

**MAVIS KLEIN**

BEING A  
**THERAPIST**



A Practitioner's  
Handbook

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*Mavis Klein*

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*This book is dedicated with gratitude to the many  
people who have trusted me with their realities  
and have so enabled me to enlarge my own*

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## *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

**Mavis Klein** has been a psychotherapist for the past thirty-five years. She is a founder member of the Institute of Transactional Analysis and of the European Association for Transactional Analysis. She is a team-building consultant to many organisations and businesses both in the UK and overseas, and gives lectures and conducts training workshops for executives. She is the author of eight previous books on psychological topics. She is also a qualified astrologer.

## INTRODUCTION

There are as many kinds of psychotherapy as there are therapists. From a client's point of view, one therapy or therapist may be greatly different from another; but from a therapist's point of view, there is much that he or she has in common with all other therapists. This book is about being a therapist from the therapist's point of view.

Mind and body are increasingly understood to be a unity, and there are many therapies today that address our psychological as well as our bodily diseases through physical means. Nevertheless, in this book my presumption is that the therapist/counsellor is offering healing essentially through a verbal exchange, and my observations will be within that frame of reference, although I am confident that even the most physically oriented therapist will also find many of the ideas in this book relevant to his or her practice.

In writing this book, I have especially wanted to encourage advanced students and beginner practitioners to be confidently themselves in their interactions with their clients, notwithstanding all the rules and regulations that beset them and all the academic input they have received, which can seem so abstract and sterile in the reality of a face-to-face encounter with a human being in distress.

In a world where, increasingly, "the customer is always right" and professionals of all kinds are made to account for and justify their authority, I feel there is a crying need to redress the balance in a treatise that emphasises the wellbeing of the practitioner rather than the client. To this extent, I hope this book will also hearten experienced practitioners who are fed up and demoralised by the politically correct, bureaucratised constraints that so confine them today.

This book is non-academic and virtually jargon free; it is personal and anecdotal. It discriminates clearly between the responsibilities, cognitive understanding, and the feelings of the practitioner, and it is intended to be useful to all "humanistic" therapists and counsellors irrespective of their particular theoretical orientation.

*Zeitgeist* elaborates the existential issues that beset all human beings in contemporary Western society. Irrespective of the personal problems that our clients seek our help in overcoming, we share with them the pervasive stresses of post-modernism, which is the context that affects the particularities of all our lives. We and our clients benefit from sharing our awareness of the issues that we grapple with collectively.

*Believing* is about professionalism in its responsibilities and privileges. I hope this chapter in particular will support the reader in the expression of his or her self-confident authority in his or her relationship to his or her clients, which is the single most important characteristic that distinguishes the effectively potent therapist.

*Thinking* is about the substantive knowledge that enables the therapist to do the job of helping the client to solve his or her problems. It analyses the assumptions that underlie all humanistic theories and therapies and the samenesses and differences between individuals that need to inform the dialogues we have with our clients.

*Five personality types* is an outline of my own original theory of psychological health and pathology, developed inductively over twenty-five years of my clinical practice. It is in no way meant to compete with readers' own confidently established theoretical frames of reference, but I hope it will nonetheless be of interest and possibly provide an extra string to the bow of the practitioner.

*Feeling* is about the emotional satisfactions and tribulations associated with being a therapist. It is intended to encourage the reader to a shame-free understanding of his or her own hang-ups and the value they have in the joyfully creative work of being a therapist.

Implicitly, if not explicitly, the profession of psychotherapy is deeply philosophical, dealing as it does with "human nature". So I ask for the reader's indulgence, in the name of rational comprehensiveness, before beginning my main theme, to make explicit the chief timeless issues that underpin all our theories and practice.

Whether or not there has been or can be progress in matters pertaining to human nature is debatable. Civilisation is the usual name given to the structures of society that aim to increase the average overall happiness of the world. But these structures seem to be eminently fragile. Regular episodic outbursts of collective, uncivilised aggression seem to increase the average overall pain in the world in exact proportion to the degree of civilisation that is the current ideal. It is arguable that the sum total of pleasure and pain in the world must, because of the immutability of human nature, remain constant. As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we are all exiles from Paradise.

