

SIGMUND FREUD  
Discoverer, misinterpreter, challenger.

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The Discoverer. Sigmund Freud, like many other great men, can be considered the last outstanding representative of a dying era, and at the same time the first great pioneer of a new one. His point of view was that of the nineteenth century; all sciences, in his opinion, had to be built after the pattern of physics. Reality, including all psychological facts, could be explained only in terms of cause and effect. Determinism was the only possible philosophy, and consequently there was no freedom, no responsibility and no creativity. Everything had to be traced back to matter and energy. Freud's psychological genius was chained to the iron ball of materialism.

Many psychologists after Freud have shared this narrow point of view. They were all lost in the sterile desert of academic hair-splitting. Freud, however, was able "to dance in chains." He is the last one of the great psychologists of the nineteenth century, of equal rank with giants like Gustav Theodor Fechner and William James. He died in 1936. His psychological discoveries belong to the twentieth century, but their philosophical interpretation carries the hallmark of the nineteenth century.

In spite of this philosophical handicap, Freud was the pioneer of depth-psychology. He discovered "the Unconscious" as an integral part of our psychological life. His scientific way of thinking, inadequate as it was on the whole, enabled him to prove the existence and efficiency of tendencies or forces in the human mind which can remain unconscious or become conscious without changing their nature. The old equation

"psyche equals consciousness" was shattered forever. We had to accept the fact that we are conditioned by unconscious factors as well as by conscious ones. The word "I" from now on covers more than what I know about myself. If this is true, a thorough-going rethinking and remodeling of ethics, social sciences, and even theology is unavoidable. No wonder the scientific world was slow to accept Freud's discoveries and eager to point out his errors and limitations. Our task of course is to correct his mistakes, remove his limitations, and go ahead in the new direction. It has rightly been said that Freud, like Columbus, discovered a new continent, mistaking it likewise for something it was not. Both great men died equally discouraged and embittered because the world did not accept their erroneous views.

The Misinterpreter. According to his mechanistic point of view, Freud misunderstood the newly discovered "Unconscious" as a kind of machine. You are angry at your boss but swallow your anger. It will come out the next day as an unjust criticism of your wife or children. The energy (anger) can exist in a latent state while you are completely unaware of its existence, and only careful analysis can prove that the new outburst against the family is actually caused by the first anger against the boss. The underlying concept is of course the preservation of energy. The new discovery is that psychic energy as well as mechanical energy can exist in a latent state and that this latent energy can be unknown to the man in whom it exists. We all may carry tendencies of great potentiality in our unconscious. We may be potential murderers or geniuses, petty thieves or magnanimous heroes, -- all this would come to light if the barriers between our conscious and our unconscious could be removed.

Innumerable riddles of the human mind suddenly became as clear as daylight. Freud's "Psychopathology of Everyday Life" is one of the most revealing masterpieces in psychological literature (and one of Freud's least Freudian books). Great and small errors, forgetfulness, lapses of the tongue and miscalculations are explained in a masterly way. But one great question remains: Where do the powerful though repressed forces originate? The repressed anger against the boss accounts only for small emotional difficulties. If the creativity of Emerson and the crimes of Al Capone are to be explained as the results of repressed forces, we need a continually flowing source of energy in the unconscious.

Freud's answer is: The Unconscious contains vital energies which never can be exhausted. They may become conscious, they may be controlled by the individual, but they will keep flowing like a river. The water can be channeled into turbines or it can break through the dams and flood the country, but it will keep flowing. Here again the mechanistic point of view is evident; but a new mistake slips in, due to a personal condition of Sigmund Freud. The idea of a flowing energy within the human soul was in keeping with all the scientific thoughts of his century. But that this energy -- now called Libido -- was supplying only one half of the human soul -- namely the sexual half, in the broadest sense of the word -- that was Freud's own personal conviction. He thought that "Libido" was essentially different from "ego-instincts" such as hunger and thirst; and he explained all our cultural achievements, art, law, technique and religion as developments of Libido, without much help from the ego-instincts. This he called his empirical discovery; but since Alfred Adler and Carl Jung have interpreted the same facts in a different way, we have to say that the Libido theory appears as a result of Freud's personal prejudice.

