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## UNCONSCIOUSLY MOTIVATED BEHAVIOR:

An assessment of Freud's theory of the dynamic unconscious and the empirical and theoretical objections raised to it, with some preliminary implications for 'Christian psychology'.

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# Introduction

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

*“ If greatness may be measured by scope of influence, then  
Sigmund Freud is without doubt the greatest of psychologists.”*

**- Thomas Leahey, 1987.**

The name of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and the ideas originating with that name, have had a significant influence on nearly every inquiry into human nature conducted over the twentieth century. His theories are applied, reviewed, debated and regularly referred to in literature, medicine, philosophy, sociology, theology and of course academic and popular psychology.

This Viennese neurologist, turned founder of psychoanalysis, revolutionized the way many people had previously thought about human behavior and mental life. Freud single handedly opened up a whole new world with his analysis of human sexuality and its critical import in human development. He developed a systematic account of the function and meaning of dreams. He uncovered "meaning" in the seemingly meaningless contents of jokes, memory lapses and 'slips of the tongue' such that 'Freudian slip' is now a household word. He uncovered the mechanisms of human defense against intolerable mental and emotional pain, in particular, the cornerstone of *repression*. He contributed to the demythologizing of religion by concluding that religious belief was an exceptionally vigorous universal illusion.

Yet all of these remarkable achievements shadow in comparison to Freud's greatest legacy - the systematic development of a theory of a dynamic unconscious, for it is on the bases of this theory that all his others are made possible. Whilst the notion of an unconscious side to the mind was not new, Freud alone postulated specific mechanisms and dynamics that offered a full explanation of *unconsciously motivated behavior* (UMB). That he did so against the tide of the emerging discipline of mental psychology is testament to his tenacity. Freud was convinced that understanding the mechanisms of the dynamic unconscious was indeed the most important discovery for the psychology of the mind.

Academic psychology at the turn of the nineteenth century was chiefly influenced by Whilem Wundt, the man widely credited with founding scientific psychology. For Wundt and his early colleagues, psychology was

the controlled scientific study of immediate experience and as a result they were only concerned with investigating the mind which consisted of human consciousness. In this context 'mind' was understood to be the totality of conscious experience at a given moment, not as a mental entity or substance. Wundt and his students then applied a method of introspection which required the 'objective' description of conscious content ( including 'subjective' elements, such as feelings) dependent on the state of the introspector at a given time and place. Given this emphasis it is hardly surprising that Freud faced more than mild disinterest in his theory of unconscious ideas from the psychological status quo of his day. He would later recall this in the 1914 paper *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement*,

... for ten years I was the only person who concerned himself with it, and all the dissatisfaction that the new phenomenon aroused in my contemporaries has been poured out in the form of criticism on my head. (1914, S.E. XIV; 7).

Wundt, for example, concluded that as it was impossible to introspect the unconscious it should be dismissed as a metaphysical myth (Leahey, 1987). Freud, however, was never deterred by such criticism. He rallied countless hours of clinical data obtained from case histories as scientific support for his theory and over the ensuing decades the tide of popular opinion changed. Today the notion of 'unconscious motivation' is widely credited.

This thesis will be particularly interested in the fact that theology has come to see much in Freud that is of value in understanding complex human behavior. The remarkable development and expansion in the field of

'Christian Psychology' and in particular Christian psychotherapy give evidence to this. Although the majority of Christian psychotherapists may not class themselves as 'Freudian therapists', or even as psychoanalytic in their theoretical position, many have nevertheless assimilated the possibility of Freud's core discovery - unconsciously motivated behaviors (UMB's). This thesis will re-examine the relationship between UMB's and theology at the most fundamental level - that of the conceptual and theoretical. The aim is to assess whether the basic tenets of Freud's theory of a dynamic unconscious and the basic tenets of a Biblical view of the human are indeed conceptually compatible. However, before this objective can be realized it will be essential to achieve two preliminary goals.

Firstly, it will be necessary to present carefully Freud's own account of his theory and it's development. The best guarantee for understanding an idea is to understand the history of that idea. The rationale that accompanies an idea's development and refinement will alone allow one truly to understand the final theory with all of it's ramifications. This is often overlooked by scholars who criticize elements of Freudian theory. Perhaps this is understandable when one acknowledges that Freud's writings were posthumous and not entirely systematic. Furthermore, Freud developed his system of psychoanalysis over a period of nearly half a century (1893-1939). His concepts and terms were not static, delivered from the outset in their final form, but rather they developed progressively over this period, thus leaving some degree of definitional confusion. However, it is my contention that these difficulties are easily resolved if one takes the time to analyze Freud's concepts in their historical context. Therefore, an adequate understanding of UMB's will require at least a brief survey of the

developments of Freud's notions of the 'dynamic unconscious' and 'repression' as given in his writings.

To this end, Part I of this thesis will trace the development of Freud's theorizing about the dynamic unconscious. The survey will be detailed although not exhaustive. The goals are to ensure that we accurately uncover Freud's theorizing regarding an unconscious mind which can motivate behavior; to define clearly the nature of such a mind; and to explore its relationship to consciousness. A full answer to such an inquiry cannot be found in one time and place of Freud's writings ( although as we shall later see this is a point to which most of his critics seem oblivious!). A survey of the main papers from several periods will be required. This will enable the achievement of two further goals: Firstly, to trace the development of Freud's conceptualizations over time, and Secondly, to deal only with the material pertinent to the issues of this thesis. It should be noted that considerable time will be spent expounding the antecedents of psychoanalysis and the development of Freud's thought in the early years. This period is of particular importance as it reveals Freud's perceived need for psychoanalysis and establishes the basic tenets of UMB's which later theorizing mainly refines and systematizes.

In Part II it will be helpful to see how others have assessed Freud's notions before we submit them to analysis. A great deal has been said about the notion of UMB's from both the empiricist and the philosopher. A basic understanding of their assessments of the issues will be a helpful base from which to launch theological discussion.



I choose to deal with Freud and Freud alone because the systematic development of the mechanism of a dynamic unconscious is truly his. Subsequent revisions and developments have added little to the master's hand. Indeed, I think Freud would defend his right to be dealt with alone in this context. In the paper *A History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* he stated,

I consider myself justified in maintaining that even today no one can know better than I do what psychoanalysis is, how it differs from other ways of investigating the life of the mind and what would better be described by some other name.(1914, S.E. XIV; 7).

I assert that despite the plethora of theorizing since, this situation has not changed significantly.

Finally, it will be helpful at the outset to point out that what is being examined here is not the hypothesis of the unconscious. It is obvious that most of what we 'know' is not in consciousness at a given moment (like your phone number before I mentioned it) and these ideas may well reside in a mental place - the 'unconscious' for want of a better name (It should also be realized that there are alternatives to such an explanation, for example, there is a view that 'ideas' not in conscious awareness simply dissipate into the neural network, ceasing to be entities until the need arises to re-form them). What **is** being examined in this thesis is the notion of a *dynamic unconscious*, that is, the hypothesis of the existence of unconscious ideas that can affect our behavior while we have no awareness of them. This reified unconscious then becomes the instigator of dreams, fantasies, neuroses, behavioral errors, obsessions, and slips of the tongue and memory. In fact, unconscious ideas become the motivating force behind much of one's behavior.

That such a notion has become so widely accepted and propagated in one form or another among evangelical Christian thinkers is somewhat surprising, for as we shall see it produces considerable theological problems. Not the least of these is how a morally good God could hold anyone accountable for amoral behavior (either overt or mental) when its origination and motivation is not under conscious control. To issues such as these we will return after the stage has been sufficiently set.

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# Chapter One

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## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **THE ANTECEDENTS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS**

The origins of Freud's formulation of the dynamic unconscious and the mechanism of repression are not systematically expounded in his early writings (1893-96). However, if the retrospective accounts of the development of psychoanalysis, such as *The History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* (1914) and *An Autobiographical Study* (1925) are superimposed over his earliest theoretical and clinical accounts, one can explicate the formulation of the basic elements of these theories.

Freud's initial training was in medicine. After several digressions he passed his final medical examinations on March 30, 1881, although as his

friend and biographer Ernest Jones records, it was not an event of great importance to the young Freud, rather, "It was a thing that had to be done in the course of events, ..." (Jones, 1961:38). Freud's real interest was in physiological laboratory research; he had no desire whatever to *practice* medicine and as a result continued to work on research projects at the Brucke Physiological Institute for some fifteen months after graduation until July 1882. It seems by this time Freud, with some input from Brucke, had realized that there was no financial security to be gained in research alone and as by this time he had met his fiancée he made the purely pragmatic decision to enter practice.

The turning point came in 1882, when my teacher, for whom I felt the highest possible esteem, corrected my father's generous improvidence by strongly advising me, in view of my bad financial position, to abandon my theoretical career. I followed his advice, left the physiological laboratory and entered the General Hospital as an *Aspirant* [Clinical Assistant]. (1925, S.E. XX; 10).

On July 31, 1882, Freud entered the surgery department of the General Hospital of Vienna but soon transferred to the Division of Internal Medicine under Nothnagel. During this time, try as he might, Freud could not generate much enthusiasm for medical practice. As Jones recalls "He found no more interest in treating the sick patients in the wards than in studying their diseases. By now he must have been convinced more than ever that he was not born to be a doctor." (1961:43). Six and a half months later on May 1, 1883, Freud took the all important step of transferring to the Psychiatric Clinic. He was immediately appointed as an assistant to the well respected Theodor Meynert (1833-1892). It should be realized that at this time psychiatry and neurology were closely related, in fact, Meynert's fame was almost exclusively as a brain anatomist. In January 1884, Freud advanced to

the department that would lead him to the specialty of his life's work; Nervous Diseases. Although he did work in other departments in the years to come, it was the fields of neurology and nervous diseases that captivated Freud. He remained at the General Hospital until 1885 when with help from Brucke, he obtained a travel award to study with Charcot the great neurologist in Paris. This would prove to be a most significant period in Freud's life as relates to the development of his own theoretical notions.

The trip to Paris (October 1885- February 1886) was undoubtedly motivated by anatomical research and not clinical interest on Freud's part. But Charcot was to change this by unintentionally turning Freud's interests from neuropathology to psychopathology, a change that was to revolutionize his outlook on human nervous disorders. In a letter to his fiancée (Martha Bernays) written a month after his arrival (November 24, 1885), Freud states, "Charcot, who is one of the greatest of Physicians and a man whose common sense is touched by simple genius, is simply uprooting my aims and opinions." Charcot's influence on Freud can be further gleaned in the 1893 obituary Freud wrote on account of his death which occurred on August 16th. It revealed that Charcot's concentration on hysteria had profoundly affected Freud. Charcot brought the notion of hysteria to a place of scientific credibility rather than a case of female malingering. But perhaps most importantly was the clinical relationship between hypnotism and hysterical phenomena which he discovered though did not pursue at a theoretical level. Freud would later recall,

What impressed me most of all while I was with Charcot were his latest investigations upon hysteria, some of which were carried out under my own eyes. He had proved, for instance, the genuineness of hysterical phenomena and their conformity to laws, the frequent

occurrence of hysteria in men, the production of hysterical paralyses and contractures by hypnotic suggestion and the fact that such artificial products showed, down to their smallest details, the same features as spontaneous attacks, which were often brought on traumatically. (1925, S.E. Vol. XX; 13).

It was this work on hysterical paralyses which became manifest after some traumatic event, that would prove to be of particular significance.

In the obituary, Freud recalled how Charcot attempted to reproduce the symptoms of such cases of non-organic paralysis by hypnotizing his patients. In successfully doing so Freud concluded that Charcot, succeeded in proving by an unbroken chain of argument, that these paralyses were the result of *ideas* which had dominated the patients brain at moments of a special disposition. In this way, the mechanism of hysterical phenomenon was explained for the first time." (1893, S.E. Vol. III; 22).

The fact that so respected a neurologist had used hypnotic suggestion was an important factor in Freud's willingness to assign it immediate credibility. After all, Charcot had shown that by use of hypnotic suggestion alone hysterical symptoms such as paralysis could be elicited in certain subjects. While the impact of such a discovery was for most scientists purely pragmatic, suggesting some as yet undiscovered neurological mechanism, for Freud it marked the realization that such symptoms could be initiated or abolished and therefore *treated by ideas alone*. Thus, his time in Paris led Freud to change his whole view of the origin of hysterical symptoms. This change is summed up by Jones when he notes that Freud now realized "they had a psychogenic origin. This opened the

door to a medical motive for investigating the psychology of patients, with all the ramifying results that the past half century has shown.” (1961:149).

Of course Freud's full realization of the significance of what he had witnessed was not immediate. He returned to Vienna in 1886 and began practicing as a specialist in nervous diseases. He recalls that during this time “My therapeutic arsenal contained only two weapons, electrotherapy and hypnotism,...” (1925, S.E. Vol. XX; 16). Electrotherapy, which he reports to have learnt from Erb's 1882 textbook on the matter was soon abandoned by Freud as ‘no help whatever’. What he had thought to be “ an epitome of exact observations was merely the construction of phantasy.” (1925, S.E. Vol. XX; 16). This now left hypnosis as the only method available to Freud for treating the neuroses. He spent the next two years, starting in 1887, developing the use of the technique of hypnotic suggestion which he had recently learnt from Charcot in Paris. Despite the association with Charcot, hypnosis still faced some stiff opposition back in Vienna. Meynert, a one time ally of Freud's but rival of Charcot's, openly dismissed it as ‘hocus-pocus’ stating that “it degrades a human being to a creature without will or reason and only hastens his nervous and mental degeneration.” (Meynert, 1889).

Whilst hypnosis had some remarkable results, Freud himself had some misgivings about it almost straight away. Firstly, some patients simply could not be hypnotized, and secondly, many others could not be hypnotized sufficiently deeply to allow the hypnotic suggestions to work. In 1889, Freud began to re-examine the technique under the influence of Libeault and then Bernheim. It was from observing Bernheim's experiments that he received “the profoundest impression of the possibility that there could be powerful



*mental processes* which nevertheless *remained hidden from the consciousness* of men." (1925, S.E. Vol. XX; 17, italic added). Freud now stood at the border of his new world of unconscious ideas, but one more important development was yet to take place.

Unhappy with hypnosis, Freud began to develop a method whereby the patient was questioned while in a hypnotic state for the purpose of tracing back the symptom in question. This technique had first been shown to be very useful by his close friend Joseph Breuer who had demonstrated it to Freud prior to his trip to Paris. At that time Freud was enthusiastic about the technique which Breuer named the 'cathartic method' but Charcot seems to have dampened his interest in it. As he recalls, "I determined to inform Charcot of these discoveries when I reached Paris, and I actually did so. But the great man showed no interest in my first outline of the subject, so that I never returned to it and allowed it to pass from my mind." (1925, S.E. Vol. XX; 19,20). On return to Vienna, however, Freud once again teamed up with Breuer and the pair started to apply the new approach with patients. It is worth recalling Freud's memories of this period and the initial success it brought.

