literature were considered as simple documentation of involuntary destructive behaviour they become mere case studies for the perusal of the scientific community rather than an exploration of human nature (Heyman 2009:113). Heyman also gives a lucid description concerning the nature of choice; he distinguishes between local choice which can be described as choices with immediate desirable effects and global choices, choices that have desirable effects within a stipulated amount of time. Local choices always pan out with having the least desirable effects within the longest term as there is always over consumption of one of a number of options. Global choice demonstrates equilibrium due to a lack of immediate enjoyment “I will not choose this option today as over familiarity breeds contempt”. According to Heyman, addiction falls under the category of local choice and it is a shift from a local perspective to a global perspective that signifies a move from an addictive disposition to one which is beneficial to well-being and conducive to an ordered society. Again, more

importantly, it infers that humans can make irrational voluntary choices which are not diseases from the outset. Ultimately for Heyman, addiction is not a disease, it is a disorder of choice (2009: 129-130).

What is brought into question is the basis of our choices; the very essence which elicits a choice from the outset. Heyman sheds light on the problem of a reductive understanding of addiction but he does not delve deep enough into alternative sources to consider the nature of human choice. What drives us to choose destructive ends?

This is a question that throws light on the liberal assumption that rationality is the primary faculty in making a decision. Yet, as Freud demonstrated, this faith in rationality as the core of our being is a mere façade which cloaks the obscene and absurd kernel at the very core of our humanity. Freud was one of the first psychologists to demonstrate that the primary nature of humanity is *Eros* and not *Logos* (Marcuse 1956: 125). If desire becomes the primary essence of humanity it does not preclude voluntarily destructive behaviour. Freud theorised about the change from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. The basic idea is one that proposes that for society to exist there has to be a transition from the animal-man to the human-being and that this transition necessitates repression and sacrifice for society to function. Relating this idea to Heyman's thesis it is possible to perceive that destructive voluntary behaviour can be related to the Freudian death drive. It is a drive toward death not for its own sake but for the repression and tension that society places on us and can be perceived as a drive toward a negation of the reality principle rather than a simple desire for death itself (Marcuse 1956: 29).

If we understand that sexual addiction is not a disease but a choice related directly to the death drive and desire, questions arise concerning how we should reinterpret sexual addiction and our approach to 'healing'. This is especially significant in relation to twelve-step programmes and their reliance on disease vocabulary as seen with Laaser and Carnes. Moreover, if the disease interpretation holds no credence, then surely another vocabulary has to lend itself to 'healing' programmes.

To explore the role of desire within sexual addiction before relating it to Christian spirituality I am going to draw on the resources of French Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. The reason why I choose Lacan as opposed to other psychologists is because of his unorthodox interpretation of desire; an interpretation which is transgressive and offers new insight into the human subject. He offers an understanding of desire which takes into account the impact of human language; our situation within social constructs which determine our sense of self. Yet he does this to the extent that his theory does not fall into a simple fatalism. He offers us a way of shaking up the coordinates of our desire so as to offer new perspective on where we locate enjoyment within our lives and an interpretation which has a lot in common with a Catholic Christian perspective on concupiscence and its relation to the divine in our finitude.

Hopefully I will be able to demonstrate the validity of using Lacanian theory as an instrument in exploring the problem of sexual addiction and its relation to spirituality and subjectivity. I do not want to trivialise the matter at hand, nor do I want to give a gross generalisation of Lacan's work, although this might seem to be the case. What I do want is to begin to open up a space of dialogue between discourses that have the human person as their focus. In seeing desire as playing a major role in the formulation of sexual addiction, this thesis is merely uncovering the tip of a very large iceberg.

