

Freud as a Humanist

From *Freud and Man's Soul* by Bruno Bettelheim, and other sources. Not for quotation

Yet who knows not conscience is born of love?—Shakespeare

Psychoanalysis is in essence a cure through love.—Sigmund Freud

Society and the Individual

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was a physician. He was also a humanistic scholar, well read in the classics. He was strongly influenced by the romantic movement. Therefore, his concept of human nature emphasized mystery and nature. To Freud, a human being is an animal that must be molded by society in order for society to exist. Underneath the orderly, polite, good intentions of the average individual is a lusty, potentially violent animal. Society forcefully modifies this animal to make it fit for social existence. The modifications inhibit and redirect its instinctual drives. Even though the animal gains much in the trade, it also loses much. Social existence consists of a trade-off between security and freedom.

The relationship between the group and the individual is ambivalent. They are in conflict with each other, as well as interdependent. The conflict begins in early childhood. Force is used by parents to control their children. Children must eventually bow to the superior power of parents. In bowing, children also identify with their parents, acquiring their values and morals.

The conflict between the individual and society is external at first. Gradually, moral consciousness develops within the individual. The conflict that was once external, becomes internal. The individual becomes self-controlling. It rewards and punishes itself emotionally. Its animal instincts are directed into socially acceptable strivings, made *sublime* in the process. Sexuality is transformed into love and creativity. Anger and aggression are transformed into righteousness. Marriage, family life, and work become meaningful, charged with instinctual energy in the process. Freud called this process *sublimation*.

Life is full of fearful possibilities. Eventually, everybody dies. Suffering characterizes everyone's life. Society forces us to forego satisfaction in countless ways. How do we cope with the tragic nature of our existence, and with the self-sacrifices required of us by social life? Some sort of adjustment must be made.

Religion is the mechanism that idealizes our sacrifices and helps us adjust to reality. In Freud's opinion, religion is a shared neurosis. *Neurosis is the price of civilization* he once announced. In order to understand Freud's model of society and the uneasiness it inflicts upon individuals, we must first discuss his model of human consciousness.

Freud's writings were poorly translated into English. Freud wrote in German, using direct, personal words that appeal to our common humanity. In English, his words were rendered in more abstract, depersonalized, mechanical terms. Therefore, American readers are not led to take psychoanalysis personally. It seems to be about others, not ourselves. The English translations distance us from the humanistic qualities of Freud's ideas. According to German scholars, Freud used language poetically and eloquently. Moreover, American readers are not familiar with the cultural environment in which Freud worked. Because of these problems, Americans have not properly understood psychoanalysis.

So most of his allusions fall on deaf ears. Many of the expressions he used have been reduced to mere technical terms; the key words no longer have a multiplicity of special connotations, even though Freud chose them because they carried deep meaning and were vibrant with special humanistic resonances...Instead of instilling a deep feeling for what is most human in all of us, the translations attempt to lure the reader into developing a "scientific" attitude toward man and his actions, a "scientific" understanding of the unconscious and how it conditions much of our behavior.

Bruno Bettelheim
Freud and Man's Soul

In 1930, Freud wrote the following in the introduction to an article in the *Medical Review of Reviews*, Volume 36:

I often hear that psychoanalysis is very popular in the United States and that it doesn't meet there with the same obstinate resistance as it does in Europe....It seems to me that the popularity of the name of psychoanalysis in America signifies neither a friendly attitude to its essence nor any extension and deepening of its understanding...Most frequently one finds among American doctors and writers only a very inadequate familiarity with psychoanalysis, so that they know only some names and slogans, which does not prevent them from certainty in making judgments.

Psychoanalysis is based on introspection. It is not the product of scientific research in any conventional sense. Freud first analyzed his own dreams and feelings. He then proceeded to analyze his neurotic patients. The history of his theory is intimately tied to the history of his patients and their treatment. American psychology has concentrated on behavior, cognition, and neurophysiology. It has neglected the inner soul of the individual.

Freud used the term *psyche* in referring to human consciousness. *Psyche* is the Greek word for soul. *Psyche* is represented as a beautiful young woman in the Greek myth about Aphrodite's jealous love for her son Eros. Aphrodite is the Greek goddess of beauty and love. Eros is the male god of beauty and love.

Freud never gives a precise definition of *psyche*. He chose it precisely for its inexact meaning and emotional resonance. However, he is not speaking about a religious concept. His atheism is well known, because he went out of his way to assert it. His idea of the soul has nothing to do with immortality. The *psyche* is the seat of both the mind and the passions. We remain largely unconscious of it. It is deeply hidden, intangible, and yet powerful in its influence over us. It is what makes us human, so essentially human that Freud could find no other term to convey what he was talking about.

