

**Schizophrenia, Primary Process Thinking, and Esoteric Religion: Reactions to  
Silvano Arieti's *Interpretation of Schizophrenia***

by Eric Heubeck

Much of the material included in this paper is excerpted from psychiatrist Silvano Arieti's book *Interpretation of Schizophrenia* (Basic Books, 1974). It is worth paying close attention to, since it won the 1975 National Book Award in the "Sciences" category. Also, a blurb on the back of the book written by a former president of the American Psychiatric Association says, "I am overwhelmed with the completeness of this volume of Arieti's. I suppose there is no one who knows more about this subject than does he. If there is someone, I don't know him." Another psychiatrist writes, "The author's knowledge of the schizophrenic shines through. He is one of the few to concern himself with the formal aspects of schizophrenic thought. In this edition he discusses teleologic regression, paleologic thought, and, as he sees it, the transference of ordinarily held abstract ideation into concrete representation." In fact, these "formal" or "structural" aspects of schizophrenia are the ones I will be paying the most attention to in this paper, and most of the excerpts from the book come from Arieti's discussion of this particular subject matter. It's not the most cutting-edge book on the neuroscience or pharmacological treatment of schizophrenia, but it remains valuable for my own purposes.

The material does not make for the easiest of reading. That's partly because the material is inherently difficult to grasp, and partly because I tend to meander somewhat in the way I present it, and I go off on various tangents in response to the excerpts. But I have included it at length, even at the risk of boring some readers, because I think it is so important that the material be thoroughly understood if we are to make sense of the Bible and other esoteric religious writings. And when I say "make sense," what I partly mean is that the material helps us to begin to understand the reasons why we *can't* ascertain the meaning of such writings with a degree of certainty sufficient to make them appropriate to serve as authoritative religious writings. It helps one to gain a firm grasp on what *precisely* is problematic about these esoteric religious writings, so that one will both understand why they need to be challenged, as well as be able to challenge them more effectively.

A primary reason why I am providing the passages from Arieti's book is simply to make certain basic background knowledge available, together in one place; and, for that reason, I will not comment upon each and every excerpt. However, I will insert my own comments whenever it seems fitting to me to do so, and I will also sometimes juxtapose the passages from Arieti with passages from esoteric religious writings, especially the Bible, in order to provide examples of how Arieti's material can be used to demonstrate the fundamentally schizophrenic nature of these writings. But by no means have I attempted to exhaust all the possibilities; and it is my hope that others will use the same method, using Arieti's writings as well as other psychiatric and psychological writings on

the subject of schizophrenic thought and language disorder, to explicitly identify some of the many other instances of schizophrenic (or, at the very least, “schizophrenic-like”) thinking exhibited in the Bible and elsewhere. In fact, I believe an entire book could be written devoted to doing nothing else than that—and I earnestly hope that someone with the proper qualifications writes that book. I think it would have a devastating impact on Christianity in its current form, which would in turn weaken the phenomenon of esoteric religion more generally.

Also, I strongly encourage you to *quickly* read the “lightly footnoted version” of my paper “The Relationship Between the New Testament Figures of Mary, the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved, and Mary Magdalene” before reading this paper. (In other words, if at any point you feel like you’re starting to get bogged down while reading it, just keep moving. It’s not necessary that you understand it very well the first time; in fact, I wrote it mainly for the purpose of leaving the reader confused and disoriented enough so that he or she would understand why this way of thinking needs to be put aside for good. Then, after reading this paper, you may wish to go back and reread “lightly footnoted version,” or else read the “fully footnoted version,” of the “Mary Magdalene” paper.) That paper and this one do a good job of shedding light on each other: the “Mary Magdalene” paper helps to illustrate the mechanisms of abnormal cognition discussed in this paper, and this paper helps the reader to identify some of the particular forms of abnormal cognition exhibited in the Bible and highlighted in that paper. A link to the “Mary Magdalene” paper can be found in the “Documents” section of the righthand sidebar.

Finally, as you read the excerpts, please bear in mind that if the text is only italicized, then the emphasis is that of the quoted author; if the text is both italicized and underlined, or both italicized and emboldened, then the emphasis is my own. Bracketed comments in quotations are my own, while parenthetical comments of those of the quoted author.

Now for the discussion of the material.

Arieti compares “schizophrenic thinking” to both “autistic thinking” and “primitive thinking” (the second of which is generally associated with the type of thinking found in “primitive societies”), on the grounds that all three kinds of thinking involve what Freud called “primary process” thinking—which has elsewhere been called “prelogical” or “paralogical” thinking, but which Arieti calls “paleologic” thinking. This is the kind of thinking usually associated with the unconscious mind and found in dreams. It is to be distinguished from “secondary process” thinking, which conforms to traditional Aristotelian logic and is the type of thinking usually found in normal, mentally healthy, conscious individual adults. In other words, as far as I can determine Arieti’s position seems to be that the conceptual class “paleologic thinking” embraces or includes the other three kinds of thinking, but is not equivalent to any of them. The relationship seems to be roughly that between genus and species.

I think I understand these distinctions, but I will acknowledge that with respect to my own purposes I am not as careful as Arieti about maintaining them, and I quite freely describe “autistic thinking” and “primitive thinking,” as well as “esoteric religious

thinking,” as all being more or less “schizophrenic” or “psychotic” in nature. As far as I’m concerned, it’s a distinction that doesn’t reflect enough of a difference to insist upon adhering to it. I am not a psychiatrist, and my goal is not to correctly diagnose patients for the sake of treating them, but to call attention to the close similarities between these kinds of thinking—similarities which I consider to be far more important to focus on than the differences. But do bear in mind that in some cases what I call “schizophrenic” Arieti would prefer to instead call “schizophrenic-like.”

Arieti writes,

Paleologic thought patterns are to a great extent based on a principle enunciated by [the psychiatrist Eilhard von] Domarus. Von Domarus, as a result of his studies on schizophrenia, formulated a principle that, in slightly modified form, is as follows: whereas the normal person accepts identity only upon the basis of identical subjects, the paleologist accepts identity based upon identical predicates. ...

...

[For example,] a patient thought that she was the Virgin Mary. Her thought process was the following: “The Virgin Mary was a virgin; I am a virgin; therefore I am the Virgin Mary.” The delusional conclusion was reached because the identity of the predicate of the two premises (the state of being a virgin) made the patient accept the identity of the two subjects (the Virgin Mary and the patient). She needed to identify herself with the Virgin Mary because of the extreme closeness and spiritual kinship she felt for the Virgin Mary, who was her ideal of feminine perfection. At the same time the patient had the need to deny her feeling of unworthiness and inadequacy.

The mechanisms or successive steps of paleologic thinking are not necessarily known to the schizophrenic, who automatically thinks in this way, just as the normal person automatically applies the Aristotelian laws of logic without even knowing them. ...

At times paleologic thought is even more difficult to interpret because the principle of Von Domarus is applied only partially; that is, some partial identity among the subjects is based upon partial or total identity of the predicate. For instance, a person who is conceived of by a schizophrenic as having a quality or characteristic of a horse may be thought of with a visual image consisting of part man and part horse. In this case, one subject, the person, is partially identified with the other subject, the horse, because of a common characteristic—for instance, strength.

It is well known how frequently similar distortions and condensations appear in hallucinations and drawings of schizophrenics. Similar conceptions appear in mythologies of ancient peoples and of primitives of today. As a matter of fact,

anthropologic studies may disclose to the careful reader how often the principle of Von Domarus is applied in primitive thinking. ... The reader may be convinced of the universality of Von Domarus's principle, just by reading a book of anthropology. The student of myths, legends, folklore, traditions, fairy tales, and so on, will also be impressed with the same findings. [pp. 230-33.]

In connection with this, consider Revelation 13:1-2:

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and upon its horns, ten crowns, and upon its heads, names of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and its feet like a bear's, and its mouth like (the) mouth of a lion; and the dragon gave to it its power, and its throne, and great authority.

By applying the principle found in Arieti's example, we might surmise that the "beast" was described as being partly leopard, partly bear, and partly lion because the author wished to attribute some quality shared in common by those animals, such as "fierceness," to the composite "beast."

Arieti continues,

... It will not be difficult to recognize the same organization or structures after a translation of the cognitive content into images has taken place in the dream. [And note that a reverse translation must be performed by the psychotherapist, along with the patient, in order to recover that cognitive content.]

Freud has shown that a person or object A having a certain characteristic of B may appear in the dream as being B or a composite of A and B. In the first case there is identification; in the second, composition. The whole field of Freudian symbolism, from a formal point of view, is based on Von Domarus's principle. A symbol of X is something that stands for X, but also something that retains some similarity with X—a common predicate or characteristic. Thus, a snake or a fountain pen may represent may symbolize penis because of the similar shape; king may symbolize father on account of the position they both enjoy; a box may symbolize a vagina because both a box and a vagina are apt to contain something in their cavities, and so on. ... [p. 234.]

Arieti continues,

[I]t is obvious that the predicate is the most important part in this type of thinking. In Aristotelian thinking only identical subjects are identified. The subjects are immutable; therefore, only a few (and the same) deductions are possible. In paleologic thinking, on the other hand, the predicates lead to the identification. ***Because the predicates of the same subject may be extremely numerous and because one does not know which one will be chosen by the patient in the***

**process of identification, this type of thought becomes bizarre, unpredictable, individualistic, and often incomprehensible. ...**

The predicate that is selected in the process of identification is called the “identifying link.” Why a certain predicate, out of numerous ones, should be selected as the identifying link can be found out only by the study of the emotional factors involved. In other words, emotional factors may determine which one of the predicates will be taken as the identifying link. ...

The emotional factors operating in paleologic thinking are, of course, the same as those described by Freud in *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and by Jung in *Psychology of Dementia Praecox* and in his works on word associations. However, a study limited to the consideration of emotional factors will not explain the formal manifestations of this type of thinking. Conscious or unconscious emotions are only the directing motivation of thoughts that ... acquire a paleologic mold. ...

Von Domarus’s principle indicates two aspects of schizophrenic cognition that only apparently are contradictory: on the one side, it defines this type of cognition as having a definite structure; on the other, it explains why cognitive conclusions reached by schizophrenics are so different from one another as to be unpredictable and thus make it impossible to talk of a schizophrenic language. The second characteristic is caused by the fact already referred to that the same subjects have many predicates, and we do not know which one is for psychodynamic reasons used by the patient in order to reach the identification. The result is that schizophrenic verbal productions, in spite of some common recognizable characteristics, often differ more from one another than they differ from verbal productions of normal people.

... A predicate is, by definition, something that concerns the subject. One is accustomed to recognizing as predicates abstract or concrete qualities of the subject or something that in a certain way is contained in the subject—for instance, the characteristic of being white, honest, attractive, big, small, of having a tail, and infinite other possibilities. These are called predicates of quality. There are, however, other characteristics that paleologically are conceived of as pertaining to the subjects and, therefore, are considered predicates, although they are not contained in the subject—for instance, the characteristic of occurring at a certain time or a given place. These are the predicates of contiguity. [Arieti then distinguishes between predicates of temporal contiguity and predicates of spatial contiguity.] In many other cases the identifying link is a mixture of predicates of the two different types, quality and contiguity.

If the identifying link is a predicate of quality, it will be relatively easy to understand the meaning of what the patient expresses. ***What are referred to in psychoanalytic literature as universal symbols are generally objects whose identifying links are predicates of quality. If the identifying link is an***

***accidental predicate of contiguity, obviously the symbol may be specific for the individual, and many details concerning his life history may be necessary in order to understand its meaning. ... [pp. 236-37.]***

Note, incidentally, that it therefore follows from this that in order to make sense of the symbolism of the Bible, interpreters will need to focus their attention on identifying “universal symbols” (in conjunction with the extensive and intensive cross-referencing of those universal symbols within the Bible), since, not being familiar in most cases with the life histories of the individual authors and editors of the Bible, the meanings of “private symbols” will usually be inaccessible to us unless the meaning is made reasonably explicit in the text itself. And that means we must focus on the quality or nature of the object serving as symbol if we are to surmise what its symbolic value may have been for the authors of the Bible. (Or its symbolic *values*, in the plural, especially if a particular symbol had different meanings for different authors.) Since “universal symbols” bridge the gap between “private symbols” or “paleosymbols,” whose meanings are known only to a single individual, and “socialized symbols,” whose meanings are commonly known, they potentially provide a means by which we might bridge at least some of the gap between the type of paleologic thinking found in esoteric religious writings, and the ordinary logical ways of thinking with which we are more familiar, allowing us to “translate” between the two to some extent.

Arieti continues,

If we take into consideration again traditional logic and its four laws of thought—law of identity, law of contradiction, law of excluded middle, law of sufficient reason—we may easily conclude, as we shall soon see, that the first three are annulled by Von Domarus’s principle. Before comparing paleologic logic with Aristotelian logic, however, I wish to point out that I am not necessarily implying that Aristotelian logic is the model of correct thinking in *an absolute sense*. This implication would require long philosophical discussions that are inappropriate here. I am aware of the criticisms that have been made of Aristotelian logic at different times. I have used Aristotelian logic as a system of reference because it is most commonly accepted as representative of normal thinking. It is only in this relative sense that the effect of Von Domarus’s principle on the first three laws of Aristotelian logic is examined. ...

The law of identity says that A is always A, never B. Now, according to Von Domarus’s principle, B may be A, provided B has a quality of A. The law of contradiction states that A cannot be A and not be A at the same time and place. Now, if the patient follows Von Domarus’s principle, he may see A as A and at the same time as B (that is, non-A), if he concentrates on a quality that A and B have in common. The law of excluded middle says that A must be A or not be A; there cannot be an intermediate state. In its tendency to condense several subjects, paleologic thinking seems to neglect this law of excluded middle. Things are often seen as a composite of A and B. For instance, in schizophrenic drawings one often sees a human figure who is half man and half woman. The

person represented in the drawing may be conceived by the schizophrenic as having a characteristic of the opposite sex. Also the emotional difficulty the schizophrenic has in identifying himself with one sex may be revealed formally by his nonadherence to the third law of thought. Similar composition (that is, abolition of the third law of thought) occurs quite commonly in dreams. The neologisms of the schizophrenic are due to composition of different verbal symbols.

The philosopher [Giambattista] Vico, who published his major works at the beginning of the eighteenth century, advanced similar ideas about the origin of mythological figures, for example, satyrs and centaurs. He wrote that the ancients, being unable to abstract the same property from two different bodies, united the bodies in their minds. Vico explained mythological *metamorphoses* in a similar way. If the subject acquires a new property that is more characteristic of a second subject, the first subject is conceived as *transformed* into the second. For instance, if a woman who used to travel or to change in many ways finally stopped at a certain place, and no further change occurred in her life, in the myth she might appear as transformed into a tree. [As a more recent example of this kind of thinking at work, consider the race of the Ents in the *Lord of the Rings* books/movies.] Even today angels are usually represented with wings because they are supposed to be in the sky (heaven) like birds. Vico's interpretation of myths may be applied also to dreams and to schizophrenic thinking.

... [I]n these types of thinking, *the part may symbolize the whole and the whole may symbolize the part*. In fact, according to Von Domarus's principle  $A = A + B + C$ , because the two terms of the equation have a part A in common. Therefore, in dreams and schizophrenic delusions we find that *a person, either the patient or another person, may be identified with a part of himself*, so that he may at the same time be symbolized by (identified with) several people, each of them having a quality that he has.

Von Domarus's principle often leads to delusions of identification of the patient with another person. The formal mechanism is the following: "*If A can be identified with B because they have a common quality, it will be sufficient for me to acquire a quality of the person I want to be identified with in order to become that person.*" The deluded patient discovers in himself a quality possessed also by a hero, a saint, or a general and then identifies himself with the person with whom he shares that given quality. Other deluded patients try to acquire identifying qualities or confer them on others. A paranoid schizophrenic wanted her child to become an angel. Because angels are nourished only by "spiritual food," she did not feed her child for a few days—that is, until her relatives became aware of her acutely developed psychosis. [pp. 237-39.]

Compare the preceding to 2 Corinthians 3:17, in which the apostle Paul writes,

And the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of (the) Lord (is), (there is) freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, reflecting (as in a mirror) the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** [*meta-morphoō*] into the **same** image, from glory to glory, just as from (the) Lord, (the) Spirit.

Also consider Galatians 6:17, in which Paul writes,

Henceforth, let no one give me troubles, for ***I bear the marks*** [*stigmata*] ***of Jesus*** on my body.

In other words, we seem to be seeing examples of a “transformation” and an “identification” similar to what was discussed by Arieti.

In addition, we can see how the doctrine of the Trinity, hinted at in 2 Corinthians 3:17, may be exemplifying paleologic thinking, since in that verse Paul at first appears to be *identifying* “the Spirit” with “the Lord” (when Paul writes “the Lord *is* the Spirit”), but then immediately after speaks of a “Spirit *of* the Lord,” which raises the possibility that the two were *not* understood to be conceptually identical. Two possible ways of explaining this peculiarity of expression occur to me.

The first is that “the Spirit” was understood by Paul to be able to take more than one form, and “the Spirit *of the Lord*” is the “the Spirit” *as it takes form* in “the Lord” (with “the Lord” perhaps understood to signify something like “universalized Spirit,” as opposed to “particularized or individualized spirit”). In that case, “the Spirit” would be the more all-embracing concept (i.e., “the whole,” or “the genus”), and “the Lord” (“universalized Spirit,” *ex hypothesi*) would be a *particular way of manifesting* that larger general concept, or a *particular type of instance* (i.e., a “part,” or a “species”) of it. Now, as a general matter—if this was indeed what Paul meant by saying that “the Lord *is* the Spirit” (assuming Paul even had a clear understanding of what he meant)—it wouldn’t necessarily be objectionable for him to speak in these terms, any more than it would be objectionable for him to say, “The lion *is* an animal”—even though “lion” and “animal” are two distinct concepts. In other words, if that’s what he had meant, Paul would *not necessarily* have been *identifying* “the Lord” with “the Spirit” in this particular verse. The *problem* with any such a supposition comes from the fact that, according to the traditional doctrine of the Trinity—which finds explicit scriptural support in [Matthew 28:19](#)—“the Lord Jesus Christ” and “the Holy Spirit” are considered to be *unique* “persons” of *equal* stature; their relationship is not as between “species” and “genus.” “The Lord” is not considered to be “a kind” of Spirit, or “a type of manifestation” of Spirit, in the same way that a lion is “a kind” of animal.