Traditional Christian spiritual processes of strengthening desire

Traditional orthodox approaches to spirituality have always had a primary understanding of the significance of desire. Against modern preconceptions of spirituality as stemming our illicit desires by reducing them to diseases and then viciously eradicating them. Orthodox interpretations of desire work on the premise that desire is something which must be strengthened and worked through. It is a spiritual practice of diligently untying the knots and obstacles in the finite expressions of our desire. In other words, the sexual desires of people and their need for God are not two separate realities which need to be separated. A quote usually attributed to G.K Chesterton (my thanks to Paul Rowen for this research) but is actually a quote from Bruce Marshall's 'The World,

The Flesh, and Father Smith' exemplifies this theological understanding by stating:

"Every time a young man knocks on a brothel door, he is really searching for God." (1945:108)

From this simple sentence one can extrapolate that *Logos* and *Eros* are interminably linked when it comes to the human subject, as opposed to conceptions that rationality has to completely dominate our desires and force them into submission. Naturally, reason is crucial in our very existence as human beings. However, reason is not wall to wall, it does not go all the way down as Terry Eagleton lucidly expresses. This is something which both Freudians and theologians equally believe in (2010: 109).

Even in the narrative of creation one can see the absurd foundation of existence in the theological notion of creation *ex nihilo*, the idea that God creates out of nothing. This idea is one which expresses the utter contingency of the universe as it is based on God's free will and desire which is the foundation of everything; it is the primary expression of understanding existence as a gift (Eagleton 2010:8-9). This can be said to be the fundamental difference between certain approaches of the past and approaches today with regards to the problem of desire. The mystic approaches the uncertainty of desire as a gift which one cannot truly fully understand, whilst those who do not understand desire wish to reduce the uncertainty of it to absolute certainty.

Aquinas understood desire in terms of a primal universal good inscribed in each of us. Nevertheless, he understood desire as something which could never be fulfilled in this life. Dissatisfaction is the requisite for finite existence and absolute perfection would signify its termination and transition into the hereafter. For Aquinas, the desire for absolute perfection which absorbs us into non-existence is accomplished in the love of God who is the object and cause of our desire (Eagleton 2009: 148). Here we begin to see a delicate connection between Lacanian Psychoanalysis and orthodox Christian spirituality. Lacanian Psychoanalysis, much like this Thomistic view understands desire as infinite and not reducible to biology. This is one of the fundamental differences between Freud and Lacan and their understanding of desire. Lacan wished to place the study of desire

in the purview of linguistics whilst Freud previously wished to place it in the realm of early neurology. It is not surprising then that modern perspectives wish to locate desire back in the realm of neurology and biology. The problem however, is that in locating desire in pure science, it becomes something else altogether.

Psychoanalysis and desire

Lacanian Psychoanalysis is peculiar as it is not interested one iota in creating well being, happiness or any notion psychic wholeness, rather it is interested in giving analysands the simple uncomfortable chance to confront the reality of their own desire (Zizek 2006: 4). So why on earth would one use it as a discourse when treating sexual addicts?! Surely being freed from sexual addiction would mean that we ought to be happy, whole and on the merry road to well being?

I am going to invoke a misuse of the principle of double effect here in order to justify my use of this deviant, bizarre discipline. The primary goal of Psychoanalysis is to further the desire of the individual, this *necessarily* means freeing a person from imaginary demands is the primary effect. A secondary effect of analysis *could* lead to an individual being happy or understanding happiness as being located somewhere else within the coordinates of their existence but *not necessarily* (as we'll consider later, some societies equate happiness with a type of benign addiction to supplement consumerism; a break from this could cause intense anxiety). Lacan would not begrudge happiness to anyone, but he would find it unrealistic if one truly believes that they are going to find total happiness in our finitude.