When I was back in Vienna I turned once more to Breuer's observation and made him tell me more about it. The patient had been a young girl of unusual education and gifts, who had fallen ill while she was nursing her father, of whom she was devotedly fond. When Breuer took over her case it presented a variegated picture of paralyses with contractures, inhibitions and states of mental confusion. A chance observation showed her physician [Breuer] that she could be relieved of these clouded states of consciousness if she was induced to express in words the affective phantasy by which she was at the moment dominated. From this discovery, Breuer arrived at a new method of treatment. He put her into deep hypnosis and made her tell

him each time what it was that was oppressing her mind. After the attacks of depressive confusion had been overcome in this way, he employed the same procedure for removing her inhibitions and physical disorders. In her waking state the girl could no more describe than other patients how her symptoms had arisen, and she could discover no link between them and any experiences of her life. In hypnosis she immediately discovered the missing connection.... When the patient recalled a situation of this kind in a hallucinatory way under hypnosis and carried through to its conclusion, with a free expression of emotion, the mental act which she had originally suppressed, the symptom was abolished and did not return. (1925, S.E. Vol. XX; 20).

In 1889, Freud applied the technique himself in the case of Frau Emmy v. N. and persisted with it for a while, but even this technique soon showed drawbacks. "The first was that even the most brilliant results were liable to be suddenly wiped away if my personal relation with the patient became disturbed." (1925, S.E. Vol. XX; 27). The second was that "the personal emotional relation between the doctor and the patient was after all stronger than the whole cathartic process,.." (1925, S.E. XX; 17).

Whilst it now seemed clear to Freud that hypnosis would have to be abandoned, he did not want to lose the very beneficial catharsis that could accompany it. Over the period of 1892-1898, Freud progressively replaced both hypnotic suggestion and Breuer's cathartic method as the core of his therapeutic arsenal and moved towards a much simpler technique based on getting patients to disclose what they already had stored somewhere in their mind. It was reflections on his time with Bernheim that enabled Freud to put the pieces together that would shape his new approach. He recalled that

when a patient had come out of a hypnotic state they had no recollection of what had happened while in that state.

But Bernheim maintained that the memory was present all the same; and if he insisted on the subject remembering, if he asseverated that the subject knew it all and had only to say it, and if at the same time he laid his hand on the subjects forehead, then the forgotten memories used in fact to return, hesitantly at first, but eventually in a flood and with complete clarity. I determined that I would act in the same way. (1925, S.E. Vol. XX; 28).

It should be noted that the techniques that had so impacted Freud such as Charcot's hypnotic suggestion, Bernheim's forced remembering and Breuer's cathartic process were all reliant on first placing the subject into a hypnotic state. It was Freud who would now begin to part from this trend until by 1898 he no longer used hypnosis at all. He was coming to realize that hypnosis was in fact unnecessary and not worth the emotional trouble it often caused.

My patients, I reflected, must in fact 'know' all the things which had hitherto only been made accessible to them in hypnosis; and assurances and encouragement on my part, assisted perhaps by the touch of my hand, would, I thought, have the power of forcing the forgotten facts and connections into consciousness. (1925, S.E. XX; 28).

This hypnosis free technique would become known as 'free association' because its central objective was to get the patient to give voice to all thoughts that entered the mind while pursuing a certain topic, regardless of their seeming relevance to the problem at hand. The development of free association is of central importance to the discovery of the dynamic unconscious. Like a detective who does not ignore the value of seemingly unrelated clues, Freud progressively saw that the content of these disparate conscious articulations actually may be related at another level. A level where they were part of an unbroken causative chain of ideas. And so it was

during such periods of his patients relaxed verbalizing that Freud was able to make the fundamental observations which allowed him to penetrate the realm of the unconscious proper.

Thus by 1892/3 the stage was set for Freud to turn his observations and speculations into theory. The one time neurologist and research scientist who had made a name for himself in histology and Central Nervous System research was now on the verge of psychoanalysis. From Charcot he had gleaned that hysterical symptoms could be produced by *ideas* and thus have a *psychogenic origin*. Libeault and Bernheim had enabled him to observe that there could be mental processes that have causative power, which nevertheless were not accessible to the patients consciousness. Finally, Breuer's cathartic method and Freud's own early attempts at free association had confirmed that his patients often knew the traumatic idea(s) or event(s) that had caused their symptom, but they seemed to resist such knowledge and needed help in brining it into conscious awareness. All these observations would now be formulated into the psychoanalytical theories of the 1890's. Although Freud does not present a concise theory of the unconscious mind until the following century, it is in this last decade of the nineteenth century where the foundations for a dynamic unconscious are built and the mechanisms of it's operation discovered.

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## Chapter Two

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**CHAPTER TWO:****EARLY FORMULATIONS OF THE  
UNCONSCIOUS AND THE MECHANISM OF  
REPRESSION, 1890-1899.**

In 1892 Freud had undertaken to translate several of Charcot's work's from French into English. Of particular importance were the *Tuesday Lectures* which gave account of many of the phenomena Freud had observed with him during the trip to Paris in 1885. Having now the benefit of seven years hindsight, Freud seemed compelled to add a brief but very salient outline of his own theorizing with respect to hysterical attacks. Thus, in a footnote to Charcot's interpretation of one such attack Freud presents his own ideas - a contribution somewhat out of the scope of a translator!

I avail myself of the opportunity offered in the text in order to lay before the reader an independent view of hysterical attacks...

I have attempted to meet the problem of hysterical attacks along a line other than descriptive, and by examining hysterical patients in a hypnotic state I have arrived at new findings, a few of which I will mention here. The core of a hysterical attack in whatever form it may appear, is a *memory*, the hallucinatory re-living of a scene which is significant for the onset of the illness. The *content of the memory* is as a rule either a *psychical trauma* which is qualified by its intensity to provoke the outbreak of hysteria in a patient or is an event which, owing to its occurrence at a particular moment, has become a trauma,.... A trauma would have to be defined as *an accretion of excitation* in the nervous system, *which the latter has been unable to dispose of adequately by motor reaction*. A hysterical attack is *perhaps* to be regarded as an attempt to complete the reaction to the trauma. (1892, S.E. 1; 137).

In this brief account the essential features of Freud's theories for the ensuing decade are introduced. Of particular importance is the notion of a *memory* of a traumatic event, which if intense enough may provoke the onset of hysteria.

During the remainder of 1892, Freud developed these ideas further with his friend Joseph Breuer. The culmination of this partnership is the joint paper *On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication* (1893). In this paper hysteria was seen as the result of a past event that provoked the initial symptom(s) and was then deliberately forgotten from consciousness although not lost from the psyche.

A chance observation has led us, over a number of years, to investigate a variety of different forms and symptoms of hysteria, with a view to discovering their precipitating cause - **the event which**

**provoked the first occurrence**, often many years earlier of the phenomenon in question. (1893, S.E. 2; 3).

The 'event' was invariably associated with trauma at the time and as a result the patient usually did not want to talk about it. Of greater significance to Freud was the idea that the patient may be "genuinely unable to recollect [and have] no suspicion of the causal connection between the precipitating event and the pathological phenomenon." (1893;3).

Hysteria is seen as a pathological phenomenon which has a precipitating cause in some trauma. The connection between the trauma and the symptom may be clear and direct or it may be symbolic. The *operative cause* of the symptom is not the physical event, but the affect (e.g. fright, anxiety, shame, or guilt), that is, *the psychological trauma*. The memory of this trauma (the ideational representative) "acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work." (1893; 6). The therapeutic effect of psychotherapy is based on the notion that a trauma evokes a memory and affect which remain active in the psyche after the trauma is consciously forgotten causing other behaviors (symptoms). Freud offered clinical observations as support for this notion.

... we found,... that each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and put the affect into words (1893;6).

That the symptom would immediately disappear when the psychological process which originally led to it was vividly recalled and articulated led Freud to make the classic conclusion; '*Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences.*' In developing his explanation of hysteria, Freud goes on to introduce the



concepts of catharsis, abreaction, repression, and the unconscious (n.b. here, the latter is still being thought of simply as a second conscious).

When some traumatic event provokes an affect, there is always some 'reaction' to it. Freud is not very clear in what he meant by 'reaction', stating only that it was "the whole class of voluntary and involuntary reflexes, ...[in which] the affects are discharged." I suggest that at this point in Freud's thinking it is best understood simply as 'taking action' to alleviate the affect, e.g. by crying, raging, confronting, or taking revenge. A problem arises when this is denied.

If the reaction is suppressed, the affect remains attached to the memory. An injury that has been repaid, even if only in words, is recollected quite differently from one that has had to be accepted." (1893;8).

Freud termed this re-living (in feeling, action, or imagination) of the situation that caused the conflict - *abreaction*. The desired result of abreaction is *catharsis* (i.e., release of the tension and anxiety associated with the suppressed affect). Freud suggested that healthy people carry out this process successfully all the time.

... a person's memory of a humiliation is corrected by his putting the facts right, by considering his own worth, etc. In this way a normal person is able to bring about the disappearance of the accompanying affect through the process of association." (1893;9).

As a result the memory is free to fade away with time and thus cease to be affectively operative. However, this process breaks down in the case of the hysteric for whom the memories "persist for a long time with astonishing freshness and with the whole of their affective coloring." (1893;9).

At this point Freud introduces the necessity of another realm of mental life outside the conscious.

These memories, unlike other memories..., are not at the patients disposal. On the contrary, these experiences are completely absent from the patients memory when they are in a normal psychological state, or are only present in a highly summarized form. (1893;9).

Freud is then obliged to acknowledge "abnormal states of consciousness in which these pathogenic ideas arise". He suggests this distinction is analogous to the classical notion of 'splitting of consciousness' and refers to the abnormal states of consciousness as 'hypnoid states' (this term was actually introduced by Breuer). "The ideas which emerge in them are very intense but are cut of from associative communication with the rest of the content of consciousness." (i.e., dissociation).

One of the factors that may stop sufficient abreaction from occurring is the mechanism of *repression* which is first introduced in the 1893 paper. In such a case abreaction could not occur because the trauma may be "a question of things which the patient wished to forget, and therefore intentionally repressed from his conscious thought and inhibited and suppressed"(1893;10). This is not to be confused with gradually forgetting unpleasant experiences, but is rather an instant reaction to the realization of a traumatic idea which occurs before abreaction is possible.

It may therefore be said that the ideas which have become pathological [ (or repressed) ] have persisted [ (outside of consciousness) ] with such freshness and affective strength because they have been denied the normal wearing away process by means of abreaction and reproduction in states of uninhibited association" (1893;11).

In the following year, 1894, Freud (writing independently from Breuer) develops the notion of repression as 'intentional forgetting' in *The Neuro Psychoses of Defense*. The latter is actually the first of two papers on the Neuro-Psychoses of defense, the second part to come in 1896. Building on the concepts introduced in the *Preliminary Communication*, Freud now gives expression, if not overtly, at least by implication to many of the fundamental theoretical notions of psychoanalysis making this the most important theoretical paper of the early period. The term 'defense' appears in this paper for the first time as does the notion of a 'sum of excitation' (soon to be called 'cathexis'), and the early formulation of what would become the 'pleasure principle'.

Placing this paper within the wider context of Freud's thinking during these years is important. The paper was finished in January, 1894, which places it a year after the publication of the joint *Preliminary Communication* and eighteen months before Freud's first attempt at a systematic presentation of his views on Psychology as a science. That work, *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), proved overly ambitious and was left unfinished and unpublished by Freud. This remained the case until 1950 (eleven years after Freud's death) when the work was finally published. The *Project* was written between the two papers on the Neuro-Psychoses. It will not be dealt with in its own right in this presentation of Freud's early thought as it requires some background knowledge of neuropsychology and also because much of its content was abandoned by its author as the transition from neurology to psychology became complete. However, before moving on it will be helpful to briefly assess the impact the *Project* had on other writings of the time.

Freud was still actively involved in neurological publications up until 1899, not the least of which was a sizable contribution to Nothnagel's great encyclopedia of medicine where he consolidated much of his recent work on Cerebral Palsies in children. The *Project* was an attempt to integrate this neurological expertise into the explanation of the emerging psychological phenomena. As a result, many of the concepts employed in the psychological works of the time are charged with neurological assumptions. James Strachey outlines the *Project's* definitive contribution in an editor's appendix in Vol.3 of his Standard Edition of Freud's works.

In his 'Project' two basic assumptions were laid down. The first was the validity of the recent histological discovery that the nervous system consisted of chains of neurones, the second was the idea that excitation of the neurones was to be regarded as 'a quantity, subject to the general laws of motion'. By combining these two assumptions' we arrive at the idea of a "cathected" neurone filled with a certain quantity, though at other times it may be empty (sic. S.E. Vol. 3:64).

It is easy to see that the notion of cathexis of the neuron found its way across to the psychological writings of the period. Freud seemed to be working on the assumption that psychological entities should be describable in neurological terms. This can be seen in the papers on hysteria. The attempt was soon abandoned. Freud's later writings show virtually no interest in the possibility of a neurological explanation of psychological events. In fact this abandonment was essential for the development of psychoanalysis proper. However, it is significant that the neurological underpinnings of the *Project* affected the choice and conceptualization of some very important terms developed in this period. This influence will be returned to in later evaluations of Freud's conceptualizations. The point being made here in it's

historical context we can now turn to the first paper on the *Neuro-Psychoses of Defense*.

Freud begins by developing the notion of “a splitting of consciousness, accompanied by the formation of separate psychical groups”, a conceptualization he had briefly introduced in the *Preliminary Communication*. Freud made a point of rejecting Janet’s theory (current at this time) which suggested that the split was due to some innate psychical weakness. Such a conclusion simply didn’t square with Freud’s clinical observations.

I was repeatedly able to show that the splitting of the content of consciousness is the result of an act of will on the part of the patient; that is to say, it is initiated by an effort of will whose motive can be specified. By this I do not, of course, mean that the patient intends to bring about a splitting of his consciousness. His intention is a different one; but, instead of attaining it’s aim, it produces a splitting of consciousness (vol. 3; 47).

Freud now associates this process with ‘defense’ for the first time. In discussing patients currently under analysis he noted that they had been enjoying good mental health up until an intolerable idea suddenly presented itself to their consciousness,

that is to say, until their ego was faced with an experience, an idea or a feeling which aroused such a distressing affect that the subject decided to forget about it because he had no confidence in his power to resolve the contradiction between that incompatible idea and his ego by means of thought-activity (1894, S.E. III;47).

