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Freud's Early Metaphysics and Epistemology

By now it should be clear to the reader that Freud's work constitutes a philosophical system and, as he himself stated, psychoanalysis brought him to philosophical knowledge. In these two chapters (20 and 21) I will discuss his philosophical premises, both implicit and explicit and how they changed as he developed psychoanalysis. I hope the reader will get a sense of the unending difficulty involved in any attempt to approach the human mind and its relationship to the human brain.

Jones (1953) points out that Freud never wavered in his attitude of belief in a regular chain of mental events, including the thoroughgoing meaningfulness and determinism of even the apparently most obscure and arbitrary mental phenomenon. This in turn was based on the simple theory of causality held in the nineteenth century before the age of quantum physics. His view on the subject of free will was that apparently free choices are actually decided by our unconscious mind but we claim conscious credit for the outcome. Therefore, he said, when unconscious motivation is taken into account, the rule of determinism still holds.

In his early book *On Aphasia* (1891) Freud declared himself an adherent of the doctrine of psychophysical parallelism. Throughout his career he insisted that no evidence existed of psychical processes occurring apart from

physiological ones, and that physiological or physical processes must underlie psychical ones. In all of this he followed the standard philosophy of science of the late nineteenth century. It is wise to remember that these viewpoints are by no means so generally accepted today as they were during Freud's time, and that numerous alternatives exist—the subject is still a matter of great controversy (Chessick 2009). At this time, therefore, any theory of mental functioning and of psychotherapy must rest on shaky premises regarding the relationship of the mind and the brain, and on the unresolved issue of free will vs. determinism. These problems are inherent in any science; they are only more apparent in the science of mental phenomena. However, a serious study of the foundations of every science runs into the bedrock of these impenetrable questions. Such questions are examined in detail by Bertrand Russell in *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (1948). The whole notion of what constitutes a theory of the mind is controversial and is discussed by Friedman (1976).

In Freud's view, in The *Interpretation of Dreams*:

> In consequence of the belated appearance of the secondary processes, the core of our being, consisting of unconscious wishful impulses, remains inaccessible to the understanding and inhibition of the preconscious; the part played by the latter is restricted once and for all to directing along the most expedient paths the wishful impulses that arise from the unconscious. These unconscious wishes exercise a compelling force upon all later mental trends, a force which those trends are obliged to fall in with or which they may perhaps endeavor to divert and direct to higher aims. (1900A; 5:603-604).

Many of the so-called modifications and new schools of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are based on the attempt to avoid this profoundly deterministic view of the role of unconscious infantile life on adult behavior, a role which is very difficult for us to accept since we like to think about ourselves as free, mature, rational beings, even though the entire course of human history demonstrates the opposite.

The essence of the Freudian system is that the psychical mechanism employed by neuroses is not created by the impact of pathological disturbance on the mind but is already present in the normal structure of the mental apparatus. Consider the following, written at the beginning of Freud's discoveries:

> The two psychical systems, the censorship upon the passage from one of them to the other, the inhibition and overlaying of one activity by the other, the relations of both of them to consciousness— or whatever more correct interpretations of the observed facts may take their place—all of these form part of the normal structure of our mental instrument, and dreams show us one of the paths leading to an understanding of its structure. If we restrict ourselves to the minimum of new knowledge which has been established with certainty, we can say this of dreams: they have proved that *what is suppressed continues to exist in normal people as well as abnormal, and remains capable of psychical functioning* (1900A; 5:607-608).

Freud's entire system stands or falls on this premise, which underlies his belief that the interpretation of dreams is the royal road to knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind, a belief that has been successfully

tested again and again in countless experiences of psychodynamic psychotherapy. The functional mental illnesses do not presuppose any disintegration or degeneration of the mental apparatus itself, but are to be explained on what Freud called a dynamic basis—"by the strengthening and weakening of the various components in the interplay of forces, so many of whose effects are hidden from view while functions are normal" (ibid., p. 608). This statement implies the essential dividing point between the currently prevalent organic or biological psychiatry and psychodynamic psychiatry. In the area of the neuroses and the personality disorders we assume biological factors to be relatively minor or at least malleable, whereas in the area of certain psychoses such as bipolar illness they are clearly of a major importance.

A crucial link between Freud and philosophy is presented to us by Section F. of Chapter VII of his first great work, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* entitled "The Unconscious and Consciousness—Reality" (1900A; 5:610-621). Here Freud makes the basic statement that the unconscious is the true psychical reality. He contends that "in *its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as the external world by the communications of our sense organs*" (p. 613). This is a profoundly philosophical statement which skirts the edge of Schopenhauer's notion of Will on the one hand, and of Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself, on the other.

The conscious mind in this view is a kind of sense organ perceiving derivatives from the basically unknowable unconscious mind, just as the ordinary sense organs perceive and organize data from the basically unknowable external reality "out there," as in the philosophy of Kant, Schopenhauer and others. This viewpoint further delimits the scope of man since not only can he know nothing for certain about the reality "out there"; he can know nothing for certain about the core of his own being.

Yet Freud's attitude toward philosophy was quite clear and scornful. He writes in a letter to Eitington: "Probably you cannot imagine how alien all these philosophical convolutions seem to me. The only feeling of satisfaction they give me is that I take no part in this pitiable waste of intellectual powers. Philosophers no doubt believe that in such studies they are contributing to the development of human thought, but every time there is a psychological or even a psychopathological problem behind them" (Jones 1957, p. 140). I suspect that here he was exhibiting a fairly typical turn-of-the-century intellectual reaction to the writings of Hegel and other German idealist philosophers. Even such great philosophers as Bertrand Russell turned away from their Hegelian convictions and toward scientistic and atomistic empiricism.