With this in mind psychoanalysis is far humbler in its claims than other therapeutic discourses. I think this humble claim offers a refreshing alternative to the overblown hubris which flows from other psycho-spiritual disciplines; a type of hubris which advocates that we can be totally happy and fulfilled in this life. Furthermore, I believe it has more in common with an orthodox, traditional understanding of spirituality which works against such run-of-the-mill "you can do anything you want to if you truly believe it!" interpretations. However before considering the main issue at hand I am going to explain some of the key ideas of Lacan in order to explore a psychoanalytical account of desire and its

relationship to mystical-theological accounts. Finally I will consider how the two can work together in consideration of sexual addiction

The Imaginary

Lacan understood human existence as being split into three interlinked registers (the borromean knot) which were re-interpreted from Freud's understanding of the ego, superego and id. The first of these registers is known as the Imaginary and it revolves around a false sense of security which protects us from the uncertainty of desire (this uncertain desire will become clear in my explication of the Real). Lacan locates the realm of the Imaginary with that of the ego and the sense of autonomy that flows from the self-determining Cartesian cogito (Lacan 2008: 1-7). It is known as the Imaginary in the equivocal sense of the term in that it means both that which is immediately known through sight and sense as well as that which is fantastical. For Lacan they both determine each other; we attain a false sense of security by adhering to a certain fantasy which structures our Imaginary reality. A case in point is the celebrity talent show culture which operates in our day to day life. The perpetual talent shows aired on television allows viewers to project their perfect winning ideal back on to themselves, thinking "*that could be me*". There is a seamless, fluid, transposition of egos in such entertainment; a mirror like quality which refracts an unbroken sense of wholeness between our ideals and sense of self. It is characterised by static immediacy, black and white answers to questions of meaning and an obsessional demand for total satisfaction.

The neurotic, for Lacan, is someone who resolutely holds on to this false sense of security through constant demand. They are alienated from their desire as they cannot accept their desire as being contingent on the other. They reject any notion that their very being is shot through with other's discourse and desires. This revelation of dependence is too much for the neurotic to bare, hence their retreat into imaginary projections of autonomy. From a Lacanian perspective the sexual addict is therefore a person who tries to locate enjoyment and satisfaction through constant repetitive demanding activity in order to shield themselves from this anxiety. The primary aim of Psychoanalysis is to free the

analysand's psyche from being totally caught up in this Imaginary aspect of existence (Fink 1994: 87). It is important to note here that neurosis is an umbrella term which depicts a certain construction of human subjectivity rather than a description of a symptom, sexual addiction just being one expression of an Imaginary compulsion (in the Lacanian sense).

Ultimately, those caught in the insistence of the Imaginary have become victims of a coagulated desire, a desire that has transformed itself into an implacable demand for satisfaction and meaning. Desire and demand cannot co-exist. If certainty and demand is the realm of the ego and the imaginary, then uncertainty and desire are located in another psychic register all together (Fink 1999: 42-49).

The Symbolic

The Symbolic then is the realm of uncertainty, mediated, flowing desire and correlates to the Freudian superego as well as to the unconscious. The Symbolic gives structure to the Imaginary in much the same way a complex code creates a video game which we can see on the screens of our televisions. In Lacanese this is formulated as the primacy of the signifier over the signified, the notion that our sense of reality is structured via language and discourse (Pound 2007: 34-36). The idea that a primordial enjoyment which lies at the core of our being is sublimated filtered and shifted through the various symbols and words we use to determine our everyday reality is crucial to understanding the operations of the Symbolic.

One of the major premises of Lacan's theory of the Symbolic is the idea of human de-naturalization. In being introduced into culture via our first utterances we have to leave behind a primary sense of enjoyment (*jouissance*) which is then sublimated into the many expressions of our culture. Human existence, consciousness and unconsciousness are defined by our introduction into language, the realm of reason, paternal authority and law (Pound 2007: 40-42). Unlike Jung, Lacan believed that the unconscious was structured like a language as opposed to a primordial set of pre-determined symbols (Chiesa 2007: 52). The very words we use, the language we speak, the sentences we utter, the thoughts we have are all products of an unconscious linguistic culmination which

results from our initial integration into the fabric of social existence. Lacan, like Wittgenstein believes that without language, there is no thought. The effect of such integration is that our desire is caught up in the linguistic mechanisms of our unconscious, in the very language we use and it is this realization that addicts, it can be argued, are desperately estranged from. At first glance, it seems unnatural to talk about the Symbolic order as being both the realm of law, language, mediated desire and the unconscious but this is precisely where the originality of Lacan's work lies. For Lacan the unconscious is not internal, juxtaposed to our external world, it is as external as the language we use and the untold laws that govern us (Fink 1994: 9-11).