The second, and I think more likely, possibility is that when Paul speaks of a “Spirit of the Lord,” it may suggest that he understood “the Lord” to be *more than* “the Spirit”; it would be “the Spirit” that was—*in this particular context*, that is—understood to be *part of* a whole (“the Lord”); in which case, “Spirit” should be thought of as a *quality* of “the Lord”—but also, at the same time, as a subject *in its own right*, and not *only* a quality—*as soon as the context is changed*. Recall what Arieti wrote above: “[I]f the patient

follows Von Domarus's principle, he may see A as A and at the same time as B (that is, non-A), *if he concentrates on a quality that A and B have in common.*" Perhaps "the Spirit" and "the Lord" came to be conceptually identified in Paul's mind—at least some of the time—because they were both understood to share the same quality of "Spirit."

Evidence of this same type of mental confusion regarding the Trinity can be found by considering [2 Corinthians 1:3](#), in which Paul speaks of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." So it would appear that there is a conceptual distinction to be made between "God" and "the Lord (Jesus Christ)"—a distinction frequently made by Paul in his epistles. But 2 Corinthians 3:17 tells us that "*the Lord* is the Spirit," while in [John 4:24](#), Jesus tells us that "*God* is Spirit." So, bearing in mind one of the methods that Arieti used to summarize Von Domarus's principle, in the formula " $A = A + B + C$ ," we might apply that formula to the Christian Trinitarian scheme in the following manner: "the Spirit (A) = the (Holy) Spirit (A) + God the Father (B) + the Lord Jesus Christ (C)"—since, presumably, all of them share the same quality of "Spirit." (And I'm leaving aside the fact that "God" and "the Lord" are not even consistently distinguished in the Bible, especially in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, but also in New Testament passages such as [Mark 12:29-30](#).) Thus the doctrine of the Trinity, at least as it is presented to us in the Bible, seems to illustrate Von Domarus's principle. Furthermore, to the extent that *individual human beings* believe they are able to share in this *same quality* of "Spirit" (thereby making themselves into a kind of "fourth term" in the equation, that of "D"), then they too might, in their own minds, become *identified with* or *confused with* or *transformed into* some other "term" in the same "equation"—most likely, "the Lord Jesus Christ"—making it possible for a person to say the sort of thing that we find said in Galatians 6:17:

Henceforth, let no one give me troubles, for *I bear the marks of Jesus* on my body.

Arieti continues,

Paleologic thinking can be interpreted with formulations that are apparently different from Von Domarus's principle and yet refer to the same phenomena. We may, for instance, state that the cognitive faculty of the schizophrenic organizes classes or categories that differ from those characteristic of normal thinking. For normal persons *a class is a collection of objects to which a concept applies*. For instance, Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt, Truman, and others form a class of objects to which the concept "president of the United States" applies. In paleologic thinking *a class is a collection of objects that have a predicate or part in common* (for instance, the state of being a virgin); *by virtue of having such predicate or part in common, these objects become identified or equivalent*. Whereas the members of a normal class (arrived at by secondary process cognition) are recognized as being *similar* (and it is actually on their similarity that their classification is based), the members of a paleologic class (arrived at by primary process cognition) become *equivalent*; that is, they are *freely interchanged* (for instance, the patient becomes the Virgin Mary). Not only

do they all become equivalent, but *one of them may become equivalent to the whole class.*

It is easy to understand why this is so. In primary classification only the common element counts; all the rest is not important or not noticed or not responded to fully by the organism. *The common element is the predicate, which the psyche experiences deeply.* [p. 240.]

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:14, in which the apostle Paul writes,

**For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded thus: that one has died for all, therefore all have died.**

It seems that in this case the “common element” or “predicate” is “being dead”; apparently, the idea of “being dead” is what the collective “psyche” of the early Christians “experienced deeply.” Perhaps those Christians felt that they were already “dead” in some sense; and that is why they identified so strongly with the figure of the crucified Jesus, and also why they yearned so strongly for “resurrection”—not just in the next life, but also in this one.

Somewhat reminiscent of the example given above about the patient who identified herself with the Virgin Mary because she was a virgin, consider the following passage from the non-canonical “Gospel of Philip” (which should be read in conjunction with [John 19:25-27](#)), which I quote in one of the footnotes to my paper “The Relationship Between the New Testament Figures of Mary, the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved, and Mary Magdalene”:

**There were three who always walked with the Lord: Mary, his mother, and her sister, and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary. [Translation by Wesley W. Isenberg. Source: [the Gnosis Archive.](#)]**

Notice that the type of thinking exhibited here falls under Von Domarus’s principle, in at least two ways. First, the Lord’s mother Mary, her sister Mary, and his companion Mary Magdalene share a common predicate, the name “Mary”; and, as a result of that, the three distinct subjects are being identified as the result of the author forming what Arieti calls a “primary class” or “paleologic class,” on the basis of sharing that common predicate, rather than on the basis of any abstract essential concept that applies to each of them alike, thus rendering them similar. (And my contention that they are being identified and treated as interchangeable becomes harder to refute if one reads my “Mary Magdalene” paper.)

Now, one might argue that the name “Mary” perhaps does actually signify some abstract concept in the mind of the author; in other words, perhaps a universal “Mary” is serving as the “subject,” while the individualizing of the universal “Mary” into various literary characters effectively serves to assign various Aristotelian “predicates” to that single

universal “subject.” (E.g., “Mary” can be “motherly,” “Mary” can be “sisterly,” “Mary” can be “wifely,” etc.) The problem is that even if that’s true, other persons reading the writing—at least, those who have not yet been “initiated” into the secret knowledge—will not know what that particular abstract concept is, since the word “Mary” would ordinarily be understood to function as a proper name, not a conceptual class name. That is what makes the formation of these “primary classes” both esoteric and schizophrenic in nature: the thinking process is basically autistic, idiosyncratic, subjective, and inaccessible to outsiders.

And those tendencies are exacerbated by the fact that the Gospels appear to be fictional allegories of some kind; in the real world, one would not expect abstract concepts to coincide with proper names so readily. This is an extremely important point, since it is the *fictitiousness* of the Bible that has produced so much mental mayhem in the world. The fictional form of writing gives a great deal more *freedom* to a schizophrenic mind to engage in imaginative flights of fancy that need not obey “restrictive” secondary process ways of thinking that strive to correspond to an objective reality.

It is worth stressing here the point that Arieti makes:

[The comparative psychologist Heinz] Werner rightly states that “this kind of interpretation is rooted in an altogether different mental pattern, a differently constituted faculty of conception, from that exhibited by the scientifically thinking man.” He adds that this primitive mode of thinking is neither illogical nor prelogical. It is logical in a different sense. [p. 233.]

That is correct; and it provides the reason why Arieti speaks of “paleologic” rather than “prelogic.” Unfortunately, I don’t feel that in his book Arieti ever sufficiently zeroes in on precisely what is defective about “paleologic thinking,” which is its basic autism. *Strictly speaking*, it is not illogical to classify an object on the basis of (what appears to outsiders to be) a merely accidental predicate or part attribute, since what appears to outsiders to be “accidental” might actually prove to be “essential”—once one had come to understand the meanings found in the “secret language” spoken by the schizophrenic person or religious esotericist. The problem with what Arieti calls “paleologic,” and the reason why it is inferior to what we ordinarily call “logic,” is that it is a logic that is not *shared* with the rest of the society speaking the same language; and that is because the same linguistic *meanings* are not shared with the rest of the society speaking the same language. Aristotle has sometimes been criticized on the grounds that his logical writings cannot be studied apart from the “peculiarities” of the Greek language. But it seems to me that the very reason *why* we associate Aristotelian logic with our own ordinary ideas of “logic” is that Aristotle placed the emphasis he did on looking at how words and language were *commonly used* in his own culture.

Without a shared language, a shared logic becomes impossible (although it is of course possible to be illogical even with the benefit of a shared language); and without accepting a shared logic, it becomes only a matter of time before the schizophrenic individual or religious esotericist will regress to the point where he is largely incapable of *any* kind of

logical thinking—even logical thinking of a “private” kind—since the mental structure and discipline generated by meaningful and responsive communicatory exchanges with others gradually slips away from him. (And that regression is no doubt accelerated when a person’s conceptual thinking is expressed exclusively in the form of fictional writings.)

The second way in which the passage from the Gospel of Philip seems to exhibit Von Domarus’s principle is that the figure of “Mary” is described as being the “sister” *of “the Lord”*—even as “Mary” is *also* described as being the “sister” *of “Mary,” the “mother” of “the Lord.”* As I explain in one of the footnotes in the “fully footnoted version” of my “Mary Magdalene” paper, it appears that the author of John 19:25-27 may have been thinking of the name/figure “Mary” as referring to both Jesus’s “mother” and “sister” at the same time, perhaps for reasons related to [Matthew 12:46-50](#), in which the primary class “disciple” is described as including both Jesus’s “mother” and his “sisters.” According to Von Domarus’s principle, that would make Jesus’s “mother” and “sisters” identical and therefore interchangeable, since they’re all “disciples”: the attribute of “being a disciple” has apparently been transformed from a predicate into a subject, while the various characters in the story are made to serve as different predicates of the archetypal subject “Disciple.” If the name “Mary” signified a “disciple,” and if a “disciple” could be either a “sister” or a “mother,” this would explain how the name/figure “Mary” could simultaneously refer to both the “mother” and the “sister” of the Lord, at the same time that one “Mary” could be the sister of another “Mary.” So two “Mary’s” could potentially be two “sisters” of the Lord, in which case they would also be “sisters” of one another, since presumably they would both be full-sisters of the Lord (rather than two half-sisters of the Lord who are unrelated to each other). The reason I say that is because first, there is only one “father in the heavens,” and second, every “mother” is a type of “Mary”—so all of those “siblings” must have the same “father” and “mother.”

Isn’t “paleologic” fun?

Arieti continues,

In my opinion the phenomena studied ... in schizophrenia do not represent a reduction of the psyche to a concrete level, but a *process of active concretization*. *By active concretization I mean that the psyche is still capable of conceiving the abstract, but not of sustaining it because the abstract is too anxiety provoking or too disintegrating.* We must remember that abstract ideations are not lost by the schizophrenic. If they were lost, the patient would not have schizophrenogenic anxiety. *The abstract ideations, however, are transformed by the psychotic into concrete representations.* [p. 218.]

***Whatever cannot be sustained at an abstract level, because it is too anxiety provoking, is reduced to, or translated into, concrete representations.*** [p. 572.]

I must say that I have some doubts about Arieti’s explanation for the extensive use of highly metaphorical language by schizophrenics, which seems to assume that this process

of “active concretization” takes place largely if not exclusively at an unconscious level of thought. I don’t doubt that that occurs some of the time, and indisputably in dreams, but I get the sense that in too many instances supposedly “schizophrenic” language is being taken literally by the psychiatrist when the patient understands perfectly well that he is speaking metaphorically. That is not to say that there would be no language disorder present in such instances; there clearly would be. But one might argue that there would be no true *thought* disorder. The problem, however, is that to the extent that there is language disorder present, the patient is cut off from mental intercourse with others; and I have to believe that in many cases any such mental isolation would lead to more and more thought disorder as the patient’s thinking became increasingly idiosyncratic, subjective, and bizarre.

In fact, Arieti gives consideration to a point of view that is roughly similar to mine:

There is finally another possibility that must be taken into consideration for the purpose of understanding schizophrenic cognition: namely, that *the patient thinks in an abnormal way simply because he wishes to do so*. This possibility may prove to be not as absurd as it may seem at first consideration, at least in some cases. Some patients, during the period of preschizophrenic panic, are able to evaluate in a conscious way what they consider the failure of their existence and to predict the unfulfillment of their life promises. *The ways of thinking that in the past would occasionally emerge to consciousness and then be immediately rejected because they were unrealistic have now a very strong seductive appeal*. The patient may choose to embrace them. Once they embrace these thoroughly, they can no longer dismiss them.

I believe that although the hypothesis cannot possibly explain the psychotic transformation, it may contain elements of truth. In some schizophrenics and preschizophrenics, and especially in incipient schizophrenics, there are periods during which the patient seems to understand both the world of reality and the world of psychosis and to be able potentially to choose between them. [p. 220.]

Arieti continues,

Before discussing schizophrenic language in detail we shall define three terms used in this context: connotation, denotation, and verbalization. The first two are traditionally used in the field of logic; the third has been introduced by the author.

...

... [T]he term table may be considered from three aspects: its *connotation*, when one refers to its meaning; its *denotation*, when one refers to the object meant; its *verbalization*, when one considers the word as a word; that is, as a verbal expression independent of its symbolic value. We can also more simply state that *the connotation is a thought, the denotation a thing, the verbalization a word*.

... Whereas the healthy person in a wakened state is concerned mainly with the connotation and the denotation of a symbol but is capable of shifting his attention from one to another of the three aspects of a symbol, the schizophrenic tends to become more concerned with the denotation and the verbalization and experiences an impairment of his ability to connote. [p. 250.]

I have to wonder if the schizophrenic does not instead experience a loss of *interest* in connoting *in the way that others do*, which appears to others as an impairment of *ability* to do so. I have repeatedly had this impression when reading the responses of schizophrenics to psychological test questions.

(By the way, Arieti is using the word “connote” as it is sometimes used in the field of logic, but in a way that that slightly departs from its traditional meaning, which is “to suggest or imply in addition to the literal meaning.” To avoid confusion, I suggest that you just substitute the word “meaning” [or “intension”] for the word “connotation” when you come across it.)

Arieti continues,

In many cases, when the connotation value is diminished or lost, the attention of the schizophrenic is focused on the verbalization or on the word merely as a word or a purely phonetic entity. The loss or diminution of the socially established semantic value (*semantic evasion* or *loss*) is accompanied by increased value of the verbalization (*formal pregnancy*). When this happens, several different situations may ensue:

1. Often mental processes occur that are stimulated only by verbalization.
2. The verbalization becomes the identifying link in identifications.
3. The verbalization becomes confused with the whole or part of the denotation; that is, the word and its characteristics may be taken as identical with the thing and its characteristics.
4. Ideas associate not because of their meaning but because of the phonetic quality of the words by which they are represented. Words also associate for phonetic reasons.
5. The assonance, and other phonetic qualities, are invested with special semantic meaning. [p. 254.]

Arieti continues,

The third possibility mentioned [listed above] concerns the tendency of the verbalization to become part of the denotation, when the connotation has been lost; that is, the schizophrenic sees the verbal symbol as part of the thing that is symbolized. [Ernst] Cassirer, too, has noted that in primitive thinking there is an essential identity between the word and what the word denotes. The word is not a mere conventional symbol, but it is merged with its object in an indissoluble unity. Thus word magic originates. The word denoting an object acquires the

same property of the object and may be substituted for the object when the latter is not available. The name of a god is as powerful as the god himself. [Heinz] Werner and many other authors have reported identical observations. [p. 256]

I mentioned above that it is conceivable that one might legitimately create a genuine “paleologic logic”—that is, provided one had a “secret language.” So it is unlikely to be a coincidence that “secret languages” are indeed common both among schizophrenics and in esoteric initiatory religions. For example, in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton University Press, 1964), historian of religion Mircea Eliade writes,

Tibetan [Buddhist] tantrism has a secret language, called the “tongue of the dakini,” just as the various Indian [Hindu] tantric schools use the “twilight language” in which the same term can have as many as three or four different meanings. All this in some measure approaches the the “spirit language” or “secret language” of the shamans, both of North Asia and of Mayala and Indonesia. It would even be highly instructive to study to what extent techniques of ecstasy lead to linguistic creations and to determine the mechanisms of the latter. Now, we know that the shamanic “spirit language” not only attempts to imitate animal cries but contains a certain proportion of spontaneous creations presumably explained by pre-ecstatic euphoria and ecstasy itself. [p. 440.]

The existence of words capable of having “three or four different meanings” is indicative not only of an esoteric religious “twilight language”; it also brings to mind the verbal ambiguity that has so frequently been observed in the communication of schizophrenic persons. By allowing a term to have “three or four different meanings” in their “secret languages,” these religious traditions are encouraging the splitting up of meaning that I believe is so closely associated with the development of schizophrenia. And the “spontaneous creations presumably explained by pre-ecstatic euphoria and ecstasy itself” mentioned by Eliade similarly brings to mind schizophrenic/psychotic, dream-like, hypnotic trance-like, primary process ways of thinking and communicating. In fact, the very phrase “twilight language” seems to suggest that the thinking involved is related to the kind of thinking that occurs in the hypnagogic/hypnopompic (“half-asleep”) mental state.

Arieti continues,

Since [Carl] Jung’s formulation, schizophrenic symptoms have been compared to dreams of normal and neurotic persons and have been interpreted similarly. However, whereas dreams are interpreted while the patient is awake and has reacquired the normal cognitive functions, the schizophrenic has to be treated while he is still in “the dream” of the psychosis. [p. 571.]