First and foremost, we are determined by our species' biology. Anthropology rules psychology which rules society and culture. Our consciousness of the imperfection of our human nature and our valiant struggles to perfect ourselves set us apart from all other species and has amongst its spin-offs all of art, science, and philosophy.

The bottom line of human consciousness is our awareness of our mortality. Reduced to its essence, human life is a desperate bid to deny or to find compensation for the fact that we must die. To this extent, we live most authentically and contentedly when we are explicitly fighting for our survival. But with full stomachs and in peace-time, we need to find causes and problems that serve as displacements of our basic quest for physical survival. Struggling, fighting, and succeeding in overcoming our quotidian problems distracts us from facing our mortality head on.

We never fully come to terms with the meaningless-ness that death makes of our mundane concerns. Some people deny death by a belief in some form of eternal afterlife, others seek continuation of their lives after physical death through being remembered for their works or deeds, and most of us find some comfort in the knowledge of the survival of some of our genes in our children, grandchildren, and further descendants. But, one way or another, contentment in the face of our mortality

is contingent on our living life as if it has meaning, even if it doesn't.

We make sense and meaning of life by concepts and categories into which we sort our experiences. First and foremost, we seek the meaning of pain. Universally, this quest creates in our minds the concept of "good and evil", with its inevitable moral derivatives of blame and responsibility, righteousness and guilt. Maturely, we are able appropriately to experience responsibility and guilt as well as righteousness and blame, although, being human—unless we are neurotically self-abnegating and masochistic—our first impulse is to find the cause of our own pains in somebody or something else.

Our hard-wired necessity to project blame for our pains was made vivid to me by one of my granddaughters. Then aged just two, she dropped and broke a cup in front of me. Despite my non-punitive, "Never mind" response, she compulsively expressed the most primitive of our ego's defences, denial, with, "I didn't, I didn't ...". A few months later, considerably more sophisticated, while sitting opposite me at the kitchen table, she accidentally dropped some food on the floor, stared straight at me, and declared, "I think you did that"!

Physically and psychologically, our completed selves are products of nature and nurture. Nurture has its say—witness the increased height of recent generations and our increased longevity due to improved nutrition and hygiene—but nature is dominant and is now precisely mapped. So how can we justify the deeply embedded Freudian presumption of all humanistic psychotherapies that we are born a *tabula rasa* on which are etched our personalities and characters through our earliest experiences?

My own resolution of this problem is that our earliest remembered experiences are *as if* causes of what we become. That is, our remembered childhood experiences, which our literary tradition and, latterly, psychoanalysis call the causes of our completed selves are actually selectively remembered by us to concur with our preordained genetic predispositions. Witness the often widely divergent memories and/or interpretations of shared experiences of siblings. But it doesn't matter that the environmental events of our early years are not "really" causes but are subsumed to the deeper determinism of our genes which, in turn, may be subsumed to an even deeper cause, to *karma* or whatever ... until we stop and call the "final cause" God—or Unified Field Theory. Our perceived causes of our pains are the outcome of our natural need to project blame, to which we are entitled, with the proviso that, healthily, we equally attend to the other side of the coin of our chosen currency, our own responsibility and guilt. Logically, we have two choices: either we "can't help" what we are because of what our parents did to us and they, in turn, couldn't help being as they were to us because of what was done to them ... to the original wrongdoing in the Garden of Eden; *or* our parents are blameworthy for what they did to us as we are blameworthy to our children for what we did to them, and so on through the generations. The no-blame option implies no praise either; the reciprocity of both blame and praise seems to be a universal and unavoidable construct of the human mind.

The corollary to this pragmatic conclusion is that, notwithstanding the overwhelming power of our genetic determinism, we do have free will, which is

contained in the responses we choose to make to our own natures and to what befalls us. Our responses are our choices and these have consequences. We cannot avoid making choices. Passivity is the self-delusion of “no choice”, but of course it is a choice and, like all others, has consequences. Psychotherapists are more aware than most other people that every moment of choice is the cause of the inexorable train of events that follows in its wake, to the natural conclusion of a “happening” in our lives. When a conclusion is painful, we are loath to remember the moment of choice that determined it, although repression is never complete, and often the knowledge that we have chosen a path to pain is manifest as obsessive fear of that pain—too late—and a conscious struggle to avoid it. We actually do know (in our hearts) that we have made the choices we have that have led to their inevitable conclusions. In our most intense moments, we are reduced to knowing, in all its simplicity, that in virtually—if not absolutely—everything that befalls us, we get exactly what we set out to get, and so what we deserve. However constrained we are by the genetic hand we have been dealt and its complicit endorsement by our earliest childhood memories, our free will is exercised on the long continuum between making the most and the best or the least and the worst of that hand.