In the myth, Eros' mother, Aphrodite, is jealous of *Psyche's* great beauty. Aphrodite kisses her son Eros *with parted lips, long and fervently* to seduce him and persuade him to destroy *Psyche*. In spite of his mother's manipulations, Eros falls in

love with Psyche. Aphrodite becomes even more jealous. She sets out to destroy Psyche by demanding that Psyche do things that will kill her, including bringing a casket filled with *a day's worth of beauty* from the underworld. Aphrodite imprisons Eros to prevent him from interfering with her plans. Eros then turns to his father, Zeus, the supreme Greek god, for help. Because Zeus remembers his own amorous experiences in youth, he accepts Psyche as his son's bride, preventing Aphrodite from possessing her son.

The myth tells the story of a mother who is afraid of losing her son's affection. She becomes jealous of her son's lover, and tries to destroy the young woman. Her husband prevents her from making a great mistake. The wedding of Eros and Psyche is celebrated in the presence of all the gods. Psyche is made immortal, and Aphrodite makes peace with her.

The happy ending of the story permitted ancient Greeks to acknowledge mothers' possessive love for their sons. The fact that Aphrodite was jealous of Psyche reflects normal human emotions. Parental possessiveness must be put aside for the Greek family system to exist. That is why the love between Eros and Psyche must be accepted. The natural succession of the generations is affirmed in the myth.

In modern linguistic usage, the soul is not a supernatural thing. Freud chose the term *psyche* as a poetic reference to the most deep-seated thoughts and feelings of an individual, the essence of consciousness and emotions. In myth, Psyche is usually depicted as young and beautiful, with the wings of a bird or a butterfly. Birds and butterflies are symbols of the soul in many cultures. By using the Greek term *psyche*, Freud suggested the beauty, fragility, and insubstantiality of the inner life of the human being. As with the mythical goddess, the individual's psyche must be approached with respect, love, care, and consideration. Any other approach violates the psyche.

Freud's life mission was helping us to understand ourselves. He admonished us with the saying inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi—*Know Thyself*. To accomplish his goal, he was forced to question deeply cherished beliefs of his times, challenging the idea that humankind is inherently good or bad. He uncovered our ambivalence toward society and other individuals. He disturbed us by insisting that we are all self-centered and potentially destructive. Freud believed that in spite of its shortcomings, civilization is humankind's greatest achievement. Envious is the individual who can experience civilization's highest rewards.

The psyche has three modes of consciousness—*id*, *ego*, and *superego*. These Latin terms were not chosen by Freud. They were used by translators in compiling the American version of Freud's writings. The German words he used were *das Es*, *das Ich*, and *Über-Ich*, meaning *the it*, *the I* (or *the Me*), and *Above I* (or *Above Me*). Psyche was translated as *mind*. The western philosophical idea of mind lacks the wider connotations of sentiment and pathos that the word soul suggests. Since all American treatments of Freud's writings use the Latin terms, we will adhere to them to avoid confusion. Evidently, the American translation was an attempt to give Freud's ideas a scientific and medical quality that they did not possess in the original. Freud was a scholarly humanist in his writings. Forcing his words into a rigid, scientific mold has distorted the nature of his thinking.

You will probably object to our having chosen simple pronouns to denote our two institutions, or provinces of the soul, instead of introducing for them sonorous Greek names. In psychoanalysis, however, we like to keep in contact with the popular mode of thinking and prefer to make its concepts scientifically serviceable rather than to discard them. There is no special merit in this; we must proceed in this way because our teachings ought to be comprehensible to our patients who are often very intelligent, but not always learned. The impersonal "it" is immediately connected with certain expressions used by normal persons. One is apt to say, "It came to me in a flash; there was something in me which at that moment, was stronger than me."

Sigmund Freud
The Question of Lay Analysis

Nietzsche used the terms "I" and "it" in a similar way. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche wrote that

A thought comes when "it" wants to and not when "I" want; thus it is a falsification to say: the subject "I" is the condition for the predicate "think." It thinks: but there is...no immediate certainty that this "it" is just that famous old "I."

The id is the animal qualities of the psyche, commonly referred to as *instincts*. Freud used the German word *trieb*, which might better be translated as human need, or impulses. Freud used the term *das Es* to indicate that instincts are not conscious thoughts. They are unconscious drives. They include such feelings as hunger, lust, anger, and fear. Individuals instinctively strive to minimize pain and maximize pleasure. The different instincts establish the different modes of pleasure and pain. The so-called higher faculties of consciousness—reason and morality—are not instinctual. They are learned as one develops. The function of the id is to promote survival and reproduction of the species. The instincts reflect the species' survival requirements. Pleasure and pain are the experiences we associate with our species' survival requirements.