Arieti continues,

When the word has lost its connotation power, its denotation and verbalization acquire greater significance. The word, disrobed of its connotation, in a certain

way remains isolated from a logical context but increases its emotional tone, acquires more subjective value, a uniqueness that is connected with the subjective sensorial image of the individual. In other words, it becomes much nearer to the perceptual level. Ideas are, therefore, quite often expressed with words which describe sensory images. [Alfred] Storch has described this phenomenon in schizophrenia at length. One of his patients spoke of “a heap of truth,” another of an “idea” as being “smaller than a flea,” and so on. [p. 253.]

In connection with Arieti’s statement that in the case of schizophrenics, “Ideas are ... quite often expressed with words which describe sensory images,” consider Jesus’s frequent use of parables in the Gospels. Consider, for example, Mark 4:33-34:

**And with many such parables (Jesus) communicated (his) meaning [or message, or word: *logos*] to them, in the degree that they were able to hear [*akouō*]. And apart from a parable he would not communicate with them; but in private he explained [or interpreted, or determined, or resolved, or solved; more literally, “loosened,” or “untied,” or “released,” or “opened,” or “set free,” or “unlocked”]: *epi-lyō*] everything for his own disciples.**

Also, specifically with respect to an “idea” being spoken of as “smaller than a flea,” consider Mark 4:30-32, in which Jesus says:

**To what may we liken the kingdom of God, or in what parable may we establish [or found: *tithēmi*] it?**

(Incidentally, compare [Revelation 21:14](#) and its use of the Greek words *themelios*, which means “foundation” and is derived from *tithēmi*, meaning “to lay, to set, to found, to establish”; and *apostolos*, meaning “apostle” or “one who was sent out.” Also compare those two passages with [Ephesians 2:19-20](#), in which Paul associates “prophets” with the “apostles,” and says of both of them that they serve as the “foundations,” *themelios*, of the same “house of God” of which Jesus Christ serves as the “capstone.” In other words, in a comparison of these passages a suggestion may be found that the cryptic “parables” and “prophecies”—that is, the “schizophrenic-like” or “primary process” ways of communicating—correspond to the “foundation” of the “building,” in which case ***the deciphering and proclaiming of the meaning*** of that type of communication would serve as the “top” or “completion” or “fulfillment” of that “building”—which would also correspond to the figure of “Jesus Christ” at the time of his “coming.” The “new Jerusalem” would then signify both that “building” as well as “the kingdom of God” referred to by Jesus in the parable.)

Jesus then proceeds to answer his own question, “To what may we liken the kingdom of God, or in what parable may we establish it?”:

**As to a mustard seed [reminiscent of the phrase “smaller than a flea”—which at least suggests the possibility that the author understood “the kingdom of God” to correspond to “an idea” which had not yet spread], which when it has been sown**

upon the earth is smallest of all the seeds which are upon (the) earth. And when it has been sown, it grows up [more literally, “goes up,” or “*ascends*,” or “rises”: *ana-bainō*] and becomes greatest of all the garden plants, and produces great branches, so that under its shadow [*skia*] the birds of the air [or heaven: *ouranos*] are able to dwell [*kata-skénoō*, derived from *skéné*, which means “tent” and is related to the word *skia*, meaning “shadow”].

(Cf. [Revelation 21:2-3](#), and its use of the Greek words *kata-bainō*, meaning “to *descend*”; *ouranos*, meaning “heaven”; *skéné*, meaning either “tent” or “tabernacle”; and *skénoō*, meaning either “to dwell in a tent” or “to make one’s tabernacle.” In other words, a comparison of the two passages may be illustrating Von Domarus’s principle, by their having something associated with God—namely, the “birds of the heaven,” perhaps signifying the “angels of God”—stand in for God himself in the parable. It may be that the authors were thinking that “that which ascends” and “that which descends” would “meet each other in the air [Greek *aér*]” (cf. [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#)). If so, then “that which ascends” and “that which descends” would just be two ways of thinking about the creation of the same “house of God” mentioned above—that is, the same “church” and the same “new Jerusalem”—depending on whether one was viewing it “below,” from its “human” aspect, or “above,” from its “divine” aspect.)

Arieti, after providing the contents of a letter written by one of his schizophrenic patients named “Margaret,” in which he notes that “there is no logical or directed thinking, and therefore no apparent purpose,” proceeds to caution the reader,

In all schizophrenic writings or verbal productions we must not stop with examining the lack of logical continuity and the specific formal characteristics. Whenever possible we must examine also the content, ***the schizophrenic’s conscious or unconscious attempt to convey a meaning in spite of his difficulties***, and the distortions in the meaning. As we shall see again in Part Nine, this type of examination will be very useful in psychotherapy, even in regressed patients. [p. 260.]

With this thought in mind, Arieti then writes,

Now if we reexamine Margaret’s letter, ***we find that it had a meaning***. ...

...

Thus a ***second*** examination of this letter shows that this patient is aware of many things, although in an unclear or peripheral form of consciousness. The extent of her feelings and the gamut of her intellect, as well as the results of experiences before and during the illness (misplaced sympathies, suicidal thoughts) come through in spite of the mental disintegration. ***The meaning is conveyed not by logical progression of thought, but by the totality of the thoughts***. No matter how disconnected, the letter conveys a tone, an atmosphere, “a sphere of meaning”.... [pp. 260-61.]

In connection with the idea of a “second examination” of the letter, consider Acts 17:32, which says,

And having **heard** [*akouō*] (about) a resurrection of (the) dead, some (of the Athenian philosophers) mocked [or sneered, or scoffed, or jeered: *chleuazō*]. But some said (to the apostle Paul), “**We will hear** [*akouō*] **you again** about this.”

Consider the possibility that “hearing a first time” was meant to be associated with the “outer meaning” or “literal meaning” of the notion of “a resurrection of the dead,” while “hearing a second time” was meant to be associated with gaining an understanding of the “inner meaning” or “metaphorical meaning” of that same notion. Such a reading receives some support from Galatians 4:21-24, in which Paul associates being able to “hear” (*akouō*) with being able to understand the “allegorical meaning” or “inner meaning” or “hidden meaning” of the scriptures:

Tell me, those wanting to be under the (Mosaic) law, **do you not hear** [*akouō*] **the law**? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one from the slave woman and one from the free (woman). But the (son) of the slave woman has been born in conformity with flesh, and the (son) of the free (woman) through the promise—**which (figures) are (serving as) allegories** [*allégoreō*].

Now, am I reading too much into the first passage’s use of the word “hear” (*akouō*) by reading it in light of the second passage’s use of it? If we assume that the authors of the New Testament were schizophrenic (or “schizophrenic-like”), then I think the answer is likely “no.” Consider the following passage from Arieti:

Because they are so involved with verbalization, patients often discover puns all over and feel that these puns are used purposely to annoy them. Actually quite often **the patients themselves, because of this unusual capacity to concentrate on the verbalization, become very skillful in making puns.** [p. 255.]

If one needs a clear example of Paul’s facility at creating puns, double-entendres, and amphibolies, even when he wasn’t writing “esoterically” *per se*, consider [Galatians 5:2-12](#). (And it can be assumed that the other authors of the New Testament would have had a roughly similar facility.) Specifically, in the course of discussing the topic of being “circumcised” (Greek *peri-temnō*), Paul uses the Greek words *kat-argeō* (twice, in fact), here apparently meaning “to cut off” or “to sever”; *ek-piptō*, which can mean “to fall off”; *eg-koptō*, which can figuratively mean “to impede, hinder,” but more literally means “to cut into”; and *apo-koptō*, meaning “to cut off” (probably with a double meaning intended, in which case it would mean both “to castrate oneself” and “to ostracize oneself from others”).

Incidentally, the schizophrenic’s “unusual capacity to concentrate on the verbalization” also helps to explain why it is important to pay attention to the etymologies of words when reading esoteric religious writings. (Etymology and punning actually pertain both

to what Arieti is calling the “verbalization” of a word as well as to what he is calling the “connotation” of a word.) Both schizophrenics and esotericists tend to be highly interested in and alert to the etymologies of words, both in their writing and in their reading. This is related to their interest in teasing out ambiguities of meaning in language, which enables them to easily pass back and forth between the literal and metaphorical senses of a word, which in turn helps to facilitate the word play and punning that they often engage in, in which they take advantage of the multiple possible meanings that individual words, verbal figures, or lengthier passages of writing can have. The existence of this tendency makes it especially inappropriate for esoteric religious writings to be written in foreign languages which must be translated in order to be (supposedly) “understood.” (Of course, that is not to suggest that esoteric writings are appropriate in *any* language—at least if they are being made to serve as authoritative religious writings.)

Arieti continues,

Even normal people do not adopt the most mature ways of thinking. *Some* normal persons, but more frequently neurotic and borderline patients, follow what I have called *spontaneous organization*. Spontaneous organization of thinking is not directed by a search for logical consistency or for consensual validation but by a tendency to satisfy wishes and to give to these wishes an apparently logical sustenance by resorting to primary process cognition. This, of course, is reminiscent of schizophrenia. The ***hidden motivation*** is easily ***uncovered*** by psychotherapy. [p. 286.]

Compare this to Mark 4:22, in which Jesus says,

For nothing is ***hidden*** [or secret: *kryptos*], except that it should be ***made manifest*** [or revealed, or made visible, or made clear: *phaneroō*], nor has a ***hidden*** (thing) [or secret (thing): *apo-kryphos*] ***come into being, except that it should come to (be made) manifest*** [or apparent, or visible: *phaneros*].

Arieti continues,

In the most pronounced cases, schizophrenic language appears *obscure* or utterly incomprehensible. Some authors go to the extent of interpreting the *lack of clarity* of schizophrenic language as an effort on the part of the patient *to hide from others, or even more probably from himself*, the anxiety-provoking content of what he has to say. ***He does not want to communicate***. These authors see in the schizophrenic speech ***the same mechanism that Freud saw in dreams: an attempt to hide the manifest content***. [p. 249.]

Why would the authors of the Bible wish to hide the meaning of their communications, either from themselves or from others? Why would that meaning generate anxiety in them? I submit that it is because the most central “hidden meaning” of the Bible is that all esoteric, mythical, cryptically symbolic religion must be brought to an end if humanity

is to become thoroughly sane and honest so that it can reach its full potential; but the authors of the Bible shrank back from *consciously* proposing such a drastic change in human affairs, given the fact that that kind of religion is the only kind of religion that human beings have ever known. In other words, the time was apparently not yet right for their true “hidden meaning” to “rise to the surface,” even in their own minds.

Arieti continues,

Another phenomenon that [Norman] Cameron has studied in advanced schizophrenia is what he calls “asyndetic thinking.” At the level of language behavior this disorder manifests itself as a juxtaposition of elements, without adequate linkage between them. It should be mentioned here that such juxtapositions are identical with those that Freud has described in his study of dreams. In my opinion *there is not only a juxtaposition of elements but also a juxtaposition of meanings. Certain sentences are as confusing as photographic films that have been exposed several times. The superimposed images and meanings, however, have some connection in the mind of the patient.* [And this connection among meanings may make it theoretically possible to discern the overall meaning of the patient’s communication.] Often the word that, as we have mentioned, is representative of an enlarged context is taken to represent another context of which it is also a part, and *the two contexts become superimposed. Schizophrenic thought often bristles with different planes of meaning* and is, as I call it, *multifocal*, because it has to focus at the same time on different meanings with their different objective situations. [p. 263.]

For a good example of this type of confusion of meanings as it occurs in the Bible, please see the “fully footnoted version” of my paper “The Relationship Between the New Testament Figures of Mary, the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved, and Mary Magdalene.” I would also recommend viewing my website post, “[Hidden in plain sight: Esoteric meanings in Jesus’s parables](#),” for a relatively quick, clear, and obvious illustration of the type of “superimposition of meanings” or “juxtaposition of meanings” being discussed by Arieti.

Incidentally, the paper “The Relationship Between the New Testament Figures of Mary, the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved, and Mary Magdalene” also does a good job of illustrating the points made in the following overview of schizophrenic thought and language disorder provided by Arieti:

According to [Norman Cameron] schizophrenic thought has the following characteristics:

1. It is asyndetic; that is, it has few causal links.
2. It is metonymic; that is, it lacks precise terms and uses words with approximate meaning. For instance, a patient instead of saying that he had three meals a day said he had “three menus.”

3. It presents interpenetrations; that is, parts of a theme intrude with others with which they are not related.
4. It presents overinclusions; that is, includes material with which there may be only peripheral connections.
5. It presents requests to change the conditions with which problems are solved in order to justify the errors.
6. It presents incongruity between acts and words.
7. It presents ineffectual change of generalizations and hypotheses in the attempt to find solutions.
8. It presents disorganization rather than organic deterioration. [p. 297.]

Also, when Arieti says that “schizophrenic thought often bristles with different planes of meaning,” consider how this fact points to the similarity between schizophrenia and the practice of religious esotericism, with its *splitting* of an “outer meaning” from one or more “inner meanings” or “*hidden meanings*.” I contend that this “splitting of meaning” is associated with the “split mind” that characterizes schizophrenia (a word derived from the Greek words *schizō*, meaning “to split, to tear,” and *phrén*, meaning “mind”).

Arieti continues,

Throughout this book we have seen how important is *the study of abnormal cognition* for the understanding of the nature of schizophrenia in general as well as of the specific symptomology. It also permits an evaluation of the state either of regression or reintegration of the patient. *It permits the therapist to understand the way the patient thinks and talks, even when at first it seems impossible to do so.*

In therapy, however, a knowledge of the abnormal cognition of the schizophrenic may also be more directly useful, because *it enables us to explain to the patient his faulty patterns of thinking.* Actually all interpretations that we have discussed in this chapter are based on the study of abnormal cognition. At a later stage of treatment the patient may become aware of the fact that some of his interpretations are based on a special form of thinking (paleologic thinking).

The *therapist* [corresponding, in the context of the Bible, to the anti-esotericist interpreter] must be able to recognize this form of thinking and logic and explain it to the *patient* [corresponding, in the context of the Bible, to the ordinary Christian who promotes reading of the Bible]. ...

If the patient is very regressed, he will not benefit from any direct explanation from the therapist. The therapist will benefit indirectly, however, because his knowledge of the formal characteristics and ways of thinking will enable him to understand the degree of regression and *the hidden meaning.* [pp. 583-84.]

Compare Arieti’s stated goal of discerning the schizophrenic’s “hidden meaning” to Bible passages such as [Matthew 13:35](#), [1 Corinthians 2:6-8](#), [1 Corinthians 4:5](#), [Colossians](#)

[2:2-3](#), and others, bearing in mind that I believe the figure of “Jesus Christ” was meant by the authors of the New Testament to be understood as corresponding to something like “the prototypical schizophrenic,” at least in certain respects (although the authors obviously wouldn’t have used that sort of terminology). I believe the authors of the New Testament were all more or less schizophrenic, and they saw the figure of “Jesus Christ” as simultaneously representing all of them in an idealized and fictionalized manner.

Arieti continues,

In typical psychoneuroses the symptoms consist mostly of primary process mechanisms, but the symptoms are rejected by *the secondary process*, which is still the recognized *ruler* of life. [p. 287.]

Compare this to Revelation 1:5, in which *Jesus Christ* is described as

the faithful witness, the firstborn [*prōto-tokos*, which hints at the idea of “prototypicality”] of the dead, and the *ruler* [*archōn*] of the kings of the earth.

Note, however, that it is only after the occurrence of the “Second Coming” and the “Last Judgment” that this new “ruler” finally takes his rightful seat upon the “throne.” (See, e.g., [Revelation 20:11](#) and [21:1-5](#).)

I believe “Jesus Christ” in this particular context—that is, in the role of “ruler”—should be understood as representing “the secondary process” at work *within* “the prototypical schizophrenic,” which is trying to assert its *dominance* over “the primary process” at work within that *same* “prototypical schizophrenic.” This “prototypical schizophrenic” would symbolically represent not only the Christian apostles and the authors of the New Testament, but also the entire human race, which is currently enslaved to or imprisoned by primary process thinking—just as the individual schizophrenic is—but, in the case of the non-schizophrenics, that is only true when they are engaging in *communal* activities, such as organized religion. The result is that the human race is far more “schizophrenic-like” in its thinking than it even realizes, since whenever this type of thinking is *shared along with others* in one’s society, it does not *appear* as “insanity” to the persons who think in that way. It is only when primary process thinking occurs completely idiosyncratically, in the lone individual, that it appears to others as “insanity.”

Now, Jesus Christ as he is depicted in the Gospels can certainly be seen as representative of the lone schizophrenic individual—see, e.g., [Mark 14:27-31](#), [Mark 14:64-65](#), and [John 2:23-25](#)—but in so far as he also represents the primary process at work *in* that lone schizophrenic individual, Jesus is also representative of the primary process at work in the human race in general. It is in this sense that the lone schizophrenic individual, struggling to make his way toward a triumph of secondary process thinking *within himself*, can be seen as the “scapegoat” for an entire human race which is also burdened by an improperly excessive amount of primary process thinking—but the rest of whose members carry a lighter burden, since they are able to share their own particular style of primary process thinking in common with those around them (or, at least, it seems that

way to them), and so they will not feel as intense a need to slough it off. In that struggle, the lone schizophrenic individual thereby becomes the *representative* of the entire human race, even as it too, in its own way, must fight its way toward a reign of secondary process thinking. (In connection with this idea, read [Isaiah chapter 53](#)'s description of the archetypal "suffering servant.")