Early Views-Instincts. Probably no other concept has caused as much confusion and difficulty for new readers of Freud than his notion of instinct

(Trieb). Freud himself described the instincts as "at once the most important and the most obscure element of psychological research" (1920G; 18:34). The main reason for this obscurity is that “instinct” as Freud uses it deals with the unresolved issue of the borderline between the mind and the body. Freud at the start defined instinct as "the psychical representative of an endosomatic, continuously floating source of stimulation," a concept "lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical" (1905D; 7:168). In this early definition (from *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) he did not distinguish between an instinct and its "psychical representative," but in later work he drew a sharp distinction between them. Thus in his later views an instinct can never become an object of consciousness; only the idea (*Vorstellung*) that represents the instinct can so become; furthermore, even in the unconscious an instinct cannot be represented by other than an idea. So he says, "When we nevertheless speak of an unconscious instinctual impulse or of a repressed instinctual impulse ... we can only mean an instinctual impulse the ideational representative of which is unconscious" (1915E; 14:177).

The differentiation between an instinct (in Freud's sense of the word) and its ideational representative in the psyche contains within it the unresolved problem of the relationship between brain and mind. The most helpful suggestion to the reader is to remember that Freud conceives of “instinct” in a much looser and less precise manner than is denoted by the English term, which latter implies an inherited behavioral trait or pattern,

especially of animals. Jones (1955) explains that other words such as "urge," "impulsion," or the American expression "drive," have been suggested as translations, but he regards none of them as entirely satisfactory. I think all of them are better than “instinct” as Freud uses the term.

This vagueness in one of the fundamental concepts of Freud's psychodynamic theory has been unfairly used to criticize the whole scientific foundation of the psychoanalytic approach. Freud himself anticipated and provided an answer to this criticism in the opening paragraph of "Instincts and their Vicissitudes." This paragraph contains one of Freud's basic statements on the philosophy of science. He reminds us that no science, not even the most exact, begins with entirely clear and sharply defined basic concepts:

> The true beginning of scientific activity consists rather in describing phenomena and then in proceeding to group, classify and correlate them. Even at the stage of description it is not possible to avoid applying certain abstract ideas to the material in hand, ideas derived from somewhere or other, but certainly not from the new observations alone. Such ideas—which will later become the basic concepts of the science—are still more indispensable as the material is further worked over (1915C; 14:117).

Freud maintains that these ideas must necessarily possess some degree of indefiniteness, and that strictly speaking they are in the nature of conventions, "although everything depends on their not being arbitrarily chosen but determined by having significant relations to the empirical

material, relations that we seem to sense before we can clearly recognize and demonstrate them" (ibid.). After the most thorough investigation and observation in the field we formulate these basic scientific concepts with increased precision and progressively modify them, but they still remain rock-bottom, basic postulates.

Such a postulate, which Freud calls "indispensable to us in psychology," is that of an instinct. He goes on in the same essay to delineate the concept more clearly, first separating it from a stimulus which represents a single impact that can be disposed of by a single expedient action, for example, motor-flight from the source of stimulation. Thus instinct does not arise from the external world but from within the organism itself and it operates as a constant force rather than as a momentary impact. "Moreover, since it impinges not from without but from within the organism, no flight can avail against it" (p. 118).

Instincts, therefore, have their origin in sources of stimulation within the organism and appear as a constant force from which no action of flight will avail. We cannot actually tell what an instinct is—we can only define it operationally. This definition in turn rests on the principle of constancy, which Freud calls a biological postulate and defines thus: "The nervous system is an apparatus which has the function of getting rid of the stimuli that reach it, or of reducing them to the lowest possible level; or which, if it were

feasible, would maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition" (p. 102). As I have mentioned above, it is most interesting that this postulate as a mode of mental functioning is quite contrary to the findings of Piaget and many other investigators, all of which imply that mental functioning even in the most primitive state seeks out stimulation and thrives on mastery, if the stimulation is not too overwhelming. It is clear that the notion of instinct as an explanatory causal hypothesis is highly controversial and fraught with philosophical difficulties and perhaps it is easier now to understand why Freud revised his instinct theory four times.

Although for many psychoanalysts and psychotherapists Freud's final version of the theory of instincts is unsatisfactory, it is important to have a working knowledge of his notion of instinct and his four instinct theories in order to avoid becoming confused in reading his works.

One of the earliest ways in which the organism distinguishes between the inner and outer world is through the discovery that muscular action can avoid certain noxious stimuli; one can take flight from the outer world but not from the inner world. The formation of the ego and its mechanisms of defense are given primary impetus by the need to develop protection against the constant instinctual forces from the inner world that cannot be avoided by the muscular action of flight. Freud sees an instinct as the "psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and

reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body" (1915C; 14:122). Each instinct is characterized by a pressure (*Drang*) which is a measure of force or the demand for work and represents the "very essence" of an instinct. The aim (*Ziel*) of an instinct is "in every instance satisfaction, which can only be obtained by removing the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct" (p. 122). The object (*Objekt*) of an instinct is the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim. The source (*Quelle*) of an instinct lies in the somatic-chemical or mechanical and biological aspects of the body. Freud claims that the study of the sources of instincts lies outside the scope of psychology: "In mental life we know them only by their aim" (p. 123).

The difficulties multiply with Freud's question, "What instincts should we suppose that there are, and how many?" It is well known that Freud had a compelling need to keep the instincts divided into two homogenous groups. The original grouping was between the sexual instincts and the ego-preservative instincts, but with very little attention paid to the latter since Freud at the time was so busy dipping into the unconscious and uncovering the infantile sexual wishes. In 1905, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, the libido was first explicitly established as an expression of the sexual instinct. In a short paper on psychogenic disturbances of vision (1910I; 11:210ff) Freud introduced the term ego-instincts, which he considered self-

preserving. So now he had postulated two groups of instincts.

In his paper "On Narcissism" (1914C; 14:69ff) this duality broke down when the notion of ego-libido was introduced as a natural stage of development called primary narcissism. It then became necessary to distinguish between originally nonlibidinal ego instincts, and libidinal ego instincts. Sexual energies flowing within the ego made it impossible to separate sexual and ego instincts, and the "alibidinous" part of the ego instincts remained poorly defined and did not balance the libidinal ego instincts. The great danger at this point was to fall into Jung's solution of using libido to represent all instincts, a monistic theory that rendered the whole concept of instincts and libido meaningless and useless.

