

Sigmund Freud and Psychoanalysis

Prior to World War One, Freud and psychoanalysis were considered radical, but because of the war, including shell shock for soldiers, Freud and psychoanalysis became popular. Since liberalism and reason did not seem to explain why the war occurred, many looked for psychological explanations. This class is a quick overview of Freud's ideas.

I. Happiness

What makes people **REALLY** happy? (Expressing desires for immediate gratification)

However, immediate gratification is often not possible. Therefore, life is a *compromise* between happiness and security (individual vs. civilization). We need laws to prevent us from doing what we want.

II. Id-Ego-World -> neurosis

From Womb to the development of the Ego

In the **womb**, there is no differentiation among the self, desires, and the world. What we want is immediately provided.

Once we are born, there is a division among the self, desires, and the world. We can't always get what we want, which is experienced as pain. We then begin to separate the desires (Id) from the self (Ego) from the outer world. The ego mediates between the desires of the Id (Pleasure Principle) and what can be satisfied in the outer world (Reality Principle).

To deal with the outside world, we learn to communicate (first through crying), locomotion, memory, substitute gratification, fantasy (or creativity). Use the desire for the mother's breast as an example.

To deal with the pressures from the inner world (Id), we use psychological defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection, rationalization, reaction formation, and sublimation. These mechanisms further develop the unconscious vs. the conscious.

Therefore **LIFE IS A DYNAMIC COMPROMISE**, with forces pushing against each other, both from outside the individual and within. These conflicts are the cause of **human suffering**.

Repression, the most used defense mechanism against the demands of the Id, pushes the desire back into the unconscious, needing continual effort (energy) to keep it down. But an instinct or a desire can never be kept down fully. The instinct keeps its strength, regains its strength, or is reawakened by a new situation. These reappearances are also compromises between the original desire (return of the repressed) and the forces of repression, and therefore manifest themselves in a warped form in **dreams, slips of the tongue, and neurotic symptoms**. Each return of the repressed contains an attempt to recover the trauma, to remember the forgotten experience, to make it real – On the other hand, the desire is met with an opposing force to keep it down. Consider the opposite meanings of the

words recover and re-cover or remember and re-member. Neurosis then is part of everyday life. Freud believed that by analyzing dreams (the royal road to the unconscious) and through free association and other techniques, the patient can examine the initial trauma and often deal with it in a more mature body and mind. As Freud said, “the aim of therapy is to turn neurotic misery into common unhappiness.”

III. Individual Development – Physical, Psychological

Freud analyzed different stages of growth, with corresponding physical, psychological, and personality development. Each stage focuses on different developmental tasks and areas of bodily pleasure, which Freud called erogenous zones. Other psychiatrists, especially Karl Abraham and Erik Erikson developed greater theories linking personality characteristics to these different stages.

Oral Stage – from birth to about 2, where the erogenous zone focuses on the mouth. Sucking, sense of power from biting (aggression). Substitute gratification and compensations (pacifiers, thumb sucking, overeating, overindulgence of smoking and drinking, sucking on pens or other objects). Possible personality characteristics: passivity, dependency

Anal Stage – from about 2 to about 4, where the erogenous zone focuses on the rectum and its control. Anal characteristics include preoccupation with orderliness and cleanliness, a marked concern with messiness and dirt, parsimony (from holding on to one’s feces; being tight-assed)

Phallic Stage and Oedipal Complex – from about 4 through 5 or later, where the erogenous zone focuses on the genitals. Freud looked at this stage in terms of males. In the phallic stage, the male child wants to possess the mother, but finds that his chief rival is his father. His feelings toward both parents are ambivalent. He wants his mother, but is infuriated by her seeming preference for the father. He hates his father for possessing the mother, but also identifies with him so as to take his place. The conflict is so stormy that it can only be successfully resolved by the child introjecting the father, thereby renouncing his claim to his mother, but also enjoying her through identification with the father. The introjected father image becomes the third part of the mental apparatus, the superego. Acting as the father, the superego defines the limits of the child’s striving. It becomes “moral” or “conscience” part of the mind and is reinforced by society.

These most important stages of development shape the adult personality, or as Wordsworth said, “the child is the father of the man.”

IV. The Effect of World War One on Freud and his Theories about Civilization

“Prior to the war, Freud had been concerned primarily with the abnormal personality, that is to say, with individuals whose behavior deviated in some way from the conventional patterns sanctioned by the society to which they belonged. Received social systems were considered to be both normal and desirable, and psychoanalysis aspired to little more than reconciling the individual to the range of gratifications and sublimations provided by his society. *But the war*

showed Freud whole societies that acted like neurotic individuals. And this raised questions of what constituted 'healthy' human behavior in societies in which the majority itself was apparently 'sick.'" from Coates and White, *The Ordeal of Liberal Humanism*

Freud then began to move from a social definition of sanity and insanity (normal and abnormal) measured by a person fit into society or not to a humanistic definition where the fulfillment of a person's life is both the ability to love and to do productive work.

After World War One, Freud also became more pessimistic about the nature of civilization and the compromises individuals must make in order to live in it.

"Civilization is not only unnatural but anti-natural; it is a process wherein men obtain mastery over their natural instincts for aggression 'by enfeebling and disarming it and setting up an institution within their minds to keep watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.' All civilizational progress is 'paid for in forfeiting happiness though the heightening of the sense of guilt.'" (Civilization and Its Discontents)

"Hope is that the civilized man can substitute the infantile means of repression with an ever-increasing set of sublimating mechanisms by which those drives which could not be directly expressed, because of the harm they cause others, could be at least indirectly expressed in art, literature, music, work, service, and so forth." (SUBLIMATION)

"Civilization was -- like humanity itself -- a burden, but it was the only alternative to a Hobbsian world of animal fear and strife." The problem was to render the burden lighter, the purpose of psychoanalysis and science in general.