Arieti continues,

When we consider all the phenomena described in this section, we are no longer surprised that the language of regressed schizophrenics becomes so *obscure*. **When one thing is substituted for another thing that it resembles or that is a different part of the same context or background, the result is incomprehensible.** These tendencies to identify segments or fragments, which are usually only associated in large contexts, explain the so-called word-salad that has so far remained incomprehensible. I repeat here that what I call "identification" of segments or fragments actually may not be identification or effort to identify so much as it may be the result of an inability to separate or dissociate a part or to distinguish any of the parts of the whole. *For practical purposes, or from the point of view of the observer, there is an identification of all of the parts of the whole with one another or with the whole.* In some cases this tendency progresses toward identification so rapidly that a word may come to replace or represent bigger and bigger contexts, so that finally the language of the patient is impoverished to the point of being reduced to relatively few words [such as "Mary" in the example given above] or stereotyped expressions [such as "Jesus is Lord"—a popular Christian expression which is usually quite meaningless to someone who has not already become a Christian and assigned his or her own idiosyncratic meaning to it]. As [Harry Stack] Sullivan wrote, in the stereotypy there is "an impractical concentration of meaning in the expression." The same stereotypes mean many things, just as the crying of a baby does. [p. 264.]

Arieti is pointing to the fact that schizophrenic thought and language disorder involves mental *regression*, with less differentiation of thought, and less insistence on maintaining firm boundaries between conceptual categories, than one finds in mentally healthy adults; it involves *a return* to a more primitive stage of mental development. So it is quite striking that in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, the apostle Paul himself seems to implicitly *acknowledge* that "prophesying"—that is to say, speaking "schizophrenically," or in accordance with the primary process—involves mental regression:

**And if (there be) prophecies, they will be done away with** [or "exhausted," or "worked out," or "rendered useless": *kat-argeō*]; **if (there be) tongues, they will be brought to an end** [*pauō*]; **if (there be) (occult) knowledge** [*gnōsis*], **it will be done away with** [*kat-argeō*]. ***For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.*** **But when we arrive at completion** [or perfection: *teleios*], **that which is in part will be done away with** [*kat-argeō*]. ***When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned as a child;*** when I became a man, I did away with [*kat-*

*argeō*] childish things. For we now look into a mirror in enigmas [or riddles, or puzzles, or “dark sayings,” or obscurity: *ainigma*]; but then, face to face. **Now** I know in part; but **then** I will know fully, just as I have also been fully known.

In other words, in humanity’s current state, in which the primary process is still generally dominant, we correspond to “children.” Paul associates “mysteries” (see verse 2 of chapter 13), “prophecies,” “tongues,” and “(occult) knowledge”—in other words, the characteristic trappings of schizophrenic, esoteric religion—with “speaking like a child,” and “thinking like a child,” and “reasoning like a child.” Paul may have understood “thinking and reasoning like a child” to correspond more or less to what we are calling “primary process thinking,” that is, the kind of thinking found in our dreaming life (which, of course, presents “enigmas” to us)—which is also the type of thinking dominant in very young children. If so, then in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 Paul comes surprisingly close to openly articulating what I am claiming to be the most central and important “hidden meaning” of the Bible: that “primary process” (read: unconscious and illogical) thinking must be put aside so that “secondary process” (read: conscious and logical) thinking can take its place as the *chief* (though not exclusive) director of human affairs.

As an example of how one might interpret the “hidden meanings” of the Bible’s authors by using “universal symbols,” consider Isaiah 11:1-4:

And there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of [or “bear fruit from,” or “bloom from”: *parah*] his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him—the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord—and shall make him *perceive* by the fear of the Lord: and he shall neither judge by what his eyes see, nor decide by what his ears hear; but he shall judge the *weak* with justice, and decide with fairness for the *humble* of the earth. And he shall strike the earth with *the rod of his mouth*, and with *the spirit* [more literally, “breath”: *ruach*] *of his speech* [more literally, “lip,” or “edge”: *saphah*] he shall slay the guilty.

This passage may perhaps be read to suggest that the “person” being described is capable of “*second* seeing” and “*second* hearing,” in the absence of which a person’s “judgment” or “assessment”—or, in this case, his “interpretation” of an author’s meaning—would be “unjust” and “unfair.” The use of the words “mouth” and “speech” suggests as much. If that is correct, it would point to an outlook on the part of the author that is commonly found in schizophrenics: it is sometimes considered “unjust” or “unfair” to the schizophrenic person to take his words at face value, instead of making an active effort to reach him where he already is, and on his own terms—perhaps because he believes that it is unfair that he is not *allowed* to speak clearly, and so is *forced* to make his communication obscure if the “inner meaning” (that is, the *real* meaning) is to have any chance at all of getting out. (However, I make no assumption that this line of reasoning would be an entirely conscious one.)

Also, the image of a branch growing from the roots of a tree suggests the idea of *bypassing* all of the incorrect secondary process interpretations of the scriptures in order to return to the primary process “roots” of an esotericist author’s thinking, thereby allowing an analyst to discern or uncover the previously “hidden meaning” of the writing. This symbol of a “branch” would signify *a new type of human being*, one that was capable of discerning the schizophrenic’s “hidden meaning”; that is, the type of human being capable of approaching a schizophrenic’s communication *in a therapeutic manner*. In other words, this type of human being would be a *healer*. The ubiquity of persons of this type would enable the schizophrenic’s communication to finally “bear fruit,” even though, so long as it was not being approached in a psychological manner, it had appeared largely “barren.” So the “branch” would signify the “hidden meaning” of the esoteric communication, at the same time as signifying the type of person that would *facilitate the emergence* or “blooming” of that “hidden meaning.” And it is unlikely to be a coincidence that this “branch” has been understood by Christians to signify “Jesus,” and that “Jesus” is repeatedly portrayed in the Gospels as a “healer.” In fact, I think that at some level it was understood by the authors of the New Testament that “the Jesus to come” would function as the “healer” of “Jesus’s” *own* obscurely parabolic manner of communicating that we find in the Gospels at the time of his “First Coming.” The “healing” of that obscure manner of communicating would coincide with the “opening up” of the communicator’s *actual meanings*. (Cf. [Mark 7:32-37](#).) The “healer’s” *ears* would be “opened,” even as the esotericist schizophrenic’s *mouth* would be “opened”; and *each type of “opening” would make the other possible*.

Just after the previous passage from Isaiah, Isaiah 11:6-9 says,

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and *a little child* shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. *The sucking child* shall play over the hole of the asp, and *the weaned child* shall put his hand over the den of the adder. They shall not hurt or ruin in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

The notion of an end being put to all “hurting” or “harming” or “injuring” is prominent in the passage. In what way might “very young children” be responsible for making such things happen? The passage from 1 Corinthians 13 quoted above suggests one possible answer: the infant or very young child may signify primary process thinking. An alternative possibility is that the “very young child” signifies the quality of “innocence” or “harmlessness”; but then, so would the “lamb”—which is apparently the reason why Jesus Christ is symbolized as “the Lamb.” That tends to indicate that the “very young child” likely signifies something other than, or in addition to, mere “innocence” or “harmlessness.”

The “asp” and the “adder,” both being poisonous or venomous snakes, likely signify “disease” or “illness” (or maybe just “harm” in general). This idea is also found in Mark 16:17-18:

And these signs will accompany those who have believed [or trusted: *pisteuō*]: In my name they will cast out demons; they will *speak with new tongues*; and with their hands they will take up [or lift up: *airō*] serpents [cf. John 3:14-15]; and if they drink anything deadly [i.e., poison], it shall not hurt [or injure: *blaptō*] them at all; they will lay hands upon [or over: *epi*] (the) sick, and they will be well.

In addition to that, however, “serpents” are also associated in [Matthew 10:16](#) with “shrewdness” (or “prudence,” or “intelligence,” or “subtlety,” or “sensiblyness”), a quality that we would tend to associate with the secondary process. Meanwhile, “doves” are associated in that same verse with “simplicity” (or “purity,” or “innocence,” or “guilelessness,” or “sincerity,” or “lack of sophistication”), a quality we would tend to associate with the primary process (although it should be stressed that communication stemming from primary process thinking can be deceptive and misleading from the perspective of the listener). Perhaps the unconscious meaning of the symbolism in Isaiah 11:6-9 is that primary process cognition would somehow bring about an end to the type of harming that is caused by primary process cognition whenever it gets seized and misused by secondary process cognition—which is what we see happening so often with esoteric religions. Perhaps the expectation was that primary process cognition would in the future serve more as the provider of *immediate, intuitive* knowledge of God and reality, and would no longer try to *usurp the role* of secondary process cognition, as it often does in the case of schizophrenic thought and communication (resulting in phenomena such as “psychotic rationalization,” discussed below). In return, secondary process cognition would become purified by learning to have *respect for the value* of what came to it from a *purified* primary process—even in spite of the fact that primary process cognition would not hold the *dominant* position. In fact, this may be the point of [John 3:14](#), in which it is said that the “Son of Man” must be “lifted up” (*airō*) just as the “serpent” was “lifted up” (*airō*) by Moses. This may signify a *joining* of the best qualities of the “serpent” with the best qualities of the “dove,” which would allow the “serpent” to “ascend into the air.”

(And in support of this hypothesis, consider that there may be a possible connection between this imagery involving the “serpent” and the “dove,” and [the symbol of the caduceus](#), often associated with ancient Greek god Hermes.)

Consider that the reason *why* the “serpent” was thought to be in need of being “lifted up” or “made to rise” may have been that in [Genesis 3:14](#) the “serpent” was cursed by the Lord and told, “On your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life.” Why would the “serpent” need to be “redeemed” *unless* it was seen to be representing some *human* mental mode or function, such as “secondary process thinking”?

Isaiah 11:6-9 might also be read to suggest that if *healing* or *therapy* of “the prototypical schizophrenic individual” occurred (who, in this case, would at least to some extent be representing all people), the *kernel of truth* to be found in that individual’s primary process thinking would be *liberated*, and thus able to make its meaning manifest; and when this happened, the harming or hurting in the world would be brought to an end.

In what way should the cryptic symbols, figures, and allegories of the Bible be conceptualized? As the products of hallucinations? I think the best way to think of them would be as the products of what Arieti calls “quasi-hallucinations,” since I do not think that the authors of the Bible ever believed that they were relating actual historical events in their writings. In a footnote, Arieti explains what these “quasi-hallucinations” are:

[Herbert] Silberer, influenced by Freud, reported a method of eliciting certain symbolic hallucinatory phenomenon. Once, while he was lying on a couch, he was thinking of a very difficult abstract subject when an image automatically occurred to him that was a concrete symbol of what he was thinking. ... Silberer called these phenomena autosymbolic. They were not real hallucinations because Silberer knew that they did not represent phenomena of external reality. **They were abstract constructs that manifested themselves in concrete forms**. [p. 269.]

If dreams and hallucinations are translations or regressions of thoughts to a perceptual level, how is it that in dreams and hallucinations the person not only hears and sees, but talks and thinks? This is due to the fact that there is no complete regression to the perceptual level. The concomitant occurrence of phenomena that belong to different mental levels is one of the most common characteristics of human psychopathology. Especially in schizophrenia, it produces a very bizarre clinical picture. In many cases, one may find symptoms belonging predominantly to one level, but a **mixture** always occurs. Thus a patient, for instance, may usually adopt the Aristotelian type of logic when he talks, but at times he may hallucinate and therefore regress to a perceptual level. The voices he hears use a paleologic mode of thinking. This mixture, **this splitting of the person at various levels**, is the most specific characteristic of schizophrenia and fully justifies its name. [p. 270.]

If we decide to describe the imagery found in the Bible as “quasi-hallucinatory” in nature, then it is significant that the author of Revelation 18:24 exults over the envisioned fall of Babylon by saying of her that

[Y]our merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all the nations were deceived [more literally, “led astray,” or “made to wander”: *planaō*] by your sorcery [more literally, “poisoning,” or “drugging,” or “**administering of hallucinogenic drugs**”: *pharmakeia*].

Arieti continues,

The difference between the concept of autism and that of paleologic thinking is even more obvious when one takes into consideration so-called “primitive thinking.” We have already discussed several examples of thinking in primitive cultures, which indicate the frequent occurrence of a paleologic logic. **And yet, primitive man cannot be called autistic**; as a matter of fact, and here is the fundamental fact that has to be stressed, **the opposite seems to be the case**. The

primitive who thinks paleologically often does so not in order to be subjective and individualistic, but so that he may comply with the mores of his society. By using paleologic conceptions, he does not withdraw behind an autistic barrier, as the schizophrenic does, but, on the contrary, he becomes more intimately a part of his tribe. [p. 290.]

I *strongly disagree* with the proposition that “primitive man cannot be called autistic.” To the extent that a human culture can be called “primitive,” I believe it is precisely *because* the thinking of its members is essentially “autistic.” I would argue that the difference between “autistic thinking” and “primitive thinking” is considerably more superficial than might at first seem to be the case; and there is a sense in which “primitive man” is actually far more “autistic” and “subjective” than one might at first be inclined to believe. It’s true that the primitive may not think paleologically *in order to be* subjective and individualistic; but nonetheless, that is the result. *All* types of “paleologic thinking” are actually highly egocentric and self-involved, for reasons that Arieti himself gives:

The reader might think: the author states that the schizophrenic is extremely individualistic, does not want to accept society, and wants to retain his unique paleosymbols and his unique paleologic way of thinking. Because the author also describes the *laws* of paleologic thinking and paleosymbols, is not that a contradiction? Is he not talking again of formality, which applies to all people regressed to a certain level, and not of individuality and uniqueness? Is he not changing the universals of Aristotelian logic and of the common symbols to the universals of paleologic thought and paleosymbols? How is that to be reconciled with the assumption of “uniqueness”?

There is some truth in this allegation, because there cannot be any content without some kind of formal mechanism, and any kind of formal mechanism is subject to laws. Perhaps the works of the abstract painters come closest to being expressions of a content without form, but some form exists in their work too.

However, one could say without hesitation that one’s originality and individuality, as far as the formal structure is concerned, are better expressed by primary process mechanisms, and for various reasons. First of all, there are many of them, and the schizophrenic and the artist may use any or several of them. Secondly, paleologic thinking, to a great extent, is based on Von Domarus’s principle. Now this principle is, or appears to our Aristotelian minds to be, a principle or a law; actually, *it gives the greatest possible freedom to the individual. A subject may have an infinite number of predicates; it is up to the individuality of the person to select the predicate for the identification.*

It is true that we view schizophrenics as being similar to one another, and we are able to detect common symptoms in them. It is because of these common symptoms that we are able to recognize them. *Actually their realm of originality exceeds by far that of the normal man. Paradoxically they seem similar to us because they are original and because they do not use our methods of thinking.*

They are similar in their difference from us, just as all Chinese may appear similar to Caucasians. Being unable to understand the originality of the content of their expressions and actions, we tend to emphasize the frequent occurrence of the few formal mechanisms that we understand. **Paradoxically, it is by adopting universal forms that the individuality of the patient, with its specific dynamic determinants, is allowed to emerge.** [pp. 377-78.]

Elsewhere Arieti writes,

The universe of the schizophrenic, of the primitive, and of the child is closer than that of the normal adult to the immediate perception, to the phenomenological world, **and so reflects an extreme subjectivity.** [pp. 251-52.]

Elsewhere he writes,

Many authors have stressed the fact that schizophrenics do not use the same categories as other people. Generally this characteristic has been interpreted as a desire on the part of the schizophrenic to reject the ready-made categories offered by society. . . . Although it is true that the schizophrenic is not eager to accept the categories of society, it is also true that he uses special ways of organizing his experiences. ***The schizophrenic seems either to break the rules of categorization or to use inappropriate categories, or to think “intracategorically,” that is, in the midst of categories used by people in general.*** We may interpret this phenomenon as due to the fact that schizophrenic concept formation does not follow normal logic, and does not accept cultural ready-made concepts, but instead it resorts to the formation of primary classes [that is, collections of objects which share a common predicate or part]. [p. 240.]

What happens when there is a tendency for everyone in a society to think in that way? The society may hold together, but not easily or readily. True, its members may not be as idiosyncratic in their thinking as the acute or regressed schizophrenic, but the principle at work is the same. The religious wars that were fought in Europe over many centuries amply demonstrate what happens when a civilization decides to found itself upon writings that chiefly employ primary process cognition (which, according to my way of thinking, makes that civilization a “primitive society” by definition). The widely varying interpretations that such writings encourage inevitably lead to social conflict; and to the extent that they do not, it is only because the writings are no longer taken as seriously as they once were—and not because agreement has been reached as to their meaning.

Arieti would probably have taken exception to my describing the Bible as a “schizophrenic” writing, since he seems to take the position that the word “schizophrenic” or “psychotic” can only be applied to individuals, not groups. He writes,

[T]he irrationality, found in culture, with few exceptions, is not schizophrenic in origin. Moreover, the acceptance of cultural irrationality does not make a person schizophrenic when such irrationality is not subjected to subsequent

transformation and is accepted directly from one generation to another or from other members of the same generation. A great deal of irrationality is transmitted by such methods as psychological habituation, indoctrination, brain washing, imitation, acceptance on faith, and so on, and is not caused by schizophrenia. For instance, staunchest Nazis may believe that Jews are evil and must be eliminated. *The acceptance of this belief is not a delusion; morally, and in its practical effects, it is infinitely much worse than a delusion.* It is cultural in origin and because of special techniques devised by society, like coercion, falsification of truths, impossibility of ventilation, and so forth, it is transformed into an introject. ... It may be a state of habituation that may be overcome much more easily than a delusion, and with different methods. [p. 288.]

I agree with Arieti that irrationality that is shared with many others is infinitely much worse than a person's own private delusion—at least from the perspective of society, rather than that of the schizophrenic individual. A private delusion is dangerous to the person entertaining that delusion; but shared irrationality is potentially dangerous to everyone in the society, as well as to those outside the society. The fact that a private delusion is not shared by others means that, as a general matter, it is easier to dislodge than a shared “delusion” (if I may call it that). Once a delusion becomes shared with others, the possibility arises that those persons adopting the delusion will be able to prevent it from being challenged by others. For example, with regard to religious beliefs derived from traditional, esoteric religious scriptures—which I believe promote delusional thinking—even though it is currently legally permissible in the United States to publicly challenge such beliefs, it is still widely considered to be “impolite” to do so, and one is expected to be “tolerant” of other persons' shared delusions, even though those same persons are not nearly so reticent about challenging what they perceive to be the private delusions of individuals. (We thus see that what appears to be “politeness” and “tolerance” is in fact cowardice.)

