

Questioning Authority

An Interview with Dr. Stanley Leavy

The interview took place on 7/30/05 in Dr. Leavy's apartment at the Whitney Center where he has resided with his wife, Margaret since 1995. They have been married for 65 years and have three children, a son and two daughters. He attended Yale College, graduating in 1935 and medical school at the University of Rochester, graduating in 1940. He did internships in Syracuse, Rochester and the Connecticut State Hospital System and his residency at Yale in psychiatry. He graduated from the New York Psychoanalytic Institute in 1953. From 1965 to 1985, he was a training and supervising analyst at the Western New England Psychoanalytic Institute. He has just turned 90. Although his hearing is not as good as it used to be, his mind is as sharp as ever. His interests are multiple. In addition to psychoanalysis, he is deeply religious, having converted from Judaism to Christianity in early adulthood. He knows a number of languages; he loves literature and poetry; he gardens and raises roses; he is a long-time owner of dogs (although not presently); he plays the piano "badly but happily" daily; he has been interested in continental philosophy and a member of a study group for many years; he has friends from all over whom he sees regularly. The interviewer was Dr. Robert White. Our conversation ranged over a variety of personal and professional topics, many of which were familiar to both of us. The themes that we covered included Dr. Leavy's devotion to the art of psychotherapy, an abiding suspicion of theory, his love of language and literature and his deeply held spirituality. He and I have shared this suspicion of doctrine and I think it is appropriate that he has named his collection of papers, *Questioning Authority*.

RW I thought I would remind you that the first time we met was when you taught the Proust course.

SL Is that when you appeared on the scene? That was a happy day.

RW I was still a candidate then.

SL It must have been in the mid eighties.

RW You never actually published anything on Proust?

SL No, although I am not modest about things, I thought that was too much for me to undertake. That belongs to the pros.

RW I want to get back to literature but tell us first about your family background and how you came into psychoanalysis.

SL How do I account for my being a psychoanalyst? In anticipation of the question, I put down a few notes. Actually, the question is part of the answer. From early childhood I was concerned about origins, and just about every range of my later interests has its stimulus in the same question, - taking shape in my career as a psychoanalyst, in my religious faith, and in my whole personal history, as well as in my study of languages, ancient and modern, and of history and natural history, - the last expressed most steadily

in gardening. And the common origin of all these quests I find in the very early death of my mother, with the disappearance of my early childhood self in that mysterious event. I suspected before my analysis that I would discover through it something I needed to know about myself. At that time I imagined the discovery in an intellectual way: lost memories would emerge like pictures in a newly-found family picture album. Memories of that kind might have come to me, but the real discovery was of feelings that had been banished in the cataclysm. They had been obliterated. It should therefore be comprehensible that I have always regarded psychoanalysis as first and foremost a journey of exploration of the emotions, - by the self in search of the self. I came also to see that it was the dialogue of the self with another self, first as experienced, secondly as examined, was the necessary setting for the journey. That dialogue is what psychoanalysis is designed to facilitate. It should also be no wonder that I hold it indispensable that the other self, the analyst, be capable of the kind of concern that permits her or him to know deeply what is taking place in the analysand. Such in brief in my conception of our work and how I got into it.

RW What happened to your mother?

SL She died after a failed caesarian section when I was 5. There were no antibiotics then. I was taken care of by my father and my two grandmothers, and intermittently by my aunts, all of them concerned enough but none of them up to a pretty tough job. I attended public schools in New York and Long Island, but what helped most in a lonely childhood was my discovery of books, which opened many different worlds. I entered Yale at sixteen, and that was a new beginning. I found endless vistas of the humanities, music, religion, nature, friendships. I did well in my studies but Yale was no great success socially for me, as an unathletic Jewish boy with a public school education. It had long been a family vision that I would be a doctor, like my business man father's elder brother, and despite my primary interest in the humanities I was eventually convinced that only a profession was a practical option, and medicine seemed the most appealing.

RW Where did you go to medical school?

SL The University of Rochester, a fairly new school with an excellent faculty and a good reputation. I enjoyed it and the friendships made there. I had only middling grades, but for the most part I found it an exciting part of my education. One serious deficiency at Rochester at that time was in psychiatry, which the eminent Dean Whipple looked on as appropriate for graduate rather than undergraduate medical study.

RW What was your training after medical school?

