

# The Freudian Plague

SAMUEL BENEDECK SOTILLOS

*The following article is a synopsis of a book by the author on Freud. It was initially published as *Psychology Without Spirit: The Freudian Quandary* (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications, 2018); and now is published as *Dismantling Freud: Fake Therapy and the Psychoanalytic Worldview* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2020).*

Freud's arrival in the New World on August 29, 1909, on the steamer *George Washington* in the New York Harbour, accompanied by his onetime disciples Sándor Ferenczi (1873–1933) and C.G. Jung (1875–1961) marks his quintessential attack on Western civilization unapologetically attempting to undermine it at its core, at its metaphysical and spiritual roots, when he made the providential pronouncement: “They don’t realize we’re [the psychoanalytic movement] bringing them the plague.”<sup>1</sup> It was Freud’s first and only visit to America to deliver five introductory lectures on psychoanalysis at the invitation of G. Stanley Hall (1846–1924) for the twentieth anniversary celebration of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. It needs to be remembered, as he disclosed

---

<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud as remembered by C.G. Jung, quoted in Jacques Lacan, “The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 336; See also Octave Mannoni, *Freud: The Theory of the Unconscious* (London, UK: Verso, 2015).

in a confidential letter, that he said: “I regard myself as one of the most dangerous enemies of religion, but they don’t seem to have any suspicion of that.”<sup>2</sup> The particular plague that was and continues to be disseminated by the psychoanalytic movement is not a plague that is lethal to the physical body, but that is lethal to the human soul and is more dangerous as it spreads insidiously and goes undetected within the collective psyche.

The twentieth century has been heralded as the Freudian century, and while the originator of the doctrine of the ‘talking cure’, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), has long since passed, his theory lives on. No matter how astonishingly and calamitously wrong and harmful his ideas have been, even to the degree of being diabolical in nature, it is certainly clear that *Freud is not dead*, as his work continues to bear influence in that it has erected the foundation upon which all contemporary approaches to therapy, mental health, and psychology have been constructed. For this reason, contemporary psychology finds itself in a quandary, if not in a crisis, and at an impasse that is often undetected or minimized, as it is situated on an erroneous ontological and epistemological foundation that is an assault on the human microcosm, having uprooted and eclipsed the metaphysical and spiritual domain.

The powerful implications of the Freudian colonization of the human psyche are made known through his triumphant pronouncement: “it was no small thing to have the whole human race as one’s patient.”<sup>3</sup> Freud, in no uncertain terms, was aware of the nefarious and destructive implications of his theory that was cloaked in the dress of modern science, which would come to challenge the very foundations of Western civilization. Freud unabashedly acknowledges the antinomian roots of his doctrine: “it [psychoanalysis] is calculated to undermine religion, authority and morals.”<sup>4</sup>

Freudian psychology reached a turning point in 1908, becoming a

---

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Letter to Marie Bonaparte – April 26, 1926,” quoted in Ernest Jones, “Fame and Suffering,” in *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 3: The Last Phase, 1919–1939* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1957), p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Resistances to Psychoanalysis” (1925), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), p. 261.

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Psychoanalysis” (1922), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), p. 249.

totalizing Weltanschauung (worldview). The open-ended application of psychoanalysis beyond the couch was stressed by Freud himself: “nothing that men make or do is understandable without ... psychoanalysis”<sup>5</sup> and “we have so often been obliged to venture beyond the frontiers of the science of psychology.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Freud asserts: “There was ... a scientific duty, to apply the ... methods of psychoanalysis, in regions far remote from its native soil.”<sup>7</sup>

It needs to be very clear from the outset that the psychoanalytic movement was not only seeking to expose how the human psyche was governed by the unconscious and its inner conflicts, but how Freudian therapy can be applied across all disciplines, human endeavours, and behaviour. Freud explains in his own words how psychoanalytic theory initially began with the study of the mind and how it expanded its inquiry, making connections across wide-ranging fields. Freud informs us,

Its original significance was purely therapeutic: it aimed at creating a new and efficient method for treating neurotic illnesses. But connections which could not be foreseen in the beginning caused psychoanalysis to reach out far beyond its original aim. It ended by claiming to have set our whole view of mental life upon a new basis and therefore to be of importance for every field of knowledge that is founded on psychology.<sup>8</sup>

We can see from this that Freud recognized the importance of the psychoanalytic doctrine beyond the discipline of psychology. It in fact opened the door to how the human psyche can be manipulated by taking Freudian therapy beyond the psychoanalytic couch to the state of being a tool for mind control and engineering public consent on a mass scale.

---

<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Explanations, Applications and Orientations” (1933 [1932]), in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), pp. 179–180.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Psychical Apparatus and the External World” (1940 [1938]), in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Psychoanalysis and Religious Origins” (1919), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books,

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Resistances to Psychoanalysis” (1925), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 253–254. 1963), p. 224.