This is the defensive nature of the ego at work.

Thus by 1894 we have an outline of Freud's first formulation of the defense mechanism, *repression*, which is sometimes retrospectively referred to as 'intentional' or 'motivated' forgetting'. The key question to be asked here is what does the term 'intentional' refer to? Does Freud provide a specific mechanism by which this impelled forgetting occurs? As the components are not gathered together by Freud and presented as a systematic outline in these two papers the specific elements of the mechanism are often overlooked. This has resulted in the truly comprehensive nature of this early theory being missed by many scholars. The fact is, a careful reading of the 1893-94 papers does allow one to identify the specific elements necessary for repression to occur. As it is usually this concept of motivated forgetting that is being used when attempts have been made to test the concept of repression empirically, it will be beneficial at this point to provide such a concise and systematic summary of the mechanism of repression as it appears in the writings of 1893 and 1894. The following points are apparent:

*1/ It is the conscious awareness of an 'intolerable idea' that caused a previously well person to show pathological symptoms.*

*2/ The thing which precipitates this symptom can be an event, idea or feeling.*

*3/ The precipitating event, idea, or feeling arouses an affect which is distressing and traumatic.*

4/ *In reviewing points one to three, Freud concludes that it was the distress caused by the affect which impelled the forgetting of the precipitating event.*

5/ *The connection between the precipitating event and the subsequent pathological phenomenon may be 'obvious' or 'symbolic'. Freud compared the latter to the relations healthy people form in dreams.*

6/ *The precipitating factor does not simply release the symptom and then fade away. "We must presume rather that the psychological traumas - or more precisely the memory of the trauma - acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work,..." (1893,S.E. II;6).*

7/ *It is the 'memory of the trauma', not the trauma itself that is active in the psyche, (Freud develops this latter as the 'ideational representative' ).*

8/ *The symptom would immediately and permanently disappear when one had "succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect,... Recollection without affect almost invariably produced no result" (1893, S.E. II;9).*

9/ *These memories which became the determinants of a hysterical phenomenon are not to be equated with 'the fading of memories' or*

*common forgetting, for even when one may think they have been forgotten, they actually "persist for a long time with astonishing freshness and with the whole of their affective coloring" (1893, S.E. II;9).*

*10/ The memories of the intolerable event, idea , or feeling "are completely absent from the patients memory when they are in a normal psychical state, or are only present in a highly summarized form" (1893, S.E. II;9).*

These then are the specific elements of repression which form the basis of the most fundamental of Freud's future theoretical notions. It should be realized that 'the unconscious' is not an independently described theory at this point. It's nature must largely be inferred from the writings that are developing the notion of repression as an explanation of hysterical phenomena. This is largely true of the early period of psychoanalysis. It will be the 1900's before Freud begins to describe the theoretical nature of the unconscious proper. Until then much can be gleaned from the closely related work on repression.

Throughout the remainder of the 1894 paper, Freud continues to develop the notion of repression, particularly as it relates to psychopathology. The first major development is the notion of separating the 'energy' belonging to the affect of an idea from the idea itself and putting it to use somewhere else. This is the best way for the ego (here = consciousness) to remove the threatening idea and its affect.



The task which the ego, in its defensive attitude, sets itself of treating the incompatible idea as '*non arrivee*' simply cannot be fulfilled by it. Both the memory-trace and the affect which is attached to the idea are there once and for all and cannot be eradicated. But it amounts to an approximate fulfillment of the task if the ego succeeds in *turning this powerful idea into a weak one*, in robbing it of the affect the sum of excitation - with which it is loaded,... *But the sum of the excitation which has been detached from it must be put to another use.* (1894, S.E. III;48-49).

This early notion of a 'sum of excitation' which would soon be termed cathexis, led to an immediate sophistication of the hypothesized psychogenic origin of hysteria and obsessions and these revisions would lead to the first major development of the concept of repression. Freud writes, "In hysteria, the incompatible idea is rendered innocuous by its *sum of excitation being transformed into something somatic*. For this I should like to propose the name of conversion" (1894, S.E. III;49). So the development of hysteria was now explained by "a psycho-physical aptitude for transposing very large sums of excitation into somatic innervation" (1894, S.E. III;50). If however, a person lacked such an aptitude for 'conversion', then when the affect is separated from the incompatible idea, "*its affect, which has become free, attaches itself to other ideas which are not in themselves incompatible, and thanks to this 'false connection' those ideas turn into obsessional ideas*" (1894, S.E. III;53).

Freud then addressed the question of what event(s) could cause an affect to be so distressing that it would give rise to a neurosis. His answer was as follows; "In all the cases I have analyzed it was the subject's *sexual life* that had given rise to the distressing affect, ..." (1894, S.E. III;52). This

point will be elaborated on in the second paper. For now Freud is content to make it clear that the process occurs without conscious control.

Between the patient's effort of will, which succeeds in repressing the unacceptable sexual idea, and the emergence of the obsessional idea, ..yawns the gap which the theory here developed seeks to fill. The separation of the sexual idea from its affect and the attachment of the latter to another, suitable but not incompatible idea - these are processes which occur without consciousness (S.E. vol. 3;53).

Here the dynamic and essential inter-relationship between the unconscious and the mechanism of repression are evident. One cannot operate, and indeed makes no sense without the other.

In the follow-up paper *Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of the Defense* (1896), Freud elaborates on the nature of the sexual causality of hysteria and obsessional neurosis. He begins by pointing out that the sexual trauma is a childhood occurrence which has effect in adulthood. "These sexual traumas must have occurred in early childhood [before eight to ten years of age], and their content must consist of an actual irritation of the genitals" (S.E. v.3; 166). It now becomes easier to see why it is the 'idea' of the sexual trauma which is the most crucial factor.

... if the sexual experience occurs during the period of sexual immaturity and the memory of it is aroused during or after maturity, then the memory will have a far stronger excitatory effect than the experience did..., An inverted relation of this sort between real experience and memory seems to contain the psychological precondition for the occurrence of a repression. (S.E. V.3; 167n).

Freud now ties differences in the circumstances of childhood sexuality to differences in the aetiological circumstances of hysteria and obsessional neurosis. He hypothesized that if the child was the passive

participant (i.e. sexually seduced by an adult or another child), then hysteria would result. According to Freud this is why hysteria is far more common among females. However, if the child was the active participant (i.e. the initiator or seducer), then obsessional neurosis would be more likely to result. Thus, the "fact that obsessional neurosis shows a visible preference for the male sex".

It is important to realize that while at this stage Freud is treating these sexual traumas as actual events, he would come to reject this idea. In a footnote, added to the discussion outlined above in a 1924 review, Freud acknowledges:

This section is dominated by an error which I have since repeatedly acknowledged and corrected. At that time I was not yet able to distinguish between my patients phantasies about their childhood years and their real recollections. As a result I attributed to the aetiological factor of seduction a significance and universality it did not possess. (S.E. V.3; 168n).

The significance of this correction can hardly be over estimated. The realization that *phantasy* played a crucial if not dominant role in mental life would become the necessary foundation for all the mature forms of psychoanalytic theory. Furthermore, it would revolutionize this literal conception of childhood sexual trauma into the greatly refined theories of infantile sexuality and the Oedipal complex. This clarification should be kept in mind when discussing the aetiology of the neuroses and the role of sexuality in childhood.

A further development at this point was the introduction of the concept of the 'return of the repressed' which grew out of Freud's analysis of

the nature and mechanisms of obsessional neurosis (1896). Freud presented the idea in a simple formula: "*Obsessional ideas* are invariably transformed *self-reproaches* which have *re-emerged* from *repression* and which always relate to some *sexual* act that was performed with pleasure in *childhood*" (1896, S.E. III;169). In the first instance, a child is involved in the seduction of another child. This provides the 'germ' of neurosis that will make repression possible. This period ends at the onset of sexual maturity, marking the beginning of the second period. "A self reproach now becomes attached to the memory of these pleasurable actions" and is replaced by primary symptoms of defense such as shame and distrust. The third period is one of apparent health, which lasts while the defense is successful resulting in the memories of the first two periods remaining repressed from conscious psychic functioning. "The next period, that of the illness, is characterized by the *return of the repressed memories* - that is, therefore, by the failure of the defense" [viz. repression] (1896, S.E. III; 169). As a result, obsessional ideas are produced which were defined as "transformed self-reproaches which have re-emerged from repression".

What are these 'transformed self-reproaches'? As far as conscious life is concerned they are a compromise between the repressed ideas and the repressing ones. Thus, these compromised ideas are related to both and the psychoanalyst will use them to point back to the traumatic event, as well as to confirm the source of the current repressing energy. While the formulation of re-emerging repressed content at this stage only referred to obsessions, by 1900 Freud had revised his theory of the nature and mechanisms of hysterical symptom formation to include the notion of a 'return of the repressed'.

The years 1896 and 1898 saw the appearance of two further papers on the aetiology of the neuroses. It is fair to say that these papers essentially contain nothing new but clarify and expand what had been laid down in the *Preliminary Communication* and the two papers on *Neuro-Psychoses*.

The first of these papers, *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896) is mostly a re-statement of the theoretical section of the second paper on the Neuro-Psychoses. The sexual experiences of childhood are given a more detailed treatment although still with the fundamental error of literalness which as we have already noted. Sexual experiences were confirmed as being initiated by adults. Strachey, in his editorial note points out that this paper in particular displays an "increasing tendency to prefer psychological to neurological explanations" (S.E. v.3; 190).

Two years later, after the completion of his promised contribution to Nothnagel's medical encyclopedia, a new paper emerged; *Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses* (1898). Again, the paper makes no significant deviations from what has been laid down already. This lack of new ideas is surprising in light of the fact that the previous summer (1897) marked the beginning of the all important occurrence of Freud's 'self-analysis'. As Jones points out "two important parts of Freud's researches are intimately connected with his self-analysis: The interpretation of dreams, and his growing appreciation of infantile sexuality" (1961:210). That the latter receives virtually no hint in this paper is an interesting omission. Perhaps Freud's self-analysis was still too new and immature to have solidified into ideas that could be articulated at this point. More likely, Freud realized that

the new ideas which self-analysis produced would require a significant maturing of the whole system as it currently stood. This would not be realized until 1900 and so it would have been difficult to introduce his new thoughts on infantile sexuality without this base.

The same year also saw the publication of *The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness* (1898). This paper is significant because it marks the beginning of a transference of Freud's theory of 'intentional forgetting' from the realm of the abnormal to the realm of the everyday. It also marks the beginning of Freud's notions of the unconscious and repression being seen as fundamental mechanisms at work in all people (healthy and neurotic) and in all situations (traumatic and mundane). Along with *Screen Memories* (1899), it also gives the first clear expression of the results of Freud's self-analysis. These two papers on memory and forgetting are not landmarks in themselves, but they point clearly to the future direction that psychoanalysis would take. They lay the foundation for the articulation of the new theory of childhood sexuality by dealing with the related issue of memory failure and in particular the notion of amnesia in early childhood.

*The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness* (1898) is essentially a recollection of a self analysis Freud conducted on his own inability to recall a familiar name. In so doing he takes the first steps toward uncovering the world of repression and the unconscious which underlie those seemingly innocent 'slip of the tongue' experiences. The theoretical side of this phenomenon would be given detailed treatment in the book on parapraxes (1901).

*Screen memories* (1899) was the final paper of the decade. It again introduced some of the concepts that would become central to the next stage in the development of Freud's thought. This will be found to be especially so with regard to childhood amnesia and infantile sexuality.

Freud begins with the observation that the criteria for retaining something in memory is the psychological significance of the experience. This is so from the time memory forms a more or less constant chain of events from middle childhood (7-10 years). "Whatever seems important on account of its immediate or directly subsequent effects is recollected; whatever is judged to be inessential is forgotten" (vol.3;303). Now, this is an obvious truism that can be validated by reflection on one's own experiences. We all retain in memory what is intrinsically or extrinsically significant, but tend to quickly forget the uneventful, the boring, the insipid. However, there is one great contradiction to all of this, which as Freud points out, lie in the "relatively small number of isolated recollections which are often of dubious or enigmatic importance" and which characterize the memories of early childhood. He was fascinated by the paradox of memory that early childhood manifests, that is, important things are not retained (infantile amnesia), but seemingly insignificant events are. Laplanche and Pontalis summarize the concept this way:

Phenomenologically, certain of these memories present themselves with an exceptional clarity and persistence that contrasts strikingly with the banality and innocence of their content - the subject himself is surprised that they should have survived... Such memories, in so far as they conceal repressed sexual experiences or phantasies, Freud called screen memories" (1988; 411).

The primary mechanism at work here is *displacement*. As before a traumatic event produces an affective memory, but unlike repression in which the content of the memory is banished to the unconscious, now the traumatic memory is replaced by, or substituted with another one. As Freud describes it,

The result of the conflict is therefore that, instead of the mnemonic image which would have been justified by the original event, another is produced which has to some degree associatively displaced the former one. And since the elements of the experience which aroused objection were precisely the important ones, the substituted memory will necessarily lack those important elements and will in consequence most probably strike us as trivial. (1899, vol.3).

Thus, the concept of a 'screen memory' entails one whose significance is not derived from its content, but from the relation that exists between this memory and some other, that is, the one from which the content was displaced and has since been suppressed.

Here we come to the end of our survey of the development of Freud's thought over the first decade of his work. We have concentrated on this first decade for several reasons. Firstly, it is here that the foundations are laid for all future psychoanalytic theorizing. Whilst many of the core concepts that have been introduced are reviewed, expanded, refined and systematized during the years ahead, the basic logical qualities of these concepts are most clearly formulated here.

Secondly, by concentrating on the first decade we get a clearer picture of the impact other scholars have had on the initial development of Freud's theories. Although psychoanalysis certainly finds its formal beginning with him, "it did not spring full grown from the brow of Freud"



(Thompson, 1955). Psychoanalysis as a theory was impacted by the thinking of the scientific community of Freud's day. The influence of many great thinkers including Meynert, Charcot, Bernheim, Fleiss, and Joseph Breuer have been noted.

Finally, as will be seen in chapter 4, it is the theoretical formulations of this period which are most closely related to the paradigms that have been constructed by the empiricist who have tried to test Freud's theories in the laboratory. Thus, it is imperative to be familiar with these earlier notions if one is to assess adequately such empirical endeavors. With this background in place, I shall now turn to Freud's more mature theorizing. In so doing the discussion will be narrowed to deal only with the dynamic unconscious and its main mechanism of repression. The goal is to trace the development of Freud's understanding of the unconscious mind from this first decade through to his most mature statements.