SL I had 3 years in a mixed internship and pediatrics, then several years in psychiatry, in state hospitals of Connecticut and at Yale. In between, as a Quaker conscientious objector at that time, I opted for alternative service, which began by doing country general practice in the Cumberland region of Tennessee. I was there with my wife and the two children we had then for a wonderful, unforgettable year, before going into the state hospital service.

RW What was your psychiatric training like?

SL It wasn't very good. There was no real training in the state hospitals, manned as they were by a skeleton staff, the few experts being in the military, and Yale psychiatry was at that time in the doldrums, being between administrations. Shock treatment, often of some emergency value, prevailed and for a while there was a great stir about the merits of prefrontal lobotomy in schizophrenia, a treatment which I recognized as horrible right away. However, somebody told me that I might find Freud interesting, and that was what made all the difference.

RW Why psychiatry in the first place?

SL Actually I had become interested in it way back in my freshman year in college. A classmate and I talked a lot of it. Oddly enough, both of us eventually went onto psychiatry, I into psychoanalysis. The truest explanation that I could give is that I wanted to know where I came from as a person. That goes back, as I've said, to age 5.

RW And now we are back at the beginning.

SL It is important not to read back too much into past decisions, but I think that I had the idea at the very beginning, that there was a knowledge of how people's minds were made, that would tell me how my mind was made.

RW Where did you train in psychoanalysis?

SL New York Psychoanalytic, late 40's.

RW What was that like?

SL It was governed (and I mean *governed*) by Hartmann, Kris and Lowenstein, and Nunberg. And to a lesser extent by my analyst, Edith Jacobson, who was a bird of a different feather, while being also an ego psychologist.. She was an animated, expressive, enthusiastic person who showed intense interest in the person as well as in what analysts called the "material". On the other side, she was willing to listen to other points of view, Horney, Klein, Reich. .

RW She was an early proponent of object relationships.

SL Yes, it is in her book¹.

RW She was a strong influence on Kernberg, for instance.

SL Yes, she had great respect for him.

RW And after graduating?

SL I had commuted to my training in New York from New Haven and had continued my psychiatric practice all during training, so there was no break..

RW Was the Western New England going at that time?

SL The Western N.E. started while I was in training; I was not a pioneer

RW You have practiced in New Haven ever since?

SL Yes, until I gave up my license several years ago. I worked until I was 75, practicing as a doctor altogether about 40 years. I was always in private practice once I started doing analysis. I got a Yale appointment early and also started teaching at the Institute.

RW What kind of practice did you have? Analytic? Other types of patients?

SL Even in those days when it was pretty easy to build an analytic practice, most of us also had patients in psychotherapy, until or unless we were made training analysts.

RW Could you tell us about your marriage and family?

SL Margaret and I married in 1940, a couple of days before my medical school graduation, having met at a Quaker work camp in Tennessee. Margaret, from a family that had always lived in and around New Haven, had recently graduated from Vassar, later getting her law degree at Yale. All I can say in summarizing our marriage is that it's been very good, loving, hopeful, interesting and productive –not least in our children of whom we have three, as well as six grandchildren and at present four (going on five) great-grandchildren, each of the progeny being characterizable with the same adjectives.

RW What do you think of the current training system?

SL I have long been convinced that the emphasis on Freud's writings makes for a pretty topheavy agenda. However, I have not lately looked into what is actually being taught, and this view might be obsolete. I do have a strong opinion about the training analyst system (as it seems I have about most things). I really didn't think about alternatives until our daughter enrolled in the Massachusetts Institute for Psychoanalysis which by design has no training analysts. I thought it was quite remarkable how they did it. It occurred to me that it made a great deal of sense. In the early years when I was on the education committee, there had been open discussion of candidates by their analysts, maybe not in full detail but too much. I objected to that at the beginning and later it was abolished. I can see that you can make a case for approved experts to train our future analysts, but the system has side effects, serious ones. One is, it puts into the shade those who are not training analysts, as if they had not made the grade. It elects a cadre of senior analysts who simply are the "ones supposed to know", which I think is a bad position for any analyst to be in, a mighty person who knows more than other analysts let alone his or her analysands. This may be not the way things actually are but it's the way things look. It creates a constant division and we might well do without them. I haven't heard him quoted elsewhere in this connection, but when I told Hans Loewald that our daughter had joined an institute without training analysts, he said, "good, that's as it should be". But I didn't resign from being a training analyst. I enjoyed the education committee meetings very much, with the high intellectual discussion as well as the comradeship of the colleagues. Still, there are other ways of achieving those ends.