A third and transitional theory of the instincts was suggested indirectly in the paper "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" (1915C; 14:105ff). Although the division between ego instincts and sexual instincts is preserved, a consideration of the relations between love and hate in this paper led Freud to the conclusion that hate was to be regarded as a nonlibidinal reaction of the ego. This implies that the important aspect of the nonlibidinal ego instincts is the aggressive or sadistic aspect. Freud suggests two kinds of sadism: (1) moral sadism, the drive for power or the control of the environment for self- preservation; and (2) sexual sadism, which appears in certain perversions and frustrations of the sexual instinct. Freud maintains

that the impulses to assert, control, and aggress upon can be separated from libidinal impulses, but the argument is not convincing since if sadism is found at every level of sexual development, why can it not be considered a part of the libidinal instincts? In this theory sadism is considered partly sexual and partly nonsexual aggressiveness—with the nonsexual aggressive strivings for power and so on representing the nonlibidinal part of the instincts.

In the final theory of the instincts described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920G; 18:3ff), Freud elevates aggressiveness to an independent status of its own and abandons the notion of ego instincts entirely. Furthermore, aggression in this final theory becomes a derivative of primary masochism.

So the instincts are now finally divided into *Eros,* the libidinal or sexual instinct, and *Thanatos,* a name given it by Ferenczi, the death instinct. The death instinct, says Freud, represents a tendency to disorganization and an expression of the inertia of living matter, of the organic to become inorganic, dead, inanimate. As libido represents the energy of the sexual instincts, "destrudo" or "mortido" represents the energy of the death instincts (terms added by Freud's followers). This postulation of a primary death instinct is not generally accepted today, but it must be pointed out that no better formulation has been offered (for a defense of Freud's notion of the death instinct see Chessick 1989, 1992b).

To claim that outwardly directed aggression is the primary instinct parallel or polar opposite to the sexual instincts forces one to postulate that man has an innate powerful, destructive, aggressive drive. Such a postulate leads, as explained, to the confusing question of why, since aggression is a component of all sexual stages of development, a separate aggressive instinct at a polar opposite to the sexual instincts should be postulated. Either the libidinal and aggressive instinctual phenomena start from something that is common to both and only become differentiated in the course of development, or each has a different origin and follows separate though at times intersecting lines of development. The first of these views is a monistic one like that of Jung; Freud tried to sidestep this view by separating out the aggressive aspect of the ego-preservative functions from the problem of erotic sadism. The final step was to remove aggressiveness from the ego instincts and give it an independent status as an instinctual group with an aim of its own. The ego is now thought of as being obliged to struggle with aggressiveness exactly as it is obliged to struggle with libido; it could give way to it, sublimate, repress, develop reaction formations, neutralize it by adding libidinal elements, or direct the aggression onto itself.

Unfortunately, the logic of the hypothesis seemed to force Freud to postulate the death instinct. Thus if the libido is the energy of the sexual instincts and is primarily and originally directed upon the self, we must similarly postulate that the energy of the aggressive instincts was originally

directed upon the self—the stage of primary masochism. Therefore, the wish to destroy oneself is primary and a polar opposite to the wish to "love" oneself, using love here in a primitive undifferentiated sense. A further consideration of the final instinct theory will be deferred at this point until I later offer detailed discussion of one of Freud's most important late philosophical books, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920G; 18:3ff).

In Freud's view, the vicissitudes of an instinct have a defensive connotation. These vicissitudes are: (1) reversal into its opposite, which can involve either a change from active to passive aim, or a reversal of the content of the instinct; (2) a turning around upon the subject; (3) repression; and (4) sublimation, which Freud later says is not a vicissitude but a way of healthy discharge. These tendencies are all opposed to the instinctual pressure for explosive, straightforward discharge, regardless of reality.

In a turning around upon the subject, the first and second vicissitudes coincide in that both the aim and the object of the instinct sometimes change. For example, the wish to exercise violence or inflict pain on another person proceeds to a change of object to the self; this may also change the aim of the instinct from active to passive, and so the self is substituted as an object to take over the role of the other person. This is the situation of masochism; thus, sadism always precedes masochism in the third instinct theory (see above). In reversal into the opposite, the active aim to look at or torture, for

example, is changed into the passive aim to be looked at and to be tortured, and this usually involves a turning around on the subject.

Freud's discussion of love and hate prepares the way for the final instinct theory. There is no polarity between love and hate for love is not an instinct. According to Freud it is an elaboration of the sexual instinct, whereas hate is an instinct and a primal emotion. So for Freud love is a higher-order reaction resulting from sexual satisfaction and therefore speaking of a reversal from love into hate is not a description of the vicissitude of an instinct. Freud explains, "The case of love and hate requires a special interest from the circumstance that love refuses to be fitted into our scheme of the instincts" (1915C; 14:133). He insists that love and hate "sprang from different sources, and had each its own development before the influence of the pleasure-unpleasure relation made them into opposite" (ibid., p. 138). Hate at this point is conceived as springing from the aggressive component of the nonlibidinal ego instincts. Thus sadism is the aggression of the ego instincts with vicissitudes of its own, although there is also a sexual sadism. The sadism of the ego instincts is a will to power or dominance. According to Freud, when the will to cruelty or torture is added we have the infusion of the sadism of the ego instincts with sexual sadism.

This distinction between sexual sadism as a part of the libidinal instincts, and hate or moral sadism as a vital component of the ego instincts,

is clearly unsatisfactory and demanded revision, as Freud obviously understood. It is fascinating to see how Freud reached his final revision of the instinct theory and to study the various aspects of his personal and intellectual life that were at play when he created the polarity of the life and death instincts.