The ego is the rational element of the psyche. Since the primary focus of reason is oneself, the term *das Ich* properly reflects the self-centered nature of rational consciousness. My experience of reality necessarily revolves around myself. Consciousness is embodied, a process occurring in each individual's brain. It is unavoidably subjective.

Reason consists of using knowledge about reality to obtain personally satisfying experiences. Unfortunately, the term ego has negative connotations of selfishness in English. Freud's German term *das Ich* is morally neutral. The function of the ego is to adapt us to reality, *as we know it*. We are not born with an ego. We acquire it through experience and through communication with others.

Since communication plays a major role in its acquisition, the ego is to a considerable extent a cultural phenomenon, not just a personal psychological quality. Without communication, the ego would be very limited in scope. Culture provides us with a vast storehouse of concepts and knowledge. No individual could ever learn so much about reality alone.

The superego is an internal representation of one's parents. Parents socialize children, encouraging and forcing them to accept morality. Children resist morality, but as they grow up, they

eventually identify with their parents, and internalize their parents' values. The term *Über-Ich* suggests the authoritative nature of the superego. It is an internalized judging process directed at ourselves and at other people's behavior. The function of the superego is to constrain and direct our choices such that social life is made possible. For example, impulsive violence disrupts social occasions and relationships, often causing violence in return. In order to make social interaction and relationships orderly, society insists that we inhibit our violent impulses. Acting out violent urges is defined as immoral, unless, of course, we are protecting ourselves or others from someone else's violent behavior.

Instinctual drives, properly channeled, are made sublimely meaningful by the superego (*sublimation*). The superego is not a rational process. It is an unconscious, emotional feeling that resists reason. Morality can be rationalized, but it is not itself rational. Rationalizing morality means portraying it as necessary and reasonable. Morality represents the requirements of society, not what is personally advantageous for the individual. For example, taking something from someone else may be rational, especially if one will not come to harm in the process. However, from the viewpoint of society, people have a moral right to property. Taking someone else's property is socially defined as stealing. If I have been properly socialized, I personally define taking someone else's property as stealing. *Stealing will feel morally wrong to me.* I will avoid theft, even if I believe I will not be caught and punished. I will feel good about my moral character, and I will feel anger toward anyone else who steals.

The superego is opposed to the id, whenever satisfaction of instinctual impulses conflicts with the moral demands of society. One of the important functions of the ego is to mediate between these conflicting, unconscious mental systems. Morality pulls us one way, instinct pulls us another. It takes a strong ego to arrange satisfactory compromises.

If the ego is weak, instinctual gratification will be difficult to achieve, especially in the areas of sex and aggression. If the superego is very strong, and the ego is very weak, an individual will be incapable of dealing with the conflict. The result will be guilt, anxiety, and a variety of neurotic symptoms.

A fundamental effect of guilt is *repression*. Freud used the German word *verdrängung*. The word is more accurately translated as repulsion, signifying only a rebuff, or displacement, a keeping of an idea at a distance from consciousness. It consists of a willful forgetting of desires and thoughts that the superego defines as unacceptable. In other words, one becomes alienated from oneself, cut off from self-knowledge. Guilt feelings prevent self-knowledge and confuse the guilty individual. Depending on the seriousness of repression and alienation, one's behavior and personality may be classified as neurotic. The label implies an excessive degree of self-alienation. Freud believed that all socialized individuals are to some extent neurotic. One earns the label only by being severely disabled by neurotic tendencies.

Neurotic behavior is unconsciously symbolic. The neurotic pursues gratification indirectly, compulsively latching onto substitutes. However, the neurotic does not understand why the substitute is important. Therefore, the individual is not in conscious control of the behavior. The symbolic substitute exercises a kind of magical power over the individual's life.

Freud spent most of his career developing an educative healing process he called psychoanalysis. Some scholars believe that

psychoanalysis is a secular religion, offering salvation through knowledge. However, the comparison between religion and psychoanalysis is strained, especially because psychoanalysis does not promise happiness or contentment. It helps people to reconcile themselves to the conflicting demands of biology and society. A healthy adaptation to society does not make one joyful. Freud claimed that psychoanalysis helped people experience *ordinary unhappiness*. Individuals will always be required to sacrifice a measure of happiness to society. However, the sacrifices can be made meaningful if instinctual drives are directed at higher, creative purposes.

In psychoanalysis, the individual enters into a special relationship with the analyst, characterized by heightened trust and intimacy. The individual is encouraged to remember and reveal details of personal history, and to search for signs of hidden feelings in dreams and actions. The process aims at weakening the superego. A too-powerful superego punishes the individual for normal thoughts and feelings, causing guilt, anxiety, and various neurotic symptoms such as obsession, compulsion, hysteria, and unnecessary inhibition.