RW What do you think is the future of psychoanalysis, given the difficulty in getting cases, the influence of neuroscience and the economics?

SL Now that's a tough one. Once on the railroad, when we were commuting to New York for training, Al Solnit, of blessed memory, said to me: "If somehow psychoanalysis should disappear, it would have to be reinvented." And I've never doubted that for a moment. A framework for self-discovery of the person having been formed and made widely known, someone is going to get it going again even in the darkest of ages.

Theories come and go, but the records of what a psychoanalysis is really like compose a constant. Yes, we're going to have to accept that the practice of analysis with many hours a week may be a luxury not often affordable. *But it will still be "real" psychoanalysis if well-trained analysts listen to free associations,, recognize both the depths and the surface of the mind ,especially in the relation we know as transference, and recognize the unconscious efforts of analysands not to know their minds.* The very intensive, very long analysis may be necessary for training; but too much can be done with fewer hours to warrant holding on to an economically impossible ideal. As for neuroscience, advances in knowledge of the nervous system are greatly to be desired, but they cannot substitute for personal interaction.

RW Have you enjoyed being a psychoanalyst?

SL Enjoyed is too weak a word for it. It is one of the intrinsic parts of my life; I'm inseparable from my being an analyst. It is the constant day to day exposition of another mind appearing before one with the multiplicity of human motivation, aspiration and desire. And contrariwise, there is the often frustrating but equally real intent to conceal our minds from ourselves as well as others. It is an opportunity to operate within an art, which, rather than science, is what I believe psychoanalysis to be. An art which is as great as the art of music, and one in which the analyst is in the illuminating presence of another seeking mind.

RW Yes, I find it endlessly fascinating every day.

SL Of course you and I have a somewhat common phenomenological ground, avoiding the domination of theoretical insights.

RW What would you say about that? Maybe you could start by defining phenomenology.

SL In the simplest way, it is observing; in the case of psychoanalysis, by responding to the endlessly varying surface of what is being expressed by people in their lives. We only know them from what they express one way or another in their words and feelings and actions, from seeing the multiplicity and variation, the tendencies and properties without too much inference about what we don't see. I am a weak phenomenologist; the philosophers in the field will have nothing to do with theoretical constructs.

RW That's the paradox of psychoanalysis. One has to make some inferences.

SL Yes they are mostly the inferences of similarities and differences in the observations. Maybe it is because we are so indoctrinated that we see the heart of unconscious conflict in the intergenerational conflict. The intergenerational conflict was not cooked up by Freud. Calling it the Oedipus conflict was a successful mistake, one might say. It expresses the conflict in too concrete terms. Freud concretized it to a certain meaning which he named for Oedipus, and it obviously caught on. In any case people are constantly responding to what happened to them in their childhood when they were little and powerless, so we do operate with that hypothesis.

RW What would be other basic hypotheses for you?

SL What is important is desire. People do what they want which means people do what they want to do or regret that they can't. Another thing that I find increasingly important is that everyone before me is a self, everyone before me is having an inner experience analogous to mine, a subject who is aware of himself and the world outside and that this self is the most precious thing, always in need of establishment, reconstruction, support and expression. That is another basic operation. When someone says "I," that comes pretty close to labeling the self. The self is a phenomenal construct, only minimally inferential.

RW In your book² you also stress the unconscious as a basic element.

SL I did and I would still hold with that but I would want a much weaker definition of unconscious. The traditional Freudian one is of something walled off except by eruptions. I also think it leaves out the sense of gradations. Freud waffled quite a bit on that over the idea of a preconscious, which is sometimes unconscious, sometimes conscious. I think the preconscious is where most things are going on. Most things that are unconscious are those incapable of verbalization. That's what we mean by unconscious. That our motivations come from all these levels, I think is quite true, but not that the unconscious is a realm of the second self, inaccessible.

RW Mereau-Ponty has a view of the unconscious as a gestalt, the unconscious is what is in the background and not currently in focus. This sounds close to your ideas.

SL It does.

RW The third concept you mention as a minimal theory of psychoanalysis is a dialogue between persons³. Would you still hold to this?

SL There are always two personal agencies in analysis, although we may recognize others implicit in the dialogue.

RW What about the structural theory?

