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HUM 3306 (online): History of Ideas--The Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Anxiety  
Summer A 2007/ Profs. Harvey & Fantina

## FREUD

FREUD INTRODUCTION VIA WEBSITES: Click the links below and browse according to your interest

1. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/bhfreu.html>

From the above site, go to the three sub-sites below:

**Formative Years**

**The Individual: Therapy & Theory**

**From the Individual to Society**

2. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/f/freud.htm>

## FREUD'S MAIN IDEAS

● Freud envisioned infants as blobs of delight, enwrapped by libidinal satisfaction (the pleasure of being tickled and stroked, etc.). He calls this "polymorphous perversity". As the infant grows, pleasure becomes focused more on the mouth (orality) and excreting (anal control). Eventually, sexuality gets reduced in puberty to genital pleasure, limited more or less to the genitalia. Folks are often shocked by Freud's notions of infant libidinal/sexual pleasure, but that is because they misinterpret him, projecting adult sexuality back into infant desire rather than seeing infants as having a very generalized pleasure zone that covers their whole bodies (which is manifestly true) which, as the infant matures into a teenager, becomes narrowed and intensified to genitalia more or less exclusively.

● The infant does not distinguish itself from mommy's body--it has no sense of identity ("I"-ness). But when mommy disappears, the infant develops a sense of "I" versus "not-I," both physically and psychically.

● The separation/return of mommy also bifurcates the mind into a id/pleasure/libidinal zone versus ego zone that has to learn to accommodate itself to frustration (mommy's breast is gone). Thus emerges the id/ego structure.

● Freud's notion of libidinal energy is one of a closed economy (like plumbing, in which pressure if it is not released through one valve, will seek to be released elsewhere). If libido/desire cannot be expressed and satisfied because of social taboos, it becomes repressed and seeks release elsewhere, for instance, creative energy or our satisfaction in beauty or our seemingly non-erotic affections (Freud calls this "sublimation").

● Although we may not want to embrace Freud's ideas about the development of the oral stage or anal stage, or fixations on either, such is interesting to speculate about: the oral fixation = desire to engulf/absorb = male desire for visual stimulation/pornography; anal fixation leads to neat-freaks, pleasure in tight control/order. The latter is very reductive, but pause and wonder: what is the pleasure that those who are obsessively neat take in symmetry and other forms of an ordered environment outside of the self?

● Towards the end of his career, Freud speculated that in addition to libidinal instinct, there is a death instinct: manifested in aggression and the desire to just become nothing (rather than exerting energy, either in motor force or psychically, one wants to lapse into pure stillness, as it were).

● When eros/libido and the aggression instinct fuse together and go outward = sadism.

● When eros and aggression goes outward, but curl back = masochism. Many folks think Freud's ideas are kinky and unscientific, but his idea that aggression/sexuality fuse in sadism makes sense, at least as a provisional explanation of aberrant behavior.

● But the latter eros/aggression dynamic also, according to Freud, carves out the super-ego. Super-ego is not rational: when you feel "guilt" it is irrational, with the super-ego aggressively being self-punitive.

● If you don't believe in aggression/death instinct: why do you mindlessly destroy ants (or tear up boxes or clocks or whatever) when young, why burst little plastic bubbles in mailing plastic wrapping? How do you explain your guilt, in which you mentally "hit" yourself?

● That the unconscious DOES likely exist in some form is demonstrable by your capacity, for instance, to make puns and jokes.

● A pun is typically based on the sudden collision of two separate linguistic codes or items; those good at making puns do not struggle to think them up ... they just "pop out."

● Example (please excuse the vulgarity--do not read this paragraph if you are likely to take offense!): think of former President Clinton and all the designations for presidential space ... office, white house, Lincoln bedroom, committee room, oval office (your mind goes thru the "rolodex" of terms). Now think of Monica ... and, suddenly, "Oral Office" pops out from the punster rather than "Oval Office." The punster, to make the spontaneous fusion of Oral/Office/Oval, had to be subconsciously processing all the words for "office" and all the words for presidential unseemly sexual behavior simultaneously, until the two subconscious "rolodex" files click together to produce the pun.

● Dreams are also evidence of the unconscious: things/actions you see or do during the day become lodged in the mind because of associations not known at the time. Here is a hypothetical, somewhat goofy, example: you take a walk and see a tree with lush fruit suspended from it while thinking, without self-consciously taking note that you're thinking, about your mother's recent death. You don't, at the time, take note consciously of the tree, but in that night's dream you envision an entity that is simultaneously your mother (in dreams, images can be fused together in a way the daytime mind would find categorically impossible) and a leafy plant. In your dream, recalling infant nurturance, you want to swing from your mother/the tree.

