

Brian Welter

Psychic Wholeness and Healing
by Anna A. Terruwe and Conrad W. Baars*

Dutch doctor and psychotherapist Anna Terruwe (1911–2004) spent her career counseling Catholic priests despite occasional opposition from within the Church. She reoriented Freudian psychoanalysis through Thomistic moral theology. Her writings have remained largely unknown aside from the translations and work of Dutch-American Conrad Baars (1919–1981). Baars attributed the saving of his own psychiatric practice in the US to his reading of and subsequent collaboration with Terruwe. *Psychic Wholeness and Healing* brings together some of their writings, starting with sections of Terruwe’s updated doctoral thesis.

Each chapter of the book builds on previous ones. The early discussion provides ample and clear background, and includes unique definitions and depictions of psychological processes, especially of neurosis and repression. Given how easily this body of thought may be misunderstood by both Catholic moral theologians and by non-Catholic psychoanalysts, this work of clarification is a key feature to *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*. Later chapters address the nature of repression and psychological issues, their treatment, the human drives, and emotional

Brian Welter — Taipei, Taiwan

e-mail: brianteachertaiwan@gmail.com • ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6796-6561>

* Anna A. Terruwe and Conrad W. Baars, *Psychic Wholeness and Healing* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2016, 2nd edition), 276 pages, ISBN-13: 978-1498288125.

maturity. Catholic moral theologians will gain from how the authors apply Thomistic thought to both psychoanalytic theories and practical psychological and spiritual issues. Psychoanalysts will see religion's possible role in reinvigorating psychoanalysis.

The authors succeed best at challenging Freud's model of repression. While criticizing Freud, even within the psychoanalytic field, has been quite common for decades, Terruwe and Baars do so in a unique way. Freud's model of the psyche regards the superego as providing a moral check on the id's instinctual impulses. The supposedly overly-rational, overly-moralistic and controlling superego represses these impulses, in other words. Terruwe and Baars reject this and the accompanying fear of reason's control of the emotions. Rather, they assert that, most commonly, one emotion, such as fear, represses another emotion or drive, such as sexual arousal. This assertion leads to fruitful discussion of the nature of the emotions which unsurprisingly departs from Freud's ideas. Emotions, which the authors define as reactions to sensory stimuli or internal thoughts and images, affect us both psychologically and somatically. By distinguishing the pleasure appetite (including love, desire, hate, and aversion) from the utility appetite (including hope, despair, courage, and fear), the authors clarify how one stimulus can evoke very different, even opposing, emotions within the same individual. Only reason can regulate this inner emotional conflict, but this is prevented when one emotion dominates and therefore represses another one. The authors avoid offering overly-simplistic or deterministic formulas for the interactions of the emotions. In some people, fear will be the repressing emotion, whereas in others it may be "energy."

Emotions, though never wrong or sinful, need reason's proper ordering. Mindful of the serious break with Freud, the authors turn to their Thomistic perspective, warning of the harm from any softening of moral theology. Mostly clear and comprehensive, the discussion does

lack a full and clear definition and discussion of the repressing action of “energy,” which the authors regard as frequently needing reason’s control. They do cover the effects of energy’s repression of other emotions, noting: “The repressing emotional energy . . . places its stamp on the person’s whole personality,”¹ regardless of “what kind of emotions are repressed.”² Despite the lack of a definition, the fascinating discussion of the psychological issues encountered by an individual with an overabundance of energy provides insight for both pastoral counselors and moral theologians. While emotions, neurosis, repression, and reason are all covered in-depth and from multiple dimensions, the will is unfortunately given short shrift. Given the will’s central role in virtuous and sinful living, this is a disappointment.