SL I have almost no use for it. I find I fall back on the concept superego somewhat because of the fact that guilt, which arises from within the self, feels in opposition to the self.. It is a structure that persists. But ego as separated self? Only if you have to give the defensive aspects of personality all sorts of names rather than ways it is operating. The self is always protecting itself and defense is one of the ways of doing so. I tend sometimes to defend myself against depression by projection. I find the Kleinian duality of paranoid and defensive positions very interesting phenomenologically, without the metapsychological baggage.

RW Have you read much Klein?

SL No, mostly derivatives of Klein, Fairbairn and some Hannah Segal. I know that there is much of value in her insights.

RW Was Fairbairn influential? He switched from a drive derivative to an object seeking derivative

SL That appealed to me

RW Who else has been influential psychoanalytically?

SL Lacan, of course.

RW I've never been able to understand Lacan.

SL Read the three essays I wrote about early Lacan⁴. Later Lacan I find harder to understand myself. I was magnetized by Lacan in that he pays attention to the words, to speech and language, insisting that they make a great deal of difference. Words are not fully transparent, as they are related to one another. I found this persuasive, something that I thought had been ignored, except perhaps in parapraxes. Dreams and waking fantasy are given additional value through the language of metaphor and metonymy (i.e. association). I found it also useful to think of development, in Lacanian theory, as proceeding into a mirror phase, the infant's awareness of itself is a reflection, through the reflection of itself from the mother, the mother's observation and picture of the child, incorporated as a picture of itself. And the way in which this, the imaginary stage, yields to a much more inclusive view, the symbolic. These all made sense to me, but like my understanding of Klein or ego psychology, for me these are all useful summaries, pictures, aspects of human experience and the real danger is any effort to treat them as if they were the sole way of understanding. I leave out other aspects of Lacan that are extremely complex. The Lacanian concept of *jouissance*, in its special meaning of enjoyment by someone of power over someone else, and what it means for the child, I find quite fascinating. Good, but don't take this as the last word.

RW Lacan brings in linguistics and semiotics, including Geertz, Pierce and de Saussure, what were their influences?

SL I once asked Lacan what other analysts had influenced him. He sniffed suspiciously, and asked whom I had in mind. I fell into the trap, and innocently suggested (on the basis of one of his papers) "Melanie Klein, perhaps?" He glared, expostulating "*Cette sauvage, cette barbare!*" I didn't press him further. He was fairly respectful of de Saussure, as he well might, since Lacan's views on signification are a sort of rearrangement of de Saussure's.

RW What about Hans Loewald. What influence did he have on you?

SL More than anything else I found help in his attitude rather than his conclusions. Hans was probably the most reflective of my teachers, the most open to consideration of all possibilities, the least confined by theory, while at the same time conforming in his writings to traditional language and traditional concepts.

RW Loewald was my first analytic supervisor. He spoke very little about his theories and concentrated on my attitude toward the work, which I found immensely useful.

They were all open to further consideration. Someone said to me when I gave the paper⁵ on his Heideggerian qualities, that Hans was much more Heideggerian than Freudian, which of course was not true because his whole orientation was Freudian. But his attitude was Heideggerian in the sense that observing someone in their fullness, you must try to live in that fullness, that there is something more there is going to reappear.

RW You noted in that paper that Loewald brings Heidegger's abstract thinking to life. He was a student of Heidegger before he turned to medicine and psychoanalysis.

SL Loewald was talking about humans, I 'm not sure Heidegger ever talked about humans; he was talking about philosophy. Hans once remarked to me that the failure of Heidegger could be seen in his turning to Hitler, that great master of idle chatter used for evil ends , when Hitler embodied what Heidegger called "das man," which could be translated as "the chattering nobody."

RW You compared Dasein⁶, the person-being there with Loewald's psychic field of mother and child. I wondered if this was one of your own influences of thoughts about dialogue

SL I'm not sure. In the philosophy reading group⁷, we read a lot of Heidegger in 1975. I guess it was around then that I read "Being and Time."

RW I think Heidegger's emphasis in "Being and Time" was on Dasein's relationship with the world. There is a sense of dialogue there.

SL It also may have come to me from Heidegger via Lacan, who was much more influenced by Heidegger than he liked to admit.

RW Let me start with this. What was the psychoanalytic climate at the time you wrote Dialogues⁸? Was this a new idea?

SL The ego-psychology of Hartmann et al still dominated. Yet it was a time of the growth of object relations theory. Hans was pushing internalization; also Paul Ricoeur was discussing intersubjectivity..

RW But not really mainstream psychoanalysis.