The vital question still remains, however, as to what other revision could be made of instinct theory that would preserve the duality and not end with the extremely speculative notion of primary masochism or a death instinct. One can imagine Freud wrestling with this problem and trying to remain as close to his clinical material as possible for, as he explained at the beginning of "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes", everything depends on these basic concepts having significant relations to the empirical material. Only by careful clinical observation can we formulate our basic scientific concepts with increased precision and render them serviceable and consistent. The notion of a death instinct is both unserviceable in the sense that it has no clinical utility, and runs against our so-called common sense, so we are hard put to believe it. It is certainly possible to explain the phenomena of the repetition compulsion as part of a self-preservative urge to master rather than a manifestation of the primary need to inflict pain on oneself, and the former explanation is more consistent with the data of experimental psychology.

Why can we not postulate the two primary groups of instincts as libidinal and aggressive? The answer, as we have seen, is because we also postulate that the primary state of the organism involves these instincts infusing the self. So, in primary narcissism, the original investment of the libido is in the self. To be consistent we would have to similarly postulate a primary masochism in which the original investment of the aggression was also in the self. One cannot logically avoid the consequences of Freud's final revision of instinct theory. Like Freud, we are forced to accept this revision by the logic of our theoretical formulations. The only way to avoid this situation is to throw out his theory of instincts entirely, which many today are willing to do. I think this represents a mistake.

As a matter of fact, certain revisionists in the field of psychoanalysis have attempted to replace these theoretical preconceptions by the use, for example, of systems theory and in so doing discard the structural concepts such as id, ego, and superego as well as energy concepts such as force and energy, as discussed in chapter 22. This is a perfectly legitimate scientific enterprise and does not affect the practice of intensive psychotherapy or psychoanalysis in its clinical aspects. Personally, I prefer to stay as much as possible with Freud's basic concepts, since in the actual practice of intensive psychotherapy they have exceptional utility in helping to arrive at conceptual understanding of what is happening in the treatment. The introduction of systems theory coupled with the total abandonment of Freud's metapsychological concepts

does not, in my judgment, lead to increased clinical effectiveness, although of course I recognize this issue as highly debatable, with strong arguments on both sides—an issue that is beyond the scope of this book. As one becomes older it becomes perhaps easier to understand and to empathize with Freud's concept of a death instinct. One cannot consider his postulation of such an instinct so outrageous as to force a radical revision of our theoretical concepts, and the suspicion arises that those who do so for reasons of their own wish to change Freud's psychoanalysis entirely and are using the admittedly controversial issue of the death instinct as an excuse.

Instincts and the Mind-Body Problem. Descartes asked, "Granted that a human mind and body are substances of different kinds, how can events in the one produce or modify events in the other?" It was difficult for Descartes to explain how an unextended mental substance which has no fundamental property except cogitation, and an unthinking material substance which has no fundamental property but extension, could ever come to grips with each other. According to Descartes, interaction between mind and body takes place only in human beings and only in the pineal gland; even there, mind somehow produces only a change in the direction of preexisting motion without changing its total quantity.

This unsatisfactory thesis was cleverly modified by Spinoza, who argued that there is one and only one substance, which he called God. This monist

substance is both mental and material, but is neither a mind nor a body; each individual person represents a mode of the one substance. Each mode has bodily and mental attributes exactly correlated with each other; thus for any bodily fact about the mode John Jones there is a corresponding mental fact about him, and vice versa. Broad (1975) explains, "It becomes nonsensical to talk of interaction here, for interaction implies two terms; and here there is only a single term, considered under two different, but precisely correlated, abstract headings." Thus at a certain moment an individual A has a mental experience denoted by E_{ψ} ; the bodily correlate of this is an event in his brain denoted by E_{ϕ} . Then E_{ψ} and E_{ϕ} are just one and the same psychical-physical event $E_{\psi\phi}$ considered respectively in its purely mental and its purely bodily aspects.

Because Leibniz could not accept the monism of Spinoza he offered a different solution, presenting the rather bizarre theory of monads. Leibniz claimed that the ruling monad is one substance, and the monads which together constitute its organism are different substances of the same general character as itself, though at a lower order of clearness and intelligence. Furthermore, these changes are determined and reflected in all the monads in the universe, so that our perception of the ruling monad or mind causing the body to change is an illusion. It should be noted, by the way, that Leibniz was probably the first philosopher to assert that there are "unconscious perceptions" and to use this information as an important part of his philosophical

discussions.

The “occasionalists,” both in a crude form and in a more sophisticated form proposed by Malebranche, revised Descartes by holding the view of psycho-physical parallelism. They argued that there is no interaction whatever between mind and body, and postulated the continued intervention of God to maintain the illusion that volition in the mind leads to bodily change. Thus for example, if at a certain moment a person decides to move a finger, God notices this and deliberately causes the finger to move in accordance with this volition.

Which of these views can best be ascribed to Freud's theory of the instincts? It seems that Freud vacillates on the question. At times he seems to maintain the view of Descartes when he speaks of instincts or energies of the body causing direct changes in the mind; whereas, in a more sophisticated vein, when he speaks of the mental representations of the instincts, he seems to lean toward the theory of Spinoza.

For Freud's purposes and for the purposes of psychotherapists the Spinozistic viewpoint, considering man as one mode who can be studied under the attributes of mind or body (brain), seems best. The psychodynamic therapist limits himself or herself to the attribute of mind and recognizes that for various reasons, changes in the body will have concurrent or concomitant

mental representations and corresponding interferences with the dynamic balance of the forces of the patient's mentation. This theory is more sophisticated than that of Descartes because it avoids the impossible question of where mind and brain interact.

Another possible approach is that of Ryle or Skinner, who view mind as a ghost concept which is purely illusory, and which may be discarded; this approach is untenable for a variety of reasons (Chessick 1977a, 2009).