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## Chapter Three

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**CHAPTER THREE:****THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE  
UNCONSCIOUS IN FREUD.**

As was noted in the introduction, the psychology of Freud's time was almost exclusively interested in conscious content. The experimental philosophers who followed in the tradition of Wundt were only concerned with the controlled scientific study of the totality of conscious experience at a given time. Freud did not deny the reality of such conscious experience but he assigned it much less importance. What Freud discovered in the realm of unconscious mental life made conscious experience seem like a periphery. Because consciousness has the property of awareness (by definition) it seems to be of greatest importance, but Freud was to show that it is precisely the mental apparatus of which we are not aware upon which the majority of psychic life is dependent.

The first comprehensive development of the notion of the dynamic unconscious came in the landmark publication *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). In this two volume work Freud begins to systematize his earlier notions into a *topography* of the mind which made distinctions between three levels of consciousness; *the unconscious* (ucs.), which consists of all aspects of psychic functioning of which we are not aware, *the preconscious* (pcs.), which consists of those elements of mental life which are not in immediate awareness, but which are *accessible*, and finally *the conscious* (cs.), consisting of the content of immediate awareness.

Freud initially seems to present these categories as separate entities, but by the time he reaches the more theoretical discussion of the seventh chapter he dispels such a myth by insisting that these states of consciousness are more like points on a continuum varying from complete awareness at one end to the hidden drives, instincts, and motives of personality at the other. It is at this point that we experience the central tension that this thesis will address; just what is the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mental content? Freud's discussion in this chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* has often been used by theorists to argue that Freud did not draw a solid line between the conscious and the unconscious systems. Typically they refer to a *transparent* and *unitary* consciousness. By transparent, it is meant that the content of one system is not completely blocked from another and by unitary, it is meant that the two systems are different emphases of one whole, not two separate entities. It is essential to clear up Freud's position on this issue.

Freud has certainly made misinterpretation of his position easy due to his awkward explanations which if taken out of context could be taken as proof for either side of the argument. For example, in the seventh chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* he states:

It will be seen on closer consideration that what the psychological discussion in the preceding sections invites us to assume is not the existence of two *systems* near the motor end of the apparatus but the existence of two kinds of *processes of excitation or modes of its discharge*.... Nevertheless, I consider it expedient and justifiable to continue to make use of the figurative image of the two systems. We can avoid any possible abuse of this method of representation by recollecting that ideas, thoughts and psychical structures in general must never be regarded as localized in organic elements of the nervous system but rather, as one might say, *between* them, where resistance's and facilitation's provide the corresponding correlates (1900: 610-11).

All Freud is saying here is that he does not intend for us to conceive of the conscious and unconscious system as two separate localized organic entities. They are not localized in an organic structure. However, this does not mean that he is suggesting that the two systems are transparent in terms of *content*. Although they have a shared source of psychical energy they employ and discharge this quite independently. They are of like kind, but have different functions and contents.

This chapter in his book places the unconscious system (consisting of the unconscious and pre-conscious) as the foundation of mental life. The conscious is a primary source of data, but it has so many gaps in it that it can never give us an accurate picture of reality. In effect, the conscious is just a sense organ for the perception of psychical qualities and as a result the unconscious must be assumed to be the basis of psychical life.

The unconscious is the larger sphere, which includes within it the smaller sphere of the conscious. Everything conscious has an unconscious preliminary stage; whereas what is unconscious may remain at that stage and nevertheless claim to be regarded as having the full value of a psychical process. The unconscious is the true psychical reality; *in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us [the conscious] as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communication of our sense organs*(1900:612-13).

Freud was evidently not a naive realist.

In explaining the dynamics of this system Freud expanded the notions of psychic energy and cathexis which he had introduced in 1894. Of central importance was the concept of the *pleasure principle* which proposed that all of psychical activity is aimed at producing pleasure and avoiding unpleasure. The unconscious system is characterized by this principle.

Thus, by 1900 we have Freud's first full topography of the mind in which nonconscious processes [*preconscious* and *unconscious*] dominate. This initial topography is often referred to as the tripartite model in order to distinguish it from a revised topography which Freud presents in 1923. Whilst it is possible for preconscious content to move back and forth between conscious and the unconscious, the content of the unconscious can "have no such easy access to consciousness". This content was, in fact, actively kept out of consciousness and as a result was given the name of *unconscious proper*.

It must be realized that as a neurobiologist and a confirmed behaviorist Freud was of the opinion that all behavior was caused. He had concluded that the tradition of studying the content of immediate awareness proved to be too fragmentary to be a reliable casual basis of behavior and so turned to the unconscious proper for the causal explanations behind human behavior. The bulk of *The interpretation of Dreams* and all of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), is a fascinating analysis of such unconscious causal chains. Freud demonstrated that such disparate phenomena as 'slips of the tongue', forgotten names, *faux pas*, dreams, bungled jokes, etc., were not chances accidents at all, but rather were behaviors which were completely consistent with the underlying causal motivation of the unconscious personality.

This is the era in which unconsciously motivated behavior becomes an obsession for Freud. Every patient became another piece of clinical evidence which confirmed his conviction that all behavior, no matter how seemingly trivial, was at least in part unconsciously motivated. The actual mechanism by which something unconscious motivates behavior receives its clearest exposition in the year of 1915, during which Freud publishes a series of metaphysical papers that deal with the relationships between the components of the tripartite system. Of particular relevance are *The Unconscious* (1915), and *Repression* (1915). The paper dealing with the unconscious contains few new developments and is just a synthesis of much that was presented in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Therefore, in order more clearly to see the mechanisms which Freud envisaged were at work with UMB's we shall look briefly at the paper on repression.

From a theoretical point of view this paper, like *The Unconscious* does not contain very much 'new' information. By the time Freud had written *Repression* nearly all of the ideas had been presented somewhere before, but they were scattered in published works from 1893–1911. This was readily admitted by Freud who refers to the paper as "a purely descriptive account of repression based on clinical observation, ... even though we run the risk of having to repeat unchanged much that has been said elsewhere" (1915:148). However, it is the fact that this is a 'descriptive account based on clinical evidence' that makes it a very useful practical companion to the theoretical papers on the unconscious.

From the outset, the 1915b paper has abandoned talk of 'memories' of traumatic events and now concentrates on 'instinctual impulses'. It is the *impulse* which is said to pass into a state of repression not just the memory. This is not a replacement of the mechanism which was outlined in the first decade but rather an expansion of it to cover instincts in general. The necessary condition for an instance of repression from the conscious to the unconscious, or (more commonly), *primal repression* in which an unconscious idea remains held in the unconscious (as when an ideational representative seeks to enter consciousness but is denied) is that the pleasure obtainable by an instincts satisfaction will be outweighed by the unpleasure caused by it in some other place or time (due to irreconcilable claims and intentions). But while this is now the case, the actual core of the concept of repression remains the same as it was in 1893, namely, its essence still lies in "turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (1915b: 147).



Another important qualification to the concept in this period is that it is no longer considered a mechanism present from the beginning of life, in fact, Freud now believes that "it cannot arise until a sharp cleavage has occurred between conscious and unconscious mental activity" (1915b: 147). Exactly what causes this cleavage, or at what time it occurs is not elaborated on in this paper. It is significant also that what has been referred to as 'fixation' is now modified into a stage where the ideational representative of an instinct is denied access into consciousness at the time of conception and as a result of this a fixation occurs.

In this paper Freud articulates what one may have expected from his work on parapraxes, forgetting, and jokes, that is, repression acts in a 'highly individual' and 'exceedingly mobile manner'. It is individual in that each single derivative of the repressed may have its own special vicissitude, and mobile in that "repression is not to be regarded as an event which takes place once, the results of which are permanent" (1915b:151). Constant energy is expended, the unconscious pushing towards consciousness, the conscious using counter pressure to balance it, being always on the look-out for newly formed and sent out derivatives.

Based on this modification a clear picture of the mechanism of repression in relation to UMB can be synthesized. Let us consider a case of primal repression. The unconscious is made up of many instinctual drives all of which adhere to the pleasure principle and seek to make their way into consciousness where they have a chance for gratification. The conscious, however, will not admit unconscious content and as a result unconscious drives and impulses are kept in their hidden dungeon. In an effort to gain

entrance into the conscious the unconscious instinct will send out an ideational representative which is sufficiently far removed from the unconscious content that it will gain entrance into consciousness, perhaps as a 'slip of the tongue', or as a dream, or as a phantasy. As the conscious has no awareness of unconscious mental content the causes of these behaviors will be unknown. They are, in fact, unconsciously motivated and without the help of psychoanalysis to trace back the causal link of the derivative to its unconscious source, the motivation of the behavior is never clearly understood. Based on this summary it is easy to see how Freud can conclude that practically all behavior is unconsciously motivated behavior at some level.

The final period of Freud's work with which we will be concerned will be that pertaining to the introduction of the second topography of the mind. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) the tripartite topography developed in 1900 is superseded by the dynamic topography of the *Id*, *Ego* and *Superego*. This change represents a move away from purely clinical description for which the tripartite model had been sufficient, to an analysis of the dynamic interrelationships of the various components of psychic functioning.

The dynamic topography sees psychic functioning as composed of three agencies: the *id*, which is the primitive reservoir of instinctual energy present from the time of birth. It is hedonistic, illogical, unorganized, timeless, and knows "no values, no good or evil, no morality". It is simply the instinctual pole of the personality which obeys only the *pleasure principle* and the *Nirvana principle* which simply means that it seeks to maximize affective pleasure, avoid affective displeasure and to do so at the lowest

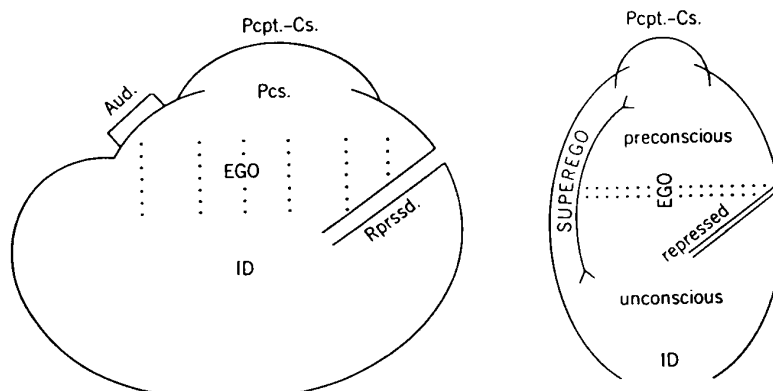
possible levels of excitation (energy use). Coffey & Appley (1984) provide a particularly good summary of *id* function.

The *primary process*, the means by which the id operates, consists in discharging instinctual energy as soon as possible [cathexis], and in disregard of reality. Ordinarily, such energy will be discharged, in the derivative forms of *impulses* or *wishes*, through any directly available motor channel. Thus reflexive bladder-emptying, spitting, blinking, and thrashing would be used as means of direct discharge. However, many wishes cannot be fulfilled so easily (as, for example, hunger, where ingestible food must be present in the mouth). In these cases, the primary process produces, from the memory system of the organism, a mental image of the desired object and, by cathecting it as if it were real, fulfills the wish...., It is unable to distinguish between image and reality (1964:608).

The *Ego* begins its development as the child begins to interact with the external environment. Like the id, it seeks to pursue pleasure and avoid unpleasure, but as it does so in deference to external reality, thus it is said to adhere to the *reality principle*. The Ego then must monitor the instinctual impulses of the id which have no concern for reality. Unrealistic instant gratification is replaced with realistic, often deferred gratification. Instinctual energy is discharged with realistic interaction with the environment, thus cathexis becomes harder to achieve. It is harder because the Ego must reduce the tension of the id by finding modes of releasing instinctual energy which are realistic. For this reason Freud referred to it as working by *secondary processes* in which continuous reality testing takes place between the memory images of previous satisfiers and those present in the environment. The ego is highly organized and able to liaise between the demands of external reality and the demands of the libidinal instincts of the id.

Finally, Freud postulated a *Superego* which is a kind of higher ego which has internalized the ethics and values of the child's culture as the ego developed by trial and error learning. In particular the superego reflects the standards and values of the parents incorporated into the personality of the individual. The superego was often equated with the *conscience* by Freud who saw it as a moral judge of the actions of the ego and ideas of the id. If the superego detects fault in the actions of the ego it produces guilt, if it detects validity it produces heightened self-esteem. As the ego strives to heighten pleasure (within the bounds of reality), the intense guilt produced by the super-ego is a very effective deterrent and stimulus to change a behavior which produces guilt and shame.

In terms of the interrelation of these agencies, Freud suggested that the id was entirely unconscious, having no access to the conscious except by way of modification by the ego. The ego and the superego, however, can be operative at all three levels of consciousness. The lines of demarcation between the id, ego, and superego are deliberately vague. Below is a reproduction of two figures Freud used to try to visualize the relationship. The first is taken from *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and the second from Freud's *New Introductory Lectures* (1933).



These figures highlight the interrelation of the three agencies. Just looking at the diagrams it is evident that communication can occur between the superego and ego, the ego and id. and the superego and the id. Furthermore, the communication between the ego and superego could occur at the conscious or preconscious levels.

The important point for our discussion is to realize that the id is the entirely unconscious repository of instincts and as such its content can never be present in consciousness except through a transformation of the ego or superego (into an ideational representative / derivative). Thus, the functional relationship of the content of the conscious and the unconscious remains the same as it was under the tripartite model. It is important not to equate 'ego' or 'superego' with consciousness. It is only the *content* of the ego or superego which determines its consciousness. Of course this raises an important difficulty for Freud, 'How can the ego know something which is both conscious, as an ideational derivative, and unconscious, as an instinct, at the same time?'. This is the issue of self-deception and as we shall see in the analysis which follows, this is the claim which ultimately makes Freud's notion of unconsciously motivated behaviors untenable.

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## Chapter Four

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**CHAPTER FOUR:**

**EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENTS OF FREUD'S  
THEORY**

Over the years, nearly every aspect of Freud's theorizing has been 'tested' in one way or another by empirical paradigms. In this section I shall confine discussion to the empirical treatments of repression. I do this for several reasons. Firstly, repression and the unconscious are inseparable from the standpoint of empirical verifiability. If one falls so does the other, if one is proven the other can ride on its proof. Secondly, of all the elements of Freud's theory, repression is the most widely tested and has thus yielded the largest and clearest body of empirical evidence. Repression is thus being dealt with as our window on the unconscious. As has been shown in earlier chapters, repression is the primary mechanism of the unconscious, it is

unconscious motivation 'at work' so to speak. As such it provides a more concrete testing point than the wider more abstract notion of the unconscious alone. This chapter will assess the empirical tests of repression as they seek to give 'objective evidence' for or against the validity of the notion.