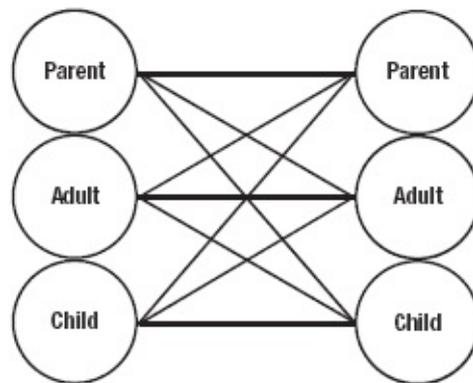
While not often explicitly stated, psychoanalysis and its post-Freudian derivatives (which constitute the vast majority of contemporary humanistic psychotherapeutic frameworks) are concerned specifically with ego development—the growth of self-esteem. Jungian analysis and other transpersonal therapies are exceptional in addressing more holistically our ultimate spiritual quest for meaning, which refers to the transcendence of the ego in favour of a return to oneness with the universe, which, it may be inferred, was the state in which we began our lives and, ideally, in the fullness of time, to which we return. But nobody has yet transcended their ego without having an ego to transcend, and the worthwhile work of most psychotherapy is about helping people find realistic ego satisfaction in their loving relationships and in their work, which is what (insistently atheistic) Freud argued is as much as we can hope and ask for of life.

The existential position of any human being at any time is informed by his or her age, individuality, and humanity. And our responses to another as “helpers” of that other, are informed by our awareness of our boundaries (moral code), theories (objective knowledge), and empathy (feelings). These three categories of our responses are consonant with the *ego states* of Transactional Analysis, which is my *lingua franca* as a psychotherapist. While I am myself enamoured of Transactional Analysis, I have no wish to impose it on my readers; but I ask leave to use a few words of the vocabulary of TA in the interest of concision, words I believe will not compromise the differing theoretical orientations of my readers. For the benefit of those readers unfamiliar with the basic vocabulary of TA, here are the few words and their meanings that I will interpolate where appropriate in my overall exposition.

The *ego states*, Parent, Adult, and Child (always capitalised), are the existential states of being into which our ego is divided. *Structurally*, our Parent contains our taught beliefs, values, and generalisations about life and the world; our Adult contains our skills and objective knowledge; and our Child contains our feelings, both innate and conditioned. *Functionally*, our Parent controls and nurtures ourselves and others,

largely through the expression of our moral code; our Adult expresses our skills and knowledge, and processes information, often mediating between our own and others' conflicting Parent and Child; and our Child expresses our feelings, including our neurotic compulsions (which we often delude ourselves come from our "good" Parent). We move around among our ego states hour by hour and minute by minute throughout our waking lives.

People interact with each other through *transactions* between their ego states. Since each person may initiate a transaction from any of his or her three ego states and address any of the three ego states of another, there are nine possible ways in which we can initiate a transaction.



Two people, six ego states, nine possible transactions.

In practice, most transactions are Adult to Adult (emotion-free information exchange), Child to Child (emotionally charged exchange), Parent to Child (authoritative care and/or control), or Child to Parent (pleading with or complaining against authority). However, for the sake of inclusiveness, here is an archetypal example for each of the nine possible kinds of transaction.

- “We must get a kid-proof lock on the bathroom cabinet.” (Parent to Parent)
- “Can you tell me the time?” (Adult to Adult)
- “Let’s make love.” (Child to Child)
- “Here, let me show you how to do that.” (Parent to Adult)
- “What’s the best way to do this?” (Adult to Parent)
- “Please may I have another biscuit?” (Child to Parent)
- “No, you may not.” (Parent to Child)
- “I know you’re very hungry. Supper will soon be ready.” (Adult to Child)
- “Oo, you are clever.” (Child to Adult)

But the nature and meaning of even such simple transactions as the examples I have given are overwhelmingly determined by tone and body language as well as literal content. Try saying “Why?” in each of the nine possible ways.