Freud's Views on the Mind-Brain Problem. "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1950A; 1:283-387), a famous early work, was dashed off in two or three weeks, left unfinished, and was scheduled for destruction by Freud. It has recently received great attention in psychoanalytic circles because, in spite of being ostensibly a neurological document, it contains the nucleus of the great part of Freud's later psychological theory. Strachey, in his introduction (pp. 283-293) to this work in the *Standard Edition,* writes that "The *Project,* or rather its invisible ghost, haunts the whole series of Freud's theoretical writings to the very end" (p.290). It is essentially a neurological theory which implies a strict psycho-physical parallelism; there is a coincidence between the characteristics of consciousness and the processes in the so-called Omega neurons which vary in parallel with them. Yet this work contains a curious mixture—which is probably why Freud abandoned it —between neurological descriptions of the various systems of neurons and

quantities of excitations on the one hand, and the language of mental processes such as tension, wishes, and dreams, on the other. Emphasis is upon the environment's impact upon the organism and the organism's reaction to it, much in keeping with standard neurological theory of Freud's day. Internal forces at this point are considered essentially secondary reactions to external ones.

It was the subject of psycho-physical parallelism on which Freud—like Descartes—foundered, and which caused him to abandon the "Project." For example, he explains that the starting point of the investigation into the psyche "is provided by a fact without parallel, which defies all explanation or description—the fact of consciousness" (1940A; 23:157), which Freud's early neurological theory had absolutely no means of explaining.

So rather than tackle the essential philosophical problem of the relationship between brain and mind, Freud at an early date chose to give up his investigations of brain—although he was already an established neurologist—and to concentrate exclusively on the phenomena of mind. He left the investigation of the relationship of mind and brain for later research. One might expect that this unresolved issue committed him to some form of idealism, but he never doubted that there was a physical reality "out there," even though he never tried to prove it any more than Kant tried to establish the existence of *Dang-in-sich* (things-in-themselves). Furthermore, like Kant,

he simply assumed that physical reality "out there" was in some way the cause of our perceptions of the external world, even though Kant's own philosophy demonstrated that the notion of causation could not be applied to the noumenal world, the world of things-in-themselves.

Freud could have chosen to stay with the neurological machinery of his "Project" and become instead a modern behaviorist or empirical psychologist. He could have adopted a view similar to that of Ryle (1949) and insisted that the mind was a "ghost" in his neurological machine or he could have anticipated the philosophy of Susanne Langer (1967, 1972) and viewed the phenomena of mind as a mirror phase of brain function, thus anticipating general systems theory, but he did not. The recognition of the immediate data of consciousness was for Freud so mysterious and so important that he could not allow himself to try to explain it away by any philosophy or to ignore it and concentrate only on neurological machinery.

It was by focusing on the data of our consciousness and therefore on what his patients had to say regarding the data of their consciousness, that Freud established the grounds of psychoanalysis. He regarded the reported data of the patient about his or her own consciousness and mentation as legitimate material for the investigation of a natural science called psychoanalysis, much as our collected observations of the motions and positions of the stars and planets form the data of the natural science of astronomy. Once

the "Project" was abandoned, these essentially metaphysical preconceptions never vary throughout Freud's work and can even be found in his very last description of psychoanalysis, published posthumously. He writes:

> We know two kinds of things about what we call our psyche (or mental life): firstly, its bodily organ and scene of action, the brain (or nervous system) and, on the other hand, our acts of consciousness, which are immediate data and cannot be further explained by any sort of description. Everything that lies between is unknown to us, and the data do not include any direct relation between these two terminal points of our knowledge (1940A; 23:144).

So we shall hear no more about the brain from the neurologist Freud. Yet some of the postulates from the "Project" survive and are applied as metapsychology to the data of consciousness in his later period. Detailed studies of the "Project" such as that of Pribram and Gill (1976) are very interesting historically, but cannot be said to throw any new light on the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of Freud's thought as manifested in his writings on psychoanalysis.

Freud's "Project for a Scientific Psychology," continues to be assessed and reassessed (see Brenner 1977 and the discussions following his book review). Freud initially formulated the mechanisms of mental function on the basis of his biological and neurological knowledge but then chose to leave these foundations implicit and even occasionally to deny their existence. These mechanisms became isolated from contemporary developments in

psychology and neurophysiology and were elaborated into "a speculative tangle of concepts and casuistry" in the hands of post-Freudian psychoanalysts, so claim Pribram and Gill (1976, p. 10). They also believe that although Freud's metapsychological model has often been alleged to be a hydrodynamic one, it is actually an energic model based on electrical concomitants of neural activity. Even these two authors disagree in their book as to whether psychoanalysis should be rejoined to its biochemical and neurological origins, or should go its own way (which Gill claims to mean purging it of its natural science metapsychology).

There is still considerable argument about the "Project." For example, the authors just cited quote Kanzer as claiming the work to be an essentially psychological document, whereas they describe it as a neuropsychological document. Kanzer (1973) insists that not only was the work a psychological document, but that Freud kept right on with it after he was supposed to have disavowed it! However, most authors agree with Jones (1953) that Freud regarded the "Project" as an "oppressive burden," a judgment which perhaps marked the transition from Freud the dogged worker to Freud the imaginative thinker. Its relative sterility is explained by its divorce from clinical data. Jones points out that the work is more like the deductive reasoning, of a rationalist philosopher than the work of a clinician, which Jones sees as a dangerous tendency that "might end in empty speculation, an arid intellectualizing of the underground urges." Jones reminds us that

despite the philosopher-psychologist Herbart's conviction that, in psychology, deduction has equal rights with induction, Freud had been drilled in the sacred nineteenth-century medical doctrine that all conclusions were to be founded on experience and experience alone. For him the writing of the "Project" could be thought of as a metaphysical heresy, running against his fundamental epistemological and his own only dimly recognized metaphysical beliefs.

Freud's Epistemology. Freud's paper "The Unconscious (l915E; 14:161ff) is the most important of all his papers on metapsychology; he considered it one of this best works (Jones 1955). It is difficult to characterize this paper because it is probably the most important meeting point for Freud's clinical work, his psychological theories, and the philosophy-of-science issues implicit in the whole foundation of psychodynamic psychiatry. In a way this paper may be considered as part of the philosophical tradition of the West, fitting into a sequence with Locke's and Hume's treatises on human reason and understanding, as well as the work of Kant, Schopenhauer, and Herbart.