Reviewing the history of empirical assessments of Freud's concept of repression brought David Holmes to the conclusion that "despite over sixty years of research involving numerous approaches by many thoughtful investigators, at the present time there is no controlled laboratory evidence supporting the concept of repression" (1990:96). This conclusion is correct. However it is my contention that the reason for this state of affairs is theoretical and not methodological as Holmes (1972,1974,1990) has claimed. I propose that it is the inadequate conceptualizations of the dynamic unconscious and repression inherent in these studies that have resulted in empirical paradigms which are testing something other than Freud's concepts. It will be suggested, therefore, that it is for theoretical reasons that all the empirical works reviewed should be rejected (although one can certainly find many methodological inadequacies in addition).

At the center of the theoretical objection to these empirical assessments is the question of whether the paradigms ever come close to a facsimile of the specific conditions Freud saw as necessary for repression to occur. However, we are then faced with the dilemma raised in previous chapters, namely that the concepts of the dynamic unconscious and repression and their specific antecedents changed significantly in Freud's theorizing from 1892-1939. As a result, when an attempt is made to replicate



Freud's concept, one must state clearly just what understanding they assign to it. It should be noted that this is not a problem for Freud, but rather for the experimenter. There is nothing 'wrong' or 'unscientific' about making modifications to a concept as one makes new and relevant observations, but it does require that any subsequent assessor be aware of the case. When a concept has several different emphases, it is the task of the experimenter to acknowledge this and clearly show which connotation of the concept is being tested. It is exactly at this most fundamental conceptual level, that of definition, that many empiricists display their inadequacy. For example, Davis (1987, 1990) reports seven experiments which could all be classified under the heading of 'repression as unconsciously motivated forgetting', a conceptualization, one will recall, which was developed by Freud in the writings of 1893 and 1894. Yet the only original work by Freud that Davis has cited, or seemingly read, is the 1915 revision paper *Repression*, and furthermore, this not until her experimental work was well under way as she herself admits:

I was not particularly familiar with Freud and indeed, did not read Freud's ([1915]/1957) seminal paper on repression until the completion of the first study here. (1990:338).

As a result Davis bases her conceptualization of repression on one sentence in the revision paper which states that "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (1915:147). Davis is not alone in this. The cited statement is without doubt the most often quoted definition of repression given in the introduction of all the empirical assessments of the concept. Perhaps this is because it is simple and general and therefore can encompass just about any formulation of repression and the unconscious that the experimenter has

chosen to adopt. This, however, is simply inappropriate. It is the job of the assessor to replicate the specifications set down by the theory not to stretch the theory to cover his or her own interpretation of it. Had Davis, or others, been referring to some 'general' or novel idea of repression the issue of definition would become relative and contextual. When, however, the concept 'repression' is associated with a particular person, in this case 'Sigmund Freud', then there can be no room for the assessors own interpretation of Freud's concept. Exactly what Freud meant when he used the term is all that is relevant.

Of course, there may be generally held neo-Freudian notions of repression which are more readily testable. I am not concerned with this possibility here. The point here made applies only to those empiricists who make a claim to actually be assessing *Freudian repression*. I think that chapter two has made it fairly clear that a set of necessary and sufficient criteria can be accurately distilled from Freud's writings as a basis for such testing, it is whether or not these conditions can be replicated in the laboratory which is the issue at stake.

The vast majority of the empirical assessments of Freud's concept are invoking an idea of repression akin to it's first formulation as *motivated forgetting*. This in itself is a questionable approach. As I have outlined, Freud's mature psychoanalytic theories of the 1930's saw the dynamic unconscious and repression as part of a tripartite topography of psyche functioning. To assess fairly a theory that has evolved, one must assess it in its most mature form. It is rather redundant to critique a theory in which the originator has already identified weakness and subsequently modified.

However, in this case some validity is maintained by the fact that the fundamental qualities of the dynamic unconscious and repression as given in the 1890's remain fairly consistent throughout Freud's work. The later modifications mainly relate to their specific workings and particularly their interrelations with other psychoanalytic entities (such as the Id, Ego and Superego).

Given that the assessment of repression in its earliest form of 'motivated forgetting' is potentially useful, it is still the case that very few assessors make any reference to Freud's own conceptualization of repression in this context. Most have chosen to start with the broad definition given in the revision paper and then proceed to test a notion of motivated forgetting that bears little or no relation to the one specified by Freud quite clearly in 1893-1894. This is inexcusable. The 1915 definition of repression only claims to give the *essence* of it. In no way was it intended to be a concise enough statement to be submitted to empirical testing. If empiricists wish to be fair to 'motivated forgetting' then they should begin with the specific criteria laid down by Freud in his early writings. If they do not do this they inevitably end up assessing a concept of their own making which is always an impostor forced to use the name of Freudian repression.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Freud's specifications for identifying repression as motivated / intentional forgetting were outlined in the papers, *On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena* (1893) and *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense* (1894). To highlight the conceptual inadequacies of current empirical paradigms, I briefly will re-state the

relevant points that should be accounted for in any experimental replication of motivated / intentional forgetting if it is to be true to Freud's formulations.

1. *Repression is preceded by an event, idea or feeling which is 'intolerable'.*
2. *Conscious awareness of the 'intolerable idea' produces a symptom.*
3. *The event, idea, or feeling produce an affect which is distressing and traumatic.*
4. *The distress of this intense affect necessitates forgetting the 'intolerable'.*
5. *The memory of the trauma remains active but not in awareness.*
6. *The symptom disappears when the memory of the event is recalled with its accompanying affect.*

While this is a greatly telescoped version of Freud's formulations at that time, it does provide the *minimum criteria* one would expect to be present in any study claiming to replicate Freud's notion of motivated forgetting. I am not suggesting that this is an easy task from an empirical point of view. Although these steps are clearly presented in Freud's writings I would not concur with Fisher and Greenberg (1979) when they claim that the phenomena dealt with by Freud are "not so much more complicated than those dealt with by other theorists" (1979:9). As we will now see, it is a matter

of great difficulty to replicate empirically even those few conditions I have outlined, in fact, at the present time, I would suggest it is not possible at all.

One of the 'classic' experimental paradigms for testing repression was developed by Zeller (1950), and has been since used with various modifications. It consists of having an experimental and control group learn a list of words and then asking them to recall the same a short time later. It is predicted that there will be no significant difference between the groups at this stage. The experimental group is then subjected to some *ego threat*<sup>1</sup> such as negative personality feedback or failure on some other task (while the controls are not). On a subsequent recall test of the original list, it is now usually found that the experimental group can recall fewer items, the assumption being that the negative affect aroused by the feedback generalizes to the memory task causing repression. Finally the experimental group is then debriefed, that is, the negative affect, 'anxiety', is lifted. Both groups are then re-tested for recall on the original list and found to be similar again, seemingly good evidence for both *repression* and the *return of the repressed*. This paradigm has been used with similar results by other experimenters (e.g. Flavell, 1955).

This experimental tradition has been rejected by Holmes (1972) as providing no acceptable evidence for repression; he offers convincing methodological objections, and produces viable counter explanations, such as *response competition*. However, if Holmes' aim was simply to show that these experiments are not acceptable as evidence for repression he could

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'ego threat' gives an initial impression that Zeller is testing Freud's theory in its mature topographical nature (the second tripartite model). I suggest that this is not the case. It seems clear that Zeller's paradigm is really testing something akin to Freud's earliest presentation of repression as 'motivated forgetting'.

have saved himself the trouble of detailed methodological objections by noting that this experimental paradigm does not replicate Freud's basic conditions at a *conceptual level*.

In Freud's formulation, the distressing affect (in this case anxiety) is the direct result of conscious awareness of an intolerable idea which has its basis in a specific event. There is no relationship between this and Zeller's model. Firstly, in Zeller's model there is no intolerable idea, event, or feeling, which precedes repression. The list of words that are learnt are neutral and therefore would not be expected to cause repression, and nothing ever happens to change this. The anxiety caused by a separate situation (e.g. negative personality feedback) would not be expected to cause repression of a thematically unrelated task (the word list) simply because the two occurred around the same time. This seems more like a classical conditioning paradigm than repression. Motivated forgetting in one place is not the result of some generalized free floating anxiety that comes from another. Its motivation is specific; an event which is *intolerable* produces an idea or memory of it which is also intolerable when consciously encountered and it is such an encounter which leads to the distress. Therefore, if anything in this experimental paradigm were to be repressed, it should be the memory of the failure or the 'negative feedback' not the items on the neutral word list. Furthermore, even if this flaw were overlooked, it is highly unlikely that the 'trauma' of failing a task in a university experiment, or of getting some negative personality feedback from an experiment, is in any way able to be equated with the *trauma* that is necessary to produce an *intolerable idea* and thus force the dynamic elements of Freud's theory into action.

Secondly, Zeller's conceptualization of *the return of the repressed* also bears no relation to Freud's concept. Zeller observed that the decrease in recall of the original word list after the anxiety was introduced actually returned to pre-anxiety levels when the anxiety was removed. The fact that subjects could recall more items when anxiety was removed was claimed to be evidence for a 'return of the repressed'. However, in Freud's writing a *return of the repressed* never referred to the point when a person became consciously aware of previously repressed material as a result of a reduction in anxiety. When traumatic ideational representatives were repressed, Freud always pointed out that they were not lost but remained active, pushing towards consciousness. However, they cannot return to consciousness due to counter pressure, so secondary formations are used, derivatives of the unconscious instinct, which can emerge into consciousness only because they are primarily unrecognizable. Clearly this bears no relation to Zeller's observed improvement in recall after his subjects had their anxiety relieved. Paradigms like Zeller's reduce Freud's dynamic model of motivated forgetting of traumatic ideas, events, or feelings, to simple *recall differences* on a list of neutral words under Low versus High anxiety conditions. The two bear little conceptual relation.

This tendency to overlook the fact that it is a matter of great difficulty to produce an experimental paradigm which is true to Freud's notions did not stop with Zeller. Holmes (1974,1990) and Bower (1990) review a wide variety of approaches to the experimental study of repression. They include studies on the differential recall of pleasant and unpleasant experiences, completed and uncompleted tasks, and stressful and non-stressful environments. The reviewers spend a lot of time criticizing these

approaches methodologically but never acknowledge that they do not meet the basic requirements for repression at a conceptual level.

In a review of studies on the differential recall of material that is associated with ego threat as compared with that which is not, Holmes (1974) begins the paper with "four generally agreed upon aspects of the hypothesized nature of repression" and states that these should constitute a "minimal frame of reference in which to work" (1974:632). These aspects are:

1. *Repression is specifically designed, motivated selective forgetting.*
2. *Repression is not under conscious control.*
3. *Repressed material is not lost but 'stored in the unconscious.*
4. *Repression can be divided into primal repression and repression proper.*

These minimum criteria for repression are in agreement with Freud's own specifications and admirably representative of his thinking. They are, in fact, the kind of representations of Freud's position, which I have been arguing should be forming the basis of empirical projects. However, Holmes subsequent review of a range of empirical studies, both for and against repression, and the thoughtful methodological criticisms of these are meaningless. None of them has been able to account for his own criteria that repression be unconscious. As Erdelyi and Goldberg (1974) point out,

it would have sufficed to spell out his four minimal criteria and to point out, quite correctly, that no experiments exist (and we would



add, could exist) that simultaneously satisfied his fourfold conceptualization. (1979:360).

As none of the experiments cited by Holmes meets his criteria that repression is not under conscious control, he should have dismissed them on theoretical grounds. However, even when the failure to do this is forgiven, every one of these approaches to the assessment of repression suffers from the same problem as Zeller (1950), namely a lack of understanding, and thus an inability to recreate Freud's conditions for repression to occur.

Bower (1990) refers to married couples learning to avoid topics of conversation (such as financial difficulty) which would disrupt current happiness, as a type of repression. He even states that when he himself thinks of such a topic, he consciously stops himself and thinks of a pleasant activity. However, in Freud's formulation of repression as 'motivated forgetting', the forgetting is not a conscious casual act. It is impelled by the deep trauma caused by a thought or event in order to protect the psyche, that is, it is an *unconsciously motivated behavior*. Further, conscious avoidance of unpleasant topics of conversation has nothing to do with repression. Nothing in Bower's example is actually repressed, but only *avoided*. Later in the same paper Bower suggests that self questioning (e.g. where did I leave my car keys?) produces a cycle of ;

retrieving the next thought in a sequence as the current idea or image in working memory triggers the next associated idea to which it is linked (1990:221).

The suggestion is that this is equivalent to Freud's technique of *free association*. Again, this is an all too common example of the complete lack of understanding of the fundamental elements of Freud's theory that is prevalent in empirical assessments. The chain of thought set in motion by

tracing the location of one's keys is not thematically 'free'. Free association was "the method according to which voice must be given to all thoughts which enter the mind" (Laplanche & Pontalis , 1988,169). Searching for the location of a specific object is a deliberate and thematically determined process.

Finally, primal repression has received much attention in the past decade, being empirically tested by the paradigm of 'perceptual defense' which is considered analogous to it (Erdelyi & Goldberg, 1979,1990; Holmes, 1990; Kihlstrom & Hoyt, 1990; Sackeim & Gur, 1972). In a typical perceptual defense paradigm, stressful (usually 'dirty') and non-stressful words are flashed on a screen for a very short period of time. The latency of subject's responses (reading the word aloud) is measured as an indication of primal repression (defending against the traumatic words by 'not seeing them'). This paradigm is again conceptually inadequate. It is presented by cognitive and learning theorists many of whom see consciousness as *unitary*, thus creating a conceptual impossibility in speaking of perceptual defense because it entails the logical paradox of claiming that an individual may perceive and not perceive at the same time. This is not a problem for Freud who presented a *non-unitary* conceptualization of consciousness.

The purpose of this chapter has not been to highlight the empirical strength or weakness of various 'scientific' claims about repression, but to show that conceptual inadequacies in the empirical paradigms mean that they should be rejected as assessments of the usefulness of Freud's theory. They are undoubtedly very useful pieces of research on differential recall phenomena but they tell us nothing about repression. The empiricists seem

to be unaware of the fact that to replicate Freud's notion of repression they must begin with a consciousness which is non-unitary, that is, one in which the unconscious is assumed to be functionally autonomous from the conscious. The few researchers who have realized this (such as Holmes) and included it in the necessary and sufficient criteria for repression, have not been able to produce a paradigm that can account for it.

