

*To people who have no other conviction, psychoanalysis can easily become a substitute for religion and for a philosophy of life . . . psychoanalysis should not be used for such purposes of adjustment or as a substitute for religion.*

## The Philosophy Basic to Freud's Psychoanalysis\*

### Freud and the Enlightenment

I WOULD say that it is the peculiar philosophical role of Freud that he has blended Romanticism with the spirit of Rationalism. Freud was indeed a romantic and he shared with others his interest in the human "underworld" in the dream, in the myth. It is not accidental, for instance, that Freud calls one pathological complex the oedipus complex. This was all the same: this was Greek mythology, this was human nature, this was neurosis. This was a world which he wanted to conquer, as he put it in a motto in his *Interpretation of Dreams*: "If we cannot conquer the upper world, we all bend the underworld." That is where we shall make our discoveries. But at the same time Freud was a typical representative of Enlightenment philosophy. He was a typical Rationalist. He shared most of all with the philosophers of the Enlightenment the pathos of faith in reason, this unbroken and unquestioned faith in

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reason as the one instrument of man enabling him to understand his world and to cope with the world. Actually, he built his whole therapy on this faith. According to the basic principle of Freud's therapy, he who understands that which is unconscious, frees himself in this very process and can overcome his symptom.

You might say that his motto is: "the truth shall make you well." In this respect, he is in the line of Socratic and Stoic thinking, of Rationalist philosophy going back through the centuries. You see it most clearly perhaps in his book, *The Future of an Illusion*, in which he argues against God and against religion. This is typical Enlightenment, typical Rationalism. It is based on a passionate love for truth. His reasoning is that as long as you believe in the fiction, as he sees it, that there is a God, a Father who will help you when you are in trouble, you prevent yourself by that belief and by that illusion from developing those forces in yourself which are the only things you really have in life, the forces of reason. Freud followed in this respect a state-

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\*This article represents the substance of an address given by Dr. Fromm at the Department of Human Relations, Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Reprinted by permission of Dr. Fromm and the editor of the CCAR (Central Conference American Rabbis) *Journal*.

ment and a view which was expressed quite a bit earlier by Karl Marx in his early writings. Marx wrote: "One must destroy the illusion in order to destroy the conditions which necessitate these illusions." This is exactly the motto of Freud's views about religion and this is of course an essential principle of his views on therapy.

What I want to say thus far is that Freud's position can be characterized by the blending of the Romantic interest in the irrational with the methods of the Enlightenment and the Rationalists, with their faith in reason and with their belief that everything can be solved only by intellect, by thought. He is the crowning point, so to speak, in a struggle which was going on in the nineteenth century between two streams of thought. It was Freud's genius to have blended these two positions. But of course it could not be expected that this could have been done without difficulties and contradictions. The result is most certainly not a harmonious synthesis of the two streams. You might say that sometimes Freud remained too much the Romantic, sometimes too much the Rationalist. Altogether I think he leaned more to the Rationalist side than to the Romantic. That was much more his nature and his temperament.

#### **Freud and the Patriarchal Prejudice**

For Freud there really existed only one sex. That was man. Women were crippled men. In fact Freud knew only one type of sexuality and that was male. Woman's sexuality did not exist. This view was quite typical of the Victorian age. You even find textbooks of gynecology in the nineteenth century which assumed that women were frigid by nature and that having sexual pleasure was something abnormal or indecent in a woman; sex was a male affair only.

Freud essentially shared this view. Woman was a castrated man and she never got over the pain of being that. Now today I think that to most people except the very orthodox Freudians, it sounds almost unbelievable that a man could be so naive in his own male narcissism. You really have to see these men of the nineteenth century with their silk hats, canes, beards, and their conviction that the male sex of western Europe was the crowning point of creation.

#### **Liberalism**

Freud was in many ways a representative of patriarchal, capitalist, bourgeois society of the nineteenth century. But we have to add that he was also a liberal. He was a social critic. Society was not doing enough to satisfy the needs of human nature. And therefore he advanced the theory that society should be more tolerant of sex. You can see that this is a typical liberal criticism. It was not a criticism of the fundamental aspect of a competitive society. On the contrary, he was a deep believer in this society. It was like prison reform, or reform in the treatment of the insane, or educational reform. It was a liberal attitude which said: "You are too strict. Be less strict. Be a little more understanding." It was never a radical criticism; by radical I refer to the literal meaning of radical, a criticism which goes to the roots. He accepted this society completely and without any question but with this kind of liberal criticism.