Freud wrote "The Unconscious'' in three weeks in April 1915. The essay is neatly divided into seven sections, beginning with what is basically a philosophical argument for the justification of the concept of the unconscious, an argument with which even medical students should be familiar. Freud himself makes the connection between his notion of the unconscious and the

philosophy of Kant: "Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psychoanalysis warns us not to equate perception by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object" (p. 171).

As early as chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (as discussed above), Freud develops the notion that our perception of mental processes which are unconscious is, by means of consciousness, analogous to our perception of the external world by means of the sense organs. Although Freud does not mention it, this notion is quite similar to Kant's notion of "coming into consciousness" in the Transcendental Aesthetic section of *Critique of Pure Reason* (1965). The parallel is all the more remarkable in that Kant explains how, as a representation comes in to consciousness it is placed in the manifold of time by an activity of the mind and Freud, as we shall see, associates the coming from the unconscious to the preconscious with an activity of the mind that places the idea in a time manifold and links it with words. The second section of "The Unconscious" reviews this point and also Freud's well-known "topographical" point of view and again reminds us that all psychical acts begin in the unconscious and given certain conditions, these can become "an object of consciousness." This statement connotes an active sense to the word conscious, a sense which is present in the German word used by Freud, *Bewusstsein.* (When Freud wishes to speak of a mental state's

consciousness in the passive sense he uses the word *Bewusstheit*—the attribute of being conscious.)

A further confusion is resolved by Freud in distinguishing between the topographical *systems* conscious and unconscious, abbreviated Cs. and Ucs. respectively, so as to distinguish these systems from the use of the words conscious and unconscious in a descriptive sense. In addition, he postulates the system preconscious (Pcs.) which "shares the characteristics of the system Cs." and that "the rigorous censorship exercises its office at the point of transition from the Ucs. to the Pcs. (or Cs.)" (p. 173).

The crucial question, as to what happens when an idea passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is left unresolved. Jones (1957) asks, "Does a new imprint of the idea in question get made in the second locality, so that there would be two of them, or does some change take place in the original impression and its original place? Freud seemed for the moment to favor the latter view."

The third section of the "Unconscious" deals with the concept of unconscious feelings or emotions. This is an extremely difficult and unresolved subject. It begins by explaining, as we have seen, that an instinct can never become an object of consciousness—only the idea that represents the instinct can do so. Furthermore, even in the unconscious "an instinct

cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea" (p. 177). That is to say, if the instinct did not attach itself to an idea we would know nothing about it. When we speak of an "unconscious instinctual impulse" we mean an instinctual impulse, the ideational representative of which is unconscious. Then Freud asks what we mean by such phrases as unconscious love, unconscious hate, unconscious anger, and so on. The affect—the feeling or emotion—is never unconscious:

> All that had happened was that its *idea* had undergone repression ... affects or emotions correspond to processes of discharge, the final manifestations of which are perceived as feelings (p. 178).

> The affect belongs to the impulse and action. When ideas from the unconscious come up to the conscious, they stimulate an affect just as they may stimulate action or fantasies (p. 178).

This entire matter is discussed later in greater and clearer detail in *The Ego and the Id* (1923B; 19:section 2). There, the transition between unconscious and preconscious is described as taking place through the unconscious ideation becoming connected with the word-presentations corresponding to it. Affects do not have to undergo this transition, but Freud still remains ambiguous on this point. At times he speaks of affects as in some way being unconscious, but at other times he implies that the affects experienced when ideation becomes conscious are added by the higher integrative processes in the ego. It is the ego, or in the earlier terminology the system conscious [Cs. (Pcs.)] that takes the energy associated with the idea

and discharges it as a conscious or felt affect. In so doing it may transform this feeling in a number of ways or even express it as anxiety. The point is that affect belongs basically to a higher integrative system than the system Ucs. (1915E ;14:179).

The fourth section of "The Unconscious" reviews the concept of repression and refines it, as well as introducing some important terminology. A metapsychological presentation is here defined as describing a psychical process in its "dynamic, topographical, and economic aspects." The economic aspects endeavor to follow out the vicissitudes of amounts of excitation or "psychic energy" and to arrive at some relative estimate of their magnitude. The topographical aspects refer to the systems already described, while the dynamic aspects have to do with the conflicting forces of energy known as cathexis, and anticathexis or countercathexis. What is not taken up in this section is a defense of the value of these metapsychological conceptions, which remain a matter of controversy even today.

The special characteristics of the unconscious are described in section five of the essay, as follows:

(1) The unconscious is made up of the ideational representatives of the instincts, which are exempt from mutual contradiction—thus there is no negation in the unconscious.

(2) Thought processes in the unconscious behave according to

primary process. One idea may surrender to another all its cathexis (the motility of cathexis), a process known as displacement; one idea may appropriate the whole cathexis of several ideas, a process known as condensation; (symbolism and secondary elaboration are also listed as part of this primary process in the *Interpretation of Dreams,* but are not emphasized at this point).

(3) The unconscious has no conception of time. Ideas and impulses from different chronological ages are telescoped together, and only the present exists.

(4) The unconscious has no sense of outer-world reality. A sense of psychical reality replaces our sense of external reality so that a wish for something is equated with the actual happening. Thus unconscious processes are subject merely to the pleasure principle and operate according to displacement and condensation, which are the laws of primary process thought.

This primary process adds further impetus to the distinction between the system unconscious and the system preconscious or conscious, since the latter systems operate according to secondary process along the reality principle and thus are fundamentally different.