Furthermore, many—perhaps most—transactions, and certainly the most

interesting ones, are *duplex*, that is, *covert* and *overt* communications are occurring simultaneously. Such transactions are part of the healthy hypocrisy that informs much of civilised intercourse between people, protecting the participants from all kinds of discomfort; but in all such cases, the covert transaction is the true meaning of the communication. An archetypal example is, “Would you like to come in for a cup of coffee?” (Adult to Adult), which is really, “Let’s have it off at my place” (Child to Child).

But covert transactions are also the stuff of the repetitive, maladaptive, pain-invoking communications we have with each other, and whose uncovering is a core task of psychotherapy. In the language of Transactional Analysis, a *game* is a set series of covert (ulterior) transactions with predictable *negative payoffs* for each of the participants. Games are played by the *Adapted Child* ego states of the players, and although the overall process of different games may vary considerably, in all games the players move amongst only three roles, *Persecutor*, *Rescuer*, and *Victim*, switching roles in the course of the game but with each player always ending up in the role consistent with his or her most familiar negative payoff. While all of the roles are manifestations of the Adapted Child ego state, Persecutor masquerades as controlling Parent, Rescuer masquerades as nurturing Parent, and Victim masquerades as the authentic part of the Child ego state called the *Free Child*. We spot complementary players for our own games with amazing speed and precision across the most crowded room.

Through transactions with each other, we give and receive *strokes*, which nourish us and are as essential to our psychic survival as food is to our bodily survival. A *stroke* is any acknowledgement one person gives another, verbally or non-verbally. There are *unconditional positive strokes* (“I love you irrespective of anything you do to please or displease me”); *conditional positive strokes* (“If you tidy your room, I’ll buy you a new pair of jeans”); *conditional negative strokes* (“Do that once more and you’re grounded”); and *unconditional negative strokes* (“There’s nothing you can do or say to please me”). Strokes are so essential to us that, as all parents and teachers know full well, we would rather receive negative strokes than no strokes at all.

All strokes reinforce the behaviour they are given for. Positive strokes reinforce behaviour and make the recipient feel good about him- or herself; negative strokes reinforce behaviour and make the recipient feel bad about him- or herself. Punishment (negative strokes) only momentarily suppresses the behaviour it is given for, while actually increasing the expression of that undesired behaviour in the future. Only by consistently ignoring, that is, giving no strokes at all, is undesired behaviour gradually extinguished. (Animal trainers have always known this anti-commonsense truth. Why don’t we choose our political leaders from amongst animal trainers?)

We all have *positive* and *negative target strokes*, respectively the strokes that give us most pleasure and most pain, that most enlarge and most diminish our self-esteem. We acquired our positive target strokes through the overt and covert positive strokes we were given in early childhood; we acquired our negative target strokes through the overt and covert negative strokes we were given in early childhood. The positive strokes we received in early childhood, called our *permissions*, are associated

with the authentic expression of our Free Child ego state; the negative strokes we received in early childhood, called our *injunctions*, are associated with the chronic and compulsive games we play with our Adapted Child, leading to our most painful payoffs.

The totality of the strokes we received to all our growing ego states in early childhood are called our *messages*, which we autonomously combined (with the use of our Adult) into the handful of existential decisions that constitute the core of our being.

On with the show!

## CHAPTER ONE

### Zeitgeist

#### *In and out of time*

It is unlikely that the total span of recorded history has been a long enough time for evolution to have wrought any noticeable changes in “human nature”. Whenever and wherever people have recorded their reflections on the problems inherent in human beings’ relationships with each other and the universe, the same difficulties and perplexities are met with the same solutions and wisdoms over and over again.

“There is nothing new under the sun” and much evidence of circularity in the “truths” espoused by human beings. Those people we call original thinkers usually utter old truths afresh in a voice better attuned to the tone of their own time. Copernicus revised the Greek idea of a Sun-centred universe; Darwinian evolutionary theory had been espoused by various others since before the Common Era; the unconscious mind had its place and was at home in literature long before Freud; and in matters pertaining to love, the advice expressed by Ovid two thousand years ago is as popular in today’s magazines as it ever was. Apples falling on people’s heads and causing uniquely revelational moments in human thought are a romantic myth.