"The unconscious is full of other peoples talk, other people's conversations, and other people's goals, aspirations and fantasies" (Fink 1994: 9-11).

For example, we believe a desire to sleep with a favoured celebrity comes to us as natural, but for Lacan, this desire comes from the injunction of the Symbolic order itself, the magazines, books, films, commercials, words and even the organization of language that we are subjected to everyday. For instance we all have a general idea whereabouts we can locate enjoyment; in a bar, on the television, in a joke, in the next DVD we buy, or for the sexual addict in the next sexual conquest. The goal of Psychoanalysis is not to offer more enjoyment, but involves giving patients the space to understand their own desire, how their enjoyment is postponed, structured and caught up in how they define themselves within the Symbolic context in which we are all situated (Zizek 2006: 4). From this perspective, sexual addiction is no longer something which can solely be determined in biological terms. Certainly, a biological definition of sexual addiction has always had its critics as sex is difficult to class as an ostensibly addictive narcotic substance. Lacanian Psychoanalysis offers a way of understanding sexual addiction which takes into account its origins in the creation of the human subject within the mesh of social existence and the demands laid upon our fragile egos.

We live in an age where the unspoken, Symbolic laws which govern our lives such advertisements and modern taboos no longer restrict and repress our sexual urges but augment them

with implacable demands. Certainly, during the time of Freud the former was the case; one visited the analyst if repressive tendencies were inhibiting ones libido. Today these unspoken laws instruct us to enjoy and if we do not enjoy then we should feel guilty (Zizek 2006: 104). There are massive implication in realising that our desire is not our own; that desire is constructed through our very integration into the fabric of social existence (Lacan 2008: 345). It gives a whole new understanding to the role of Psychoanalysis and sexual addiction. Modern therapeutic perspectives take the dull clichéd view that the sexual addict is a law unto themselves and that these aberrant individuals break the unwritten western rule of society which stipulates that even though we are free in our pursuit of happiness we should not take it too far. A Lacanian account of sexual addiction differs from this perspective in what I would call an awareness of an all-pervasive economy of Imaginary demand. This has two meanings:

1. How the super-ego operates by creating new rarefied demands in society.
2. How these demands are organised within the libidinal economy of the individual.

Psychoanalysis operates by making the individual aware of these Symbolic processes. From this perspective the psychoanalytic setting is the only setting where there is no injunction to enjoy (Zizek 2006: 104). In an anti-intuitive move then, sexual addiction is no longer a simple transgression against the law of society as Heyman or Carnes would argue; rather it is the obscene underpinning of our societies Law today. Disturbingly, the sexual addict, in a purely vulgar utilitarian view, probably does more good than bad for late capitalist society. He/she spends a lot of hours and/or a lot of money downloading porn from expensive sites and buying sexual supplements such as Viagra, condoms, lubricant, sex toys, magazines etc. In this respect they are simply dutiful consumers gladly reducing sex to a commodity which defines our existence. Nevertheless, the duty of Psychoanalysis is to make individuals aware that our desire is not natural but 'filtered' through these demands which in turn allows us to re-locate desire in other symbols and expressions of existence.

The Real

The Real is the final register of Lacan's tripartite scheme. It represents the realm outside the purview of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. It is the realm of pure desire, the pre-unsymbolised aspect of existence and therefore the realm of anxiety *par excellence* (Fink 1994: 24). For Lacan it is the aspect of our existence that can never be completely overwritten by either the Imaginary or the Symbolic and as such it always presents itself as an antagonistic kernel ever threatening to disrupt our constructed reality. In analysis it presents itself as that aspect of our own individual existence which we refuse to put into words. It is totally traumatic and it is only by facing it and transcribing this trauma into words can we change the coordinates of the Symbolic order to the extent that our desire can be freed up from static Imaginary identifications (Loose 2002: 259).