Freud's genius was inexhaustible. In spite of his philosophical narrowness (materialism and mechanism), and in spite of his personal prejudice (overemphasis on sexual energy or Libido), he constructed a magnificent model of a psychic machine which seemed to account for everything that psychology can observe. There is the ever-flowing river of Libido. Then the environment, parents and society, build a dam. Libido is forced to flow in certain directions, to avoid other directions, and to go partially underground. Repression begins. The individual himself takes care of the dam that cripples his own life. Indeed he creates a special caretaker of his inner dam, the super-ego. The occasional inundations are neurotic symptoms, crimes, or cultural achievements. The gospel of St. John is "nothing but" sublimated Libido because St. John's super-ego did not allow him to express his Libido more naturally, for instance by begetting children. This sounds exaggerated, but Freud's book on Christianity, "The Future of an Illusion", leaves no doubt that this was his interpretation of religious experiences.

The Challenger. Freud's naive blindness in the field of religion could be dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders were it not for the "religious" fanaticism of his followers. There is enough healing truth and psychological value in the psychoanalytical method to cure certain neuroses and to conjure up experiences of death and regeneration which, like ancient initiation rites, imbue the client with emotional convictions of great depth and unusual power.

It does not help us to withdraw from the battle field in indignation. It is true that Freudianism is a poor philosophy and was disproved before it was invented. But it is also true that its scientific appearance has a strong appeal for academic minds and that the Libido theory is fascinating for the younger generation. Our psychotherapists have to produce

better (and faster) results in the treatment of neuroses; and our religious leaders have to find better ways into the depth and power of Christianity.

History usually produces diseases and remedies, problems and solutions, almost simultaneously. Freud found the first part of the answer to the neurotic deviations of our time. He discovered the dynamics of the Unconscious. Then he went astray and spent the rest of his life in the elaboration of his Libido theory. It has often been said that psychoanalysis is the disease itself which it tries to cure; and among Freud's earliest disciples were clear and independent minds who recognized the danger and sought to avoid Freud's mistakes. Alfred Adler replaced boldly the mechanistic category of cause and effect by the biological category of means and ends. He gave back to human nature the freedom, the responsibility and the creativity which Freud's determinism had eliminated. Fighting against a giant like Freud, Adler was bound to overplay his theme. He replaced the newly discovered "Unconscious" by the merely "Unknown," thus giving up the greater part of Freud's discovery. But his merit is that he broke the spell; he showed that the Master was not infallible. Carl Jung took the next step. He not only restored the Unconscious to its proper place, but he discovered its real meaning, which is far greater than Freud had imagined. Jung's concept of the "Collective Unconscious" enables us to understand widespread historical movements such as Communism and Fascism in their psychological nature. But neither Adler nor Jung could have made their contribution had they not been challenged by the great discoveries and the rigid limitations of Master Freud.

The provocative power and stimulating impact of psychoanalysis is not yet exhausted. Adler and Jung did not solve all the problems

of the Unconscious. Freud, as it were, has put us to the task; we have to sift his discoveries, replace his interpretations by better ones, and integrate our new insights into Christianity. Freud's unfortunate concept of "sublimation", for instance, has to be replaced by a deeper understanding of the term "evolution". Instead of saying primitive sexual Libido should be sublimated into cultural achievements, we should say: Primitive love should evolve into higher love. The acorn is not sublimated into an oak tree, and a child is not sublimated into a man. Freud's "Unconscious" has been replaced by Jung's "Collective Unconscious" which usually is understood as "the memory of the human race." But it carries already certain qualities of timelessness or super-time. The development of depth-psychology is fast reaching the borderline of a new dimension, in this respect parallel to but not dependent on modern physics. We are beginning to distinguish between the Collective Unconscious of the past (the memory of the race) and the Creative Unconscious of the future (the power that calls us into existence and controls our evolution). As the adult is dormant in the child and the plant is dormant in the seed, so spiritual man is dormant in carnal man. Our future is dreaming in the present, and what we did in the past is conditioned by the magnetism or the "call" of our future, together with our resistance against our destiny. The new religious psychology is unfolding, owing to the challenge of the great pagan, Freud.