Self-understanding (ego) is enhanced in process. This reduces guilt and anxiety, permitting the individual to make a more rational, less self-punishing compromise with morality. It does not make one less moral, rather it makes one more rational and self-accepting. Instinct gratification can be obtained instead of repressed. It can be suppressed when necessary, and obtained when not necessary.

Religion and Psychoanalysis

From the point of view of psychoanalysis, God is a father figure, the reflection of a child-like wish for a powerful, protecting and punishing father. One's feelings about God revolve around a mixture of love and hate, fear and hostility, dependence and independence, and forbidden sexual desire. God is a symbolic substitute for the father missing in adult life.

Freud believed that men desire sex with all women. However, in the family, sexual desire must be repressed, otherwise family and society could not exist. Fathers play a complex role in the lives of their sons. The father is both a protector, and the authority who denies their sons sexual access to females in the family. The combination of positive and negative elements in father-son relations causes men to both fear and love their fathers.

Freud wrote that God is a symbolic, projected father figure. Since fathers judge and punish their children, denying them instinct gratification, children become repressed. They become alienated from their true nature. Repressed individuals identify with God. They feel God is the source of values. They feel kinship with God, and with to obey God.

People desire the existence of God. Without this projection, people can not easily accept reality. Reality is basically tragic. We know we are going to die and we can't face that fact without the emotional crutch of a father figure who is all-powerful and immortal, and with whom we feel a profound similarity. God is also a judge, the ultimate source values and morality. God is the superego projected into a sacred realm, made divine.

Freud constructs a mythical description of the origin of society. Before the dawn of civilization, there were no sexual rules in this mythical family. Families were "primitive hordes" without morality. The father of this primal family had the privilege of sexual relations with the women in the family, forbidding his

sons to do likewise. Such a father was feared, but also loved, because he also protected the family from predators and men from other primal families.

The brothers in the primal family, out of sexual desire, rebelled against the father. They joined together to overpower and kill their father. Now the path to sexual intercourse with their sisters was open. However, they were overcome with guilt and fear. In the aftermath of patricide, religion emerged to resolve their complex feelings. Having killed the father, they could not bear to live without him, so they invented a supernatural father who lives in another realm, not on this earth.

Their guilt also caused them to renounce sexual desire for the females in the family. In this manner, the incest taboo was created. The incest taboo founded society. It forced the brothers too seek sexual partners from outside the family. Their kindred females became forbidden as sexual objects.

Freud believed that this was a plausible scenario for the creation of society. He also argued that even if it is not historically accurate, it is psychologically accurate. That is to say, the scenario is an image of male motivation, repression, and participation in the moral order of society.

Religion is the social institution wherein the myths of morality are taught and reinforced through ritual. Religion's primary objective is to induce and maintain psychological repression, making society possible. Without instinct repression, men could not be united into a single, organized group. Society places demands on us to curb our instincts of sex and aggression.

Religion is the shared behavior system which accomplishes this task through the psychological mechanism of guilt and repression, not just suppression. Religion helps people adjust to society via self-sacrifice of the instincts, and to death and suffering, but at a high cost. The individual must surrender the intellect.

Freud used the term *Oedipus complex* in referring to the ideas, emotions, and impulses centered around the relations a child has with its parents. Freud was tremendously impressed with the Greek myth of Oedipus as a metaphor for the development of adult consciousness.

As a child, Oedipus was traumatized by his parents. His father, Laius, the King of Thebes, was warned by an oracle that his son would grow up to murder him. Laius ordered that a spike be thrust through his son's feet, and that he be taken out into the forest and killed. The servant charged with the killing took pity on Oedipus. He concluded that if Oedipus was taken far away to be raised by foster parents in another land, the prophecy would not come true.

Oedipus is raised by the King and Queen of Corinth. He grows up believing them to be his true parents. One day, at the suggestion of someone else, he consults the oracle at Delphi. The oracle tells him that he will slay his father and marry his mother. Horrified, Oedipus flees Corinth, determined never to return. He wanders through Greece and meets, at a crossroads, a quarrelsome stranger. They argue, and in the heat of anger, Oedipus murders the stranger. Oedipus does not know that the stranger he murdered is his true father, Laius.

Later on, Oedipus comes to Thebes. At the time, Thebes is being ravaged by a mysterious creature, the Sphinx, who has settled on a nearby cliff, posing riddles to all who attempt to pass by. The Sphinx destroys anyone who cannot give the correct

answer. Oedipus accepts the challenge, solves the riddle she poses to him, and is rewarded by being made King of Thebes. He marries the Queen, Jocasta, widow of Laius. Jocasta is, in fact, his true mother.