SW I thought there was too much objectivism of seeing the other as a laboratory point of view. Even though from the very beginning, it was recognized that interaction was going on. Freud recognized it all the time. But the transference, for instance, was itself an artificiality arising within the situation of analysis and therefore something was treated rather than recognized, and here I come back to my other to my other influence, who was Martin Buber.

RW I was going to ask you about Buber⁹.

SL No matter where you are, what you are doing, when you are talking to other human beings, there is a thou out there who is in response to another thou and therefore we cannot possibly have fully objective views of one another as we could probably have of that bonsai there. Of course to a much lesser degree, a tree is also a thou, although it is mostly what I invest it with. I don't invest you with a thou, I know you are. If I'm not addressing you as "thou" I'm not here either. This is my interpretation of Buber in action. That must be true when you have a patient. There is someone there you are interacting with, which means you can't simply look on transference as a purely objective thing. Hans I think would agree with all I said, but he had a belief in the

transference neurosis, which seemed to me to be an objectification. I haven't really observed that.

RW There is even talk today of love as part of the psychoanalytic situation. Have you ever thought of it that way.

SL What do you mean?

RW Love between the analyst and patient. L. Friedman has an article on the subject¹⁰. I think you would enjoy it.

SL It is a word that I look on with great care because it is thrown around indiscriminately in the church.. If you mean by love as concern for the well-being of the other, I think that is essential. I have wondered about some people, how they can possibly do analysis, as I have been unaware of concern in them. That personal interest in the other, a kind of empathic identification must be there. There has to be a subjective change in oneself for the benefit of that person. I also know the dangers of that, which are tremendous, leaving aside the obvious one of sexual involvement, which cannot possibly have a legitimate place, although it seemed to with many of the early analysts. A less manifest danger is that one cares so much about that person that one is unable to see things, unable to see the defenses. What I see as unifying is caring.

RW Friedman suggests the importance of a particular intimacy between analyst and patient, that a kind of loving understanding is necessary to the process. I like the word love because I think it has more emotional immediacy than care or concern.

SL You aren't one of the people likely to abuse that kind of love. Stick with it.

RW You quoted P. Ricoeur¹¹, psychoanalysis is interpretation from beginning to end. My favorite quotation from your book¹² is: "confronted by the unfamiliar or the unforeseen, we marvel and then we interpret."

SL My sins have found me out. When I wrote that, I meant that it wasn't that you were always telling the interpretations but you were always translating. Then I meant more of a phrase to phrase translation. I think now that goes on more in the background. Now I think that interpretation is corralling rather than translating, corralling related ideas and seeing how they influence one another. Observing a fantasy or a dream image, one doesn't focus as much as I thought then on that particular segregated idea but see how it goes with others and how they influence one another Interpretation is much more pointing to similarities and contrast of what has been said rather than any form of this means that. Language is not so much going to reveal another language behind it as it is reveals other aspects. The interpretation is how they go together

RW Ricoeur contrasts two aspects of interpretation in psychoanalysis. The first, which I think you have illustrated above, is that of recollection, description, concern and participation. The second is the exercise of suspicion, a concern with illusion and false consciousness. How would this second aspect enter into your work?

SL "Suspicion" travels our way from Nietzsche and Marx, I understand, and I really don't like it. It's a hostile word, implying in psychoanalysis that our patients are

deceiving us, else why hold what they say in suspicion? What we can be sure of is that they are defending themselves, and always for some purpose. We know –this is a point of theory no one can contest- that any position held by the self is a kind of equilibrium of motives, memories, convictions that may be quite at odds with one another. We want to allow as full as possible disclosure of the components of that equilibrium.

RW I believe that Ricoeur means by suspicion that we never take what is on the surface of language but are always interpreting, suspicious of latent meanings and motives, looking for the unconscious meaning.

SL On "suspicion": I know that the term here is intended to be neutral, but can it be? I've used it often in Ricoeur's sense, but I still don't like on account of its overtones. It goes well with the phrase a candidate once told me his supervisor had used: "the patient is *up to something!*" Taken etymologically "suspicion" is ok, but it has been too long in bad company; "round up the usual suspects," for example. More simply, it's unfriendly.

RW It seems to me that Paul Ricoeur was a big influence on ideas about dialogue and intersubjectivity. Is that true?

SL Yes, I believe that Ricoeur in particular brought the word and idea of "intersubjectivity" into wide recognition.

