

# J.L. Moreno and Meister Eckhart: A Not So Unlikely Couple

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In this article I present to you two people, Jacob Levy Moreno (1889-1974) and the Dominican priest-mystic, Meister Eckhart (c.1260-c.1329), who lived centuries apart and led different lives and vocations. Yet they shared a similar belief that all humans are co-creators with the divine. Moreno believed in the importance of spontaneity and its relationship to creation. Both Moreno and Eckhart believed in co-creation and the potential for healing in every human being. Understanding Moreno's spiritual world can assist us as producers and directors to think of ourselves as co-creators when working with groups. As we shall see, Moreno's writing can be somewhat cryptic and confusing and may be illuminated by an understanding of Eckhart.

## **Creation in the work of J.L. Moreno**

Jacob L. Moreno of Vienna was the founder of Psychodrama, Sociometry, and Group Psychotherapy. He studied philosophy and medicine at University of Vienna in 1917 and received his MD. Moreno moved to the United States in 1925 and began a medical practice in New York. Lewis Yablonsky, who knew Moreno and studied with him, describes him as a "holy man, in the sense that he is whole and holistic." (Yablonsky, 1974: 220).

This holistic approach permeated his life and work and is found especially in his introduction

to 'The Words of the Father' which he first published anonymously in 1920. Here Moreno paints a picture of God as co-creator now and forever, stressing the importance of relationship, 'How can one thing create another thing unless the other thing creates the one thing?' (Moreno, 1941:53)

Such a fresh look at creation as dynamic and ever-present is far from the fundamentalist perspective that God rested on the seventh day of creation. "Each new living thing created by God, whether an organism or a person becomes a co-creator with God as soon as it enters the realm of existence" (Moreno, 1941:xi).

## **Creation in the work of Meister Eckhart**

The 13th century mystic, Meister Eckhart held a similar appreciation of creation as ongoing and ever present. "God so created the world that he (sic) still without ceasing creates it" (Eckhart 1981:229). Creation for Eckhart is a blessing. Eckhart claims that 'creation spirituality' sees all of creation, including human beings, as good and full of blessing.

Matthew Fox, a contemporary theologian and writer has popularized the ecstatic element of mysticism in recent years. Mysticism is a fundamental search and yearning for the Divine.

Fox translates the sermons of Meister Eckhart from German and Latin and makes creation spirituality accessible, as Eckhart advocated six centuries ago. Fox writes about creation spirituality as an awakening to an organic understanding of the power of the creation tradition. Eckhart and many of the well-known mystics of the Middle Ages - Hildegarde of Bingen, Mechtilde of Magdeburg and Julian of Norwich - heavily influence Fox.

The four pathways of creation spirituality are as follows:

- Creation is a blessing, = via positiva  
= Befriending creation
- Creation is not for clinging = via negativa  
= Befriending darkness and letting go
- Creation is creative action in motion  
= via creativa = Befriending creativity
- Creation is transformative  
= via transformativa  
= Befriending new creation

(Fox, 1983:23)

In directing a drama we work to warm up the protagonist to new roles, an expression of creative spontaneity. The pathway to new roles is often through fully warming up to old disintegrating roles, befriending the possibilities within these negative roles and befriending and living out of creative and spontaneous roles that emerge in the drama. This process parallels the spiritual journey described by Fox and others.

### **A New Surge of Meaning**

Many scholars attest to an upsurge of spirituality in our times (O'Murchu, 1997; Tacey, 2000; Berry, 1998; Wheatley, 1992). Descriptions of this burgeoning spirituality relate to Moreno's vision of co-creation. O'Murchu writes "We are being carried along by a new surge of meaning which, contrary to religious beliefs, is not drawing us away from the world but plunging us more profoundly into it, not alienating us from the divine but re-connecting us with the God who co-creates at the heart of creation" (1997:12-13).

