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The Shaping of the "Second Europe" 1914 - Present

Sigmund Freud and the Revolt Against Europe

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Introduction

Sigmund Freud played a large role in the Revolt Against Europe we have been examining. But you should not think of Freud as a conscious enemy of the Enlightenment tradition as, say, Friedrich Nietzsche was. He was himself a rationalist and a scientist in his approach to studying human behavior. He created psychoanalysis, a science of discovering and healing human ailments for which there is no physical explanation. But he is part of the Revolt Against Europe because of the implications of his ideas about man and human behavior. Indeed, Freud put the last nail in the coffin of basically good, basically free, basically rational man. Man is driven by forces in his unconscious; they explain his behavior. He may think he is rational, determining what he will do or not do. But that is like a puppet moving about on a lighted stage. Forces hidden behind the stage and the screen were pulling the puppet strings. Freud (rationally) tells us that man is driven by irrationality, and offers to describe (with reason) those irrational forces.

Freud knew the significance of what he was saying: he compared himself to Copernicus and Darwin. Just as they, he had destroyed an illusion about man, an illusion perhaps even more cherished than those they destroyed. Copernicus had shown that man was not at the center of the universe; Darwin that man was not lord and master of life. Freud said he had shown ("the most wounding of all") that man was not even master of *himself*. That such ideas could have come from a man who came from, and lived, a very traditional life may strike you as one of the most surprising things about him.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

[Freud](#) was born in 1856 in what is now the Czech Republic to a conventional, Jewish German middle-class family: strict disciplinarian father; indulgent mother. In light of his theory that the basic character is formed by the age of three in response to experiences, Freud's early life is fascinating. A strict father stands in his theory for "the reality principle" (denial, authority, restraint). An indulgent mother stands for "the pleasure principle" (solace, nourishment, fulfilment of pleasure-seeking). In theory the tension between these two principles characterizes all life, and the proper balance between them, successful adaptation to the conditions of life. In 1860 the family moved to Vienna. A passionate reader and extremely bright student, Freud was drawn to the study of medicine and research into neurology. Upon receiving his degree, he set up practice in neurology in Vienna. Although destined to provoke a storm of controversy about sex and marriage, Freud himself had a very conventional marriage which produced six children. It could not have been a more normal life, typical of the middle class professional anywhere in Europe, certainly in Vienna.

Freud spent a lot of time in his early practice studying nervous diseases, particularly hysteria, a disorder afflicting women with various kinds of symptoms, including paralysis. He spent months in Paris studying with [Jean Martin Charcot](#) (1825-1893), one of the founders of neurology. Charcot pioneered in treating hysteria psychologically through hypnosis. In this state the patient was induced to recall early experiences of which he was unaware as a means of curing hysteria. The use of hypnosis had a profound impact on Freud who adapted it and used it himself in Vienna to treat hysteria. His ideas and methods early on caused opposition from the Viennese medical profession which lasted almost until the end of his life. Freud branched out into other kinds of mental illnesses, using what he called "psychoanalysis" to explain the reason for those illnesses. He collaborated with Josef Breuer (1842-1925) in writing [Studies in Hysteria](#) (1895), which attributed [hysteria](#) to earlier traumatic experiences the patient had forgotten, but which when recalled, led to curing the disorder. Freud soon broke with Breuer because he believed, unlike Breuer, that sex lay at the bottom of nervous disorders. That idea was too much for many at that time.

Freud turned from hypnosis to a technique he called "free association", encouraging a spontaneous flow of thoughts to uncover hidden roots for nervous problems. As he observed his patients, he identified what he called "repression" and "resistance" and a mental province he called the "unconscious." Without knowing it, patients caused a memory to be inaccessible to the conscious mind and resisted the awareness of that memory. Freud used free flow of speech, slips of the tongue, and interpretation of dreams to get into the unconscious and the root of the patient's problems. Then he made his most shocking find: infantile sexuality. Listening to his patients, Freud discovered a psychological foundation to the ancient myth of Oedipus, the Greek figure who killed his father and married his mother, all unknowingly. The child, he asserted, had strong ambivalent feelings about the parents. If a male, he resented and wished to remove the father so as to possess the mother (the Oedipal version); if a female, she resented and wished to remove the mother so as to possess the father (the Electra version). At the same time the child had feelings of love and respect for the parent of the same sex, the one being wished away. Freud's work on dreams was published in 1900 in [Interpretation of Dreams](#). In 1904 came [The Psychopathology of Everyday Life](#) which described how slips of the tongue, of the pen, of actions, of memory were based on unconscious traumatic memories. In 1905 appeared [Wit in Relation to the Unconscious](#) showing how in jokes and reaction to them lay real hidden motives growing out of conflict and repression.