I am not merely saying that traditional, esoteric religions are “delusional,” in the sense of making false claims about reality; I am saying that they *promote* delusional thinking, both individual and collective—which is far worse. That is why I consider the traditional religions in particular to be “schizophrenic,” even though I might not be willing to say the same about all other forms of cultural irrationality. Arieti says, “[T]he acceptance of cultural irrationality does not make a person schizophrenic when such irrationality is not subjected to subsequent transformation”; but I do not think that that statement applies to traditional religions—which are, of course, “accepted on faith”—since the cryptic symbolism found in those religions is constantly re-interpreted, not only with each new generation, but also in the mind of each individual member of a religion. Thus, the esoteric symbolism is necessarily subject to ongoing transformation—which means that it seems to qualify as schizophrenic, if “subsequent transformation by the individual” is to be the criterion. The esoteric symbols themselves may not be subject to transformation, but their meanings most definitely are. Traditional religions effectively provide the “raw materials” that help enable a person to become schizophrenic; and this is a service that they provide over and over again, so that various individuals can become schizophrenic in many different ways. When what specifically is being “accepted on faith” is a set of

cryptic, esoteric, schizophrenia-inducing symbols which are subject to wide interpretation, then it may be said that the culture is indeed transmitting schizophrenia (or, at the very least, schizophrenia-like thinking) from one generation to the next.

More generally, however, I think a distinction needs to be made between irrational *beliefs* and irrational *thinking*. When Arieti speaks of irrationality that is “transmitted by such methods as psychological habituation, indoctrination, brain washing, imitation, acceptance on faith, and so on,” I am inclined to assume that he has “irrational beliefs” in mind more than he has “irrational thinking” in mind. To my mind what makes schizophrenia harmful to both the individual and the surrounding society is the irrational, idiosyncratic *thinking* that it involves, such that other persons are shut out from it and left unable to follow along with it. With shared rational thinking, irrational beliefs can be challenged and eventually supplanted; but without it, they can’t be. For that reason, I have absolutely no problem identifying social institutions, as well as families, that actively *promote* primary process cognition in adults, as being “schizophrenic” in nature; at the very least, they must be regarded as “schizophrenogenic.” Phenomena such as hallucinations may jump out at people and get their attention more easily since they’re so “out of the ordinary,” but I do not consider them to be *essential* in the identification of what exactly it is about schizophrenia that makes it *harmful*; in fact, Arieti himself is unwilling to label religious mystics who claim to perceive apparitions and other “hallucinations,” without more, as being “schizophrenic” (p. 277-78). Alternatively, if the distinction rests on the fact that, by definition, a schizophrenic person’s delusion is private and individual, while the delusion of the “normal person” is shared, then my question is: Exactly *why* is that an important distinction to make, for sociological purposes anyway? Why should we want to maintain that distinction?—especially when we consider that in the specific context of traditional religion, the delusion of “normal persons” may *originate as* the delusion or quasi-hallucination of a single schizophrenic person, or several of them. If people are *thinking like* a schizophrenic person, then for practical purposes why shouldn’t they be regarded as *being* schizophrenic themselves? The “normal people” are undoubtedly *happier* on average with their shared delusion than is the schizophrenic individual with his private delusion, but their delusional thinking is just as harmful—in fact, it is *more* harmful, since to the extent that delusional thinking is associated with relative happiness for the individual, there will be more of it.

Another point: Just because secondary process cognition is used to *promote* primary process cognition, does not make that primary process cognition any less schizophrenic when it dominates the thinking of waking adults. For example, Christian ministers, priests, and apologists are obviously capable of secondary process thinking, sometimes of a very high order, and in their work they are often willing to avail themselves of the latest digital technology, which could not exist without secondary process cognition; but that doesn’t change the fact that they are using their secondary process thinking and technology for the sake of promoting primary process thinking, inasmuch as they promoting the reading of the Bible in a largely “primary process” way.

Arieti also writes,

[W]hen we hear or read that in some islands in the Pacific or in some remote Indian or African tribes all the members of the tribes have a paranoid and delusional attitude toward other people or groups of people, we cannot conclude that these natives are schizophrenic. It would also be a misnomer to call the culture itself schizophrenic. Myths, ceremonials, rituals, ideas transmitted from generation to generation and *taken for granted as true*, may seem to us delusional, although we have our own, not less irrational beliefs and traditions. They are learned from society. As long as they are accepted by the individual from the external world, they become part of his psychological content; they are not products of his own alleged schizophrenic process. [pp. 288-89.]

Again, “irrationality” is more than just a collection of *false beliefs*; it is an entire way of thinking. A person can be mistaken without being “irrational” (although I grant that irrationality does tend to lead to more mistakes). The fact that this irrational way of thinking is promoted by society does not mean that the products of that thinking are any less delusional than what is produced by the individual schizophrenic mind. The fact that people were taught to think that way, and they didn’t discover that way of thinking on their own like the individual schizophrenic supposedly discovers his, does not make it any better or more innocuous. One might concede that the delusions of the individual schizophrenic are often more extreme than those found in persons who associate in groups, but that doesn’t make them different in kind.

But having said that, I repeat my strong disagreement with the proposition that “social irrationality” is *genuinely communal* in the same way that “social rationality” is—meaning that I can’t even accept that a delusion associated with “social irrationality” is ever a *fully shared* one; it may be “loosely shared,” but it also gets “fragmented” in the minds of the various members of the society as that “loosely shared” delusion gets idiosyncratically “internalized.” In fact, that is the very reason *why* “shared delusions” are generally not as intense or extreme as the delusions of the individual schizophrenic, and generally do not depart as far from reality, since an individual mind is far more *unified* than the collective “mind” of an irrational society; therefore, the mind of an individual is sometimes capable of being far less sane than the surrounding society, but also sometimes far more sane. “Social irrationality” only *appears* to be genuinely communal, because of the fact that *outwardly* people are doing and saying many of the same things; but *inwardly*, at a spiritual level, the members of such a society mostly remain hostile strangers to one another. As a result, they can only associate at a quite low level of thought and culture—which is, after all, what makes a “primitive culture” primitive. (And I think *all* existing cultures are “primitive” in that sense, even if some may happen to be slightly less primitive than others.) In other words, the members of a “socially irrational” culture may be doing and saying the same things, but those “same things” will, in general, tend to be quite base or trivial.

Arieti does acknowledge that there seems to be a correlation between the presence of irrationality in a person’s environment and the development of schizophrenia:

When we come specifically to study the family and not the general culture, we find that in addition to the cultural irrationality there is some irrationality transmitted in every family from parents to children and between siblings. We have seen that in disturbed families, like those of schizophrenic patients the amount of irrationality is greater. [p. 289.]

Note, however, that Arieti is unwilling to identify any direct correlation between social irrationality and the development of schizophrenia. I think Arieti places too much influence on the “psychodynamics” of the family as the sole environmental factor involved in instigating the development of schizophrenia, believing that social irrationality can only have an effect on the vulnerable child indirectly, by means of its effect on the way in which he is brought up within his family. Arieti apparently assumes that the family ultimately mediates all social irrationality. I don’t agree with this, since I believe society can find ways to teach vulnerable children more rational ways of thinking that might allow them to diminish (though certainly not eliminate) the harmful psychological influence of their family’s accustomed ways of thinking. I think Arieti may exaggerate the “inevitability” of secondary process cognition. I do not think it is as robust as he seems to think, even in relatively emotionally healthy families. While it ought to be seen as “natural,” it should, at the same time, also be seen as being in need of careful cultivation and nurturing. He writes,

Schizophrenia is not learned, although it may be acquired by virtue of certain relations with parents and the family. The family affects the patient psychodynamically, so that eventually under the stress of conflicts the secondary process mechanisms weaken or disintegrate, primary process mechanisms acquire predominance, become the media that carry the conflicts, and the psychosis occurs. [p. 129.]

I think more than just “the stress of conflicts” is involved in the weakening or disintegrating of secondary process mechanisms. I think the failure to properly strengthen and encourage those mechanisms also helps to explain their eclipse by primary process mechanisms. And I think the families in which “the stress of conflicts” are the most severe will likely also be those families in which “properly strengthening and encouraging secondary process mechanisms” is not seen as something that is especially important or even desirable to do. Both family and society (including religious institutions) play a role in deciding whether or not “properly strengthening and encouraging secondary process mechanisms” is something that will be regarded as important and desirable; and both family and society exert their influence on the prepsychotic individual, whether as a child or as an adult.

Arieti continues,

[E]arlier in the book, in order to show the impairment of connotation power, I reported the answers given by a regressed schizophrenic patient who had been several years in a state hospital. A high school graduate, she gave typical examples of schizophrenic thinking and language when she was asked to define

words. Many years later I went over the records of the same patient and looked at them *with different eyes*. Some of her answers which had appeared to me only typical of a regressed schizophrenic *disclosed additional meanings*. ... On [one] occasion she said, “A fool is a fool when a fool calls a fool a fool.” I considered this sentence as indicating the schizophrenic tendency to repeat the same word. But didn’t the patient perhaps refer to the fact that I was a fool if I thought that she was a fool because she was a mental patient?

...

On another occasion she spoke about people. She said, “People are not people. If people were people, things might prove to be more beneficial for the people.” I asked then, “Aren’t people people?” She replied, “There are all kinds of people.” I *asked* her, “What do *you mean* by people?” She replied, “Persons of quality.” Now the first sentence became *clearer*. If people were persons of quality, things in general would be more beneficial for everybody.

These examples disclose that in some cases what appears unusual, illogical, imaginary, or exclusively the result of psychosis, should be seen not only in the restricted sense of being outside of reality but also of being an expansion of reality. [pp. 379-80.]

Consider, by the way, that Dr. Arieti was wrong to assume that if the patient was *able* to give appropriate answers to his test questions, then she would necessarily do so. She didn’t have to comply with his demands just because he wanted her to. It seems to me that she was using her answers to make the points that *she* wanted to make—regardless of whether or not the psychiatrist understood them. It would essentially be the last possible exercise of power by someone who had been left almost entirely powerless. In order not to be labeled as “uncooperative” and be punished for it (even if only with anger or irritation), she would allow herself to be seen as “sick,” if doing so made it possible to express her opinion (albeit in veiled form)—and hope that the psychiatrist would be bright and caring enough to pick up on what she had really been trying to say.

Also compare the paragraph above which deals with the question of how to define the word “people,” with [2 Corinthians 6:10](#), in which Paul says that the apostles are treated “as having nothing, and yet (we are) possessing all things.” It is possible to make this statement make sense, but only by distinguishing two separate meanings for the word “things” (or else for the words “have” and “possess”), in exactly the same way that the patient implicitly assigned two different meanings to the word “people”: first, *the world’s* definition, and second, *her own private* definition based on how she thought the word *ought to* be defined in common usage.

Incidentally, I find it significant that Arieti uses the metaphorical phrase “*with different eyes*” in the context of the idea of discerning “additional meanings.” It may help us to gain a better understanding of the meaning of shamanic initiation rituals and initiatory

ecstatic trances that involve the theme of receiving “new eyes,” or “new organs,” or “a new body”:

It is clearly apparent that the initiatory ecstasy [in *Siberian* shamanism] very closely follows certain exemplary themes: ... semi-demonic beings teach [the novice] the nature of all diseases and their cure; finally, other *demonic beings cut his body to pieces*, boil it, and *exchange it for better organs*. [For instance, “new eyes,” or a “new heart.”] [Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 42-43.]

In all these examples we find ***the central theme of an initiation ceremony: dismemberment*** of the neophyte’s body and *renewal of his organs*; ritual ***death followed by resurrection***. We may also note the motif of *the giant bird that hatches shamans in the branches of the World Tree*; it has wide application in North Asian mythologies, especially in shamanic mythology. [Cf. [Mark 4:30-32](#), which I quote and discuss above.] [*Shamanism*, p. 38.]

The content of these first ecstatic experiences, although comparatively rich, almost always includes one or more of the following themes: dismemberment of the body, followed by a renewal of the internal organs and viscera.... [*Shamanism*, p. 34.]

The ecstatic experience of dismemberment of the body followed by a renewal of the organs is also known to *the Eskimo*. They speak of an animal (bear, walrus, etc.) that wounds the candidate, *tears him to pieces* or devours him; then new flesh grows around his bones. Sometimes the animal that tortures him becomes the future shaman’s helping spirit. [*Shamanism*, p. 44.]

The earliest observers long ago recorded that certain initiations of *Australian* medicine men involve the candidate’s ritual death and removal of his organs, an act performed either by spirits or by the souls of the dead. [*Shamanism*, p. 45.]

Among the Warburton Ranges aborigines (West Australia) initiation takes place as follows. The aspirant enters a cave, and two totemic heroes (wildcat and emu) kill him, open his body, remove his organs, and replace them with magical substances. [*Shamanism*, p. 46.]

In the [Central Australian] Mara tribe.... [o]ne who wishes to become a medicine man lights a fire and burns fat, thus attracting two spirits called Minnungarra. These approach and encourage the candidate, assuring him that they will not completely kill him. “First of all they make him insensible, and in the usual way cut him open and take out all his organs, which are then replaced by those of one of the spirits. Then he is brought to life again, told that he is now a doctor, shown how to take bones and evil magic out of men, and carried up into the sky.” [*Shamanism*, p. 49; citation omitted.]

Then too, *in South America* as in Australia or Siberia both spontaneous vocation and the quest for initiation involve either a mysterious illness or a more or less symbolic ritual of mystical death, sometimes suggested by *a dismemberment of the body and renewal of the organs*. [*Shamanism*, p. 53.]

[Among the Dyak of *Borneo*], [a]fter a night of incantations the old shamans take the neophyte to a room shut off by curtains. “And there, as they assert, they cut his head open, take out his brains, wash and restore them, to give him a clear mind to penetrate into the mysteries of evil spirits, and the intricacies of disease; they insert gold dust into his eyes to give him keenness and strength of sight powerful enough to see the soul wherever it may have wandered; they plant barbed hooks on the tips of his fingers to enable him to seize the soul and hold it fast; and *lastly they pierce his heart with an arrow to make him tender-hearted, and full of sympathy with the sick and suffering*. [*Shamanism*, p. 57; cf. [John 19:33-34](#).]

Among the Iglulik Eskimo.... [t]he initiation proper begins with an operation of which we have only inadequate accounts. The old angakok extracts the disciple’s “soul” from his eyes, brain, and intestines, so that the spirits may know what is best in him. After this “extraction of the soul” the future shaman himself becomes able to draw his soul from his body and undertake long mystical journeys through space and the depths of the sea. It is possible that his mysterious operation somewhat resembles the Australian techniques studied above. In any case, extracting the soul from the intestines obviously conceals a “renewal” of the internal organs. [*Shamanism*, p. 60.]

The initiation of a medicine man by the Aranda (Arunta) of Central Australia is described as follows:

In the cave the spirit *tears* out his internal organs and gives him others, which are completely new. [*Shamanism*, p. 46.]

Recall, by the way, that the word “schizophrenia” is derived from the Greek words *schizō*, meaning “to *tear*, to split,” and *phrén*, meaning “the mind” or “the faculty of perceiving and judging”—but which originally meant “the midriff (diaphragm), the viscera beneath the heart,” and later “the heart as the seat of the passions,” with the figurative meanings of “*the feelings*” or “*insight*” or “*will, purpose*.”

The initiation of the (Siberian) Samoyed shaman is described as follows:

The blacksmith then fished the candidate’s bones out of a river, in which they were floating, put them together, and covered them with flesh again. ... He forged his head and taught him how to read the letters that are inside it. *He changed his eyes*; and that is why, when he shamanizes, he does not see with his bodily eyes but with these *mystical eyes*. He pierced his ears, making him able to understand the language of plants. [*Shamanism*, p. 42.]

The initiation of the (South American) Araucanian shamaness involves something similar:

[T]he new *machi*'s prayer appears to be addressed to the Father God.... She asks him for the gift of ***second sight*** (to see the sickness in the patient's body) and the art of drumming. [*Shamanism*, p. 124.]

Compare the preceding passages to Ezekiel 11:19-20:

**And I will give them a single heart, and I will put a new spirit in the inner parts [or "bowels": *qereb*, which can also mean "seat of thought and emotion"]; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh, so that they may walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and do them; and they shall be a people to me, and I shall be God to them.**

Given how common this theme of "the renewal of the organs" is in traditional religions located around the world, one wonders whether the notion of "the resurrection of the body" found in the Bible might not in fact have been referring (consciously or unconsciously) to a time when it was hoped that *all* people would have this gift of "second sight," and would have "new organs" in the sense found in these passages.

In addition, consider John 19:23-24:

**Then the soldiers, when they crucified Jesus, took his outer garments, and made four parts, a part for each soldier; and (they took) the tunic also. And the tunic was seamless, woven from the top throughout the whole. And so they said to one another, "Let us not tear [*schizō*] it...."**

If we surmise that the symbolic "crucifixion" of Jesus was meant to be seen as a metaphorical or "concretized" depiction of the typical "ordeal" of the "initiate" that can be found in traditional cultures the world over, then it is worth considering the possibility that the "Roman soldiers" may have been understood to correspond to the "demons" or "evil spirits" or "wild animals" found in the shamanic initiations. Jesus's "outer garments" may have been meant to symbolize the "old body" or "first body" of the initiate which is "torn apart" by those "demons" or "wild animals" in order that the initiate can receive a "new body" with "new organs"—perhaps symbolized by the "seamless tunic," the "inner garment."