Jones (1957) calls the sixth section, on the intercommunication between the two systems, "the most valuable part of this essay." The relationship between the unconscious and the preconscious, says Freud, is not confined

only to repression. Much preconscious material actually originates in the unconscious. In this way the preconscious may be said to have instinctual derivatives "imbedded" within it such as fantasy. Attached to these derivatives is what Freud later calls tonically bound id energy. In order for their derivatives to become stored in the preconscious, unconscious instinctual impulses must pass a censorship barrier between the unconscious (Ucs.) and the preconscious (Pcs.), and so “A very great part of this preconscious originates in the unconscious, has the character of its derivatives and is subjected to a censorship before it can become conscious" (p. 191). This implies a *second* censorship barrier between the preconscious and the conscious, a fact which curiously has been overlooked in many studies of Freud. The first of these censorships is exercised against the unconscious itself by the preconscious, and the second against the preconscious derivatives of the unconscious by the conscious.

The important clinical and philosophical point here is that, although in intensive psychotherapy we deal with the instinctual derivatives appearing from the preconscious to the conscious, it is not possible to actually reach directly into the unconscious itself. Furthermore, as psychotherapy lifts the barrier between the conscious and the preconscious and as tonically bound id energy in the preconscious is released through expression in the treatment, less energy is available for anticathexis of the unconscious by the preconscious, permitting more derivatives of unconscious material to emerge

into the preconscious. Notice, however, that all unconscious material comes out as derivatives subject to the laws of secondary process—in this sense one never reaches the unconscious itself.

The unconscious contains inherited mental formations and what has been discarded in childhood in the process of ego formation. The basic repression barrier is between the preconscious and the unconscious, while the barrier between the conscious and the preconscious is usually experienced in clinical practice as resistance to free association or communication.

The situation is made even more complicated by the clinical fact, which Freud calls "a very remarkable thing,'' that the unconscious of one human being can react on that of another without passing through the conscious. No metapsychological explanation of this is offered by Freud; however, one of the lost papers on metapsychology (destroyed by Freud) apparently deals with this issue.

An example of such communication is given by Freud (1913I; 12:313ff). In this case report a previously satisfied wife develops neurotic symptoms when she discovers that her husband is unable to have children. Although she never mentioned the intense frustration that this discovery engendered in her—indeed, she did all she could to prevent her husband from guessing the

cause of the trouble—her husband understood "without any admission or explanation on her part" what his wife's anxiety meant. He in turn felt hurt but did not show it; instead he reacted by failing, for the first time, in sexual intercourse with her, and "immediately afterwards" he went off on a journey. In my clinical experience this unspoken communication of information from one individual to another is especially prominent in the relationship between husband and wife. It also appears frequently in the psychotherapy of schizophrenics, who seem to have an uncanny capacity both to communicate directly to the unconscious of the therapist and to read the therapist's unconscious in turn.

The last sentence of this difficult section of Freud's essay reminds us that a sharp and final division between the unconscious and preconscious systems does not take place until puberty. As Gedo and Goldberg (1973) point out, this means that different models of the mind may be necessary to understand psychological phenomena before puberty.

The final section of "The Unconscious" presents Freud's theory of schizophrenia. This well-known theory postulates that schizophrenics have given up the cathexis of objects with libido; they return this libido on their soma in the formation of hypochondriasis, and on the self in the formation of megalomania. Freud makes the crucial point that in schizophrenia words are subjected to the same process as that which makes dream images out of

latent dream thoughts. Words undergo condensation and displacement and indeed, a single word may take over the representation of a whole train of thought. However, there is an essential difference between dream work and schizophrenia. In schizophrenia the words themselves, in which the preconscious thought was expressed, become subject to modification, but in dreams, it is not the preconscious thoughts or words which are modified but what Freud calls the "thing-presentations" in the unconscious.

This crucial distinction between word-presentations and thing-presentations is a very early notion of Freud's, first appearing in his early monograph *On Aphasia* (1891), and is sharply contradicted by the research of Piaget. Thing-presentations for Freud exist in the unconscious more or less as memory (mnemic) images, or at least as remote memory traces derived from memory images. The phrase "mnemic images of things" is used interchangeably by Freud with the phrase "thing-presentation."

In the preconscious, according to Freud, word-presentations become linked with thing-presentations. This linkage brings about a higher psychical organization and makes it possible for primary process to be succeeded by secondary process thought. In transference phenomena seen in our clinical work, repression denies the linkage of words to what is presented. In this situation, what the patient cannot put into words he or she communicates by attitudes and behavior. In a clearly Kantian statement Freud next insists that

we can become conscious of the unconscious only indirectly and after the thing-presentations in the unconscious have become linked with word-presentations, a linkage which occurs in the preconscious.

Freud characterizes this discussion as "philosophizing." He sees the distortion of the word-presentations in schizophrenia as representing an attempt at recovery from the illness. The schizophrenic, according to Freud, is forced to be content with words instead of external things (because of withdrawal of libido from the outside world). Their hypercathexis of word-presentations is an effort to regain the lost thing-presentations from both the external and internal world. The schizophrenic confuses these two worlds and ends up embedded in the word-presentations of each.

Freud's study *On Aphasia* (1891) is of considerable historical interest since it illustrates the fact that his neurological and psychological concepts were linked in a continuum of development in his thought. The great neurologist Hughlings Jackson made a deep impression on Freud. One of Freud's basic principles, that of regression, is based on the Jacksonian notion that the functions of the "speech apparatus" under pathological conditions represent instances of "functional retrogression (disinvolution) of a highly organized apparatus," and therefore correspond to previous states of its functional development. Notice the use of the phrase "speech apparatus," which antedates the notion of mental apparatus, as well as the basic concept

that arrangements of associations acquired later and belonging to a higher level of functioning are lost while an earlier, simpler arrangement is preserved.[i] Here is the essence of Freud's explanation of aphasia: "Our considerations have led us to attribute a certain clinical type of speech disorder to a change in the functional state of the speech apparatus rather than a localized interruption of a pathway" (1891 p. 29).