Other major works followed over the years. In 1910 appeared [The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis](#). Freud also took up the social and religious application of his theories and studied biographies for evidence of his theories. In 1914 he published [Totem and Taboo](#) whose premise was that society began as an act of parricide and incest. In myth, embedded in human consciousness and remembered since, the younger males clubbed together and killed the patriarch and took his wives. Then to prevent themselves from doing this again, they adopted parricide and incest as taboos (forbidden practices). Freud also did a study of Leonardo da Vinci to illustrate his theory that sexual childhood experiences caused homosexuality. In 1917 came [A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis](#). [Civilization and Its Discontents](#) (1930) pursued Freud's theme that civilization came into being and could exist only by denial and sublimation of the life instincts. In the struggle between the pleasure principle and reality principle, the reality principle had to win out if civilization were to exist. Another way of putting it was that for Freud, civilization could only exist at the expense of happiness. (Think about that in terms of the Enlightenment view where happiness is guaranteed by the state!) Freud continued publishing until the last year of his life, 1939, when [Moses and Monotheism](#) appeared. In 1938 when the Nazis took Austria and threatened Freud and his family, he emigrated to London where he [died](#) in 1939 from

throat and jaw cancer caused by, or aggravated by, [his love of cigars](#). This brief biography has hinted at Freud's basic ideas and theories. Some of the most important parts of his thinking follow.

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1. Before going into Freud's ideas, is there anything you wish to say about Freud himself?
 2. Man is not even master of *himself*?
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The Theory of Psychoanalysis

Freud himself coined the word "[psychoanalysis](#)." By this he meant both a method and a theory. As a method, the word meant the investigation of unconscious thoughts by getting the patient to reveal those thoughts or hints of them, and then, by helping the patient understand the meaning of those unconscious thoughts, to effect a therapy. As a theory, psychoanalysis means the bringing of the unconscious into consciousness so that the patient through recognition and understanding of unconscious thoughts may be healed.

Freud [developed psychoanalysis](#) after recognizing that the conscious and unconscious provinces of the mind interacted in ways his patients were unaware of. Ideas, thoughts, feelings, and images stood for one thing in the conscious part of the mind; but under the influence of the unconscious province of the mind they meant something quite different. Early life experiences, he believed, had produced sexual and aggressive impulses which were unacceptable and which had been forced out of the consciousness into the unconscious realm. The Oedipus/Electra impulse to desire the parent of the opposite sex and hate the parent of the same sex was crucial and happened during the period from 4 to 6 in the child's development. The child, pained and naturally frustrated because of this impulse, repressed it. But it still lurked in the unconscious, and, depending on the strength of the impulse and the child's ability to repress it, posed a threat to the child's development. It continued to live in the fantasies and fears of the child and later the adult. If strong, it produced neurotic behavior; even if weak, it lingered to affect the way the adult responded to intimacy and love relationships.