Many years later a plague occurs in Thebes as punishment of the city for the unavenged murder of Laius. As King of Thebes, Oedipus takes charge of the search to discover Laius' murder, in spite of dire warnings not to pursue the matter. Oedipus finally discovers the awful truth, that he murdered his father and married his mother. He immediately rushes into his wife-mother's chamber full of horror and anger, wanting to kill her. He finds that she, too, learned the truth, and has already hung herself. Oedipus, in rage and self-hatred, blinds himself with his wife-mother's broaches.

The meaning of Freud's term *Oedipus complex* is metaphorical on several levels. It alludes to other metaphors from Greek myths and dramas. The term defies concise expression. Many readers have carelessly concluded that the term implies that little boys want to kill the man they *know* is their father and marry the woman they *know* is their mother. However, we must keep in mind that Oedipus did not know he was killing his father and marrying his mother. His greatest desire was to prevent the prophecy from coming true. The term *Oedipus complex* suggests a child's anxiety and guilt for having patricidal and incestuous wishes, and the consequences for having them.

Oedipus' guilt and his discovery of the truth are the central issues in Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*. Freud believed that we cease to be children when we finally recognize the totality of our feelings about our parents. Freud believed that these feelings include sexual desire and hostility, as well as the socially approved feelings of love and admiration. Whatever our feelings toward our parents, psychological maturity requires recognition of our deepest feelings. Feelings about our parents are among the most primal feelings we have.

We are unconsciously motivated by our feelings, even if we are not aware of them. Maturity consists of rational self-control. To control oneself, one must have self-knowledge. Unconscious desires and guilt feelings can have devastating consequences. When we become conscious of repressed hostility and sexuality, we can act to prevent negative consequences.

Oedipus was a victim of total rejection as an infant. A child who is not rejected would never wish to kill or sexually possess its parents. Why should it, and why should someone feel guilty for wanting to murder such a villainous parent? The wish to be loved exclusively by our mothers, and the guilt for wishing to possess them, make no sense if our mothers turned against us when we were young. *It is only our love for our parents and our conscious wish to protect them that leads us to repress our negative and sexual feelings directed toward them.*

Oedipus paid no attention to the temple inscription *Know thyself*. It warns us that we misunderstand reality if we do not know ourselves. The story of Oedipus suggests that he fulfilled the prophecy because he was unaware of his innermost feelings. In his ignorance, he believed that he actually *could* murder the father that raised him and the mother that loved him well. At the end of the story, he blinds himself, metaphorically acting out the blindness of his psyche.

The significance of blindness in the play is also related to Teiresias, the blind seer who revealed the truth about Laius' murder to him. The blind seer symbolizes turning one's sight away from

the external world, directing one's attention inward, toward the inner, hidden nature of events.

Oedipus' father, Laius, contributed to the tragedy by believing in what he feared. He believed his son would murder him and replace him. It was common knowledge that the sayings of Pythia, the oracle, were ambiguous and difficult to interpret correctly. In spite of this knowledge, Laius and Jocasta were convinced by their own fears of the correctness of their interpretation. Each feared that the prophecy would come true in a literal sense.

Oedipus was convinced of *his* interpretation of the oracle because of his own forgotten, unconscious resentment toward his father and his wish to possess his mother. Laius and Jocasta were convinced by their unconscious feelings of fear and guilt.

Laius feared his son would replace him in the affections of his wife, and later in his social role. In the normal course of events, every son replaces its father in society as the son grows into manhood and the father grows old.

Jocasta secretly feared that she loved her son more than her husband. Otherwise, she would have tried to convince Laius that his interpretation of the prophecy was incorrect. Because she passively participated in the plot to kill her son, which resulted in the prophecy coming true, she killed herself in the end. Sophocles makes clear in the play that her guilt is not over incest. Instead, she feels guilt over plotting to murder her son. In this way, the play suggests that the guilty secrets of parents are an integral aspect of the family system that induces Oedipal conflict.

The myth shows that the anxieties of children are mirrors of the anxiety of parents. These feelings are the parents' attraction to their children of the opposite sex, and their ambivalence toward their children of the same sex who they fear will replace them. If parents are dominated by these feelings, the children are led to wish the events, also. At the most general level, the myth is about fearful, unconscious dreams coming true, in spite of conscious efforts to avoid their coming true.

In contemplating the play, Freud realized that it represents the struggle to get at hidden truth. Oedipus' tragedy is a battle for truth won too late. Sophocles' play is not focused on incest or patricide in themselves. These are the particular issues used to illustrate the more important lesson of the myth. *Nor need this mother-marrying frighten you; many a man has dreamt as much* says Jocasta, implying that the wish to replace one's father and to possess one's mother is fate. Also to the point is how Jocasta clearly states that she does not want to learn the truth, and when she does, she kills herself.