#### **Culture and Repression**

Now I should say one word here of the sense in which Freud was really different. He was much more of a pessimist than was usual in his time. He believed in the inalterable conflict between society and human nature. To

put it very briefly, his reasoning is that culture is a result of repression. If you repress the sexual instincts, you have sublimation, i. e., the use of that energy for a more valuable cultural achievement. Therefore cultural achievements are based on and conditioned by repression. But if you repress, you also produce neurosis, because not everyone is capable of so much repression or so much sublimation. In other words, neurosis is really the negative aspect of culture. If things go well you have culture, but if things do not go well, you have neurosis.

Freud was convinced that culture and human nature were in the last analysis incompatible and therefore he saw no future for mankind. In this respect he is truly the opposite of Marx. Marx had a messianic vision of what the human race would be if it overcame the state of alienation . . . And in many ways you find Marx a more secular version of prophetic ideals. The eighteenth century is full of such visions and messianic ideas. But Freud was a pessimist and in this respect most different from the essential ideas of the Enlightenment philosophers. If you take the Enlightenment or the hopes of the Renaissance, there was always this great enthusiasm for what man could do. But not in Freud. In this respect Freud was like a Spengler, like one who passionately denies the messianic hope which had been the great hope in the centuries from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century.

#### Scientism

Now from a different standpoint Freud shared with the humanistic tradition the pathos for truth but not the pathos for love. Of the two great ideas of the humanistic religious tradition of the West, love and truth, Freud chose one and denied the other . . . Actually

Freud was a man for whom the experience of love was rather foreign, erotic love as well as brotherly love. He has no faith in love, but he had faith in reason. And this faith in reason was manifested in his method. Faith in reason means that one is capable of believing in the common sensically absurd. The statement "I believe because it is absurd," wrongly attributed to Tertullian, is indeed the principle of science. Every new statement which is on the road to a new discovery is absurd. Why? Because it is in contrast to our senses and common sense. If anybody thinks that science gives certainty, then he does not know what science is. What theoretical physics says today is utterly absurd to us. That this table here should be empty space and energy is the most absurd statement anybody can make. Why do we accept it? We are convinced, and quite rationally, that these physicists could not be such liars, because the lie would be too big. So we accept the "absurdity." Scientific discovery is always absurd inasmuch as it is in contrast to what senses and common sense expect. That is the nature of science and this is the beautiful thing in Freud's thinking. Not that all of his theories are right. In fact I think that many of them, if not most of them, are wrong. But what makes a statement "scientific" is not that it is right; the history of science is the history of errors. If the scientific quality of an endeavor would require its rightness, there would be no science at all. The scientific quality is always a matter of method, i.e., of observing, making inferences and having an unbounded belief in the result of one's reason, even when the results are in contradiction to common sense. And this faith Freud had. This made him one of the great scientists of the world, one of the great figures of the Enlightenment. This is

why I believe his system will be the basis for psychology for centuries to come.

the human mind as an object of scientific procedure.

### **The Psychoanalytic Movement**

It is quite interesting that in psychoanalysis you have a development that is similar to religious and political development. You have a school and then you have schisms; you have the truth and you have dogma. People have vested interests in building new schools. Then naturally they have an interest in emphasizing all the things which are new and denying all the things that are old, since that is favorable for their school, getting them more adherents . . . Even the term "revisionism" is really quite unwarranted in a scientific sense. In the history of physics do we talk about revisionism? We speak of the history of physics. Nobody assumes that Newton said the last word about physics. It is not belittling Newton if we say that there are many things which he did not see . . . so this whole problem of psychoanalysis or "revisionism" is really only to be understood in the sectarian sense of founding schools. Objectively speaking we deal here with a theory whose premises are already in Spinoza, in Nietzsche, in Bachofen, but which found its first great fruition in Freud. Freud essentially discovered two things: the unconscious, i. e., the fact that to a large extent what goes on in ourselves is dissociated from our awareness; and a scientific method which was to apply reason to our observations. I would say that psychoanalysis is the only true scientific method which exists in psychology . . . I would say that if we read Freud philosophically, he belongs in the line of the great scientific thinkers who have taken first the heaven, then material nature, then the body, and eventually