Finally, Holmes claim that 'repression' should be subject to a 'truth in packaging' law because it has no 'proof' may not be entirely reasonable. What eventually leads to the acceptance or rejection of a theory of human behavior? The answer is debated, but I would suggest that its *perceived usefulness*, that is, its ability to explain the observed behaviors, to stimulate thoughtful research, and to remain free from invalidating conceptual criticisms, must be included. Freud's theory has certainly stimulated volumes of research, some claiming to validate and others negate certain aspects of it. Furthermore, it has remained remarkably rigorous in resisting purely conceptual criticisms. So the issue at hand is whether or not it actually 'explains the observed behaviors'. To my mind this must necessitate the issue of *truth*. The ultimate question is whether or not Freud's theories are *true explanations of reality*. I do not concur with Edelson's conclusion that:

Such properties as truth and falsity are not properties of a conceptual analysis, or of decisions about what domain to study, or what concepts to use in studying it. (Edelson, 1988: xix).

The point of this chapter is that the conclusion regarding the 'truth' or 'falsity' of Freud's theories has been little helped by the empiricism applied to date. In the absence of any widely acceptable falsifying empirical evidence one could not be said to hold a 'false belief' if one accepts a

psychoanalytic explanation of behavior unless it can be shown that the theory is not, in fact, an *true explanation* of what one observes to take place *in reality*. Then, regardless of how theoretically rigorous or stimulating it may appear it is not an acceptable explanation of the observed phenomenon. In the following chapter we shall assess whether psychoanalysis is indeed a true theoretical explanation of observed human behaviors.

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## Chapter Five

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**CHAPTER FIVE:****THEORETICAL ASSESSMENTS OF  
FREUD'S THEORY.**

The preceding chapter has highlighted the failure of the empirical tradition to produce a statement of the necessary and sufficient criteria for an instance of Freudian repression to occur and therefore, to produce an empirical paradigm that could test it. As a result it is very difficult to determine to what extent any of their reported results should bear on the ontological status of the concept. It is the contention of this thesis that the most fruitful way to assess the status of Freud's concept of unconsciously motivated behavior is to subject it to a theoretical analysis, testing it for serious logical flaws, contradictions and conceptual confusion's and finally for moral and theological adequacy. The notion proposed by Holmes

(1972,1974,1990) and others, that the usefulness' of repression and indeed of psychoanalysis is general, must be determined solely on the basis of empirical support is rejected. If the theory is shown to be conceptually rigorous then it is the task of empiricists to produce an acceptable experimental paradigm to test it. If it is not, then the theory is of little value at its most fundamental level - that of conceptual validity and as such should be rejected on that basis alone.

In order to make some assessment of the notion of UMB's, this chapter will deal with several of the main logical objections to Freud's theory found in the scholarship of the last few decades. The principle objections raised in this process will then become the basis of the discussion of the final chapter which attempts to apply the logical implications of these problems to 'Christian psychologies' which rely heavily on Freudian concepts and categories.

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## ***The Logical Paradox***

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A commonly stated problem for psychoanalysis and in particular the theory of repression as a mechanism of unconsciously motivated behavior is that referred to as the *logical paradox* (Erdelyi and Goldberg, 1979; Pears, 1974; Sackeim and Gur, 1979; Sartre, 1973). This paradox is allegedly the most serious flaw in Freud's theory.

The basis of the paradox is the assumption that repression can be taken as a special case of the wider notion of *mauvaise foi* (bad faith), or *self-*

*deception*, and as such is subject to the logical flaw outlined by Sartre (1973):

The one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as the deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet, I must know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it more carefully - and this not at two different moments, which at a pinch would allow us to re-establish a semblance of duality - but in the unitary structure of a single project (1973:129).

For Sartre, consciousness and being are a unitary phenomena. He uses the idea of *being-in-itself* to denote the realization that something is there. It is a pre-reflective awareness which is simply there and from which awareness or consciousness and a 'sense of being' arises. Consciousness and being are the two qualities of human existence that arise from being-in-itself, how they arise is a metaphysical question and, therefore, irrelevant to Sartre. As one ponders this consciousness an awareness of the self develops which Sartre called the second consciousness of *being-for-itself*. Here the emphasis is on humankind's unique ability to reflect on its own consciousness. Finally, *being-for-others* is the element of consciousness which shares in the *being-in-itself* of other people. I include this brief overview of Sartre's notion of consciousness to stress its unitary nature. It is remarkable in that it avoids the classical Cartesian dualism between mind and body by seeing consciousness and being as two transcendents of the one construct, viz., being-in-itself.

Thus, for Sartre, people are only the sum of their actions and purposes and these are not determined, but the result of free conscious



choices. As a result, Sartre views the determinism of Freud's unconsciously motivated behaviors as an example of *mauvaise foi* (bad faith). The breaking down of the human psyche into structural components with functional autonomy is unacceptable. Sartre, of course, is approaching the issue of consciousness from a different epistemological base from Freud. He is a phenomenologist and Freud a biological determinist. This is the point of an insightful paper by Richard Chessick.

Sartre and the phenomenologists insist on preserving the unity of the psyche at all costs and object to compartmentalization of the psyche in the fashion of Plato and later of Freud into any "realms" or "structures" regardless of theory. This is a fundamental epistemological difference which Sartre insists on again and again,...(Chessick,1984:232).

The important point for this discussion is that Sartre's epistemology, regardless of whether one accepts it as an epistemological starting point or not, does point to a serious logical flaw in Freud's system and this logical flaw, or paradox, can stand on its own as we shall now see.

When one considers a case of *other-deception* (lying to non-self), no logical paradox is involved. For example,<sup>2</sup> if John lies to Fred, John makes Fred hold a belief, **X**. John does not believe **X**, on the contrary, John believes **non-X**, and furthermore, Fred will not be aware that John believes **non-X**. There is no logical problem with these two individuals holding contrary view points, even when one party (John) is aware that the other's view is a lie. However, if we now transfer this model of *other-deception* to a situation of *self-deception* so that the deceiver and the deceived are one and the same person, then a new factor arises, namely, the one individual now holds two

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<sup>2</sup> Example adapted from Sackeim and Gur, 1977.

contradictory beliefs *at the same time*. This is the logical paradox inherent in the notion of self-deception.

There are two possible courses of action which one can take at this point to overcome the logical paradox. Firstly, one could reject the parallel between a case of self-deception and other-deception. This in turn requires that an alternative explanation of self-deception be provided which can be shown to differ significantly from other deception and yet still maintain the integrity of the concept. This has proven an illusive task. Alternatively, one can point out that the validity of Sartre's argument rests solely on the premise that consciousness is a "unitary structure of a single project". The logical paradox only carries weight if consciousness is *unitary* and *transparent*. If it is a unitary entity, aware of all the beliefs it holds (i.e., transparency), consciousness cannot logically hold **X** and **non-X** at the same point of time (a requirement of repression). However, "when it is not claimed that consciousness is necessarily unitary and transparent, it may be possible to maintain the assimilation and yet avoid contradiction" (Sackeim and Gur 1977:146).

When consciousness is referred to as *unitary* it is meant that it is not divided into separate, localized, functional systems which are autonomous in operation and control. A unitary view of the mind sees it as one functional unit regardless of organization. When consciousness is referred to as *transparent* it is meant that the contents of consciousness are capable of reaching awareness and as a result they are not hidden or unintelligible to other agencies within that consciousness. Some philosophers and psychologists such as Descartes and Wundt held that

consciousness was both unitary and transparent (Leahey, 1987). But there is a long tradition starting with Plato which asserted that if people are capable of lying to themselves by holding contradictory beliefs, then consciousness must necessarily be nonunitary and nontransparent. Sackeim & Gur (1977) sums up Freud's place in this discussion well:

Freud's most radical claim and perhaps his most important contribution to psychology is the idea that not only is consciousness nonunitary and nontransparent but also that, at times, selective awareness and nonawareness of the content of consciousness are, in part, motivated (1977:141).

Sartre seems to have a fallacious understanding of the conscious / unconscious distinction in Freudian psychoanalysis. He sees Freud's notions of conscious and unconscious as opposite poles of one rod, which are separated by "a censor, conceived as a line of demarcation with customs, passport division, currency control, etc., [and this establishes] the duality of the deceiver and the deceived" (Sartre, 1973:129). The censor is the dividing line in an otherwise unitary thing. However, one can argue that this is not the understanding attributed to consciousness by Freud, who along with a tradition of thinkers beginning with Plato, proposed that consciousness was nonunitary and nontransparent (Brown, 1990). Sackeim and Gur (1977) have shown that if it is assumed that consciousness is nonunitary, then *self-deception* becomes a duplicate of *other-deception* and therefore produces no logical paradox. If Freud's conscious / unconscious distinction is nonunitary, then two autonomous systems can each hold separate and contradictory beliefs without being logically problematic. Furthermore, as the notion of nonunitary consciousness means that one

system is autonomous from the other, then by definition it also implies non-transparency (the self-deceived who expresses belief **X** is not aware that **not-X** is also believed).

It is my contention, however, that Freud conceptualized a nontransparent conscious / unconscious division (which by parsimony also implies a non-unitary view) only in theory. In practice Freud's nonunitary consciousness is impossible to maintain. As such, the criticism that Freud's notion of UMB should be rejected because of its inherent logical paradox is invalid theoretically, but perhaps necessary in practice.

Sackeim and Gur (1977) provide four criteria for a case of *self-deception*.

1. *The individual holds two contradictory beliefs (**p** and **not-p**).*
2. *These two contradictory beliefs are held simultaneously.*
3. *The individual is not aware of holding one of the beliefs (**p** or **not-p**).*
4. *The act that determines which belief is and which belief is not subject to awareness is a motivated act.*

These four necessary and sufficient criteria for a case of self-deception also come very close to describing Freud's special case of 'repression'. In fact, if we were to add the following criterion we could say that these five make up the necessary and sufficient criteria for an instance of repression.

5. *The belief which is not subject to awareness is stored in the unconscious.*<sup>3</sup>

The fifth point is crucial because Freud saw the unconscious not as a 'second conscious', but as a functionally independent control system with its own contents, mechanisms and energy. That is not to say that the conscious and unconscious systems were so autonomous as to lead separate lives. Happenings in one may have casual efficacy for happenings in the other, *but their contents and accessibility are distinct*. By definition, contents in the unconscious can effect behavior but they will not be known by the conscious system. As Freud states, "to require that whatever goes on in the mind must also be known to consciousness is to make an untenable claim" (1915c,144). It is untenable in the face of his clinical data which suggested that non-conscious mental contents (i.e., 'ideas') do produce changes in behavior (such as symptoms) which can be a form of unconsciously motivated behavior. Furthermore, the contents of the unconscious only become accessible to the conscious when strong sources of resistance have been removed.

Freud defined 'conscious' very simply in *A Note on the Unconscious in Psycho - Analysis* (1912),

...let us call 'conscious' the conception which is present to our consciousness and of which we are aware, and let this be the only meaning of the term 'conscious' (1912:135).

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<sup>3</sup> The question could be raised as to the real difference between this criterion and that of number 3. Here it is important to realize that there are alternate explanations for what happens to data which is not in 'awareness'. For example, some theorists would suggest that an idea not in awareness simply dissipates in to the neural network and ceases to exist as an idea until recall necessitates its reconstruction (Hesslegrave, 1988). Thus, it must be specified that for Freud information not in awareness is stored in the unconscious system as a whole idea with causal efficacy.

According to this definition the essence of the conscious is 'awareness'. It is for this reason that in the 1915 paper *The Unconscious*, he firmly rejects any notion of a 'second conscious'. He detected that the most common response to his observation that people have ideas, wishes, and beliefs, of which they are not aware, has been to invoke the false assumption "of another, second consciousness which is unified in ones self with the consciousness one knows" (1915c:146). That is, seeing the psyche as consisting of two *kinds* of consciousness which are unitary and transparent in their activity. Such a view would validate Sartre's assumptions about the nature of consciousness in psychoanalysis. However, Freud points out that such an assumption is invalid, if like himself, one holds that *awareness* is the defining feature of the 'conscious'.

...a consciousness of which its own possessor knows nothing, is something very different from a consciousness belonging to another person, and it is questionable whether such consciousness, lacking as it does, its most important characteristic, [awareness] deserves any discussion at all (1915c:146).

It is, in fact, the equivalent of invoking an 'unconscious consciousness' according to Freud and this simply could not account for the different latent mental processes which he has described, which "enjoy a high degree of independence, as though they had no connection with one another" (1915c:146).

Finally, Freud reminds us that his clinical investigation, which by this time was well past its twentieth year, constantly showed him that latent mental processes often had characteristics which were foreign and contrary to those attributes of the conscious life with which we are familiar. Therefore, what psychoanalysis proves, "is not the existence of a second consciousness

in us but the existence of psychical acts which *lack consciousness*' (1915c:146).

Clearly, Freud's theoretical conception of the conscious / unconscious division was one that was non-unitary and non-transparent. Therefore, when one adds the clause that *the belief which is not subject to awareness is stored in the unconscious* to the four other criteria for a case of 'self-deception' outlined by Sackeim and Gur (1977), one effectively removes the basis of the logical paradox. As it has been shown that Freud conceived of an unconscious which operated as an autonomous system to the conscious, with its own non-transparent contents, energy, and action, there is no logical objection to the possibility that it could believe **X** while the conscious held **non-X** and that the conscious would be unaware that the unconscious held **non-X**. The autonomy of content in the two systems really makes them parallel to a case of *other-deception*. As a result the criticism of a 'logical paradox' only shows an inaccurate understanding of Freud's own conceptualization about the nature of the conscious and the unconscious.

Given that Freud's notion of a nonunitary and nontransparent consciousness is theoretically valid, we can now ask whether it is valid in practice. The fact is that although Freud goes to great lengths to show that there is a great divide between the conscious and unconscious systems which renders them functionally autonomous, there are several instances in his clinical accounts where this conclusion is betrayed by the patients' behavior. As a result, there is a contradiction between theory and practice when it come to Freud's nontransparent and nonunitary consciousness.

The 1915 paper *Repression*, provides a discussion of an instance of the *return of the repressed*. Freud refers to the situation in which an idea that was primally repressed, sends out derivatives, some of which, have become sufficiently far removed from the repressed representative, whether owing to the adoption of distortions or by reason of the number of intermediate links inserted, (that) they have free access to the conscious (1915:149).

The 'free access' of repressed material to the conscious, only happens because the *ideational derivative* is so far removed from the *original idea* that it is quite unrecognizable. Freud goes on to say that during psychoanalysis, a patient can produce a thread of these associated derivatives until,

he is brought up against some thought, the relation of which to what is repressed becomes so obvious that he is compelled to repeat his attempt at repression\* (1915:150).