#### *Our contemporary voice*

Notwithstanding the timelessness and immutability of our deepest concerns—love, death, meaning, fate, and free will—we are so constituted as to keep wondering and struggling to find better ways of understanding ourselves than have so far been achieved. In the parlance of today, this quest may be seen as a reflection of our homeostatic disposition, the constant pull– push of arousal and quiescence that is written into our biology and which has amongst its spin-offs all of art, science, and philosophy.

Probably the longest cycle in the history of ideas is the alternating orientations of holism and atomism. Although neither orientation has ever been entirely absent, the general tenor of human thought seems to have begun holistic and then started swinging towards atomistic about two and a half thousand years ago, apparently reaching its apogee in the twentieth century, from which time it has begun to turn. Physics seems to have reached the turning point first, expressed in Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle and Einstein’s theory of relativity, but biology is still engaged in the tri-umphalism of the human genome and atomistic brain research. And

psychology, which only began to be atomistic when most other fields of endeavour were nearly finished with analysis, as an academic discipline is wildly out of step with the current *Zeitgeist*.

Outside academia, psychology seems to have found its contemporary voice by blending itself with philosophy and medicine, both of which fields have branches that seem precisely to reflect the compromises between materialism and mystery, determinism and choice that characterise humanity's present hovering outlook. In philosophy, existentialism is the name of the game; in medicine, it is homeopathy. Psychology that blends itself with these calls itself humanistic. Contemporarily, we are aware of the homeostatic balance between left-brain atomism and right-brain holism in what we call "New Age" thinking.

But the mundane reality of people's professional lives has lagged behind the movement of theories. The twentieth century was still one of increasing specialisation in which people were required to know more and more about less and less in order to procure their PhDs and ensure their viability in the employment marketplace. In many subjects, knowledge continued to be particularised to its limits; and perhaps more importantly for the general human condition, academics and others became more and more unhappily isolated in the autism of their specialisms.

But towards the end of the twentieth century and continuing to the present, there has been a burgeoning of interdisciplinary conferences and cogent but popular writing about science that extends communication and nourishing strokes for intellectual givers and receivers alike. It is no longer *infra dig* for academics to step out of their ivory towers and communicate simply with the intelligent lay public. Not only has this represented a backlash against the loneliness of those whose expertise is ultra-specialised; it is also a manifestation of a contemporary cultural climate in which academia is called upon to justify the funds it receives, and academic salaries are relatively low. Books such as James Gleick's *Chaos* (1988), John Gray's *Straw Dogs* (2002), and Dava Sobel's *Longitude* (2007), as well as many science-made-easy television programmes, have flourished, and such authors and television presenters are now envied rather than disdained by their colleagues for their popular acclaim and monetary gain.

While the particular preoccupations of any age may be seen with hindsight to be transient or even trivial, to the people alive at a given time they are imperatively demanding of attention. Though I am conscious of the unavoidable blinkeredness of my own here-and-now perspective, I believe there are a number of contemporary conditions that are stretching our innate adaptability to critical limits. Those of us alive today are suffering the Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times".

### *Population explosion*

By far the biggest change in human consciousness over the past fifty years has been the emergence of universal awareness of the world's population explosion. This was not the case even in the 1950s. Especially in Australia, where I was then living, there was plenty of room for everybody, full employment, and government hoardings that

exhorted us to “populate or perish”. Our individual existences were valued and useful to the collective, we knew we were needed and so were full of buoyant self-esteem.

Now, we all know there are far too many of us and the world could well do without us individually. Collectively, self-esteem is low, especially among the working classes whose unskilled labour has greatly diminished in value. In the developed countries with which we are familiar, the contented, conservative, reliable, conscientious working-class personality, full of pride and dignity, has been replaced by a personality type that is envious, bitter, pugnacious, amoral, hostile, and despairing. As a species, we have become like rats in an overcrowded cage.