In psychoanalysis Freud sought to bring these painful and repressed memories to the consciousness. There with his help the patient could understand the root of his neurosis and be cured. This was not a simple, quick task. The hidden repressed impulses often were difficult to uncover. They conflicted with conscious thoughts or with other unconscious ideas. Freud found that often patients in therapy had difficulty in freely associating, grew silent, or stuttered, which he took to be signs that the experiences being repressed were so disturbing that the patient could not deal with them. By clinical experience Freud concluded that those experiences frequently were of a sexual nature so abhorrent and threatening that the individual could not, except through long psychoanalysis, become conscious of them. After trying hypnosis, Freud next turned to what he called a 'talking cure'. The patient lay on a [couch](#), relaxed; Freud placed himself so that he was out of sight. Then with as few words as possible, he encouraged the patient to speak freely and without premeditation (free association) so that he could sense the underlying meaning of what the patient said. Freud was particularly interested in the patient's dreams because he believed that dreams were "the royal road to knowledge of the unconscious". Dreams interested him because behind the "manifest" meaning lay a "latent" meaning which was the more important. Probing dreams, [slips of tongue](#) (parapraxes), free-associations, and the patient's responses to questions, Freud began to dredge up to the conscious those repressed ideas, images, and thoughts which produced the neurotic symptoms. Almost always, he found that what had been repressed was the sexual instinct and the conflict this set up in the young child. The cure came when the patient became aware of what he had repressed and confronted it directly. The result was a purging or catharsis which released the psychic energy dammed up by repression which had caused the neurotic illness.

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A brief digression. I visited Freud's apartment on a trip to Vienna in the fall of 2000. The furnishings are not original. His couch is now in the London house Freud occupied his last year. However, the Vienna apartment and neighborhood give an informed visitor a good sense of the setting in which Freud lived and worked.

What is the Personality?

Freud said the human personality consisted of three components: id, ego, and superego.

The id (from the Latin word "it") is the reservoir of instincts in the personality, everything that forms part of man's basic drives such as sex, hunger, and aggression. These furnish the psychic energy of the personality and make demands for fulfillment of the "pleasure principle." The id is not in contact with reality. It "knows no values, no good and evil, no morality."

The ego (from the Latin "I") is the part of the personality which mediates between the id and reality. It receives energy from the id, translating id wishes into fulfillment. "In it," Freud said, "is generated, while it is functioning, the phenomenon of consciousness." Its function is the protection of the organism, "for the id, blindly striving to gratify its instincts, in complete disregard of the superior strength of outside forces, could not otherwise escape annihilation." In this way, Freud continued, "it dethrones the pleasure-principle, which exerts undisputed sway over the processes in the id, and substitutes for it the reality-principle, which promises greater security and greater success." Compared to the id, "the ego stands for reason and circumspection, while the id stands for untamed passions...."

The third component, the superego, is society's system of values implanted in the individual. It has been called the moral arm of the personality. It functions to hold up ideals and moral goals over realistic ones and to see that the personality realizes them and strives for perfection. How does it relate to the ego? It makes demands on the ego like the id and external reality do. If these demands are not met, "it punishes the ego with feelings of tension which manifest themselves as a sense of inferiority and guilt." When the ego is forced to acknowledge its weakness, Freud said, "it breaks out into anxiety: reality anxiety in face of the external world, normal anxiety in face of the super-ego, and neurotic anxiety in face of the strength of passions of the id."

How Does the Personality Function?

Freud took the positivist position that man was an organization of physical and psychic energy. These two converge in instincts which Freud defined as an "inborn psychological representation of an inner bodily source of excitation." Hunger, for example. Instincts play a larger role than environmental forces in Freud. They move the organism to take action. Hunger moves the organism to take action to reduce the tension created by hunger. But ego, sensing reality, says that edible food may not be available, or not then. And the Super-ego, speaking for ideal moral reasons or taboo reasons, says that available food may not be religiously, morally, or socially acceptable. (Eating pork for a Jew; human flesh for a human; any flesh for a vegetarian, and so on). Instincts, Freud went on to say, are of two kinds: life (eros) and death (thanatos). Life instincts performed using a form of energy he termed the *libido* which arises from erogenous zones. Death instincts, he said, were more difficult to discern. But Freud said all life had death as its goal. This aggressiveness led in its most visible manifestation to a desire for self-destruction. He called any investment of energy

to fulfill an instinct "object-cathexis." Energy used to restrain the id he called "anti-cathexis." The tension set up by the demands of the id, the environment, and the super-ego Freud called "anxiety", a concept central to his theory about how the personality functioned. Anxiety motivated the person to do something to relieve tension.