In this account Freud seems to depart from his established notion of a non-transparent consciousness. How can the derivative which is now conscious have a relation to what is repressed (and therefore unconscious) which is 'so obvious'? The contents of a primally repressed idea can *never* be 'obvious' to the conscious.

Now, an immediate objection to this point could be that this is one of a few isolated exceptions to Freud's commitment to a functional autonomy between the content of the conscious and the unconscious. I would suggest that on the contrary, this is in fact, the logical conclusion which the *practice* of psychotherapy forces one to see. Here we have an instance where Freud relates one of his metaphysical theories to the actual workings of psychoanalytic technique with a patient. We see that at the logical base of the therapy is the notion that resolution only comes when what has been



primally repressed finally becomes obvious to the conscious. The whole point of psychoanalysis is to allow the therapist to collect the derivatives and to slowly suggest associations to the patient. It was only by bringing "to light the memory of the event by which [the symptom] was provoked and is arousing its accompanying affect" (1983:SE 11;9) that the contents of the repressed should become obvious. This occurs as the therapist suggests the event based on the clues given in the associated derivatives. Thus, the therapist is the link between the unconscious and the conscious. She alone can see the relations of all these derivatives to what must be primally repressed. Yet, it is entirely unclear how the conscious is *ever* going to be able to recognize these threads and trace them back to what is repressed. For the conscious, the content of the unconscious does not exist. It simply should not be possible for it to 'recognize' *primally repressed* content because this has never been given access to the conscious. That the conscious could suddenly become aware of the repressed contents of the unconscious simply by recognizing the importance of an associated derivative, is to suggest a transparent consciousness and this is in contradiction to the claims Freud made about unconscious contents in many other places.

I would tentatively suggest that it is here, at the level of the pragmatic application of the theory that the incoherence of Freud's theoretical commitment to a nontransparent consciousness is betrayed. The conscious should never recognize primally repressed instincts, drives and ideas, and yet in practice it clearly does so. Either the two systems are, in fact, to some *significant degree* transparent even at the level of primary processes, or the only other option is that the therapist is actually

reconstructing the association between the conscious threads and the unconscious reality and the patient comes to accept these suggestions after the latent link has been proposed. In the first case, the specific practices of psychoanalytic therapy to uncover totally hidden truth is unnecessary. In the second, one places a great deal of faith in the therapist to lead you down the 'right path'. Even if one ignores the incredible power of 'teacher expectancy effects' which could be at work in this situation, one is left wondering how the therapist can possibly make the right connections given the literally countless options.

The conclusion is that in practice Freud is forced into a duality. It has never been clear how the content of the unconscious can have causal efficacy for the conscious and yet be completely unknown. Despite Freud's explanation of ideational derivatives, the fact remains that there is supposed to be a direct causal link between two agencies, one of which is never known to the other. The fact that this causal link can be discovered *by the patient* in psychoanalysis is direct evidence for the fact that the consciousness is at least to some degree transparent. I suggest that it is impossible for any strict account of a nontransparent and nonunitary consciousness to ever make real sense of the observable data of conscious experience. Furthermore, such a notion of consciousness has very important implications for Christian beliefs. I shall return to a discussion of these implications in Chapter Six.

### ***The Questionable Foundations' (Grunbaum's Critique)***

Adolf Grunbaum (1984,1986) has seriously called into question the empirical and philosophical foundations of some of the key casual

conjectures of psychoanalysis. For example, he takes the claim that repression of conflict in childhood is a necessary cause of neurosis as an example of a casual claim in psychoanalysis. Grunbaum then suggests that to be an acceptable proposal, controlled evidence must be presented which demonstrates that whether or not the effect occurs (neurosis), will depend on whether or not the hypothesized cause occurs (repression of conflict).

Whilst this seems a reasonable and straightforward task, it has proved elusive for psychoanalytic constructs such as repression. If for example, one was to take the position that 'repression of conflict' always occurs in childhood and this is the cause of neurosis, then all one actually does is reduce the meaningfulness of the concept. It is the equivalent of saying 'life is a necessary cause of neurosis' or 'being born is a necessary cause of neurosis'. If then one supposes that only certain types of childhood conflict cause neurosis, one must lay down specific criteria that differentiate when the 'repression' would have causal efficacy and when it would not. However, it precisely this kind of definite *predictive claim* which psychoanalysis avoids. As a result, Grunbaum suggests that psychoanalysis is not able to make comparisons between outcomes under different casual conditions. Yet this is what is required to 'show' that repression of conflict is a necessary cause of neurosis. In particular, this task eludes psychoanalysis because of its reliance on the case study method, the very nature of which, in the psychoanalytic situation prevents systematic controlled comparisons.

However, if one looks behind Grunbaum's empirically based criticisms of methodology, such as the technique of free association, and the bias inherent in clinical data, it becomes clear that what he is raising in his

objections to psychoanalysis is the much wider question of the nature of science and the nature of *evidence* in science and it is at this level only that Grunbaum's criticism will be answered. Its specific empirical claims are not relevant to this thesis.

Grunbaum seems to assume that the *truth* and *usefulness* of a theory can be determined only by reducing that theory to a set of propositions that can be empirically verified in a controlled environment. Scientific knowledge is empirically proven knowledge. Indeed, he seems to hold what Chalmers (1990) would call a 'common sense' view of science in which,

Personal opinion or preference and speculative imaginings have no place... Science is objective. Scientific knowledge is reliable knowledge because it is objectively proven knowledge (Chalmers 1990:1).

Although Grunbaum does not couch his criticism in the following terms, what he seems to be pointing out is that just because it is possible to derive logically valid premises and conclusions from Freud's writings does not mean that the premises can be empirically verified. He presents the following casual chain as an empirically testable hypothesis in Freud's writings.

1. *Neurosis is always caused by the repression of conflict in childhood.*
2. *Fred repressed conflict as a child*

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3. *Fred is neurotic.*

This syllogism is logically valid, if the premises are true, the conclusion follows. But the point is, deduction and logic alone tell us nothing of the *truth* of the premises. Grunbaum argues that unless premise (1.) is able to be proven then the whole syllogism establishes nothing. Surely this is a truism which would be acknowledged by any scientist or philosopher. However, it is the nature of what constitutes *evidence* or *proof* that produces the basis of Grunbaum's argument. He rejects the notion that, the collective success of psychoanalytic treatment is evidence for the truth of the Freudian theory of personality... [or that] Freudian analysis of the unconscious by means of free association is validated as an investigative method by its therapeutic success (Grunbaum 1986:223).

While he gives reasons such as the clinical data being artifacts of the analyst's self-fulfilling expectations, really, the center of the criticism is the validity of Freud's 'tally argument'. This argument proposed that the repeated observed success of psychoanalytic treatment can be taken as evidence in support of the theories foundational causal claims. Freud was clearly an inductivist, he gathered his 'evidence' from observing a particular sequence of events producing a particular conclusion under a wide variety of conditions (patient backgrounds), and when all those observed occurrences led to the same result, he took this to be 'evidence' and generalized the conjectured casual chain to all people. What Grunbaum's critique comes down to is a rejection of the inductivist approach to science. As a falsificationist he suggests that theories cannot be established as true, or even probably true in the light of observational evidence. He does not deny that observation is always guided by and presupposes theory, but such theory

is only speculation or considered guessing about an observed behavior or event. It cannot be considered an adequate *explanation* until it is rigorously and ruthlessly tested by controlled observation and experiment. This is the process of validating theories. To be scientifically acceptable a theory must be able to be *falsified*, that is, there must exist a logically possible observation statement or set of observation statements that if established would falsify the claim.

The logic of falsificationism is grounded in the conviction that a scientific law or theory "should ideally give us some information about how the world does in fact behave, thereby ruling out ways in which it could (logically) possibly behave but in fact does not" (Chalmers, 1990:41). It is at this point that Freudian theory becomes very difficult to defend. Grunbaum cites it as a classic example of speculative theory which cannot be validated because it cannot be empirically falsified. I would want to modify Grunbaum's claim to point out that in the first decade of Freud's work his claims were, in fact, more readily testable and I think potentially falsifiable. However, by the time the topography of the id, ego, and superego has been developed, the theory as a whole has become unfalsifiable. For example, if a man was walking past a burning building when suddenly he noticed a beautiful young lady trapped at a high window he could either act on an *id* impulse to dash into the building, despite the risk to himself and attempt to save the damsel in hope of some serious gratitude on her part [the pleasure principle]; or he could follow the *ego's* reasoning which would consider the stupidity of running into a burning building where you could be burnt or killed by falling materials with no assurance of reward and thus, chose to stand back or leave [the reality principle]; or he could act upon his ethical

conscience, the *superego* which would point out his obligation to help the girl, but in a realistic way, in this case he might ensure the fire department has been called and wait for their arrival [the morality principle]. Thus, *whatever course of action* the man takes, psychoanalysis can construct a seemingly plausible 'explanation' of the behavior. In retrospect, one of these elements of the personality would have too much psychic energy and thus would dominate behavior. What then is the theory actually explaining? It does not predict behavior based on definite claims about personality, it only re-constructs a possible account after the event. A good scientific theory is falsifiable only because it makes definite claims about the world *a-priori* and these claims can then be tested. Freudian theory, particularly in its topographic formulation resists any specific claims to *predict behavior a-priori* and thus is never acceptable as scientific *explanation* of observed behaviors.

### **Poorly Defined Terms.**

Freud has often been criticized for poorly defined terms and for using different terms interchangeably that were supposed to have different meanings, as well as for changing the meanings of words over time. For example, Madison (1957) claims that "the term 'repression' has at least four distinct meanings, and these differences were just not worked out by Freud, nor have they been by anyone else since" (1956:76). If this, in fact, is true then it would cause some concern about the explanatory power of Freud's theories, for one would constantly be unsure as to exactly what meaning 'repression' had at a given place and time in his writings.

If one surveys the use of the word 'repression' in Freud's writings, it is true that at least four different emphases can be identified (Brenner, 1957; Cohen & Kinston, 1983; Madison, 1956). Chapter one has already presented an introductory survey of the development of these usage's with original references. Here it will suffice to summarize the four ways Freud used the term from 1893-1939.

- 1) *Repression as 'motivated forgetting'.*
- 2) *Repression as a term synonymous with the wider notion of 'defense'.*
- 3) *Repression as the psychological function of rejecting and keeping something from consciousness.*
- 4) *Repression as the inhibition of emotional experience (affect).*

There is no question that the concept of repression changed and developed over the half century of Freud's writing, and it is granted that this may indeed cause some conceptual confusion for those coming to grips with the concept and all its ramifications. But surely this is not a vice on Freud's part. If people remain confused by the changes it is only because they are unwilling to survey the development of Freud's thought in the primary sources until they clearly understand them. Furthermore, it is not correct to assume that Freud's later ideas on repression and the dynamic unconscious were seen by him as the 'right ones' which supersede all others. As J.R. Mazes (1983) points out on this subject; "people's final views are not necessarily their best, and need not be taken as canceling all their earlier ones, as if they were a last will and testament negating all previous versions" (1984:144). Madison's claim that the differences in usage 'were just not



worked out by Freud' is absurd. There is no 'working out' to be done. The term simply had different emphases at different times and places, and it depends on what context you are referring to as to what emphasis is correct. It would, in fact, be quite misleading to try to force one definition of repression on all its uses in Freud's writings.

This chapter has dealt with three of the most common theoretical criticisms of Freud's theory, i.e., the alleged logical paradox, the inability to produce scientific *explanation* of behavior, and the alleged conceptual confusion's. Whilst I have tried to point out that elements of these criticisms are perhaps not as problematic as they have been portrayed to be, it seems clear that some significant objections have been established. In particular, we have suggested that although the logical paradox may be able to be explained away on theoretical grounds, it is not so easy to do so in practice. Freud's theory seems compelled to come back to a transparent consciousness in the pragmatic workings of psychotherapy. Furthermore, I think that the discussion of the nature of scientific evidence or proof for a theory must be taken into account by proponents of psychoanalysis. It is hard to see any way in which Freud's topographical theory of personality can produce specific claims about how a person will behave in a given condition. Without *a-priori* suggestions of what is involved in a causal chain, it is not possible to 'test' and thus potentially falsify the claim. The degree then to which psychoanalysis can be said to truly *explain* behavior is highly questionable.

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## Chapter Six

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**CHAPTER SIX:****THE UNCONSCIOUSLY MOTIVATED  
CHRISTIAN ?**

*"There is nothing worse than self-deception - when the deceiver is always at home and always with you" (Plato, circa 386 B.C./1953).*

*"Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand'" (Mt. 12:25, NIV).*

In this final chapter we shall make some preliminary and tentative comments about the implications of the Freudian conception of the mind, UMB's, and self-deception for classical Christian theism. I say 'preliminary' because the implications are so vast and so varied that it is only possible to give an introduction to the issues which need further study. I say 'tentative'

because this is only the beginning of my *personal reflection* on these issues and as a result I do not claim to be able to fully substantiate any conclusions. That is not my intent. The object is to raise concerns and issues as I see them as a basis for further scholarly investigation.

As I see it, one of the great problems in this area is that so many of the categories and assumptions of Freudian thought have found their way into modern 'Christianized Psychology' with very few people really assessing the philosophical and metaphysical presuppositions that must go along with them if they are to remain coherent. I use the term 'Christianized psychology' because this seems to be the end product of contemporary psychological reflection engaged in by much of the Christian community. This raises the issue of the nature of the 'Christian' and the 'Secular', and in particular the question of what "Christian" knowledge is. This is a critical issue for the Christian scholar to deal with, especially in the field of the humanities where the distinction between 'Christian' and 'Secular' is often very unclear. As a general rule I concur with the conclusion of Nicholas Wolterstorff in his provocative essay *Reason within the bounds of Religion* (1976) that the committed beliefs of the authentic Christian scholar will be determinative in the formulation and assessment of theories and explanations. We ought not be ashamed to be distinctively Christian in our world-view, for that is fundamental to who we are. The Christian scholar does not automatically conform to the 'scientific' conclusions of the age or the defensive reactions of the church, but rather embarks on bold and imaginative research that is guided by their authentic commitment to Christ in God's revelation resulting in generally recognized truths.

In particularizing Wolterstorff argument to our discussion of 'Christian psychology' one is led to as the question 'What makes a psychology 'Christian' ?'. And furthermore, what should be the Christians response to secular psychological theory? A classic treatment of these questions can be found in Carter and Narramore's *The Integration of Psychology and Theology* (1976) in which they suggest that four possible relationships exist. Firstly, the Christian can hold that the integration of psychological theory and Christian belief is fundamentally inappropriate<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, one can assume that psychological theory and Christian belief share a large arena of common concerns and that the exploration and application of psychology to Christianity is fundamentally fruitful<sup>5</sup>. Alternately, one could concede that there are, in fact, significant parallels between Christian and psychological concepts but that these do not easily translate from one to the other<sup>6</sup>. Finally, as the authors themselves conclude, the Christian can hold that psychological theory and Christian belief are thoroughly integrateable and that this is our task<sup>7</sup>.