As Terry Eagleton explains, pure desire is a disfiguring reality; it is an obscene object, a type of alien obstruction at the core of our being. It is the sense of dis-ease at our very existence which we cannot quite get a grip on. However, it is also our very essence. It can be understood as a modern day version of the Kantian sublime which is seductive and repugnant at the same time, or the malignant power of the Schopenhaurian will which we have no control over (2009:142). One notes here that any explanation of the Real runs into massive problems in the corpus of Lacan's work. The main problem is that the Real is the un-symbolised aspect of our human existence, so any language we use to depict the Real is pure metaphor and analogy. Since it is ultimately the unknowable limit of our humanity it can only be known by its effects, much like how astronomers can detect a celestial body through its warping effect on the space which surrounds it (Eagleton 2009: 143). If the Imaginary aspect of our existence can only understand the Symbolic register as dry calculations and the Symbolic can only understand the Imaginary as so much egotistic sentimentalism then both of these registers will perceive the Real as terrifying, meaningless, disruptive nonsense.

Spirituality, Psychoanalysis and the treatment of sexual addiction: theory

The crux of this paper then, is to offer an alternative perspective to the treatment of Sexual addiction. One which makes an attempt to show how the interface between post Freudian theory and traditional Christian spirituality is not as disparate as one might believe, especially in considering the human person. I do this as I believe any treatment of sexual addiction has to start with a non-reductive view of human desire.

A pastoral spirituality of sexual addiction which acknowledges the contribution of Psychoanalysis would be one which would position God as the cause of our desire. Now, grace can be thought of as what causes our desire of God. Yet grace can cause great anxiety, like the words of Christ in Scorsese's classic *The Last Temptation of Christ*: "I know God loves me, I can feel it, and it hurts". Reflecting this long ago, Julian of Norwich said there is in God a quality of thirst and longing which is reflected in our own existence (Lane 1998: 146). Now, if sexual addiction can be understood as an Imaginary protection from the grace of God - a protection from a reality that cannot be formulated in words sufficiently and the addict seeks protection by route of repetition - an addict suffering from sexual addiction can be defined as "a subject who suffers in the Real" (Loose 2002: 252). Theologically this can be translated as "one who suffers in grace". Human beings have a level of incompetence in comprehending and reacting to this gift. What the mystic and the sexual addict have in common is an anxious reaction to incomprehensibility. Addiction, therefore, is an Imaginary inordinate attachment, a 'false desire' if you will. Therefore, furthering the desire of the addict involves a type of letting go and reordering of desire.

The desert fathers understood this process as *apathia*, which is quite the opposite of the common interpretation of dusty old men leaving their desires behind in a vulgar example of quietism. Rather, by confronting themselves to the emptiness of the desert, the topography of the desolate landscape nurtured within them certain attentiveness toward true desire (Lane 1998: 188). The emptiness of the desert is a stand in for the true emptiness which is our call toward Christ and like the Lacanian Psychoanalyst who

becomes a stand in for the cause of our desire; the desert plays a similar role in all its unnatural brutal glory for the desert mystic. Ian Parker, who argues for a de-Christianisation for Lacanian theory, states that the defining aspect of Lacanian practice within the clinic is its organisation around 'absences'

"Psychoanalysis revolves around absences in speech, and Lacanian Psychoanalysis is theoretically attuned to the importance of the analyst refusing to fill in those absences with stuff that is meaningful..." (Parker 2011: 3).