A similar idea can be found in Mark 1:26, which, describing Jesus's exorcism of a demon from a man, says,

**And the unclean spirit [that is, the demon] convulsed (the man) [or "tore him in pieces," or "pulled him apart," or "mangled him": *sparassō*], and, crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. [Indicating the end of the man's "initiatory ordeal," perhaps?]**

Note also, by the way, that the use of metaphor by the members of these shamanistic religions is highly reminiscent of the “active concretization” that Arieti believes characterizes schizophrenic thought and language, with the result that it is often difficult for the listener to know whether the speaker means for his language to be understood literally or metaphorically. At first it seems that the speaker might be speaking literally, but then, at least in some cases, it soon becomes clear that that is simply not possible. Unfortunately, many persons—even persons who are members of the same tribe and religion as the speaker—*do* often make the mistake of giving a literal interpretation to the language; and this is the source of all religious superstition. It therefore follows that religious superstition could be ended entirely if this reckless way of communicating were ended entirely.

Arieti continues,

In their psychiatric dictionary Hinsie and Shatsky defined *autism* as

a form of thinking, more or less genuinely, of a *subjective* character; if objective material enters, *it is given subjective meaning and emphasis*. Autism generally carries with it the thought that the material is *derived from the individual himself*, appearing in the nature of day-dreams, phantasies, delusions, hallucinations, etc. The content of thought, in other words, is largely endogenous. *In classical instances of autistic thinking, such as occurs in schizophrenia, the unconscious sphere makes the largest contribution to autism.*

It is obvious that the terms autistic thought and paleologic thought are applied to the same phenomenon. Autism, however, is a more descriptive term. ... Paleologic is more a structural term; it means that autistic thought uses a paleological type of logic. Thus, both terms are useful; autism refers generally to a particular type of thinking; paleologic refers to the type of logic that is used in that type of thinking. [p. 289; citation omitted.]

This brings to mind something written by Mircea Eliade, which points to the strong tendency toward autism found in all esoteric religions, due to their very nature:

Poetic creation still remains an act of perfect spiritual freedom. Poetry remakes and prolongs language; every poetic language begins by being *a secret language*, that is, *the creation of a personal universe, of a completely closed world*. The purest poetic act seems to re-create language from an inner experience that, like the ecstasy or the religious inspiration of “primitives,” reveals the essence of things. It is from such linguistic creations, made possible by pre-ecstatic “inspiration,” that the “secret languages” of the mystics and the traditional allegorical languages later crystallize. [*Shamanism*, p. 510-11.]

Eliade also writes,

The shamanic “miracles” not only confirm and reinforce the patterns of the traditional religion, they also stimulate and feed the imagination, demolish the barriers between dream and present reality.... [Shamanism, p. 511.]

Recall what the psychiatric dictionary said: “In classical instances of autistic thinking, such as occurs in schizophrenia, the unconscious sphere makes the largest contribution to autism.” I think it is fair to say that the “unconscious sphere” is heavily involved in “ecstasy” or “pre-ecstatic inspiration,” which Eliade describes as “a completely closed world”—that is, an autistic world. In other words, we come quite close to the very definition of schizophrenia as soon as we look carefully at the essential nature of esoteric initiatory religion.

Arieti writes that, while “the frequency of paleologic thinking in some societies neither implies that their individual members are mentally inferior, nor calls into question the moral and spiritual equality of man,”

[t]here seems to be no doubt that paleologic thought is less differentiated than the Aristotelian. It consists of primary categories or classes, which have a simpler organization than the secondary ones.... It is much less reliable and induces errors and the perpetuation of these errors that could be avoided with Aristotelian thought. Unless we revise our philosophical concept of progress, we have to consider Aristotelian thought as being superior to the paleologic. The achievements in which humanity takes pride could not have been attained if the paleologic method of thought had been the prevalent one. The tendency of such thought to occur in early childhood, in a dream-state, and in pathological conditions, when our higher mental functions have not yet developed or cannot be used, indicates irrefutably that it is a way of thinking that does not require our highest levels of integration.

Primitive thinking occurs in every culture. The difference in quantity of paleologic thinking between Western and non-Western culture is more apparent than real. Most anthropologists were Western men who were more prone to detect paleologic thinking in other cultures than in their own. It is very difficult to detect illogical thinking in the cultural, social, and religious manifestations to which we are accustomed, and whose truths or values we take for granted. **Often the culture itself imposes paleologic conceptions and habits on the individual, even though the individual is capable of high forms of thinking and behavior.**

... [A]nthropologists have stressed the fact that the individual native is capable of thinking with Aristotelian logic even in his own environment. **It is only when he wishes to comply with the mores of the culture, especially in situations that have a social significance—such as magic, religion, initiation rites, marriages, wars, and so forth—that he accepts paleologic conceptions.**

[The anthropologist Lucien] Lévy-Bruhl, too, in speaking of “primitive” mentality in inferior societies, has been misunderstood. He wrote about the presence of paleologic mentality in social situations, not in the individual. It is true that he considered some societies to be inferior, but only the societies, not the individual.

...

There is an intrinsic conservative or static quality in every culture on account of which cultural elements are perpetuated and transmitted as they are. *The more abundant is the paleologic thinking in a culture, the more difficult it is for the culture to get rid of it.* ...

...

... Some historical, social, and geographical factors have helped Western culture to get rid of primitive thinking faster than other cultures have done. Some of these factors are: the abstract thinking of the Hebrew religion and of religions that derive from it; Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy; Greek mathematics and Euclidean geometry; expansion of mathematics and sciences. ...

... *Obviously [paleologic thinking] must originate from the minds of one or several men and be accepted by the collectivity,* because of its magic, reassuring, sociopolitical, religious values. [pp. 291-93.]

And I would argue that these “one or several men” in a given culture must have been more or less schizophrenic in their thinking. It was these “originators” who were, in effect, thinking schizophrenically *on behalf of* the rest of the collectivity, the members of which must have been strongly attracted to that way of thinking—but who still needed to keep enough distance from it so that the collectivity could survive in the real world.

Arieti continues,

... Often culture detracts, arrests, handicaps, delays, or distorts the potentiality of the individual man. This is a very high price that some individuals have to pay for belonging to a given culture. ... As I have expressed, “... *Every existing man who is in a state of health and more than three years old is at least potentially capable of thinking in accordance with the Aristotelian laws of thought.*” [p. 293; citation omitted.]

In other words: *It is only when an individual wishes to comply with the mores of his society—especially including those mores involving religion—that he is willing to accept paleologic thought; and to accept paleologic thought means being forced to think like a lunatic, or like a child under the age of three.* It is *imperative* that this social arrangement be brought to an end as quickly as possible. *It is a social arrangement that actively works to keep healthy adults mentally crawling around on all fours,* and which retards and prevents what ought to be viewed as normal human development. And it is by constructing new religions—religions which *promote* logical

thought and secondary process thinking, instead of *discouraging* them—that a person’s desire to be accepted into mainstream society would no longer require that the person be willing to submit to being mentally infantilized or deranged.

The “Messianic Age” understood as the ultimate reign of “secondary process” (or “conscious,” or “logical”) thinking

Arieti goes on to put the development of primary process and secondary process thinking into the broad context of human evolution:

Prehuman species had indeed a type of cognition that was not symbolic. Animals are capable of learning. They respond to stimuli and to signs, which are signals of these stimuli. Although their understanding of the universe is limited, they retain a grasp of reality, and it is difficult for them to escape from reality. When an animal responds to a sign, as for example when a cat responds to the odor of a mouse, he is a realist. *The cat does not let his imagination confuse him.* The odor is there, therefore, the mouse is there. At the level of signs, mistakes are difficult and rare, unless artificial situations are devised by men to confuse the animal. However, *when species evolve and are capable of images, paleosymbols* [that is, symbols whose meanings are only understood by a single individual, as opposed to socialized symbols], *and paleologic thinking*, together with a greater vision of reality, ***there is a greater facility of escaping from reality*** and plunging into error. If presapiens species of men existed that had not reached a connotational, secondary process, Aristotelian degree of cognition, they lived in danger. One may wonder how these primitive species were able to survive or evolve into others if their actions were determined *exclusively* by a system of thinking, like that of the primary process, that appears so unrealistic to us.

When a new state of evolution brings with it new challenges that make species survival very difficult, two possibilities present themselves: either the species perishes or a mutation (in this case Aristotelian or secondary process thinking) that insures survival occurs. Presapiens hominids had at their disposal a way by which they could live more or less safely and realistically: by relying purely on (or regressing to) their presymbolic or sign levels; that is, by being guided exclusively by stimuli and signs. However, whenever they indulged in paleologic thinking, they put themselves in a dangerous situation. Eventually *all* the species that could not sufficiently overcome this type of thinking perished; no one has been left on earth. ***Thus, although the appearance of symbolic thinking was an evolutionary improvement that led to what is specifically human in man, it was a dangerous improvement because at first it emerged in the form of paleologic thinking.*** Secondary process thinking probably did not occur abruptly by the sudden occurrence of a mutation, but possibly was the result of a slow, tremendously improbable convergence of minor positive mutations.

...

... [W]hen *Homo sapiens* (or other races) equipped with secondary process thinking appeared, *the use of primary process thinking in collective organization was overwhelming.* We have already stressed that any society and culture imposes ways of thinking on the individual, even if he is capable of higher levels

of cognition. We must realize, however, that not only culture or society impose primitive ways of thinking. ***Primitive ways have also a strong appeal to the unconscious or to the less evolved part of the individual psyche.*** [pp. 293-95.]

I contend that it is this “less evolved part of the individual psyche” that has been responsible for humanity’s universal attachment to esoteric religions, due to the fact that such religions are essentially “schizophrenic,” or “primary process,” or “unconscious,” in nature. One might say that this is the part of the individual psyche that is always trying to find a way back into the symbolic “Garden of Eden” after having been “expelled” from it; in other words, it is the part of the individual psyche that would like to regress to the mental “womb”—and which blames the “shrewdness” or “subtlety” of the secondary-process “serpent” for its expulsion. (See [Genesis 3:1](#).)

(Note, by the way, that the Greek word found in the Septuagint translation of Genesis 3:1 that is used to mean “shrewd” or “subtle,” *phronimos*, has a mostly positive connotation when used in the New Testament—especially including [Matthew 10:16](#), in which Jesus exhorts his disciples to be “shrewd as the serpents.” It strikes me as inconceivable that the authors of the New Testament would have been willing to use such a loaded expression unless their attitude toward the figure of “the serpent” in the Garden of Eden was at least an *ambivalent* one.)

As I indicated above, it’s true that the member of a primitive society is more focused on conforming to the mores of his society than is the autistic individual member of a modern industrialized society, so it is fair to say that the “primitive thinking” of the former does indeed promote the outward cohesion of the group. But the methods that such an egotistic society uses to achieve that cohesion necessarily tend to be more brutish and juvenile in nature: coercion, intimidation, mockery, threats of ostracism or exclusion, peer pressure, bullying, scapegoating, the demonization of those located outside the society, and so on. There is little in the way of *actual* communion of thought and meaning in such a society, as opposed to the mere *appearance* of communion. In fact, one might say that such a society is held together mostly by fear and greed, rather than by love, empathy, rationality, and mutual respect.

It is crucially important that it be understood that the existence of love in the world requires that secondary process thinking be *dominant* over primary process thinking. In fact, I believe that this idea can be found contained in 1 Corinthians 13, the famous “love chapter,” which indicates that even after “primary process” ways of thinking have been put aside, or at least demoted in importance, love will still remain—and not only remain, but increase. It would be a grave mistake to first associate “love” with “the emotions,” and then to oppose “the emotions” to “logical thinking.” There is nothing about logic that is incompatible with the emotions *per se*. Logic is neither the enemy nor the rival of love; it is the *protector* of love. Bizarre and idiosyncratic ways of thinking, and unchecked subjectivity in one’s thinking, are the enemies of *both* logic and love, in addition to truth and meaningfulness in society.

This fact serves as a reminder that secondary process thinking—i.e., “logical thinking”—is invariably accompanied by the values of compassion, love, truth, and honesty. Secondary process thinking requires forming conceptual categories and making conceptual distinctions in more or less *the same way* that other members of one’s society form them and make them. Secondary process thinking also requires using words and language in more or less *the same way* that other members of one’s society use them. In other words, secondary process thinking requires that one always be *keenly attuned* to understanding and anticipating the thoughts, thinking processes, and meanings of other persons, and also that one make one’s own thoughts, thinking processes, and meanings readily accessible by those other persons. Primary process thinking, on the other hand, is highly idiosyncratic, subjective, and self-involved. (“**For we now look into a mirror** [which suggests the idea of ‘self-involvement’] **in enigmas** [which suggests ‘primary process thinking’]; **but then, face to face** [which suggests the idea of ‘genuine dialogue with another person’]. **Now I know in part; but then I will know fully, just as I have also been fully known.**”) That is not to say that primary process thinking has no value; it does, especially in the generation of new and creative ideas—that is, ideas which *differ* from customarily accepted ones. But whenever a person is concerned with making *genuine contact* with another person in order to *share* those new ideas, his thinking must be done in accordance with the secondary process.

Also note that regardless of whether a person is coldly and deliberately lying, or is speaking in a way that reflects primary process thinking (such as by speaking in “schizophrenese”), in either case his actual intended meanings are not being made available to other persons, with the result that the others are either misled or confused; and this restriction or constriction of the interpersonal circulation of thought and meaning has the effect of severing the interpersonal bonds that hold society together.

At the same time, however, it would be a fallacy to think that a “primary process society” is more “individualistic” than a “secondary process society,” and that people would be sacrificing something valuable if they were to move to a social scheme that gave greater emphasis to secondary process thinking. A society that promotes secondary process thinking actually promotes *genuine* individuality far better than one that promotes primary process thinking, since the former type of society does not depend upon force and coercion to keep the society intact. In relation to this idea, recall what Arieti wrote in the passage quoted above: “**Paradoxically, it is by adopting universal forms that the individuality of the patient, with its specific dynamic determinants, is allowed to emerge.**”

So a society that actively promotes secondary process ways of thinking will be a healthy, honest, sane, and loving society, while a society that actively promotes primary process ways of thinking will be characterized by fear, hate, division, selfishness, deception, mutual exploitation, stupidity, confusion, and insanity. And any society in which the dominant religion is one of the traditional, esoteric religions—such as Christianity—should be thought of as a society that actively promotes primary process thinking, and indeed *forces* that way of thinking upon people—even though many of them might have the courage to aspire to advance beyond it. The result is that they are made more stupid

and deranged than they would have been had their culture treated their aspirations with the respect they deserved.

A dominance of primary process thinking (i.e., “unconscious thinking”) effectively serves as a brake on human evolution and progress—which in turn means that the traditional, esoteric religions are likewise serving as a collective brake on human evolution and progress. By promoting primary process thinking, the traditional religions have in fact been promoting mental regression. We can put an end to this state of affairs by making the simple choice to reject the world’s traditional, esoteric religions, and replacing them with religions that instead promote secondary process thinking as deserving of the dominant position. By embracing that new *type* of religion, human beings would finally be able to unleash their full potential, liberated from the oppressive dead weight of culturally-imposed unconsciousness and irrationality.

With the help of the excerpts from Arieti given above, we are now in a position to understand that during the time of its co-existence with the phenomenon of mythical or esoteric religion, humanity has essentially been traversing a very long, very dangerous, and very violent transition stage in its evolution. First, with its acquired ability to deliberately bring *images* before the mind, and then, with its acquisition of *symbolic thought*, humanity gained the ability to *take leave of reality* whenever its members so wished. We have arrived at that point in time when we as a species can envision (more or less) fully returning to reality—only now, we need not do so by mentally regressing to the developmental stage of animals by abandoning the symbols that make human culture possible.

And it cannot be stressed enough that this return to reality would *not* be contrary to the mission of Christianity; rather, it would be the *fulfillment* of Christianity—provided the heavily symbolic thinking found in the Bible is interpreted correctly. At some level of awareness, the authors of the Bible seemed to *understand* and to *be announcing* that humanity was in the process of making a huge, portentous transition, as it collectively moved away from mental rule by the primary process, and toward mental rule by the secondary process, signified by the great symbolic idea of the “Messianic Age.” And they were announcing this even as those very authors were still, not merely *using* primary process thinking, but positively *ensnared in* it; again, there is good reason to think that many if not all of those authors were literally schizophrenic. And because they were still mentally ensnared in the primary process, they were forced to *unconsciously* express their great desire to be *liberated* from that primary process (and, along with it, their own schizophrenia) through the use of cryptic metaphorical *symbols*—which must be deciphered and interpreted in much the same way that Dr. Arieti has described the deciphering and interpreting of the communication of a modern-day schizophrenic individual.

For example, there is good reason to believe that the Biblical symbol of the “dawning” of the “day of the Lord” ought to be seen as signifying the “awakening” of humankind from its collective “sleep,” or its collective “dream” (or rather, its nightmare), which has been created by its passionate desire to escape from reality through regressive paleologic,

“dream-like” thinking, and by its refusal to be “bound” by the logical, socially rational constraints of secondary process thinking. (Cf. [Isaiah 59:9](#), [Isaiah 62:1](#), [Malachi 4:1-3](#), and [Psalm 37:6](#).) As a general rule, I believe that the Biblical symbols of “darkness” and “sleep” ought to be associated with the idea of “unconsciousness” (and “meaninglessness”), while the symbols of “light” and “wakefulness” ought to be associated with the idea of “consciousness” (and “meaningfulness”). After all, it is the products of the sleeping, dreaming mind whose meanings are obscure and “dark,” not the waking mind; and it is these which therefore require *interpretation* in the “light of day” of conscious psychoanalytical thought in order to make their meanings “manifest.”