The *Oedipus complex*, as Freud himself understood it, contains all these issues. It can not be reduced to any one of them. Those who oversimplify the play by thinking it is mainly about incest and patricide, also oversimplify psychoanalysis. The lack of American readers' familiarity with Greek tragedy has contributed much to a misunderstanding of psychoanalysis. The English translations take their cue from the youthful, more medical and scientific attitudes of Freud. As he matured, Freud revised his ideas in keeping with his deepening appreciation for the human condition.

Late in life, Freud admitted that he never was particularly enthusiastic about psychoanalysis as a form of therapy. Psychoanalysis gradually became transformed in his writing into a pro-

found commentary on humanity. Freud hoped that eventually, children would be raised differently so as to free people from unnecessary repression, anxiety, and destructive hatreds. Freud claimed that psychoanalysis was not a medical therapy or simply about individual pathology. It was his critique of our civilization's social structure.

In the United States, psychoanalysis was restricted to practicing physicians. In 1926, the New York State Legislature passed a bill declaring illegal any analysis not conducted by a physician. In Europe, this was never the case. The consequences of this decision were far-reaching.

Freud reluctantly acquiesced to the decision. Neither he nor anyone else foresaw that the center of psychoanalytic activity would rapidly shift from Europe to America, grossly affecting its reception and development. With the advent of Hitler and the Nazi movement, psychoanalysis disappeared in Europe. Refugee intellectuals came to America. Here, they had to conform to the American Psychoanalytic Association's dictates. Psychoanalysis became a medical specialty.

Late in life, Freud wrote that he wished to entrust the future of psychoanalysis to lay practitioners, not to priests or medical doctors. He wanted to see a new profession that did not yet exist, a profession of secular ministers to the psyche. He consistently opposed turning psychoanalysis into a *mere housemaid of Psychiatry*. He preferred the image of the mid-wife to that of physician. A midwife neither creates the child nor decides what it will be. The psychoanalyst was to be a midwife to the individual's new soul. Only the person under analysis should make himself over. Freud never thought of psychoanalysis as simply adjusting the individual to society. It was a creative refashioning of the soul.

Psychoanalysis stresses that self-knowledge requires recognition of one's own unconscious feelings. When we find ourselves at some crossroads, with the way blocked by some symbolic parent-figure, we will not strike out at the figure in uncontrolled anger. We will not, in moments of great stress, be pushed by our unconscious feelings to act in ways that will destroy us.

The plague at Thebes suggests that unconscious feelings exert destructive power as long as they remain unconscious. When Oedipus learned the true cause of the plagues, he cleansed himself and the plagues stopped. This is a crucial part of the myth. When the unknown is made known, the unconscious loses its power over us. The longer we defend ourselves against our own secrets, the more damage we do to ourselves and others.

It takes courage to face complex, ambivalent feelings toward oneself and one's parents. They are, however, paper tigers. They are effective only in the presence of our fear and avoidance. When we confront dark emotions with the powers of our rational mind, unencumbered by unconscious pressures, rationality wins out.

The Sphinx devoured those who could not solve her riddles. She was, herself, a riddle. She was part woman and part destructive animal. The upper part of her body was that of a woman with large, prominent breasts. The lower part, in which sexual organs are located, was the body of a bull, or dog, with the claws of a lion, the tail of a dragon, and the wings of a bird. Freud believed that she symbolized the nurturing mother and the destructive mother. She symbolized the child's fear being devoured by the same mother that the child wishes to possess. The child eats *from* the mother, and fears being eaten *by* the mother. This is the

dilemma of all who would totally possess anyone. We can't live with something if we can't live without it. It will consume us as we attempt to consume it.

In more general terms, a sphinx is the embodiment of an enigma. It keeps watch over an ultimate meaning which must remain forever beyond the understanding of humans. It unites various aspects of creatures, thereby uniting the four Elements with the quintessence of spirit, signified by the human part of the figure.¹

According to Freud, Oedipal desires and fear of punishment are closely connected. Each contributes to the other. The unavoidable abandonment of parents as love and hate objects leads to identification with them. Children incorporate the conflicts with parents into their psyche. In this manner, the controlling institution of morality becomes part of each individual's personality.

Freud as a Scholar and Philosopher

Today we believe that children's love for their parents has much to do with the development of conscience. The emotional tensions of family life are built into us, not merely external to us. Freud believed in reason as a solution to the destructive consequences of unconscious emotion. He argued that science will eventually allow humankind to see reality more clearly, and to rationally adjust to reality. The rational individual is a mythical archetype in Freud's theoretical system. The goal of psychoanalysis, and of psychoanalytic theory, is the enhancement of reason in the individual, and eventually in all of us.