He argues that spirituality potentially dilutes the revolutionary character of Lacanian Psychoanalysis by removing it outside the context of the clinic and therefore conflating it with other therapeutic healing ideologies which aim to integrate the subject back into the current social status quo (2011: 161). I would agree to an extent but I think that Parker has a limited view of what spirituality actually is

"Lacanian Psychoanalysis is not a set of techniques...or a guide to life" (it is not spiritual) (Parker 2011:11)

I would argue that spirituality functions as spirituality only if it retains its revolutionary character (and not a 'guide to life' which would be damaging to addicts). Or, in other words its ability to allow the subject access to their desire and subvert current ideology. Contrary to Parkers argument, this actually happens in clinical like 'settings': confession, the relationship of the spiritual director to the directee and, for this paper, in the actual clinic treating the sexual addict. Maybe, however this just highlights the contradictory elements in religion as Parker points out. Nevertheless, rather than assuming that religious discourse has to be negated from Psychoanalysis if it is to critique the hegemony of our time, I believe that Psychoanalysis can draw attention to and strengthen these transgressive elements of religion which challenge the status quo.

The new film *Of God's and Men* (2010) by Xavier Beauvois depicting the life of a group of Trappist monks during the revolution in Algeria demonstrates the nature of the Real from a mystical perspective. This operative reality of the mystical element within the film is clearly seen, from one perspective, as a revolutionary guide *against* life contrary to Parker's insinuation.

Each of the monks in the monastery begin to realize that they are in grave danger and each have the opportunity to leave the monastery and go someplace else, back to their original lives away from the Cistercian order. However, when it comes down to moving away, each monk discovers that they cannot leave, even if it means their death. The desire which drives them to such an irrational decision is a desire which, from the outset, enabled them to give over their lives to God in the first place; a desire which is found in contemplation and silence. Everything else, the various demands placed on them to leave, the antagonisms, the arguments, the constant rationalising are just a pale reflection of staying true to this primary desire. There is a beautiful moment in the film when the poor Muslim community which depend on the monastery are told that there is a possibility that the monks may leave. The elder monk says *"we are like birds on a branch unsure whether to leave or not"*, to which one of members of the community retorts *"No, we are the birds and you are the branch, if you leave then the birds will fly"*. The monks finally realise that they are the ironic, absurd foundation of the Islamic village and not some arbitrary factor in the lives of the community, much like how the desire of God is the absurd foundation in their own existence which, if they want to be authentic, they must hold on to with all their strength. The anxiety in the film is palpable, as the political situation begins to deteriorate. What starts out as a niggling antagonistic kernel which rears its head every now and then in conversations finally returns as the full blown reality of their desire.

Obviously for the sexual addict nothing so dramatic is asked of them as to become a martyr, but like the monks, the addicts order of existence will be disrupted, they will be faced with a primary desire which will threaten to swallow them. They will wrestle with it, come up with substitutes for it, try to situate and accommodate it but ultimately they will have to make the traumatic sacrifice of preparing to look at things in a completely different light in order to free themselves from Imaginary identifications.

Prayer itself can be understood as entering the realm of the Real. Herbert McCabe once said that Prayer is a waste of time. Those caught in the perseverance of the Imaginary will be those individuals that expect prayer to function as an emotional supplement that placate wayward sentiments. Others may

understand prayer as a Symbolic duty which must be performed at a certain time in order to preserve ones identity. From both of these perspectives prayer is most certainly not a waste of time, it holds a very specific purpose, and it fulfils a demand for the individual. So what are we left with when this purpose is drained away?

McCabe argues that the primary purpose of prayer, when stripped of everything else, is to simply waste time with God because ultimately, that is what God does, he wastes time with himself. God the Father, needlessly wasting time with the Son and the love between them is the Holy Spirit. Prayer at its absurd core is taking the time to enter into this seemingly fruitless activity/relationship at the invitation of God Himself. It is gratuitous, and from the perspective of the Imaginary and the Symbolic utter nonsense, and it is this in the end which gives it sense (McCabe 2005: 75). At the end of the day, after all the contingent expressions of our incarnate demands, the one 'Real' desire in our lives is the one which reflects our true essence and purpose, to be with God. The God of the Real is one which is stripped away of all ideological content; a frightening God who can only free us from hegemonic symptoms if we are willing to give up God himself. As Meister Eckhart once said "God free me from God".