In addition, the related symbol of the “*Second* Coming” might be thought of as signifying the widespread replacement of “primary process thinking” by “*secondary* process thinking,” especially in the area of religion. And no, I don’t think that the similarity of expression here can necessarily be written off as a mere coincidence. If the idea occurred to Freud of regarding the more conscious and logical type of thinking as “second” in order, then there is no reason to assume that the same notion would not have occurred, even if only unconsciously, to the authors of the Bible and the Christians who came after them. Remember, the movement to “schizophrenic thinking” always marks a *regression* to a less developed stage of thinking after the individual has *already* passed through a more developed stage of thinking. When one sees such thinking in persons, it is not a sign that those persons were simply born without the capacity to develop normally; rather, it is a sign either that some dynamic has *prevented them* from following a normal path of development, or else that they are *refusing* to do so (but even that “refusal” is likely just an expression of the fact that they have been faced with what they deem to be insuperable obstacles standing in the path of their normal development). They already *have experience* with secondary process cognition—but they made the choice to return to an *earlier* form of cognition. For that reason, it is not at all unreasonable to suppose that the Biblical authors would have recognized two different modes of thinking, one of which preceded the other.

As additional support for this hypothesis, in a footnote to the 12th century Jewish theologian Moses Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* (University of Chicago Press, 1963), which was written in Arabic, translator Shlomo Pines says that an Arabic term used by Maimonides that Pines translates into English as “the first meaning” signifies “the conventional meaning” (p. 64, n. 19). In other words, “the second meaning” would signify the “unconventional meaning” or “private meaning.” Consider that in the example given by Arieti above, in which the word “people” was found to *sometimes* mean “persons of quality” when it was used by the schizophrenic patient, the “unconventional meaning” or “private meaning”—that is, what Maimonides would presumably have called the “second meaning”—had to be learned *before* it would be possible to “translate” the obscure “esoteric” or “primary process” communication into something that could be understood by someone using “secondary process” cognition. According to my hypothesis, the “Second Coming” would therefore correspond to the “general discernment of the second meaning or private meaning,”—that is, a *translation* of the private or second meaning into secondary process thinking—which, if it occurred

routinely, would make possible the widespread reign of secondary process cognition along with mutual understanding.

Also, the symbol of a universal human “resurrection” (Greek *anastasis*, which literally means “standing up” or “rising”) might be seen as corresponding to the “rising” of the human mind from a state of relative unconsciousness to a state of full consciousness, just as the idea of “consciousness” is suggested by the concretized image of the human body “rising” from a supine sleeping position to an upright waking position. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:13, Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as having been “raised,” Greek *egeirō*—a word which can also mean “to wake from sleep.” (Cf. [John 11:9-16](#), which shows how the authors of the New Testament regarded “sleep” and “death” as largely interchangeable, or at least overlapping, concepts.) And it is no doubt significant that the Gospels depict Jesus as having been raised from death “at dawn.” (See [Matthew 28:1-7](#), [Mark 16:1-6](#), and [Luke 24:1-7](#)).

It is interesting that the resurrections of both Jesus and Lazarus (see [John 11:38-44](#)) are associated with the image of their emergence from a symbolic “cave,” a symbol which in the minds of the authors may have signified the idea of solipsism, or autism, or self-involvement, or isolation, or solitude. If so, it would be reminiscent of the passage from Mircea Eliade that I quoted above: “Poetry remakes and prolongs language; every poetic language begins by being a secret language, that is, the creation of *a personal universe*, of *a completely closed world*. The purest poetic act seems to re-create language from *an inner experience* that, like the ecstasy or the religious inspiration of ‘primitives,’ reveals the essence of things.” The symbol of the “resurrection” might then be seen as signifying a return of the “initiate” to his people, after having gone through a period of solitude, in order to *share* his new interior discoveries with them.

Arieti continues,

Some psychiatrists interpret the psychosis, not as a negative or pathological phenomenon, but as a positive development that reveals truths to fellow men and opens new paths toward greater moral values. ... [T]he Finnish psychiatrist [Martti] Siirala discusses what he considers the prophetic value of many apparent delusions of schizophrenics. Siirala sees the patient as a victim and as a prophet to whom nobody listens. He sees the therapist as a person who has the duty to reveal to society the prophecies of these patients. These prophecies would consist of insights into our collective sickness, into *the murders that we have committed for many generations and that we have buried so that they will not be noticed*. He feels that schizophrenia emerges out of a common sort of sickness, a sickness shared by the others, the healthy.

In [Ronald] Laing’s opinion schizophrenia is not a disease, but a broken-down relationship. The environment of the patient is so bad that he has to invent special strategies in order “to live in this unlivable situation.” *The psychotic does not want to do any more denying. He unmask himself; he unmask the others*. The psychosis thus *appears as madness only to ordinary human beings*, who have the

limited vision of the secondary process. Not only the family but society at large with its *hypocrisies* makes the situation unlivable. Echoing in a certain way [Thomas] Szasz, Laing goes to the extent of saying that the diagnosis of schizophrenia is political, not medical. [pp. 125-26.]

In light of that passage, consider Mark 3:20-23,30:

And (Jesus) went into a house, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. And having heard (of this), those close to him went out to take custody of him, for they said, “***He has gone out of his mind.***” And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul,” and, “By the prince of the demons he casts out the demons.” And having called them to (him), ***in parables*** he said to them... [I’m omitting Jesus’s response] ...***because*** [!] ***they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”***

(Now go and read Jesus’s response in [Mark 3:23-29](#). If you informed a person that you believed he might be acutely psychotic and/or demon-possessed, and, in response, he uttered a string of highly obscure and even incomprehensible “parables” like the ones found in that passage, would you view that as *confirmation* of your suspicion that the person might be “mad,” or as *disconfirmation*? Be honest, please. I’m not saying that the author of this passage had nothing worthwhile to say; only that, in the form in which his thoughts have been given to us, it requires considerable effort and ingenuity to ascertain with any reasonable clarity what those “worthwhile” things are.)

In other words, we find that Jesus had been put on the defensive by being accused of being “demon-possessed,” and he was fighting back in the only way he felt able to do—that is, schizophrenically, in the form of obscure parables.

Also—keeping in mind the specific words used by Dr. Arieti to describe the views of Drs. Siirala and Laing—consider Matthew 23:27-39, in which Jesus says:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, ***hypocrites!*** For you resemble whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful [*hōraios*, which can also mean “ripe” or “blooming” or “flourishing”], but inside they are full of (the) bones of (the) dead and all impurity. So you also appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of ***hypocrisy*** and lawlessness.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, ***hypocrites!*** For ***you build the tombs of*** [in other words, “you *bury*,” or “you *silence*”] ***the prophets***, and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and you say, “If we had been (alive) in the days of our fathers, we would never have been partakers with them in (shedding) the blood of the prophets.” ***Thus*** [that is, by “burying” or “silencing” the prophets] ***you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. And you fill up the measure of your fathers.*** [In other words, to *cover up the fact* that the message of the “prophets” has *been* silenced is just as bad as to “murder” or “silence” them because of their message—that is, to render

them “mad” and therefore worth ignoring—in the first place. The scribes and Pharisees who are being addressed here “fill up the measure of their fathers” because the “murderers” couldn’t have gotten away with what they did unless the “buriers” continued to cooperate with them in their plans; each of the two parts is required to make a whole. The “fathers” come first, the “sons” come second.] **You serpents, offspring of vipers, how shall you escape from the sentence of hell? For this reason I send out** [*apo-stellō*, from which the English word “*apostle*,” meaning “one who is sent out,” is derived] **to you *prophets* and wise (men) and scribes.** [In other words, there seems to be a possible suggestion that the Christian “apostles” were meant to be regarded as the “prophets” of that time. That hypothesis is supported by the use of the future tense in what follows.] **Some of them you *will* kill and *will* crucify, and some of them you *will* flog in your synagogues, and *will* persecute from town to town, so that upon you may come all (the) righteous blood *being* poured out** [present tense, not aorist past tense, indicating that the “persecution” and symbolic “bloodletting” continues, meaning that a symbolic universal “resurrection” has not yet occurred] **upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered** [aorist past tense, indicating that the initial symbolic “murder” has already taken place; cf. [Galatians 6:17](#), quoted above] **between the temple and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.**

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the *prophets* and stoning *those who have been sent out* [*apo-stellō*] to her. How often would I have gathered together your children as a hen gathers together her chicks under her wings—and you wished it not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate. For I say to you, you shall not see me from now until you say, “Blessed (is) the one who comes in (the) name of (the) Lord.”

Consider that “the one who comes in the name of the Lord” would presumably not be “the Lord” himself—in which case the passage would be indicating that *when people finally began to be receptive to the message of the “apostles”*—that is, the schizophrenic-like “prophets”—they would also finally be able to (metaphorically) “see the Lord” himself. (As support for this hypothesis, compare [Matthew 25:31-46](#) with [Ephesians 3:8](#), focusing on their use of the word “least,” Greek *elachistos*.) In other words, the “Second Coming” would occur when human beings finally gained the strength to confront the “collective sickness” for which the “schizophrenic” or “madman” or “prophet” has always been made to serve as human society’s scapegoat down through the ages. And my personal belief is that the existence of that “collective sickness” finds its source in the existence of the Lie—which, unfortunately, the schizophrenic-like “prophets” unwittingly help to perpetuate by their attempts to transmit their (concealed) message to the “normals”: a message telling us that the whole sick and dishonest arrangement of esoteric religion needs to be jettisoned once and for all.

And if that's true, then it's not only Christianity that has been trying to deliver such a message. St. Clement of Alexandria, a Christian theologian who lived in the 2nd to 3rd centuries A.D., wrote, in the course of denouncing the ancient pagan mystery religions,

If you would like a vision of the Korybantic orgies also, this is the story. Two of the Korybantes slew a third one, who was their brother, covered the head of the corpse with a purple cloak, and then wretched and buried it, bearing it upon a brazen shield to the skirts of Mount Olympus. ***Here we see what the mysteries are, in one word, murders and burials!*** [G. W. Butterworth, trans., *Clement of Alexandria* (Loeb Classical Library, 1968), § 2.19. Taken from Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987, pp. 246-47.]

These facts seem to point once again to a close relationship between schizophrenia or psychosis, on the one hand, and esoteric initiatory religions (including Christianity), on the other. In fact, I often get the sense that the ancient initiatory mystery religions served especially as gathering places for prepsychotic and psychotic personalities, places where they could find refuge from the harsh gaze of the broader, "normal" society.

Incidentally, the Korybantes in particular had a reputation for frequently castrating themselves while in a state of ecstatic frenzy. Self-mutilation is not uncommon among regressed schizophrenics. Arieti writes,

*Self-mutilation* is a socially unacceptable alteration of the body inflicted by the individual upon himself. It is carried out by actions that aim at cutting off, removing, destroying, maiming, or impairing one or more parts of the body. ...

A large number of these patients want to substitute a physical pain for an emotional one. Perhaps in these cases we may consider again the self-mutilating act as a concretization or an embodiment of the mental anguish. The patient, however, does not succeed in obtaining what he wants because the physical pain is considered less disturbing than the mental one, and so the act is repeated. A few patients, in the course of treatment, told me that they used to hurt themselves because the pain then became real. They wanted to escape from what they vaguely perceived as unreal pain.

In many cases the self-mutilating act has a more specific symbolic meaning. Castrations play a prominent role. By cutting, or burning, or injuring in any way the arms, legs, fingers, toes, penis, and testicles, often male patients want to castrate themselves in order to punish themselves or because "they prefer to belong to the other sex." I have found that self-inflicted injuries to testicles and penis are not necessarily castration attempts but symbolic expressions of preoccupation with birth, being born, being one's parents' real son, or the father of one's children, and so on. At times these acts of self-mutilation carry out commands received from auditory hallucinations [read: "gods"]. At other times they are determined by delusional beliefs.

[Otto] Fenichel compares the self-castrations, as they occasionally occur in catatonic conditions, to the “auto-castrations” performed by religious fanatics, who, by such radical denial of their active sexual wishes, try to regain “peaceful unity with God,” that is, an extreme passive submissiveness, less a feminine nature than an early infantile “oceanic” one. [pp. 307-08.]

Also, in connection with the topic of self-mutilation, consider [Matthew 5:29-30](#). Jesus’s saying in that passage is often explained away as a mere “orientalism,” but when we regard the Bible as a schizophrenic writing, it takes on a different sense. That is not to say that the authors were prepared to actually engage in such self-mutilation; but it may indicate that they could at least in some way sympathize with the desire to do so.

Again in connection with the topic of self-mutilation, consider Mark 5:5-9,13, which, speaking of a demoniac (i.e., a schizophrenic), says,

And all night and day in the tombs and in the mountains he would **scream** [or shriek, or cry out: *krazō*] and **cut himself with stones**. And, having seen Jesus from afar, he ran and prostrated (himself) before him. And, having **screamed** [*krazō*] **with a loud voice**, he said, “What have I to do with you, Jesus, son of the most high God? I implore you by God not to torment me!” For (Jesus) was saying to him, “Come forth, unclean spirit, out of the man!” And (Jesus) asked him, “What is your name?” And he said to him, “‘Legion’ is name to me, because **we are many**.” ... And having come out, the unclean spirits entered into the pigs; and the herd, (numbering) about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and they were **drowned** in the sea.

Now compare this passage to what Arieti writes:

Another symptom, even in patients who are not regressed, is the *scream*. At times unexpectedly, or after a period of acute disturbance, **the patient explodes into a loud, horrifying scream**, a symptom that for centuries has been represented in literature as a symbol for madness. The scream stands for the lifelong whimpering that was never heard. From patients who later were able to verbalize their feeling, I have learned that the scream is a protest. The scream means, “Stop, stop, **surrounding malevolent forces**. Don’t overcome me, don’t **drown** me. I want to live, I am alive, I scream.” [p. 307; compare [Mark 1:26](#) with [Luke 23:46](#).]

With the passage from Arieti in mind, it becomes easy to imagine that the author of Mark 5:5-9,13 may have meant for the pigs to be seen as suffering the same “drowning” fate that the demoniac **would** have suffered **if** the demons had **not** been exorcised from him—except that with the pigs, that fate is being depicted in the form of an “actively concretized” metaphor. The fact that the unclean spirits entered specifically into “pigs” might signify the low self-esteem and sense of worthlessness of the typical demoniac or schizophrenic; the fact that the pigs numbered “two thousand” might signify how

overwhelming and numerous the “surrounding malevolent forces” would have seemed to their victim; and the “rush down the steep bank into the sea” might signify the rapid unraveling and deterioration of the acutely disturbed psychotic person. It is difficult to conceive of any more plausible explanation for the author’s decision to narrate such a strange episode.

Incidentally, it is noteworthy that the authors of the Gospels seem to have had so much interest in and knowledge about demon-possession and schizophrenia. Is it possible that the reason for their preoccupation was that they had first-hand experience with these phenomena? Were they hoping for the arrival of someone or something that could rescue them from their own schizophrenia? Might the figure of “Jesus Christ” have served as an “actively concretized” symbol of that hope?

Arieti continues,

[T]he *psychotic rationalization* is an effort on the part of the regressed schizophrenic *to justify*, in a way seemingly so inappropriate or childlike to the point of being humorous, a position or *an attempt to escape from a serious predicament*. . . . ***[B]ehind this absurd rationalization is often hidden the real voice of the patient, a personal truth which wants to be heard. But the environment is deaf and a specifically thunderous way of expressing it had to be found.*** [p. 381.]

I believe the schizophrenic’s mode of “active concretization” is probably adopted out of the belief that this will serve as the “specifically thunderous way of expressing” his truth that he has been seeking—even if in most cases it does not have the intended effect, since most listeners simply get confused by the heavily metaphorical language he uses, and have no idea what his “personal truth” might be. And if no one understands the idea he is trying to express, no one will be able to correct it if it happens to be mistaken. Arieti touches on this point when he speaks of

that perplexing and mixed picture that the schizophrenic presents: on the one hand, he is very sensitive and is capable of seeing through a situation and perceiving the truth even more so than a normal person; on the other hand, what he does with what he sees is so distorted that it will increase, rather than decrease, his difficulties. [Or, in the special case of esoteric, mythical religion, it will increase the difficulties of everyone in society.] . . . The fact remains that the schizophrenic cannot be considered indeed only a person of great feeling and understanding; he is much more complicated. He adds a great deal of misunderstanding to what he keenly understands. [p. 567.]

Arieti provides us with an example of a “psychotic rationalization”:

A woman who was born and raised in a South American country in a well-to-do family, came to the United States in her early twenties, after having completed her college education. While in the United States she married an American citizen,

from whom she had a child. When I first saw her, she was in her middle thirties, had been sick for several years, and showed signs of regression. She appeared apathetic, except when she was talking about her husband, for whom she nourished bitter resentment. She would repeatedly say that her husband was a bad man and that she always knew it. When she was asked why she married her husband if she knew he was such a bad man, she replied, "The wedding ceremony took place in this country. When the priest asked me if I wanted to marry my husband, he spoke in English and I did not understand him. I said, 'I do.' If he had spoken Spanish, my own language, I would have never agreed to marry such a man." This rationalization would be facetious if it were not pathetic. It would be logical if it was not based on illogical premises. The patient obviously understood the question at the wedding ceremony and replied, "I do," in English. Moreover she spoke English fairly well, even at the time of her wedding. Her rationalization, however, cannot be interpreted just at face value as an attempt to justify herself or to disavow her responsibility or to make her marriage almost illegal. There was much more than that in this apparently absurd rationalization. The years spent in the United States had a flavor of unreality for her, or at least there seemed to be an atmosphere of foginess and confusion. These years were characterized by a series of unfortunate events, which culminated in her unhappy marriage. Only life prior to her coming to the United States, that is, that period of her life when she was speaking Spanish, made sense to her. In her mind thus what was confused or unclearly motivated or directly or indirectly led to mental pain became associated with the English language. Again, following our theoretical framework, we could say that the patient resorted to active concretization. She reduced the uncertainty and foginess of her North American life to a linguistic difficulty. Again this symptom, a rationalization, is not just a technical device to avoid responsibility; it is also and predominantly an expression of her whole life history, of her whole tragedy, of the difference between the peace or apparent peace of her early life and the turbulence or apparent turbulence of her married life.