Most of the ego's trouble came from the id and primarily from the libido. Sexual drives began at the beginning of life (a declaration which shocked contemporaries). Up to Freud, the conviction was that sexual urges had to be overcome as children grew to adulthood. Bad or perverse sexual urges had to be eliminated by punishment and threat of punishment. But Freud made sex central to human development, starting at the mother's breast and ending only with death. Freud believed that the ego had to defend itself against the sexual urges of the id and concluded that it did so using a variety of "defense mechanisms". It repressed them to the unconscious. It also "sublimated" sexual urges to other activities and aims. And it directed the libido towards itself, "narcissism". The resulting neuroses from these defenses were outgrowths of efforts to prevent satisfaction of sexual urges, to substitute for them something else, or a mixture of the two. We mentioned earlier the Oedipus/Electra complex as the identification of sexual and aggressive urges towards the parents. It was this sexual energy which the ego had to defend itself against. And the result was the illness which Freud found in his patients.

How Does the Personality Develop?

Freud emphasized childhood as the time of greatest importance in the development of the personality. Personality developed as the ego responded to pressures and threats and learned how to reduce tension and defend itself. In addition to defense mechanisms mentioned earlier, Freud called another identification: a person taking on the characteristics of another and making them part of his own personality. Another was displacement: a person frustrated in one area learns to transfer energy to another area.

The stages through which the personality developed, Freud said, were the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages. How a person resolved conflicts arising during these stages influenced the person's personality. And it determined whether the person remained fixated at any of the stages.

Oral - The stage from birth to about 18 months centered on the sensual pleasure derived from sucking, biting, and chewing.

Anal - The stage from about 18 months to 3 years centered on the pleasure derived from bowel and bladder elimination, retention, and control.

Phallic - The stage from about ages 3-4 to 6 focused on the pleasure obtained from the genitals and on the sexual feelings toward the parent of the opposite sex.

Latency - The fourth stage from about age 6 to puberty was the period when sexual impulses are repressed.

Genital - The last stage was that in which sexuality matures and the person focuses on pleasure derived through sexual contact with the opposite sex. (Freud saw homosexuality as aberrant.)

By age 5 or 6, the personality was almost completely formed. The person should have resolved the Oedipus/Electra conflict and the Super-ego should have been formed. But the person who failed to resolve conflicts at earlier stages would have what he called fixations or traits associated with the unresolved conflicts. The healthy person would have an ego in charge, firmly controlling the id and Super-ego. For those who failed to achieve that and needing therapy, Freud likened his job as psychoanalyst to land reclamation: "[the object]...is to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of vision, and so extend its organization that it can take over new portions of the id. Where id was there shall ego be. It is reclamation work, like the draining of the Zuyder Zee."

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Your own observations about Freud's theory of personality development?

A Reading From Interpretation of Dreams

If there is time I want to read you some Freud to show you how he used dreams to understand what was going on in the unconscious.

Sigmund Freud and the Second Europe

Freud and his science of human behavior do not leave us much in the way of rational man. His theories depict man as a kind of mechanism: a machine whose internal forces make him do what he does. Reason is useful only in explaining the way the mind works. Freud proposes a science of human behavior. But what does the science tell us? Remember that this mind is mainly id, with the ego sitting on top like the tip of an iceberg. And you know how much iceberg there is below the water line.

What about changing society for the better? Will it make any difference? He believed that society and its civilized apparatus rose from the ability of men to repress their ids. In Civilization and its Discontents, he wrote

It is impossible to ignore the extent to which civilization is built up on renunciation of instinctual gratification, the degree to which the existence of civilization presupposes the non-gratification (suppression, repression, or something else?) of powerful instinctual energies.

For "civilization" read the Enlightenment, all the ideas and ideals created by Western man and made possible only by the victory of egos over ids in countless humans. As I said earlier, civilization could only exist at the *expense* of happiness. (The pursuit of which the Enlightenment believed was guaranteed by the state!)

And where in this set of theories is there room for any higher ethical or moral power? What of a fundamental set of moral laws built by God into nature and man? Where would you look?

Is there optimism in Freud about what man can look forward to? If man can control his unconscious, can he cure himself? Maybe so. So if nowhere else, perhaps there is a bit of the Enlightenment here.

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