The authors avoid shame-based expressions and judgments, such as concerning emotions. In fact, they regard emotions as ennobling:

The emotion of anger is of great importance in every person’s life. Unfortunately, its function as a natural and necessary psychological motor has been largely misunderstood, and consequently many people have been emotionally crippled.³

The authors criticize religious educators for instilling shame in children, who then carry this throughout their lives and may eventually develop various neuroses. Teachings on sexuality, anger, and other impulses and emotions can and must issue from a rational perspective, Teruwe and Baars argue. This respect for emotions and other natural impulses contributes to the authors’ cautiously optimistic view of humans: We have the ability to develop ourselves to a very high degree, but even non-neurotics can stumble psychologically because of their failure to regulate the psychic life. For example, individuals with energy-repressed emotions “are so occupied with material things that there is no

¹ Teruwe & Baars, *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*, 67.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

room for finer human sentiments, and although they are not neurotic, they neither possess nor experience the full expansion of the human personality.”⁴ Worse, such people “are unable to sense the emotional needs of others and to establish rapport with them.”⁵ Such practical and relevant reflections build reader confidence in Terruwe and Baars. Going beyond mere theory, the authors connect Thomistic thought to their own psychoanalytic practice.

In one of the most powerful themes of the book, the authors refute Freud’s blaming reason for repression. They observe the detrimental effects of Freud’s model of the repressing superego:

[C]onscience and reason, being the alleged perpetrators of so much untold suffering in the world, became increasingly suspect. The more they fell into disrepute, the easier it became for unrestrained emotions to determine people’s behavior.⁶

In fact, the authors show quite the opposite: Emotions and impulses unregulated by reason are responsible for all sorts of neuroses. Reason itself, the authors argue, is regulated by the natural law. This law is not repressive because it reflects the human being’s rational nature. This is a key argument and insight: Humans are reasonable. Neurosis therefore ensues when the person denies reason its rightful place in the psyche. Yet the authors’ coherent and consistent anthropology requires concrete proof.

Such proof is provided through the discussion on repression, which examines both the actions of the repressed and the repressing emotions as well as the ideal behavior of both types of emotions. This clarifies both the etiology of neurosis and the Thomistic virtues-based solution. Repression works very deeply in us, affecting not only emotions, but also the imagination. Such repression leads to somatic issues

⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

that we cannot easily connect back to the repressed emotion, but this connection needs to be made for healing of the neurosis and subsequent healthy living. Since emotional repression also represses related imagery, the individual may have no inkling of repression.

This helps readers see the critical role of counseling, for proper counseling can help unearth these deeply-repressed emotions. The authors imply that such therapy requires a long time in order to untangle repressed and repressing emotions from each other so that reason can resume its rightful oversight. Many contemporary therapists, more used to the quicker results of psychodynamic therapy, may rightfully regard this as unrealistic. Are we all so emotionally repressed that we require extensive, years-long psychotherapy? The authors remain mostly silent on grace and the sacraments which would presumably aid and even quicken our psychic healing.

Despite these lacks, *Psychic Wholeness and Healing* is not dated, but uncannily current. Repression leads to an inauthentic personality because some emotions remain unexpressed and in need of reason's guidance. This affects even the most basic psychological and interpersonal issues and extends to the social arena. Inauthentic individuals create family and social problems from their neuroses and failure to live out their uniqueness. Readers come away understanding the interplay among the sense appetites, the usefulness judgment, the imagination, reason, and the will. In a healthy psyche, these elements carry out their rightful duties and obey the powers to which they rightfully subordinate themselves. The psyche, paralleling family and society, naturally orders itself hierarchically. While such a politically incorrect view will raise the hackles of many, the case studies, logic, and philosophical insights solidify the argument. *Psychic Wholeness and Healing* can help Catholic counselors and teachers articulate how psychoanalysis is and is not compatible with Catholic thought. In short, Thomist moral theology has as much to teach us today as it ever has.

Psychic Wholeness and Healing
by Anna A. Terruwe and Conrad W. Baars

SUMMARY

This paper is a review of the book: Anna A. Terruwe and Conrad W. Baars, *Psychic Wholeness and Healing* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2016, 2nd edition). According to the author, the book shows (1) how Thomistic thought can be applied to both psychoanalytic theories and practical psychological and spiritual issues, and (2) what role is possible for religion to play in reinvigorating psychoanalysis.

KEYWORDS

Anna A. Terruwe, Conrad W. Baars, Catholicism, Thomism, psychology, Freud, psychoanalysis.

REFERENCES

Terruwe, Anna A., and Conrad W. Baars. *Psychic Wholeness and Healing*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2016, 2nd edition.