● Still, even with the mysteries of pun or dream production (both of which Freud wrote about), you might not be persuaded that the unconscious exists.

● Maybe we just have a higher language/culture brain structure enwrapped around a lower mammal brain, in turn wrapped around a lizard-like purely appetitive (instinctual brain). It would make sense, from a Darwinian perspective, that we have vestiges of brain structures from much lower animals. The higher language/culture brain functions would constrict the instinctual impulses of the, as it were, reptilian brain. You could reject Freud's theory of the subconscious, and yet still find his ideas of conflict between impulse and control, based on the strictly biological structure of the brain, compelling.

#### OVERVIEW OF FREUD'S CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENT

It is important to emphasize that Freud's Civilization and its Discontent is broadly speculative in the fields of anthropology, ethics, cultural evolution, sociology, and so on as well as psychology per se. As he proceeds from chapter to chapter, he habitually and agilely complicates what he seems to have settled upon in the previous chapter.

The shifts can get very confusing. And, sometimes, he assumes familiarity with his own psychoanalytical theory that can make his writing seem, if you are not prepared, rather esoteric. Nonetheless, his short book was intended to reach a general, educated audience; and even if you do not accept his argument in part or in whole, or the theory of the subconscious and repression/ sublimation, there are innumerable profound and provocative speculations along the way.

At the minimum, you should recognize that Freud contributes to a pervasive philosophical/social thought tradition in the Western world of brooding about a peculiarly Western/modern malaise. It begins with Rousseau, goes through the Romantics and Karl Marx, whose basic point is about unsatisfactory labor pleasure for the masses of workers in a capitalist economy/culture, and on through 20th-century existentialists (Sartre, Camus, Heidegger) who moan and groan about modern "being" (Sartre's big philosophy treatise--800+pages--is called Being and Nothingness, sounds fun eh!).

Come to think about it: the vast bulk of 20th-century philosophy/social thinking essentially asks the question: are we happy? and if not, why not?

#### INTERPRETATION OF FREUD'S CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENT

For an interesting, although partial, interpretation of Freud's book, go to this site:

## ROADMAP OF FREUD'S CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENT

### CHAPTER 1: YOU'LL NEVER FEEL AS GOOD AS YOU DID IN THE WOMB

--"oceanic" sensation in the womb, then ego/external reality split

### CHAPTER 2: TO SOME EXTENT, HOWEVER, YOU CAN AVOID PAIN

--defines purpose of life as "programme of the pleasure principle"

--reviews several ways we can avoid unpleasurable sensations

--dismisses religion as an "unconditional submission"

### CHAPTER 3: AND, TO BE SURE, CIVILIZATION HAS ITS VIRTUES EVEN IF REPRESSIVE

--reviews attributes of civilization or culture

--reviews relationship of individual liberty to the law

### CHAPTER 4: WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL LIBIDO AND COMMUNITY?

--families established when sex no longer periodic

--explains how "aim-inhibited affection" functions to expand community

--cultural development requires an "expedient distribution of the libido"

--civilization requires that we curb sexual drive

### CHAPTER 5: WHY IS SO MUCH AIM-INHIBITED AFFECTION NEEDED TO BOND US COMMUNALLY?

--asks why society must "summon up aim-inhibited libido on the largest scale so as to strengthen the communal bond by relations of friendship," which requires an "antagonism to sexuality"

--introduces aggression instinct

--critiques communism for naivete

--summarizes: "Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities for happiness for a portion of security"

### CHAPTER 6: WHERE DOES THE AGGRESSION INSTINCT COME FROM?

--introduces death instinct as force of dissolution within the organism

--some of the death instinct is "diverted towards the external world" as aggression

--primary evidence of death instinct is when it mixes with libido: sadism and masochism

--aggression when "inhibited in its aim" provides the ego with the satisfaction of controlling nature

### CHAPTER 7: HOW CAN WE REALLY KEEP AGGRESSION IN CHECK?

--aggressiveness is "introjected"/directed back to the ego: thus the "super-ego" develops, "which now, in the form of 'conscience', is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals"

--tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego is called "guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment"

--we learn from parents (who threaten us with a loss of love) how to distinguish "bad" from "good"