The most extreme outcome of this critically unstable scenario is that, one way or another, like countless other species, we will fail to rise to the challenge and will become extinct. Yet there is already a spontaneous corrective response to our crisis of overpopulation that suggests we may save ourselves. Notwithstanding the desperate bids of many infertile couples to overcome their infertility with the aid of science, there are now many people—and especially women—who are voluntarily renouncing parenthood out of their own free will. This was virtually unheard of when I was first married fifty years ago, when having babies was the unreflected desire of all couples; and the small proportion of infertile couples would almost surely adopt the surplus of unwanted births as quickly as possible. Although the rise in declared homosexuality in some developed countries is clearly associated with its decriminalisation, it may be that its rise is factual as well as apparent, that is, an unconscious collective response to the world’s population crisis. And the proscription in China against having more than one child certainly suggests that a species-preservative adaptation is under way.

Even the use of “weapons of mass destruction” may have an ecological purpose. Only time will tell; but we are meanwhile faced with the here-and-now reality of many individuals with deeply undermined self-esteem associated with their perception of their personal redundancy. Responsively, it behoves us, as therapists and counsellors, empathically to philosophise with our clients on this contemporary contingency of the human condition.

### *The death of God*

For the whole of recorded history, mankind has found in its gods and their commandments the justification of turning away timidly rather than braving the excitement and terror of uncertainty. The major monotheistic religions counteract all our fears of uncertainty in espousing an all-loving, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God to whom we are obliged. Conceptually, we are thus made safe and certain; pragmatically, the commandments of God leave us little scope, if we are obedient, for doing much that might excitingly imperil our lives. If those who flout God’s commandments seem to survive His wrath unscathed, in societies where judicial legislature is religious, punishment is meted out by human judges in the name of God; in societies where secular authorities are less vengeful towards sinners, the obedient majority are reassured that the sinner will at least receive his or her just

deserts in the world to come. Psychologically speaking, the function of religion is to console us by justifying the sacrifices of adventure and excitement that we make for the sake of safety.

Our fear of death—and of the unknown generally— which is, throughout the world, rationalised and justified by our obedience to our understanding of God’s will, is intellectual as well as physical. Not only must we do and not do certain things in order to avoid punishment in this world or the next; we are also required to have pure thoughts and to refrain from heresy. God’s own punishment for a too open mind is insanity. For public heresies, men are publically punished—at least made to recant; for heresies that take place in the privacy of a man’s mind, the influence of God within him persuades him to make public his confession, or at least to experience the private punishment of guilt.

In the last hundred years or so, the Western world has become, at least nominally, a great deal more secular. For individual human beings, it now seems possible—perhaps for the first time in history—to disavow the existence of God without being out of line with the ethos of the culture. Humanism espouses “enlightened self-interest” as the new rationalisation of the old, God-imposed controls on our self- and other-destructive impulses, but increasing competition for jobs and homes, and the tenuousness of sexual relationships, seem to have invoked in us self-interest that tends to be more unbridled than “enlightened”.

Our new-found collective willingness to challenge the authority of God is less courageous than it superficially appears. At least until very recently, we were able to relinquish the reassurance of God only by replacing it with the reassurance of science. During the course of the few centuries since the Renaissance, God has trembled at the presumed insults to Him by men of science, most notably by Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud, who respectively disavowed man’s centrality in the universe, his specialness as a species, and his self-awareness. At first, God fought back valiantly, bringing down His wrath on hubristic mankind in the form of the Black Death and sundry other collective calamities, and on particular men and women in the form of inquisitions, burnings, and derision. But by the beginning of the twentieth century, the theories of science could confidently account for the most horrendous acts of God in materialistic terms. To very many more people than ever before, God was toppled and presumed dead.

But the new-found materialistic security of human consciousness has been very quickly found wanting. In the wake of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, Einstein’s theory of relativity and post-Einsteinian cosmologies, full of uncertainties and such nihilistic horrors as black holes, have permeated the everyday existential consciousnesses of large numbers of people. Without God to fall back on, we are left trembling at Nothing.

We are presently left floundering around in our quest for certainty and meaning in a choppy sea of possibilities. As yet, our lack of resolution is expressed in a primitively volatile mixture of despairing nihilism and despotic religious fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism is the bid to make God a fact, like scientific knowledge. Its literalism misses the point that there cannot be just one interpretation of anything. Out

of its adherents' desperate terror of death, fundamentalism avows the absolute one and only truth with absolute certainty of eternal life through privileged absolute knowledge of God. Unavoidably, it must righteously murder all infidels, whose mere existence threatens its precariously teetering security.