Spirituality, Psychoanalysis and the treatment of sexual addiction: in Practice

So how do the spiritual and psychoanalytic elements of sexual addiction relate to a pastoral context? In relating spirituality to Psychoanalysis and understanding the importance of both in terms of their relationship to desire and to the treatment of sexual addiction, then a new qualifying discourse has emerged; a discourse that urges those who deal with addicts, from a spiritual perspective, not to conflate their "ideal" with the object of the addict's obsession. In other words, it is very easy for addicts to simply trade one obsession for another as they live in a world of Imaginary demand. In their addiction they demand a certain effect from their activity and in replacing their obsession for something else they expect demands to be met. In other words they still expect certain satisfactory effects from the analyst on the same level as their addictive activity.

Explanations are important for the subject in terms of understanding their addiction, whether this comes down to family situations, cultural circumstances or past sexual abuse. However explanations are *not always* causes, causes lie within the very substance of our existence, within the very constructs of our subjectivity, within the unconscious. Since our subjectivity lies within language and language makes up our unconscious then the roots of an addiction are found within our unconscious as constructed in the very language and symbols we use to determine our reality. For example, how a sexual addict relates to the object of their obsession is constructed via the words he/she uses to depict them. Lacan was very clear that the content depicted in our language is affected as soon as we give voice to it or when others listen to it:

"The Symbolic function presents itself as a two fold movement in the subject: man makes his own action into an object, but only to return its foundational place to it in due time. In this equivocation, operating at every instant, lies the whole progress of a function in which action and knowledge alternate...in Phase one a man works at the level of production in our society considers himself to belong to the ranks of the proletariat; in phase two, in the name of belonging to it" (Lacan in Zizek 2006: 15)

As Zizek explains, there is no such thing as a neutral statement; everything uttered ultimately shows how we relate to the content enunciated. Take for instance a sexual addict, the very fact that they engage in a repetitive obsessional activity might be neither here or there, but in the very act of enunciating *"I am a sexual addict and it is a disease"* the unconscious as the determining factor of Imaginary identifications comes into play. One realizes that there is a certain amount of relief in defining oneself as an addict to the extent that an individual can become addicted to defining oneself actually as a diseased addict; we simply remove the investment of *jouissance* from one register to another. One's addictive activity is shaped by the utterance. In other words, the content we relate to is reliant on the ability to construct that content via language and our subsequent relation to it (2006:18). Symptoms and words are closely interlinked and it is the ability of the Lacanian analyst to interfere with our tendency to use language in a certain way, by

not allowing the unconscious path of our language to intuitively follow its course (this is one of the reasons Lacanian psychoanalysis feels so brutally unnatural).

The offshoot of this is that a change in the use of language and symbols can also change our position in relation to anxiety. If language can change this position, then it can change addictive activity. Put simply, words can most definitely free us, but we will fight tooth and nail against this freedom. This is not a language that presents certainty after a certain demand, it is a language that presents itself as the embodiment of anxiety and uncertainty to the subject. It is ironically called full speech a demonstration of the subjects unconscious reflected from the analyst. As Brown states; "(for the mystic) it amounted to nothing less than the discovery of a new alphabet of the heart" (1988: 229). Words are flung at the analyst but the analyst lets these words swerve and slide under the nose of the analysand rather than solidifying in one particular place which would simply create another Imaginary identification. These words reveal the unconscious relationship one has to anxiety and the Real. In making the unconscious conscious one reconstructs the very symbols that constitute the relationship one has to the Real of their existence. The fact that addiction exists proves that this previous addictive defence against anxiety is a failure. These delusions, Imaginary identifications and symptoms need to be drained away, so as to allow the addict to take responsibility for this anxiety, to allow it to be managed within the realm of the Symbolic and to realise that this lack is the cause of our desire. This all amounts to hitting analysands with the Real- the parts of their existence they do not want to know and desperately seek defences to ignore- so they can repeat difficult past events in order to change their perspective of the present in order to instigate change in their lives (Pound 2007: 144).