RW Actually, I believe Husserl first used the term intersubjectivity, which Ricoeur borrowed. Intersubjective and relational theory have taken the ideas that you and Loewald and others have developed and extended them in a number of directions. For example, you say, speaking of ordinary conversation, each participant interprets the other¹³. Irwin Hoffman¹⁴ and others speak of the patient interpreting the analyst. Do you find this clinically important?

SL It happens all the time that the analysand tells me what I mean. The patient complains that what you are saying is innocent enough but you sound as if you are impatient. It has happened to me more than once.

RW Were they correct?

SL More often than not. If you are condemning me for what I'm saying, then that can be an interpretation, preferably a false one but nevertheless it can be one.

RW The idea that the transference is a mutual construction influenced by both the unconscious of the analyst and the patient?

SL That seems self-evident to me. For example, there was an analyst a number of years ago who believed he should keep his office absolutely bare, nothing to give stimulus to the patient's imagination. Or the analyst who maintained a continuous, emotionally hands-off attitude toward the patient. I was once given instruction not to reply merry Christmas or ask how anyone feels. This was supposed to allow the transference to develop as if it would come entirely out of that person. Of course if I behaved like an indifferent observer, then the transference will develop accordingly. Or if I am sugary, then I am intrusive and will bring about transference in response to that intrusiveness. One case I mentioned in a paper: it was the very fact of the analytic situation in which there is a persistently interested and concerned person who listens acutely, in this instance

me, that can be experienced as a hovering mother figure, from whom one is trying to escape and unless this is fully understood, which I didn't always do, it becomes a resistance. Is that what you mean by the mutual construction of the transference?

RW That would be one thing. Another is that the analyst though his own unconscious fears and desires may determine what shape the transference takes.

SL I would agree with that too. One of Lacan's gnomic statements was "The transference is the desire of the analyst." Since Lacan never said anything not at least a *double entendre* you can't be sure if that's what he meant, but it seems to fit. As for me, women in distress seem to call on me for help. I feel an urgency to help.

RW So this is one of your pulls.

SL Yes. My heart goes out to them in a certain special way. It is always one of the ways that transference is possible because the person in distress becomes aware that this is a helping hand. Now of course there may be a demand for infinite help but also it need not be. That was the experience with my analyst. I felt her to be a constantly available and helpful person, and not intrusive.

RW What about the past?

SL You come at a time when I am so full of the long past that the past is practically everything. The past is also fully operative in the present in a way that it couldn't be when I was one third this age and being analyzed. In my work with patients the past was always there, a constant there to which reference has to be made because antecedents of the present are always there, the flower is in the bud, the stem, and the root.

RW I was wondering about reconstruction as a technical operation.

SL You mean piece together from isolated materials a hypothetical event from the past.

RW Yes, I think the trend, at least for me, is to do much less than that, to stay with the past as present in the transference.

SL I don't think I've heard of ways that the reconstructed past becomes something of a new insight of reality. As I said, I hoped that from my analysis that events would occur like opening up an old photograph album to when I was a child and you say ha, ha, this is what really happened. The analyst would put that together for me. I may have made such interpretations early in my career but less so later. What is important is the recovery of the past in feeling content. I think we have all had the experience of wondering, did this really happen and I didn't know it. Other times, these examples of recovering lost memories from abuse by reconstruction may be valuable but there are real dangers of imposing ideas on persons. The analyst is a powerful person and can impose ideas.

RW I know you have strong opinions about the role of science in psychoanalysis. Could you comment on this?

SL I may quote Hans Loewald too often, but I look of him as often a more judicious authority than me, and he did say to me "It doesn't make any difference whether it's a science or not." I'm pretty sure he meant that analysis has its own data, rationally derived and considered.

RW You've written papers on literature, John Keats, Emily Dickinson, Alain-Fournier, Adolf Hitler.

SL The Emily Dickinson was a book review. A nun who was a critic was visiting some friends next door and she knew that I was a psychoanalyst. She had been sent for review a biography of Dickinson, she said it was beyond her and would I like to read it. So I did. Hitler's "Table Talk" belongs to garbage, or at best to material for history or biography, not itself literature.

RW What has been the influence of literature on your work?

SL (points to his book shelf) I've been a reader all my life. I think to a great extent what one hears as an analyst is affected by the sum total of one's experience, analytic and other and one's literary experience as a reader is there too. When I hear someone tell parts of a life story, I may hear in it themes related to something I've read. Novelists and poets especially transmit (not just talk about) human experiences that otherwise lie outside my own. Having them in mind I can sometimes *place* what is new to me in the life of the person before me.