At the heart of creation spirituality is a yearning and hunger to create and co-create. As Meister Eckhart testifies "God is creating all that is in the innermost and deepest realms of the human soul. Everything, which is past, and everything, which is present, and everything future, God creates in the innermost realms of the soul." (Fox, 1980:66).

### **The Spark of Creativity**

Both Moreno and Eckhart in their philosophy of creation and co-creation are mystics. Because of Eckhart's cosmic focus and vision of all humans co-creating with God I imagine him agreeing with Moreno's view: "The essence of our existence is a craving to create - not in the intellectual sense, but as a dynamic force, a flow of creativity. The quintessence of this spark of creativity is God" (Moreno, 1941: xiii).

Moreno teaches that spontaneity within humans is a manifestation of the divine. He asserts, "The world within, which is enacted on the psychodramatic stage, is a sacred space, calling for respect and love. It may access the transcendent ..." (cited in White, 2002:9).

### **Finding Identity As The Creator**

Reading J.L. Moreno and Meister Eckhart is a very harmonious experience. Eckhart describes the divine-human relationship as "the spark of the soul" - "Just as there is a dark and unknowable ground in the Godhead, so too in the soul is a hidden and unnameable spark that is the source for the powers of understanding, memory and will." (Simsic, 1986:41)

Moreno, however, is more explicit than Eckhart, asserting that humans are God. "In order to exist meaningfully we must find the path of creativity and let it lead us into direct communication and identity with the creator" (Moreno, 1941:xv).

In the following words Moreno develops the image of the creative spark endlessly creating and co-creating. "God becomes the centre of a magnified creativity ... a centre from which the creative spark is continuously springing in all

directions and to which sparks of magnified creativity continuously return from every point, thus forming a multi-dimensional network of relations" (Moreno, 1941:xiii). This forms the spiritual ground behind the Canon of Creativity.

This multi-dimensional network of relations must be seen realistically in the context of human beings making meaning of the journey of life. Some people may have little or no appreciation of themselves as creators or co-creators when participating in a group. They may even entertain dangerous illusions and fantasies of power or omnipotence. Despite Moreno's call for 'identity with the creator', it does not mean they are God. As Antony Williams asserts "Moreno did try to reconcile for clients the fantasy of God with the reality of being human ... Moreno does not argue for persons to live under some megalomaniac illusion that they are God, or for a private world that is ever seeking to engulf the person's social identity" (Williams, 1989:224).

By contrast, for Meister Eckhart, God and the human person are united on the deepest level "where God's ground and the soul's ground are one" (Colledge and McGinn, 1981:192). It is here that Moreno's vision is illuminated by Eckhart's understanding.

### **Mystics, Saints and Spontaneous Creativity**

In his introduction to 'The Theatre of Spontaneity' Moreno refers to inspiration received from "the prophets and saints of the past who appeared as the most shining examples of spontaneous creativity" (1923:5). Moreno says to himself, "This is what you have to produce first and you yourself have to give flesh to it." Moreno warms himself up to the theatre of spontaneity and dedicates himself to educating actors in spontaneity and creativity, an unheard of dynamic at that time. In contemporary times the New Zealand psychodramatist, Mike Consedine, adds "The flame of creativity must be lit. Spontaneity provides the spark." (2004:39)

Moreno teaches producers to warm up the protagonist and the group to new possibilities. As a result their spontaneity often intensifies. The power of this work is ignited by use of the skills and methods we have learnt. The spark is spontaneous, the preparatory warm-up work often very focused and intense. Thus protagonists learn very quickly the process of co-creation and make new responses.

Spontaneity and creativity inspire the healing of society and bring about more open and inclusive communities. The fanning into flame of sparks of spontaneity and creativity also heal us individually. When we heal ourselves we may unknowingly heal someone in a distant social atom.

Eckhart and Moreno's views on the power of creation and the critical importance of originality illuminate each moment we live, act in the world, and have our being. •

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