This does not mean to say that Christian spirituality has come closer to giving a final solution to the problem of desire; the problem is that desire always causes anxiety. Anxiety is something that is to be quelled, masked up and ignored. A person once told me that "anxiety never comes from God" to an extent I agree but this does not mean to say God has nothing to do with anxiety, on the contrary, God is anxiety as he is no object, he is the cause of our desire. We want to transform this desire into demand; we

want idols to protect us from pure desire. This has continued with the disease discourse and its utilisation within healing programmes. Addiction as a demand giving discourse eventually solidifies and can continue infinitely if it can perceive itself as an object, namely a disease. In calling it a disease, addiction is charged with an inert quality and exists independently from the subject. In other words, if we can replace the demands of addiction with the demands of medicine we supply ourselves with Imaginary wholeness.

It is interesting to note that in our current era there is an ironic collusion taking place between scientism and fundamentalism. Zizek states that fundamentalism and scientism are precisely two sides of the same coin in as much that they mistake faith for knowledge (Eagleton 2009: 114-115). As I have argued, the core of faith is desire therefore it is not unreasonable to conclude that the problem with current treatments of sexual addiction is precisely that neither scientific nor pop-spiritual/fundamentalist perspectives understand the complexities of desire efficiently enough to consider the reality of sexual addiction.

Conclusion

This paper has been an unorthodox exploration of an alternative perspective on sexual addiction. It argues for addiction programmes to start an exploration of a possibility of dialogue between a traditional spirituality with a Lacanian analytical perspective with the problem of the desiring subject firmly in focus. In order to aid the addict a space needs to be opened, a space to explore the signifiers, the jumbled words, the recorded memories, the multi layered chains that make up the unconscious. It is the only space where there is no cruel injunction to enjoy, no demands are placed on the subject. This is the analytic setting and it has ties to traditional Christian mysticism. However, one has to ask how does one practically incorporate a Lacanian ethic into such programmes? This question is important and shall be the subject of for another study.

I would like to say a final word on the interface between Psychoanalysis and theology and the interpretation of desire. The idea of transcribing faith into the words and expressions of our culture has long been the primary incentive for theologians past,

present and most certainly the future. Theology is an endless activity as this linguistic discipline can never exhaust faith. It is hysterical in character, in the strict Lacanian sense (this gives a whole new meaning to theology as a feminine discourse as hysteria is a feminine clinical structure; theology is truly the queen of the sciences) in that it will perpetually question and investigate faith to the extent that the answers it gives will never be satisfactory; faith will always resist full Symbolic representation. The transition to mystical theology takes place when one realises that these hysterical questions toward an external reality will ultimately be turned back upon themselves. Indeed, the source of theological truth is not found in solely in scriptural, philosophical or empirical proofs, it is found in our own hearts. Therefore, if theology is faith seeking understanding then Psychoanalysis is desire seeking understanding. Mystical theology starts where Psychoanalysis ends as faith is simply another word for recognising the deepest desires of our hearts. Therefore, the fundamental difference between these two discourses is that mystical-theology takes the further risk of delving deeper into this dangerous un-symbolised realm of desire via the spiritual tradition. To reinterpret the Bruce Marshal quote earlier:

“The sexual addict who knocks on the door of the therapist is really looking for God”

However and here is the kicker, if the addict is to find the God who is to free them of Imaginary identifications, therapists who deal with addicts from a spiritual perspective should best be prepared to knock on the door of Lacan. Lacan argued for a Return to Freud, not in the sense of having a direct literal interpretation of Freud, but in returning to his revolutionary discoveries, both explicit and implicit, via using the current academic disciplines of his time ranging from structuralist linguistics, mathematics and philosophy (Zizek 2006: 4). I would argue that current trends in spirituality need to turn to Lacan in order to re-discover its true roots, and its purpose especially in considering the dilemma of sexual addiction as being a disorder of desire.

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