

1988

Review of Fuller's "Americans and the Unconscious"

Mark R. McMinn

George Fox University, mmcminn@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McMinn, Mark R., "Review of Fuller's "Americans and the Unconscious"" (1988). *Faculty Publications - Grad School of Clinical Psychology*. Paper 181.

http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac/181

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Clinical Psychology at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Grad School of Clinical Psychology by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolf@georgefox.edu.

THE UNCONSCIOUSNESS
PARADOX

Fuller, R.C. (1986).

Americans and the unconscious. New York:

FEATURED REVIEWS

Oxford University Press. Hardcover. 248 pp.
\$19.95. ISBN 0-19-504027-9.

Reviewed by MARK R. McMINN

Robert C. Fuller, PhD, is an associate professor of religious studies at Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois.

Robert Fuller proved himself a thoughtful scholar in his first book, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls*. Dealing with the same historical period, the 18th to 20th centuries, Fuller has again authored an impressive work of scholarship. Although shielded by an overly narrow title, the book is a masterful blend of history, philosophy, religion, and psychology.

Fuller's goal is not to explore the construct validity of the unconscious. Rather, he attempts to present the role of the unconscious in intellectual history and the development of American thought. His style is thought-provoking and creative and his positions are richly researched and well-documented with 43 pages of end notes. Although he is articulate and concise, his style is aimed at intellectual audiences and would be most appropriate for advanced graduate students and professionals.

Fuller's story starts with the influence of Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James (he later spends an entire chapter on James) in a historical overview of how the psyche has been influential as a symbol in American thought. His second chapter is a review of mesmerism, focusing heavily on the work of Phineas Quimby. Quimby, says Fuller, managed to "translate the rather vague metaphysical language of an Edwards or Emerson into the semblance of an empirically based science" (p. 48). But mesmerism went beyond science and ventured into pseudoscience, advocating the power of thinking in spiritual and material matters. Thus, in his third chapter, Fuller asserts that at the beginning of the 20th century psychology was left with the challenge of demystifying the work of the mesmerists. This task was left largely to American functionalists. Chapter 4 is devoted to a treatment of William James, showing his steps toward integrating the spiritual and the psychological using the unconscious as a common denominator. The fifth chapter is a refreshing interpretation of psychoanalysis as it related to the existing American schools of functionalism and behaviorism. Chapter 6 is a critical look at American behaviorism. Fuller points out the metaphysical paradoxes implicit in the behaviorists' denial of the unconscious. Fuller presents the

humanists as the rediscoverers of the unconscious in Chapter 7. His final chapter deals with popular psychology, showing how self-help philosophies are broadly based, competing with traditional religion and freely borrowing the construct of the unconscious.

Fuller is an impressive scholar and an articulate writer. His book effectively points to a historical paradox. On one hand, the unconscious has threatened the scientific status of psychology by its implicitly vague nature. On the other hand, it has provided a bridge between psychology and metaphysics, causing integration (and competition) of behavioral science with philosophy and theology. Fuller elucidates the place of the unconsciousness paradox.

The paradox of unconsciousness goes far beyond in-house debates by psychologists as to whether or not the unconscious is relevant. As Robert Fuller demonstrates, it is a historical paradox affecting the position of psychology in academic and philosophical domains. The unconscious has contributed to the metaphysics of psychological thought, yet it has been rejected by those seeking more objective science.