### **Adler and Freud**

Adler's theory took out from Freud a great deal of its speculative, purely theoretical character and very often led back to a sound and realistic appreciation of the strategy and tactics of life. Adler was primarily not a deep searcher of the soul but a very practical man in the way he looked upon life. One of his main doctrines was the idea that man naturally wants to rise from a minus to a plus situation. It did not matter how one was born; what mattered was where one landed. One's original defects were really assets. If one would characterize the social philosophy implicitly lying behind Adler's theory, I would say it was a kind of optimism which you find in the rising of the lower middle class and the middle class after the revolutions of 1918. It was the same optimism expressed and felt in the rise of the Social Democrats of that time to whom Adler belonged. Everything is going better; there is really nothing tragic in life. The classes which were down at the bottom will rise without great conflict and really the very worst thing can become the very best thing.

### **Symbolism: Freud and Jung**

It must be said that Jung has a much greater gift for understanding symbolism and myths than had Freud. It is amazing how little talent Freud had for the direct understanding of the expressions of the unconscious. He was in this respect a rationalist. I mean he did two things when he was interpreting myths. He either had a very primitive kind of symbolism in which there was always only the choice between two things, the male or female symbol, or he relied on an almost pippulistic, if I may

say so, interpretation of associations. If you read Freud's dream interpretation you will often see that he indulges in the most brilliant connection between associations, but at the end you don't know too much more about the total person than you knew before . . . Now Jung has a great capacity for understanding symbolism and this was really a very important correction which he added to Freud. For Jung the unconscious was not just a dungheap, not worthy to be seen in the light of day, but it was that of which you might say the light of day was not worthy of seeing. It was that inner recess of thought and feeling, that wisdom and that intuition which the daily life of the marketplace does not permit to appear publicly. But in our sleep and our dreams, in myth and in religion, in our philosophical ideas, this hidden secret wisdom comes to the fore. In this respect Jung is a romanticist and really continues consequently the one side of Freud, i. e., the tradition of German romanticism, of Kreuzer, Grimm, and Bachofen.

#### **Religion: Freud and Jung**

Jung has a reputation of being much friendlier to religion and is usually quoted in religious books as the one great psychological authority who is in favor of religion. Superficially speaking, that is true. But Jung was much more of a relativist than Freud was. For Jung the problem of truth did not exist. He indulges in statements such as, "It doesn't matter whether religious belief is true as a fact; it is always psychologically true." Now logically speaking this is complete nonsense. If a paranoid patient has a paranoid idea, there is no truth about it; it is a fact that he had this idea; that is all that can be said about it. Naturally that is a psychological fact. But a truth, a statement about

truth, is always a judgment. The description of a fact itself does not fall into the category of a truth. For Jung religion is essentially the submission to a power higher than man. That would be more or less the same definition that Schleiermacher has given of religion. But this power is not God—it is the unconscious, whatever that is. From Jung's standpoint there is no question that one religious statement is true and the other not true. If you please, this is pure relativism in matters of religion. If one would ask who is closer to the ideals of the monotheistic tradition, then it is decidedly Freud rather than Jung. Because for Freud there exists the category of truth while for Jung there is a God who is equated with the unconscious; the matter of truth does not exist at all.

Now unfortunately this is not entirely academic. Jung praised the Nazis as long as they were victorious and repudiated not only the Nazis but all the German people because they lost the war. He has shown in his personal conduct a lack of conscience and a lack of adherence to truth . . . I have to mention it because if you want to understand the philosophy behind his system then it is very important to see that here is a man who is lacking completely in that pathos which Freud had, namely, the passion for truth.

#### **In Contrast with Freud**

I believe, in contrast with Freud, the situation in therapy must not be that between the observer and the object. It should be a situation of full human relatedness, between one human being and another, or to use Martin Buber's terminology, a relationship of the I to the Thou. In this relatedness which is alive and productive, the patient experiences himself, the reality of his life, perhaps for the first time in his life.

Ordinarily when we communicate with each other, most of us talk fiction, because usually we do not experience the words we are talking . . . and as far as the realities are concerned, we try to disguise and fictionalize almost everything. Even death is fictionalized into a nice social affair. Now in analysis, the whole problem is that of undoing this dissociation, of dissolving that which is repressed. This is only another way of saying that we arrive at and touch reality, the human reality in the patient rather than the fictions which exist in his mind.