RW I find when I am sitting with a patient that I will think of a passage from a book or a movie as an image of what I think is going on in the patient. Does that happen to you?

SL When I was doing analysis and reflecting on it, I sometimes thought it was like going to the movies, I'm a visual person and when I hear what is said, I see it on the screen at the same time. This may be rather improper. It could be turned into a pornographic movie at times. That wouldn't be very nice but it happens. Or like being on a train. So in that sense, the modalities of empathy would include sensory modalities. You can see and hear. I don't know if this is true for everybody to be predisposed to visual things.

RW I expect it is individual. I find the visual very compelling in my work. I gather you do too. I trust my visual images.

SL I do and I don't. That I also know they have to be monitored. What I see is not necessarily what others see. And my reaction to it. Someone talks about roses. The rose for me has a persona, spiritual and mystical quality to it. So I would have to be careful.

RW I agree. That's a good example. We all have things like that. Tell me a little about your religious influences.

SL Naturally my faith has always been looked on as odd. In the NY Institute, I found out that there had been some hesitation about admitting me because I was a believer and a Christian convert. This was looked upon by some as being impossible to tolerate, since believers were crazy, and converts --!. They let me enter, I'm not sure why. True, there were a few Catholics around who were admitted to institutes with condescending tolerance as indication of broadmindedness. In our institute and society I have never met with unfriendliness in this regard. I always thought myself from the very beginning that with the intent of understanding human motivation, religious experience as wish-fulfilling, gratifying or on the contrary threatening, can readily be accepted as human experience. So I never felt a conflict. I've done a fair amount of justifying myself, like

all people in the minority, and I've written about it. No one makes much of it now; psychoanalysis has more serious matters to worry about.

RW You describe religion in part as the subjective intuition of the presence of God¹⁵. How did you become a serious Christian?

SL In very brief, the "subjective intuition of the presence of God" is at the heart of it, and religious claims that don't resonate inwardly just pass me by. However, there is a further essential to make the experience religious, and that is trusting the authenticity of a specific religious tradition, being convinced, for example, that the Christian church, while always a mess and often a disaster, still is the bearer of a truth that is not subjective, but of something transcendent that really happened.

RW Do you think being a Christian has influenced your analytic work¹⁶?

SL What would I do if I were not a believer? In a practical way, a number of Jewish people didn't want to be analyzed by me for that reason and some did. I find religion very supportive of a central analytic attitude, the concern for the individual and the concern for helping find himself or herself: that's consistent with everything in Christian ethics.

RW Do you think there is an ethical dimension to psychoanalysis? It is traditionally beyond ethics.

SL Yes, but when you get beyond ethics, please show me the nearest exit because I see a Nazi coming in. Here's how I see it. Psychoanalysis recognizes and pays full attention to mind, there is a *person* there who is a mind not only a brain. It is a full recognition of the other person. The analyst and the patient are trying to come to the *truth* about something, about themselves. We want to know the truth and we gradually are able to get over our resistances to the truth. Sometimes it takes a lifetime. At this stage, I think I am finally able to tolerate the whole truth about me as far as I can imagine it. The last is *concern*. What we are principally involved with is the concern for others, whatever the other may be. For most of us, this is a person or persons but not solely. I have come to realize that there are people who cannot be fully committed to another person but who can be fully committed to an art or a science or a branch of learning or a cause.. These three, mind, truth and concern are ethical and inseparable in an analysis. To think of the other as a brain is impossible but people try to do this. If we don't have regard for truth but think things can be varnished, you can't do analysis. And if there isn't basic concern by the analyst, with the other one as another life, there is no analysis either and also recognizing what the other is seeking for objects of concern. I say concern to move it deliberately away from the passionate side. These three things form for me an ethic of psychoanalysis. I can't imagine an analyst working without those three.

RW We as analysts help our patients develop there own personal set of ethics.

SL Yes, but there are some indispensable constants. If it turned out that our patient was wanting to think of ways of cheating other people and getting away with it, it wouldn't be telling the truth. Michael Thompson who is one of my off-beat analyst friends has written a book about Freud's truth in effort to show that analysis is truth seeking.

RW You say that suffering is a universal condition, born of desires that are limitless and the human power of concealment. What about human suffering?