**In a way comparable to the work of the fine artist and of the poet, a little episode, or a single symptom like a rationalization, becomes representative of a much larger segment of reality.**

...

... In [nonpsychotic rationalizations] there is ... a concordance between the obvious reality, although a superficial reality, and the psychodynamic reality that is suppressed. ...

In the rationalization of the South American woman **there was no congruence or concordance between the external or superficial reality and the psychodynamic [reality].** The rationalization becomes plausible only if we know the complicated experiences the patient went through. ... [I]t is evident that an attempt is almost constantly made by the human being, even when he is schizophrenic, to maintain

*an element of plausibility.* Contrary to what is believed by some, most human beings cannot accept anything that seems irrational to them. The need for rationality is as powerful as the need to gratify the irrational motivation. This need for rationality is always underestimated by people who see the human being as dominated by instinctual drives. ...

If rationality is never completely abandoned, a certain level or type of rationality, however, is often lost, especially in situations of severe anxiety or emergency. The rationality seems at times to have declined to such an extent that it can no longer be recognized. ... However, and here we cannot avoid marveling at the multifarious aspects of the human psyche, *every irrationality has its own rationality; the illogical element is a plausible part of a logical gestalt.* ... [pp. 225-27.]

I think that much of what Paul writes in his epistles about Jesus Christ can be viewed as “psychotic rationalization” along the lines described by Arieti. (Closely related to this, I think that the so-called “miracles” described in the Gospels can also probably be described as the products of “psychotic rationalization,” in addition to being “active concretizations.”) Consider, for example, what Paul writes in Romans 6:2-10:

How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or are you ignorant that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **Therefore** [!] we were buried with him through baptism into death, **in order that** [!] just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. **For** [!] if we have become united (with) the likeness [*homoiōma*] of his death, we will also be (united with the likeness of his) resurrection, knowing this, that our old self [more literally, “man”: *anthrōpos*] was crucified with (him) **in order that** [!] the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. **For** [!] the one who has died has been acquitted of sin. And if we died with Christ, we believe [or trust, or have confidence: *pisteuō*] that we will also live together with him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer rules him. **For** [!] (the death) he died, he died to sin once and for all; but (the life) he lives, he lives to God.

Behold all the specious reasoning which rests on nothing at all other than Paul’s mere *ipse dixit*. As with what the South American woman had to say, reading the preceding passage at face value would be a mistake. What Arieti wrote about the woman’s psychotic rationalization applies equally well to Paul’s writing here: “*It would be logical if it was not based on illogical premises.*” (I think Arieti’s comment, “It would be logical if it was not based on illogical premises,” also applies quite well to the writing preceding the quoted passage, in [Romans 5:12-21](#).) As a matter of fact, I find it easier to make sense of the South American woman’s thinking than the thinking in the quoted passage from Paul. Christians have become so accustomed to the “logic” demonstrated in this passage—since that “logic” undergirds their theology—that they lose sight of just how *bizarre* it sounds to someone who is approaching it with a “beginner’s mind.” The

problem is not just that it doesn't make sense; it's that Paul seems *oblivious to the fact* that it won't make sense to most people, and feels no need to prepare them for or even acknowledge its apparent nonsensicalness. It makes absolutely no sense to our ordinary ways of thinking to suggest that one person can somehow be "baptized into" the life events (or death events) of another "person" by undergoing a magic ritual—even if we are willing to make the difficult assumption that that other person was somehow able to achieve "sinlessness" through his own death. (And if someone feels tempted to respond to this by saying, "God's thinking is far beyond our ordinary ways of thinking," then my response is that if "God's thinking" is superior to ordinary thinking, then psychotic thinking must also be superior to ordinary thinking—because that's what "God's thinking" here closely resembles.) For that reason, we cannot accept that one person was "buried" or "died" just because another person allegedly was, or that one person will be "raised from the dead" just because another person allegedly was.

And even if we are somehow able to accept Paul's reasoning here, how does metaphorical "burial" lead to metaphorical "death"? Doesn't "death" *precede* "burial"? Just because we're dealing with metaphors doesn't mean the metaphors don't need to track reality—at least if we wish to remain sane. Paul's thinking here seems to be illustrating Von Domarus's principle: Since "being buried" is a predicate usually attached to "dead people," Paul sees it as possible to become a metaphorical "dead person" by being metaphorically "buried."

And even if we accept that as well, it seems that since the "death" and "burial" of the Christians were obviously meant to be understood as metaphorical, the "resurrection" must have been meant to be understood as no less metaphorical, if we are to maintain symmetry between them. In fact, Paul himself equates "resurrection" with "walking in newness of life," not necessarily with a literal resurrection. So, whether we choose to accept Paul's reasoning or not, either way we find no support for the traditional Christian understanding of the idea of "resurrection" in this passage—which may show that Christians have been left as confused by Paul's thinking as I have been, and they've just filled in the gaps with their own personal preferences as to what they wish Paul meant.

And even if we accept a metaphorical understanding of "dying to sin," it makes no sense to posit *any* kind of "dying to sin" of which a person can possibly be *unaware*—a notion indicated by Paul's asking, "Or are you ignorant...?". Paul asks, "**How can we who died to sin still live in it?**"—*and that's a very good question*. Most people would view the fact that the persons Paul is addressing are still "living in sin" as evidence that they *never did* in fact metaphorically "die to sin" after all. Paul's unwillingness to view it in the same way seems to provide an example of what Arieti calls "reverse inference" or "inference before description":

... In normal cognition the human being moves from description to inference. When we interpret a descriptive statement, or even a perception, we make an inference. ... If a person evaluates, or responds to, an inference as he would respond to a description, he beclouds whatever evidence there is to support the inference. The inference is already made, and it influences the observation. ...

In these cases of schizophrenia the patient is able to foresee the conclusions of his reasoning because it is the anticipated conclusion that retrospectively directs his train of thought. In other words, in the process of demonstrating something, the patient chooses only those possibilities that lead to the conclusion he has anticipated and wished. [p. 245.]

In other words, Paul knows that some individuals are still “living in sin” as he sees it, but instead of concluding that they had in fact *never been* metaphorically “buried” (if we accept that as the symbol of metaphorically “dying to sin”), he concludes that they didn’t *understand what it meant* to be metaphorically “buried,” and that as soon as it is made clear to them, it will, in a sense, be *as if* they always *had been* “dead to sin” as the result of receiving their baptism. The baptism—the metaphorical “burial”—was a *concrete* act, and so their “death,” though metaphorical, must still have been *real*; all they have to do now is understand what that metaphorical “death” signifies. As far as I can tell, Paul was essentially trying to stage a kind of ritualistic drama; and, in a manner especially reminiscent of autistic children at play, he was getting upset that the other players in his ritualistic drama weren’t “doing it right.”

Furthermore, Paul writes, “For (the death) (Christ) died, *he died to sin once and for all.*” If Christ “died to sin,” that necessarily means that *he had to have been living in sin prior to that*. This is inconsistent with Hebrews 9:14, which describes Jesus Christ as “unblemished” at the time of his crucifixion—but that poses no difficulty for schizophrenic logic. The authors of the New Testament want Christ’s “death” to be a perfect “mirror image” of their own metaphorical “death,” and symmetry would require that Christ be understood as having died to *his own* sin; but at the same time, they *also* want Christ to be sinless. Recall one of the features of schizophrenic thinking described above: “It presents requests to change the conditions with which problems are solved in order to justify the errors.”

Also recall another of those features of schizophrenic thinking—“It presents incongruity between acts and words”—when reading the passage from Romans, especially the words “*our old self was crucified with (him) in order that [!] the body of sin might be brought to nothing.*” Paul believes that merely to state *that* “our old self was crucified with (him)” actually has *causative force*—even though, as Paul himself indicates to us, it’s still an open question whether “our old self” indeed *was* “crucified,” *even in a metaphorical sense*—that is, if we choose to make our focus a person’s *actions* and *behavior*.

The only way in which we can make any kind of sense of this passage by the apostle Paul is to approach it in much the same way that Arieti approached the South American woman’s “psychotic rationalization”: as “an expression of his whole life history, of his whole tragedy.” I will not hazard a psychological interpretation of this passage myself; all I know is that it would be a grave error to take it at face value. Unfortunately, however, that is what Christianity has done over many centuries, because it has eschewed a more psychological approach to the interpretation of these sorts of writings.

Arieti continues,

[It would be a mistake to assume that] the schizophrenic is directly concerned with the sickness of society or that the sickness of society is directly or solely responsible for the schizophrenic syndrome. Although the paranoid schizophrenic may borrow the scenario of the society-oriented person, his suffering can be recognized as a personal one and as different from that of the philosopher, the prophet, the innovator, the revolutionary, the dissenter. [p. 127.]

I must say that I don't agree with Arieti's assumption that if the schizophrenic is primarily motivated by his own personal suffering, that necessarily excludes the possibility that he is genuinely concerned with the sickness of society or that he is a genuinely "society-oriented person." I don't think there is a single human being who has ever been "directly concerned with the sickness of society," if by "directly" we mean that he is in no way concerned with his own advantage or influenced by his own interests, experiences, "hang-ups," preoccupations, or pet concerns. Every person who is "concerned with the sickness of society" is so, first and foremost, for the reason that he is an individual *member* of his society. I would not like to see a schizophrenic person's message be invalidated on the grounds that since he has suffered so much, we can safely assume that he must necessarily be concerned *only* with his own suffering. "The philosopher, the prophet, the innovator, the revolutionary, the dissenter": none of these have *ever* been completely selfless in their motives, and so it is unfair to expect more from the schizophrenic person than we expect from other persons, merely because he has suffered more than other persons. I also don't agree with the suggestion that a schizophrenic is unable to be an authentic "prophet," "innovator," "revolutionary," or "dissenter." (However, it may be true that there haven't been any genuine schizophrenic "philosophers"—unless one chooses to regard the fact that Plato's Socrates often spoke of "hearing voices" as an indication that Socrates may have been "schizophrenic.")

Arieti continues,

Contrary to [Ronald] Laing's conceptions, in by far the majority of cases we cannot consider the patient in his *predominant* characteristics as an asserter of truth, a remover of masks. The patient tells us his experiential truth, which often contains some truth about the evils of the world. This partial truth must be recognized by the therapist and must be acknowledged and used in treatment. Its import must be neither ignored nor exaggerated. If we ignore it, we become deaf to a profound message that the patient may try to convey. If we exaggerate it, we also do a disservice to him. We may admire the patient for removing the masks, for saying what other people do not dare to say, for how much he accepted and how much he rejected, for the supreme effort to adjust to a nonadjustable situation, and for going down to defeat rather than to deny his self. But we must also recognize that the fragments of truth he uncovers assume grotesque forms, and that he will apply these grotesque forms to the whole world, so that whatever insight he has achieved will be less pronounced and less profound than his

*distortion*. And his distortion not only has no adaptational value, but is inimical to any form of adaptation even within a liberal community of men. [pp. 127-28.]

I think Arieti is on somewhat safer ground here than in the previous passage.

After having presenting the opinions of Drs. Siirala, Laing, and Szasz, Dr. Arieti writes in response,

In agree with these authors only to a limited degree. In my opinion, the schizophrenic, especially the paranoid, in both his prepsychotic and psychotic stages, behaves and thinks as if he had a psychological radar that enabled him to detect and register the world's hostility much more than can the average person. Must we assess this characteristic as a positive value that we can share or as manifestation of illness? To discuss whether the paranoid is delusional or a prophet is like discussing whether a dream represents irrationality or the "real reality." *The dream is very true as an experience and may indeed reveal a message that is not easily heard when we are awake, but dreams transmit the truth in a fictitious way.* Although hostility exists in the world, the psychotic's version of it is pathological. [And note, incidentally, I believe that the Gospels should be regarded as fictitious myths or "quasi-hallucinations"—that is to say, they should be regarded as strongly analogous to "dreams."]

*We must be aware of the possibility that the patient has positive values upon which the psychosis inflicts a transformation. If we remove the delusional overlay we may retrieve the values in their original purity.* ... However, in my opinion we cannot conclude that the schizophrenic psychosis is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation, as the mentioned authors imply. In my opinion it is *an abnormal way of dealing with an unfavorable situation*. The psychosis cannot be called just a rebellion to a prior unlivable situation. The prior situation may have been so unfavorable as to be experienced as unlivable, but the rebellion is abnormal and also hardly livable. [p. 126.]

I will end with a final excerpt from Dr. Arieti's *Interpretation of Schizophrenia*:

... An intense relatedness, like the one required for the therapy of the psychotic, and, by the way, for any healthy human encounter, necessitates the experience of sharing values. ... We have seen ... that some therapists have found these common values in their belief that schizophrenics have an understanding of social injustice that is superior to that of the average person, an understanding that the therapist should accept. ... [W]e have also seen that although the schizophrenic may be alert to realistic hostility, malevolence, and evil more than the normal person [for good examples of this, consult the Psalms, especially Psalms 10, 14, 35, 52, 53, 64, and 73, as well as [John 2:23-25](#)], we would do him and ourselves a disservice to accept his experience of this hostility, with the psychotic structure, deformations, and exaggerations that he has superimposed on it.

We must, however, be always aware of the possibility that the patient [and I suggest that one think of the “patient” in this context as corresponding to the Bible and those who promote its reading] has positive values and that these positive values can be retrieved in their original purity once we remove the psychotic overlay. Even if we feel that the patient, in both his prepsychotic and psychotic stages, responds abnormally to the world or misinterprets the world, we should not necessarily evaluate his position in a negative way. Let us first of all become aware of the fact that normality, or what we call normality, may require mental mechanisms and attitudes that are not so healthy. At times what is demanded of us is callousness to the noxious stimuli. We protect ourselves by denying them, hiding them, becoming insensitive, or finding a thousand ways of rationalizing or adjusting to them. We become a silent majority. By being so vulnerable and so sensitive the patient may teach us to counteract our callousness. By spending so much energy in adapting we survive and live to the best of our ability, but we pay a big price that may result in the impoverishment of a part of our personality. This impoverishment of the personality is particularly pronounced, not always but often enough, in the nonpsychotic members of the patient’s family. They were able to avoid the psychosis, but often the rigidity, peculiarity, compromises, and distortions that they underwent, mutilated important parts of their personality and deprived them of some dimensions of living.

When the preschizophrenic and schizophrenic see society as a Darwinian jungle, we must remind ourselves that not the patient but Darwin himself made the first analogy in the reverse order. After having studied society in [Thomas] Malthus’s writings, Darwin in the Galapagos Islands saw the jungle as a reproduction of society. Inequality, competition, struggle, and power prevail in the two situations. Unless checked by human will, power wins out in both society and jungle. The future schizophrenic is certainly not the fittest in any jungle. When he becomes psychotic, he is not literally a prophet but a reminder of the inimical powers that most of the time win and say, “Woe to the vanquished.” [Again, however, I strongly disagree with Arieti’s assumption that there is some “genuine” type of prophet that is incapable of being schizophrenic.] He is not a prophet but a significant voice; and yet, in spite of its significance, this voice is most of the time *too humble, too weak*, too deprived of adaptational value *to be heard*. [I ask the reader to **please** review Isaiah 11:1-4, which I quoted above; in fact, one might view the “person” or “branch” in that passage as corresponding to Dr. Siirala’s ideal “therapist,” who would be willing to speak *on behalf of* the schizophrenic “prophet” who cannot speak for himself—thereby “slaying the guilty” with his “speech.”] *The therapist* [and I suggest that one think of the “therapist” in this context as corresponding to the anti-esotericist interpreter of the Bible] *must hear this voice. At the same time he must dismantle or help dismantle the psychotic scenario that deforms the message*. The philosopher, the dissenter, and the revolutionary, like the schizophrenic, lack adaptability, but they compensate for this lack with their creativity. With a few outstanding exceptions, the schizophrenic is not as creative as they are. [This seems somewhat inconsistent

with what Arieti writes in the excerpt quoted above, in which he says of schizophrenics, “Actually their realm of originality exceeds by far that of the normal man.”] *If we want to hear **this disguised voice** and transmit this message to the world, we must overcome the obstacles built by the psychosis.*

*What is the real voice, the value that the schizophrenic tries to express before it is distorted by the disorder? **It is the basic value of the human being.*** He wants to be the sovereign of his will. He wants to be totally himself, but he does not know how. He finds, as a matter of fact, sovereigns all over, but not in himself. He attributes to them hostile intents, and he himself harbors a great deal of hostility. [Cf. Psalm 109, Psalm 137:7-9, and Isaiah 47:1-3.]

We are willing to accept and transmit his message, but this action may possibly help only future generations. We want to help the patient himself. We will be in a position to help him, to transmit to him our own message if he experiences us as human beings who share his values and as peers. When he feels that some of the real or fantastic forces that disturb him disturb us also, he will start to relate to us without distrust. By accepting his perception of hostility from a general point of view, we shall be in a position to help him later to cut or dismantle the delusional distortions of this hostility. Gradually the patient’s main goal becomes not that of fighting persecutors but of fighting evil and searching for love and fulfillment. Thus, his first and ultimate values will also be our values.

When the patient realizes that we stand neither for his madness nor for that of society, but that we are his companions in both madneses, treading cautiously but hopefully on the narrow path on which the intangible universal values of individualism reside, the prognosis is good. [pp. 607-608.]