Reasoning individuals accept the demands of society because they realize they are necessary. Reasoning individuals are also more tolerant of differences in people. Freud was a crusader for greater acceptance of sexual deviates. He believed that all of us are a mixture of neurotic repression and perverted desires. Morality has caused us to be too intolerant, and when taught too harshly, it causes us to hate and fear ourselves. Freud believed that humankind would eventually outgrow religion as science made more and more progress illuminating reality.

Freud is not taken very seriously today as a physician or psychologist. Modern scientific psychology is more concrete, less philosophical. The effectiveness of psychoanalysis as a therapy for the mentally ill has not been confirmed through empirical research. Various studies have reached the conclusion that people get well without therapy in about the same proportions as those who obtain therapy.

Critics of these tests point out that the studies are flawed. Psychoanalysis is not for many forms of mental illness. It is only for anxious, oversocialized individuals. Also, it is a lengthy, expensive process. Alternative forms of therapy have been developed to make therapists more efficient. The goal of psychoanalysis is self-knowledge. There are other ways to gain it than a personal relationship with a concerned tutor. In the long run, psychoanalysis is perhaps more important as another benchmark in the history of moral philosophy than as a medical or therapeutic system. Freud helped change our understanding of society and of our relationship to society.

Freud based his explanation of human behavior on biological instincts. He was afraid to acknowledge motivations other than sex

and aggression. He feared psychoanalysis would become an occult science if it did not stick to basic, biological instincts as its foundation. Other psychoanalysts formulated theories not based on biological instincts. Some of his students did, in fact, stray into occult orientations. Jung was the most influential of these, and interestingly, he and Freud had a sort of father-son relationship.

They both found Jung's break from psychoanalytic dogma painful, but Jung became too convinced of man's desire for transcendence to see religion and human nature as driven only by sex and aggression. Jung's ideas took on an increasingly occult flavor as his thinking evolved. His psychoanalytic theory proposed a *collective unconscious* as an addition to Freud's concept of the individual's unconscious. The collective unconscious is a reservoir of symbolic archetypes that express ancient, inherited yearnings for meaning and spirituality.

Adler, another of Freud's students, developed a psychoanalytic theory that revolved around the ego. Adler believed that individuals seek personal power, ego enhancement. He, too, believed that biological instincts were not the only foundation of human motivation.

Psychoanalysis developed and spread through a secret society Freud created. For years, Freud and his students met and corresponded about psychoanalytic theory. They were afraid of official reactions. They realized that their views were highly controversial. When psychoanalytic theory was finally published, it revolutionized western philosophy and art.

The psychology in Vienna in Freud's time was speculative and descriptive. Freud saw psychology as a comparative discipline, similar in this respect to sociology and anthropology before they became more theoretical and mathematical. Freud used metaphors throughout his career to assist in the imaginative interpretation of hidden causes. Hidden causes reveal themselves to us in symbols. Therefore, metaphor is the appropriate form of explanation of the unconscious. Also, metaphors touch us and arouse our emotions more powerfully than dry, literal explanations. An understanding of psychoanalysis requires a sympathetic emotional response as well as an intellectual understanding of its ideas. Poets and other artists communicate through the use of metaphors. Freud found literature and the arts a source of inspiration. He often quoted Goethe, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and others. He believed that they already knew much about the psyche. All he claimed for himself was the explicit organization of their knowledge. He rarely quoted natural scientists or other physicians.

Mental illness and psychoanalysis as its cure was his central metaphorical device. The object of psychoanalysis is to cure the soul, an insubstantial object compared to the body. In German philosophy, the sciences are divided into natural sciences,

Naturwissenschaften, and sciences of the spirit, *Geisteswissenschaften*. Each entails a distinctive way of knowing as well as a distinctive subject matter. Psychology in Freud's Vienna was clearly a science of the spirit. In America, psychology quickly became a natural science. The natural sciences are nomothetic. They search for general laws. The spiritual sciences are idiographic. They are concerned with unique, historical events, and with individual ideas and values. Nomothetic sciences require verification through experiment, prediction, and replication. Idiographic sciences deal with events that never recur in the same form. They can neither be replicated nor predicted.

¹ J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1962.

Freud was disgusted by the American behaviorists explicit denial of consciousness. He also was dismayed by the prevailing shallow optimism of our culture. It stood in stark contrast to his own tragic and pessimistic view of life.

Since time immemorial mankind has been undergoing a process of cultural development. To this process we owe the best that we have become, and a good part of that from which we suffer.