*Unconscious* simply means that which is dissociated and which is replaced by fiction. Freud used a very good word for this—rationalization, that is to say, the use of thought for the purpose of hiding the reality of experience. The whole purpose of analysis is to help the patient to arrive at the reality in himself, whatever that reality is. Sometimes he is better than he thinks, sometimes worse than he thinks. He is not necessarily always worse. In fact in our culture people are usually more ashamed of the good things in themselves because they are more afraid of being called a sucker than they are afraid of the bad things in themselves. Analysis must strive to arrive at uncovering the human core, at the very reality of the feeling of love or of criticism of a person which the patient has dissociated because it runs against the social pattern, common sense, and public opinion. This is the aim of analysis and this can be accomplished in my opinion only if you have a situation between analyst and patient which is a full and honest genuine human situation of communication. In this situation both people act as human beings, forgetting their professional status, forgetting that one is supposed to be sick and the other is supposed to be healthy.

I have been analyzed by my patients. While I tried to cure them and helped a few, they helped me in a process of true human relations. In giving we receive and in receiving we give. This is the very opposite of a marketing situation in which there is no reality of human contact, but an alienated reality in which we exchange something, but do not truly communicate.

#### **Psychoanalysis and Society**

An essential element in my understanding of psychoanalysis is its relation to a criticism of our society. I am firmly convinced that one cannot divide the capacity for seeing reality in one's patient from seeing the reality of the marketplace. Unless one is capable of discovering underlying human reality in the social situation, one's eyes are more and more blinded towards the reality in a personal, individual situation. They cannot be separated.

#### **The Outlook for Psychoanalysis**

My own thinking is based on the essential and fundamental discoveries of Freud: the unconscious, free association, dream interpretation, the importance of childhood experience for later life development, on the phenomena of transference, on resistance, and essentially on the scientific method which he applied to the study of man. I believe, however, that today, psychology, and psychoanalysis especially, is in grave danger. Psychologists, including many psychiatrists and psychoanalysts develop into the new priests of an industrialized society, though I know quite a few who are exceptions to this general trend. It seems that many theologians do not feel strong enough in speaking in the name of God and need the help of the psychologist; their aim is very often the same, to be adjusters, helping others to conform.

In industry you speak of "human relations," which are in fact relationships of complete alienation in which the aim is to "oil" the worker. If the boss has to be "oiled," he has enough money to go to the psychoanalyst. But it is all the same—this adjusting, oiling, removing conflict and friction. This is the same spirit behind the new prescriptions for happy marriage . . . It is the idea of industrial teamwork applied to the most intimate relationship between two human beings. In reality it is often nothing but an alienated small social group in which love is not experienced at all or to a small extent. Now psychoanalysis today lends itself to this process of adjusting, of becoming more alienated by not complaining, not feeling sad. Even your sadness which would be your last refuge of humanity in an alienated society is talked out of you. It is explained as something neurotic or as something which you should not have, when actually it might be the beginning of a better life for you.

Quite aside from anything else, psychoanalysis has lent itself very much as a substitute for religion or for a kind of philosophy. Actually you find people in these days for whom psychoanalysis becomes such a fad; these people have no other conviction . . . I am concerned with the problem and I believe that the

future of psychoanalysis, of a great discovery which Freud made, will depend on whether this tendency will prevail or, whether, as I hope, counter tendencies will eventually be stronger and more fruitful.

I would say that psychoanalysis should not be used for such purposes of adjustment or as a substitute for religion. It may have a very definite use in a restricted clinical sense for the therapy of symptoms. I believe its main function lies in a paradoxical phenomenon—it is a method, which by trying to cure a symptom, attains more than it was originally meant to attain. By the very method of coming in touch with one's self, with the reality of one's own experience, one does not only overcome a symptom, something negative, but one achieves something more than one could have without having used that method. It is the overcoming of alienation, the general sickness of our time. In this respect I feel that psychoanalysis, while it is a method of therapy, is at the same time a method whose most fruitful aim coincides with the method of all humanistic philosophy or of humanistic religion, the overcoming of alienation, the helping of man to develop the capacity of being more human.

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**D**ESPITE the extravagant forms of pessimism of pure Freudianism and the extravagant optimism of the neo-Freudians, modern psychiatry has developed a rather more valid account of the relation of self-regarding motives to creative ones, not only than Freudian or neo-Freudian accounts, but than conventional religious or Christian interpretations.—REINHOLD NIEBUHR, "The Christian Moral Witness and Some Disciplines of Modern Culture," in *Making the Ministry Relevant*, Charles Scribner's Sons