SL I have trouble with some Christian ideas of making suffering a good. Since we are therapists, almost by definition, we are working to alleviate suffering and prevent it or at least help endure it. We can recognize, being or not being Christian, that people through suffering do have a chance at spiritual advancement or leading more fulfilling lives. So in suffering, we see if something good can come out of it. People have terrible things happen to them, even if we leave out external evil. We as analysts are aware of non-euphemistic ways of surmounting trouble. Avoiding euphemism is very important, among other reasons because religion is full of opportunities to euphemize, and that isn't the way to truth.

RW There is the acceptance of real suffering.

SL I would say enduring. No one should be asked to endure a concentration camp but there can be hope of a soul there that will care enough to make the suffering less.

RW The Christian message is that out of our unhappiness and guilt, we can find forgiveness and salvation. This reminds me of Klein's emphasis on reparations. There has been recent work in psychoanalysis on forgiveness and shame. Do these concepts enter into your work?

SL Examples might serve best here. Some patients, usually but not always Roman Catholic, have felt estranged from the church because of its moral rigidity. Through analysis they were able to separate their genuine guilt and shame feelings from those imposed on them in their earlier life in the church, and in this way return to observance.

RW You mentioned in your book that psychoanalysis doesn't talk much about death.

SL There is a recent book by DeMasi¹⁷ on why we so avoid thinking and talking about death, because of the idea of nothingness and the intolerableness of acknowledging that the self is extinguishable. We don't allow ourselves to think about it.

RW Tell us about your course.

SL We have 8 sessions. We are starting off with Erickson's ideas of stages. Where I hope we come in is showing that there is some value in the stages, it isn't downhill all the way after 40. Then we will talk about creativity in old age and psychopathology in old age. Discussing some chapters of DeMasi. Then an informal unpublished study by me of group psychology in an old folk's residence, namely Whitney Center.

RW How are you finding retirement?

SL I never expected to live this long. I really officially retired around 70 and a little more, then at 75 and then at 80. I do miss analyzing and supervising, but life is full of many things. I practice piano every day. I walk every day or swim. I have a garden all summer long. I work with the roses. I enjoy my friendships. I have our little family to take care of. I write a page or so every day. Unhappily, I don't have a dog any more. In church, I am mostly active as a communicant. I do help with a little Episcopal group here at Whitney Center also.

RW You have titled your collection of papers, *Questioning Authority*¹⁸, and note that you want to promote a skeptical attitude toward received opinion and you also use the word, *subversive*. Could you comment on this? You question the power of theory as well.

SL Like many old analysts, I wanted to put some of my writings into permanent form. I chose ten that I particularly liked and found on rereading that they all one way or another called on people to question what they had been taught authoritatively, literature, philosophy, religion psychoanalysis. Hence the title, which naturally invites the same criticism of me.

¹ Edith Jacobson, *The Self and the Object World*. New York: International Universities Press, 1964

² Stanley Leavy, *The Psychoanalytic Dialogue*.

³ Stanley Leavy, *The Psychoanalytic Dialogue*.

⁴ Psychoanalytic Interpretation. *Psychoanal. Study Child*, 28:305-330, 1973, The Significance of Jacques Lacan. *Psychoanal Q.*, 46:201-219, 1977, and The image and the word: further reflections on Jacques Lacan. *Psychiatry and the Humanities*, 6:3-20, 1983.

⁵ Time and World in the Thought of Hans W. Loewald. *Psychoanal. Study Child*, 44:231-240, 1989.

⁶ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. Macquarrie and Robinson, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962.

⁷ A long-standing reading group of philosophers and clinicians of which both Stan and myself have participated in.

⁸ Stanley Leavy, *The Psychoanalytic Dialogue*.

⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 1937.

¹⁰ Lawrence Friedman, Is there a special psychoanalytic love? *JAPA*, 53:349-375, 2005.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur

¹² Stanley Leavy, *The Psychoanalytic Dialogue*.

¹³ Stanley Leavy, *The Psychoanalytic Dialogue*.

¹⁴ Hoffman, I. Z. (1983). The Patient as Interpreter of the Analyst's Experience. *Contemp. Psychoanal.*, 19:389-422

¹⁵ Stanley Leavy, *In the Image of God, A Psychoanalyt's View*

¹⁶ Stanley Leavy, *In the Image of God, A Psychoanalyt's View*

¹⁷ F.DeMasi: *Making Death Thinkable*. Free Associations Books. 2005.

¹⁸ Stanley Leavy, *Questioning Authority*.