Sigmund Freud
from a letter to Albert Einstein

In this letter, Freud wrote that uneasiness and malaise about life is the price we must pay for enjoying all the great advantages we derive from culture. Culture can not be obtained without this uneasiness. It is an inescapable by-product of the process of sublimation. Remember, sublimation is process of redirection of our basic needs to socially necessary symbolic substitutes, denying us what we really want. It invests the requirements of society with our deepest passions. The American tendency to think that all problems can be solved, and that life can be happily lived, struck Freud as shallow, in the extreme.

The ego is the sphere of tragic conflict between our creative and destructive urges. The struggle adds emotional richness to our existence. It causes depression and elation. It gives life its deepest meaning. Being aware of our tragic existence makes us feel a need to secure a better life for those we love, and for those who come after us. According to Bettelheim:

The good life, in Freud's view, is one that is full of meaning through the lasting, sustaining, mutually gratifying relations we are able to establish with those we love, and through the satisfaction we derive from knowing that we are engaged in work that helps others to have a better life. A good life denies neither its real and often painful difficulties nor the dark secrets of our psyche; rather, it is a life in which our hardships are not permitted to engulf us in despair, and our dark impulses are not allowed to draw us into their chaotic and often destructive orbit.

America is dedicated to individualism. Love thyself might be the creed of our nation, especially in recent times. Bettelheim wrote that:

Freud evoked the myth of Narcissus to help us understand that egocentricity is undesirable. . . . Narcissus' infatuation with himself causes him to destroy himself...What the myth symbolically represents as Narcissus drowning in his own image is in actuality the emotional deadness of the Narcissistic person. . . . He [Freud] knew that caring only for oneself is self-defeating, that it alienates one from others and from the real world, and eventually from oneself, too...loving oneself too much results in emotional starvation...Narcissism leads to a shallow, meaningless life, devoid of close, reciprocal, mutually satisfying and enriching relations with others, which represents the best life has to offer.

Psychoanalysis is concerned with discovery of events in the past lives of individuals, and with the consequences of those events. Psychoanalysis can never be the same for any two persons. Freud often compared psychoanalysis with archaeology. The psychoanalyst unearths deeply buried remnants of the past, com-

bines them with more accessible fragments to form a picture of the origin and nature of an individual's psyche.

When Americans here the word *science*, they automatically think of the natural sciences. The English translations of Freud's writings add an artificial precision and naturalistic meaning that Freud never intended. Good English style requires avoidance of ambiguities in meaning. German is a much better language for expressing the subtle, multiple meanings of psychoanalytic concepts.

Freud began psychoanalysis in his forties. He was a complex individual whose own inner conflicts prompted self-analysis. He discovered psychoanalysis through introspection. As he grew older, he learned more about himself, which changed his thinking about psychoanalysis through the years.

Freud made many interesting observations concerning human nature, and he made some serious mistakes, particularly where female psychology was concerned. He ignored female's status in Victorian society, admitting that he couldn't understand women. Contemporary feminists, understandably, often reject Freud out of hand because of his distorted ideas about femininity.

Many social scientists think he was wrong in believing that human beings and society can become totally rational. Myth and religion have important social functions that reason can not replace. His assumption that culture is only a defense against a harsh nature oversimplifies the role of meaning in human affairs. The realm of ideas can not be reduced completely to rationalization without losing sight of the most distinctive aspect of our nature. Cultures are dramatizations of tragedy and comedy. All societies dramatize meaning through ritualized myth. Individual existence attains meaning through involvement in these archetypical stories. Seeing religion as a neurosis helps us understand the passionate, fearful grip religion can have on individuals. But religion is more than neurosis. Freud failed to distinguish between individual and social functions of religion, and between the positive and negative consequences of religion.

Research does not support the notion that religious individuals are all neurotic personalities. There are neurotics whose neuroses are intertwined with religion, but there are also many religious individuals who are not profoundly neurotic. For them, religion is an aspect of maturity and successful adaptation to life. They are not riddled with guilt and anxiety, not obsessive or compulsive, and do not cling to religion out of fear. They find in religion a meaningful expression and resolution of the existential dilemmas of life—tragedy, meaninglessness, and necessity for self-sacrifice in human relations. The image of rational humankind, no longer needing religion, is reminiscent of Nietzsche's superman—a powerful individual not connected with others. It is in our relations with each other that the truths of religion remain vital. The idea that one could base life solely on reason is an enlightenment myth. Sociology and psychology show that we become persons through intimate contact with each other.

Goethe said that in seventy-five years he had experienced barely four weeks of being truly at ease. An inescapable sadness is part of the life of any reflective person, but is only part—by no means all—of living. The prime requirement is that we love well so that we are well loved by those who are most important to us. . . . If we do, . . . psyche rejoices . . . only in conflict with itself can the human heart . . . attain what is best in life.