But notwithstanding the perils of fundamentalism, there is also peril in nihilism. Absoluteness, which is the ugly defence against existential terror, unites the two extremes. Dogmatic atheism and religious fundamentalism are opposites that are identical in their expression of contemporary spiritual disease.

### *The dissolution of trust*

In parallel to the dissolution of our trust in God—the super-duper Parent who makes everything all right in the end—we are also beset by the dissolution of trust in and respect for secular authority.

Professionalism is a function of the Parent ego state, encompassing the balance of caring responsibility and autonomous authority. A hundred years ago there were few professions, and the professions there were—doctors, lawyers, teachers, and the clergy—were revered and trusted for their unquestionable integrity and selfless concern for the people they served. Now, professionalism is democratized to include multitudes whose orientation is me-first Child rather than you-first Parent, so we feel justified in *mistrusting* the plethora of “servants” we rely upon to keep our cars, televisions, computers, plumbing, and roofs in states of repair; and we also call to account the traditional professions there were, discounting their authority and suspecting their integrity. Constant invigilation insults professional autonomy; complaints procedures abound; professionals who touch those in their care risk being charged with criminal abuse; targets are set for doctors and teachers as if they were manufacturers of consumer goods. The frightened Child in us all escalates its rebellious tyranny in the name of freedom while actually desperately seeking the containment of a confidently and lovingly controlling Parent. And the deposed Parent, divested of authority and respect, resorts to indemnity policies against litigation, or else bows out completely. At the time of writing (November 2010), according to a recent survey, one-third of teachers say they want to leave their profession within the next five years, and one-quarter of doctors want to quit their jobs. In America, in some high-risk areas of medical practice like neurosurgery, doctors are choosing to retire early rather than pay malpractice insurance premiums of up to \$200,000 per annum.

For psychotherapists, too, litigious action has become a constant risk and, even when not threatened legally, therapists are regularly taken to task and even disenfranchised by ethical committees which no longer tend to support their practitioners against complainants but, in the interest of protecting their politically correct status, fearfully presume the Child/Victim to be “right”. The deeply mutually challenging, complexly private relationship between therapist and patient, whereby the therapist plays out the controlling and nurturing Parent to the needy Child of the patient and to the satisfaction of both of them, has been democratized to “helper and

client” and fast approaches “seller and customer”, which, in the context of psychotherapy, means the “customer” does not get what he or she most needs.

Undoubtedly, there are abuses of Parental power— in the home and in society at large—that need to be addressed and dealt with by any civilised society; and maybe our present *Zeitgeist* in this regard is a backlash against such abuses in previous generations. Nevertheless, I maintain that our present *Zeitgeist* is an extreme that both reflects and reinforces the profound existential dis-ease that is the hallmark of our time. A psychotherapist today is challenged to go against the politically correct orthodoxies and to be the stalwart, confident, assertive, authoritative Parent that his or her patients/clients are deeply seeking.

### *Parents and children*

As for God and professional practitioners of all kinds, ordinary parents are today undermined in their authority and unconfident in their role.

### *Materialism*

It used to be the case that children stayed innocent of greedy materialism at least until their teenage years, when their desire for fashionable clothes and other possessions bears witness to their burgeoning need for sexual display. But in response to the market forces of capitalism, communicated to children principally through television advertising, over the past forty or fifty years children have become “consumers” and “customers” at ever-earlier ages, their innocence ruthlessly exploited by canny manufacturers of “must-haves” for every tiny tot. Birthday parties can no longer be simple celebrations, but every one competitively elaborate and expensive.

In the face of these forces, the most puritanical of parents find it virtually impossible to deprive their children of the goods that “everybody” has; and those parents who, by dint of poverty, are unable to provide these goods know the cruel scorn and humiliation their children will experience in the playground.

And rarely is it possible today for the income of one parent to suffice for a family’s needs. Most mothers are obliged to have at least part-time paid employment to meet the enormous cost of paying the mortgage, which is the average family’s anxious obsession.

### *Harassed togetherness*

Until about thirty years ago, when they were not at school, children “went out to play”, freely adventuring with other children who lived nearby. Typically, children left the house soon after breakfast, sometimes returning briefly for lunch but often taking picnic supplies with them, and only returning home in the late afternoon. They lived in the wonderland of imaginative play and the invigorating largesse of physical exploration of the outdoor environment. And the vast majority of children walked or