My concern is that such a call for integration does not seem to understand that at the base of secular psychological theory and Christian

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<sup>4</sup> For example see J. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), *The Biblical view of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1986); W.K. Kirkpatrick, *Psychological Seduction: The failure of Modern Psychology* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Hunt & McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> For examples see: S. Hiltner, *Theological dynamics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972); C. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); P. Meehl, *What then is Man?* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958); J. Sanford, *Dreams: God's Forgotten Language* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> For examples see: J.R.Fleck & J.D.Carter, *Psychology and Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981); C. Narramore, *The Psychology of Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960); M. Sall, *Faith Psychology and Christian Maturity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> For examples see: Carter & Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); L. Crabb, *Effective Biblical counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Gary Collins, *The rebuilding of Psychology* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1077); Paul Tournier, *Guilt and Grace* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); K. Farnsworth, *Whole-Hearted Integration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985); also the now out of print work by Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology*.

theism are fundamentally conflicting world-views which yield irreconcilable conclusions. I think that it is possible to conclude that in many ways modern Christian psychology has grown out of secular psychology. It could be argued that a Christian understanding of the human being existed long before the modern development of 'psychology' around the turn of the 19th century and, therefore, secular psychology must have developed from it. In a sense this is true, but the critical point is that the development of secular psychology was based on the *identification of the presuppositions* of Christian belief and the subsequent rejection of them. Men like Wundt and Freud and Skinner identified the underlying metaphysic behind traditional Christian views of man and rejected these as inconsistent with their own observations (Leahey, 1987). Furthermore, they rejected anything requiring a supernatural explanation as absurd, for they were all scientific determinists. Their resultant theories of human behavior are, therefore, 'secular' in the true sense of the word, that is, they are naturalistic and deterministic.

The great problem with the trend of the last several decades for Christian scholars and practitioners has been their tendency to take these theories as a starting point, and *then* to marry them with Christian beliefs, disregarding only that which cannot be made to fit. Very rarely has the attempt been made to identify the metaphysical presuppositions that are an integral part of these theories. Thus, we add Christian language and categories to secular theories of human behavior and rarely see the incongruence that exists at the most fundamental level - that of metaphysic or worldview. It is my own conviction that a truly Christian psychology will only occur if it grows out of excellent biblical exegesis and subsequent theological reflection. Yet, this is a most rare phenomena in the world of

'Christian psychology'. I have yet to find a significant work on the nature of the unconscious mind which uses scriptural exegesis as its *starting point* rather than Freud, Herbart, Jung or some other secular scholar. The trend is to let the work of Freud, for example, define the existence of the concept of a dynamic unconscious and then to go to the biblical record to find 'proof' or 'disproof'. In so doing the Bible becomes a commentary on the validity, or otherwise, of a secular concept of human mental ontology which is assumed to have validity *a-priori*.

The result is that Scripture is used to decide what can be retained and what ought to be discarded. This, of course, has some validity, but it is not the primary role of a Christian scholar. The primary question ought to be 'What is the nature of the human mind according to Scripture?', and secondarily, 'Does Scripture suggest an understanding of human mental functioning consistent with the notion of UMB's?'. The fact that this is not done, and that in its place secular theories are 'picked over' and the suitable parts married to Christian concepts and categories has yielded a lot of what I suggest should be seen as 'Christianized psychology' rather than authentic Christian psychology.

Now at this point the objection could be raised that the Bible is characteristically silent on scientific issues. All of what we know about cosmology and biology and the laws of physics has arisen from extra-biblical conclusions based on innovative research. Of course this is true. I am not suggesting that psychological theory stands against Christianity and that it should be disregarded. Nor am I suggesting that Scripture is the only source of truth with respect to human behavior. But I think that in the realm of human

psychology the revelation of God's dealings with humanity does reveal some fundamental parameters for understanding behavior and thought. A thorough exegesis of biblical views on 'mind', 'body', 'soul', 'spirit', 'flesh', 'sin', & 'knowledge', as they relate to human functioning would be a good starting point for a biblical psychology.

With this general discussion in place, I shall now turn to the specific task of considering a few *implications* of the notion of unconsciously motivated behaviors for Christian theology. In particular, we shall ask whether the notion of self-deception is congruent with classical theistic beliefs. This is not a straightforward question. As we have seen the coherence of the notion of self-deception relies on a specific view of consciousness, that is, a conception of the mind as nonunitary and nontransparent. It has been argued that this is the view of the mind which Freud held to at a theoretical level. The logical consistency of his entire system of psychoanalysis rests on the assumption that the mind is a nonunitary entity comprised of conscious and nonconscious agencies in which the content of each was completely nontransparent to the other.

What are the implications of this fundamental view of the mind for the theories of Christianized psychology? The vast majority of Christianized psychoanalysis assumes the validity of the dynamic unconscious and resultant UMB's<sup>8</sup>. Yet they seem to manage this without ever realizing that to do so requires the logical acceptance of a mind which is nonunitary and

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<sup>8</sup> For a few examples see: M. James & L. Savary, *The Power at the Bottom of the Well* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); J. Sanford, *Dreams: God's Forgotten Language* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968); C. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press); J. & P. Sanford, *The Transformation of the Inner Man* (Logos, 1982); Morton Kelsey, *Christo-Psychology* (Crossroads, 1982), *The Christian and the Supernatural* (Ausborg, 1976).



nontransparent. The critical issue then, is whether this notion of the mind is compatible with a Biblical view of the human being as a free moral agent who is fairly held accountable for her actions to a morally good God. It is difficult to imagine how a morally good God could endow his creatures with a nonunitary and nontransparent mind capable of true self-deception and still hold them morally accountable. And yet, if this view of mind is rejected, the logical foundation of the notion of unconsciously motivated behaviors falls apart. This is the tension created when secular theories are christianized. In order to understand more fully the issue, it will be beneficial to look more closely at some of the implications of Freud's view of the mind for Christian beliefs.

### **The issue of moral freedom:**

Freud's entire theoretical system rests firmly on the assumptions of biological determinism. All behavior is caused and at least to some degree that causation is internal. Furthermore, all conscious behavior is causally related to unconscious instincts, wishes, desires, and so on. Now, it is often recognized that determinism and human moral freedom are incompatible, but what of the specific case of the dynamic unconscious? Here also, there seems to be no way to escape the ultimate conclusion of determinism if one holds that the mind contains an unconscious system which has causally efficacy for the conscious. Whenever conscious mental activity is explained in terms of unconscious content, whether that be an instinct, a drive, a traumatic memory, or a fantasy, then truly free moral choices become highly dubious. If one behavior can be explained in terms of unconscious motivation, then there is nothing to stop the logical conclusion that all

behavior, even the most 'everyday' has some causal link to the realm of the unconscious (as Freud himself concluded).

The notion of *choice* in such a system is absurd. One cannot choose which unconscious content will be acted on and which will not because consciousness (by definition) has no awareness of any unconscious content. All human behavior ultimately becomes the result of internal drives and instincts which are modified by the environment as it informs the ego's reality principle. Now, most Christianized psychology will reject such determinism as incompatible with theism and yet will retain the possibility of UMB's. This is a blatant point of logical inconsistency. How can an agent be morally free and yet be subject to the causal efficacy of an agency of which she is, by definition, unaware?

### **The issue of responsibility:**

The logical issue which arises from the discussion of determinism is that of responsibility. Real moral freedom seems to be a pre-requisite to any notion of morally accountability for one's actions. It is very difficult to see how a morally good God could hold a being responsible for conscious behavior which was unconsciously caused, even if this causation was only to a small degree. There can be no moral responsibility required for the instinctual workings of a dynamic unconscious whose content is not even known to exist by conscious awareness.

Surely, when theism talks of a God who knows the 'thoughts and intentions' of our heart and our 'secret ways' (Ps 40:32; 90:7,8; Mt. 6:17,18), it

refers to thoughts and intentions which *we ourselves know* but keep hidden *from other people*. This is required by the notion of a fair judgment. Although this work does not pretend to be an exegetical study, it seems fair to point out that the New Testament only refers to 'secret ways' in the context of hidden thoughts and actions of which we are aware, but which we do not admit, or actively speak against in the presence of others. That Paul could refer to the fact that he and the Corinthians "have renounced secret and shameful ways" (2Cor 4:2), implies a conscious *decision of the will* to cease hidden thoughts and practices of which the Spirit of God had convicted them. Indeed, this is the healing power of the gospel, to bring light to that which is hidden in darkness and denial. However, it is not hidden in an unconscious mind where it continues to cause our sinful behavior whilst we have no awareness of it. The Spirit of God is nowhere in the NT portrayed as coming into a life to clean up all of the unholy material in the unconscious mind. Quite to the contrary, the Spirit convicts us of hidden sin which we actually *know exists*, but which we never articulate or confess.

The biblical notion of Judgment makes this point very clear. Let us consider a passage from Romans chapter 2:12-16.

*All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law that are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

At least one of the things this passage seems to show is that humans will be held morally accountable for all their thoughts and actions, even those which are never articulated to another person. How can a morally good God do this? Paul's answer is that the human mind (conscience) has been given a basic understanding of the content of God's idea of moral decency. Furthermore, the thoughts of the mind will either defend or accuse our behavior in relation to this moral code.

Persons can be held morally accountable for every thought and action by God precisely because they had the free will to rebel or conform to God's standards. Far from a notion of a dynamic unconscious which is full of primeval lusts and passion causing our sinful behavior, the NT seems to indicate that each human mind has a built-in awareness of God's basic moral requirements and that even secret rebellion is not excusable. The reason it is not excusable is that we are 'aware' of it. It is not a matter of unconscious motivation which makes a person sin. It is a matter of *choosing* sin in the secret places of the heart when you know it is wrong. This is the job of the Holy Spirit, to enter a willing life and to convict it of such thinking and behavior for what it is - willful sin. What Freud would claim was the unconscious motivation of the pleasure seeking *id* over which we have no conscious control, God calls willful, though hidden sin. In most instances the person is aware of the deepest, hidden places of their personality where private lusts, perversion, and distortions live, always seeking to be overtly fulfilled, thus, they are not truly *unconscious* at all. The beauty of conversion is its work in exposing these elements of the personality for what they are and giving us the option to *choose* against them with the help of God's grace.

*But if an unbeliever or some one who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" (1Cor 14:24,25).*

The conclusion of this look at NT theology is that it is simply inappropriate to equate the 'inner man' or the 'secret ways' of people with the unconscious mind. Modern Christianized psychology is far too prone to commit this fallacy.

### **The issue of self-deception:**

One of the purposes of this thesis has been to show that the notion of UMB and subsequently the issue of self-deception, logically require a view of the mind which is nonunitary (that is, it is comprised of functionally autonomous agencies), and also nontransparent (that is, the content of the unconscious is never known to the conscious). This is the only formulation of consciousness in which self-deception and UMB can make logical sense. And yet it is a conceptualization that even Freud could not adhere to in practice as we have seen.

The conclusion I am forced to make is that there can be no place for a notion of consciousness which claims to be nonunitary and nontransparent in a Christian view of the human psyche. That is not to deny levels of awareness, it is obvious that most mental content is not in awareness at a given point of time. But that does not mean it is hidden in a dynamic unconscious where it has causal efficacy. As a result the whole notion of unconsciously motivated [and therefore causally determined] behavior must

also be rejected. It has been shown that a nontransparent and nonunitary consciousness which is capable of self-deception seriously questions the central theistic notion of humans as morally free and responsible agents. Only a unitary and essentially transparent consciousness can fit the biblical data when it speaks of the moral responsibility people have even for the hidden places of their hearts.

### **The issue of inner healing:**

Perhaps the most common area of discussion in popular Christianized psychology is that of 'healing of the memories', or 'inner healing', or 'healing the subconscious'. In closing I shall take a moment to consider the implications of my conclusions for this body of ministry.

A clear distinction must be made between those whose wish to 'heal the memories' and those whose wish to 'heal' or 'sanctify' the unconscious. It should be realized that nowhere in this thesis has the notion of unconscious mental content been questioned. This is a given in most schools of thought. Obviously there is a huge amount of mental content which is not present in conscious awareness at a given time. The question is whether this content has causal efficacy. In the instance of a painful memory of a traumatic event which may have happened a long time ago, there is often causal efficacy for current behavior. For example, the memory of an instance of incest in childhood may be contributing to current personality dysfunction (e.g.. avoiding all relationships with the opposite sex), but where is this memory? Freud would say that it has been repressed to the point of complete conscious oblivion, now existing only in the unconscious where it wrecks

havoc on the unsuspecting person. What then if this person engages in same sex relationships - is this a point of moral accountability on their part? It seems hard to see how it could be if their homosexuality is caused by a traumatic memory of which they have no conscious awareness and thus can do nothing about.

An alternative suggestion is that the memory is indeed stored in the unconscious along with a lot of other material, but it is not completely hidden from the conscious. The memory is known to exist, but due to its painful nature it is ignored as much as possible. Yet at times it does come back and cause intense guilt and anxiety. It is this associated guilt and anxiety which caused current behavior to be dysfunctional. The Christian approach is to have the patient own the memory, forgive the offending parties, forgive themselves, and let the Spirit of God bring freedom from that hidden memory. This may sound like psychoanalysis, but there is one major difference: nowhere was the notion of a dynamic unconscious invoked to explain the behavior. Instances where people actually have *no* awareness of a traumatic event, or memory, or desire which is affecting their current behavior is very rare and may, in fact, point to a specific pathology (Naramore, 1984). The point is that a things 'being unconscious' does not mean that it is *intentionally* hidden from the conscious by some internal dynamic, it simply means that it is not in conscious awareness at a given point of time.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the incredible contribution of Sigmund Freud to the psychological enterprise. His theory is vast and detailed. We have dealt with aspect of that theory the unconscious

motivation of behavior. Yet, while I respect the theory, I am forced to challenge its philosophical presuppositions. The view of the unconscious mind as nonunitary and nontransparent opens the door for self-deception. This in turn is incompatible with the theists view of humans as morally free and morally responsible agents. It has been suggested that an appropriate conception of consciousness for the Christian must begin with the qualities of unity and transparency; the notion of a fair judgment seems to require this. Finally it has been suggested that the practice of Christian psychotherapy can continue with intellectual integrity without ever invoking the idea of a dynamic unconscious and all of the logical problems it entails. Fully to develop these implications is a task that is currently needed. To develop a biblical theology of the mind is a task which is long overdue.



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