For the most part, Freud's monograph on aphasia is only of historical interest, except for certain crucial passages which have been translated as Appendix B and Appendix C to his paper "The Unconscious" (Freud 1915E; 14:206-215) discussed above, and which lie essentially within the field of pure epistemological philosophy. Reality in the human brain, according to Freud, is represented by (1) a thing-presentation which essentially constitutes a passive image, and (2) a human way of presenting things to ourselves, especially words. These words are linked to the thing-presentations. So in the various aphasias, according to Freud, visual, auditory, or kinesthetic representations of the word are cut off from the thing-presentations. Learning for Freud occurs by connecting images with the words. In transference and neurotic phenomena patients are presenting images not connected with words and suffer from "nameless fears," showing that the linkage has been broken. The purpose of psychotherapy in the neuroses is to rejoin the words with the images or thing-presentations, as provided, for example, by the therapist's interpretations.

An organic severing of the linkage between word-presentations and thing-presentations results in the phenomena of aphasia. The functional severing of this same linkage is the process of repression fundamental in the neuroses. Within the unconscious, thing-presentations are cathected by the energy of the instincts and then strive for expression, but the process of repression forbids the linkage of thing-presentations with word-presentations, and therefore, such thing-presentations become incapable of expression in the conscious. The linkage with words is a higher development, according to Freud, and has the eventual function of imposing a barrier between instinctual drives and impulse behavior. This barrier works through words in which a person thinks it over, talks it over, and thereby tames, neutralizes, or binds instinctual energy.

A representation in the conscious mind is made up of a linkage between a thing-presentation and a word-presentation. For Freud there are four components of the word presentations: the sound-image, the visual letter-image, the motor speech-image, and the motor writing-image. A word acquires its meaning by being linked to a thing-presentation. As mentioned, Piaget's genetic epistemology is directly antagonistic to this theory, since, according to Piaget, the developing child first acquires conscious concepts and then, after the sensory-motor stage, learns to attach words to these concepts.

We are forced to conclude that the basic philosophical postulates of Freud's metapsychology—(a) psycho-physical parallelism, and (b) the notion that conscious representations are made up of thing-presentations which have become linked to word-presentations—are philosophically and experimentally highly debatable.

Freud's "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams" (l917D; 14:219ff) may be considered a rather turgid continuation of the subject. It contains some obscure statements which refer to a lost (destroyed by Freud) paper on the Conscious. The thesis of the paper is that the completion of the dream process consists of a regressive transformation in the mental apparatus, in which thought content, worded over into a wishful fantasy, becomes conscious as a sense perception, a hallucinated dream wish. Secondary revision occurs at the same time. Because this is a hallucination, it meets with belief in the reality of its fulfillment. This is essentially a restatement of the basic principles already quoted from chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, propounded seventeen years earlier but here rounded off into a more polished form.

The dream wish, based on unconscious instinctual excitations, cannot find expression along motor paths during sleep. Therefore, it regresses through the unconscious "backwards" to the perceptual system itself and it is this regression that makes dreams akin to hallucinations. In distinction to

temporal regression in the psychoneuroses and the personality disorders, this is a topographical regression in which there is also a postulated return to earlier stages of psychosexual development. The word-presentations of the preconscious thoughts that are disturbing the dreamer are reduced backwards to the primitive thing-presentations which then undergo displacements and condensations under the laws of primary process. After secondary elaboration, all this appears in the perceptual system as a dream hallucination. Basically the dream itself is a wish-fulfilling fantasy.

One of the important premises underlying this thesis is the assumption that a wishful impulse may be dealt with along three different paths: "It may follow the path that would be normal in waking life, by pressing from the Pcs. to consciousness; or it may bypass the Cs. and find direct motor discharge; or it may take the unexpected path which observation enables us in fact to trace" (p. 226). In the first instance it would become a delusion, having as content the fulfillment of a wish. The second instance is that of direct motor discharge which, of course, cannot happen in the state of sleep. The "unexpected" path is that of dream formation, as has already been described in the foregoing discussion of topographical regression. Notice that in dream formation, in contrast to the psychoneuroses, both topographical and temporal regression occur, since the wish-fulfilling fantasy also represents a return to the early stage of hallucinatory wish fulfillment, but in the psychoneuroses topographical regression does not occur. Neither is there a topographical

regression in schizophrenia, since this condition is represented by primary process changes only in the word-presentations.

Again we see the fundamental distinction that runs throughout Freud's metapsychology and goes back to his early neurological work, between thing-presentations [(*Sachvorstellung*, replaced by the synonymous *Dingvorstellung* by Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917)] and word-presentations *(Wortvorstellung).* Here, the difficult German word to translate is *Vorstellung*, which covers the English terms "idea," "image," and "presentation". The same problem arises in translation of Schopenhauer's philosophy, surely known to Freud.

A further philosophical assumption is Freud's comment, "It seems justifiable to assume that belief in reality is bound up with perception through the senses" (p. 230). Our reality-testing function is here placed by Freud in the perceptual apparatus so that "when once a thought has followed the path to regression as far back as to the unconscious memory-traces of objects and thence to perception, we accept the perception of it as real" (ibid).

In the same work, Freud places the perceptual system as coinciding with the system conscious. Thus he speaks of "the system Cs. (Pcpt.)". Reality-testing is based on the capacity of this system to orient itself in the world by means of its perceptions, distinguishing external and internal according to

their relations to the muscular action of the system. "A perception which is made to disappear by an action is recognized as external, as reality; where such an action makes no difference, the perception originates within the subject's own body—it is not real" (p. 232). Cathexis of the system Cs.(Pcpt.) is required for reality-testing to occur efficiently. In dreams there is a voluntary withdrawal of this cathexis in the interest of maintaining the state of sleep, for this withdrawal permits the wish-fulfillment fantasies to be temporarily accepted as undisputed reality.

In the hallucinations of schizophrenia a disintegration of the reality-testing function is postulated so that it no longer stands in the way of belief in reality, and Freud considers this to be such a disintegration that hallucination "cannot be among the initial symptoms of the affection" (p. 234). The reader is referred to Arlow and Brenner (1964) for further discussion of Freud's views of schizophrenia and problems with these views entailed by his important theoretical revisions, to which we now turn.

[i] This is dramatically illustrated in the film “2001” when a highly sophisticated computer is taken apart.

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