The Freudian revolution was an attempted overthrow of medieval epistemology that defined knowledge as “*adaequatio rei et intellectus* — the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known.”<sup>9</sup> This is to say that in the traditional or premodern world were included Spirit, soul, and body and their corresponding degrees and modes of reality. Knowledge and being are inseparable from each other, as knowledge is necessary to fully realise the human condition. There is a distinction made between reason (*ratio*) and relative knowledge and Intellect (*Intellectus*) and knowledge that is supra-sensible and that is transcendent in nature. This transpersonal faculty immanent within the human being, known as the Intellect, enables him or her to know the fullness of what can be known. In contradistinction, the ontological and epistemological quicksand of psychodynamic theory is made apparent by Freud: “Since the criterion of truth ... is absent, it is entirely a matter of indifference what opinions we adopt. All of them are equally true and equally false.”<sup>10</sup>

It is essential to situate the Freudian revolution within the broader historical context to see how it aided modern science in overthrowing the traditional cosmology of the Great Chain of Being that was a universal norm across the cultures.<sup>11</sup> Freud’s assault on medieval cosmology must not be minimized and does not in any way legitimize the emergence of psychoanalysis. Freud misconstrued medieval cosmology’s erudite understanding of the human being’s place within the Great Chain of Being that was transcendent yet included all life forms.

In framing the Freudian revolution as the heir of the revolutions of Copernicus and Darwin, Freud’s messianic mission to attack and ultimately surmount the domain of religion so as to deify himself becomes blatantly clear. *The desacralization of the ‘science of the soul’ or psychology that severed the human psyche from Spirit was certainly a revolution, as it turned the perennial psychology found across the*

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in E.F. Schumacher, “‘*Adaequatio*’: I,” in *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Question of a *Weltanschauung*” (1933 [1932]), in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> See Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

*cultures on its head.* The phenomenon that is psychoanalysis becomes intelligible when situated within the gradual decline of religion and spirituality in which it arose that is inseparable from the emergence of the modern world.

Psychoanalysis is in many ways an attempt to fill the spiritual void—the loss of the sense of the sacred—both in the outer world of society and the inner world of the human being. Freud and his disciples were fully aware of the weakening of the Christian tradition in the West and the spiritual crisis in their midst, as Freud noted: “religion no longer has the same influence on people that it used to.”<sup>12</sup> Again, the marginalization of faith in the modern world gave rise to the notion of “homo psychologicus” or psychological man, which in many ways is a dominant feature of the present day.

By undermining and reinterpreting the traditional exegesis of the world’s religions at their innermost level, Freud was then able to appropriate metaphysics, and in its place, establish his metapsychology. Freud’s doctrine provides him with free reign to speculate on all and everything, further emboldening his totalizing worldview. He attempted to codify his own brand or privatized version of science and epistemology, regarding them as ‘our science’<sup>13</sup> and ‘our knowledge,’<sup>14</sup> which are key facets of his psychoanalytic worldview. Freud declares his unwavering allegiance to scientism or scientific fundamentalism: “No, our science is no illusion. But an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere.”<sup>15</sup> Sacred science, which is rooted in metaphysical and spiritual principles, and profane science, rooted in a materialistic worldview, could not be further apart.

The emergence of psychoanalysis is inseparable from the vacuum created by the marginalization of the sacred, and yet psychoanalysis was also complicit in systematically undermining religion and was

---

<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Chapter Seven’, in *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘Chapter Ten’, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Psychological Apparatus” (1940 [1938]), in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Op. Cit.*, Freud, ‘Chapter Ten’, p. 71.

itself an attempt to fill this void. We recall an often-quoted passage from *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) that underscores Freud's extreme contempt for religion, interpreting it as mental illness. This view is powerfully expressed here: "Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity."<sup>16</sup> Freud's assault on religion is well known and documented; however, the way in which psychoanalytic psychology attempted to substitute itself for the role of religion to become a secular pseudo-religion in its place is less known and requires more attention. Freud minces no words when suggesting the complete overthrow of religion by modern science by his psychoanalytic 'talking cure'. On February 6, 1899, he wrote: "the religion of science ... is supposed to have replaced the old religion."<sup>17</sup> Although it is not commonly known, Jung is more extreme than his one-time master on this point, and is arguably more dangerous, as he asserted that only a religion—even if this meant supplanting traditional religions with the secular pseudo-religion of modern psychology—could replace the human need for the sacred, an assertion that he conveyed in a most revealing letter to Freud on February 11, 1910: "Religion can be replaced only by religion."<sup>18</sup>

For those who are sitting on the fence or are ambivalent about the doctrine of the 'talking cure', the verdict on psychoanalysis has been rendered once and for all and made explicitly clear by Frederick Crews: "there is literally nothing to be said, scientifically or therapeutically, to the advantage of the entire Freudian system."<sup>19</sup> We are reminded about the ill-fated prognosis that confronts the shaky foundations of modern psychology: "Psychoanalysis is the disease

---

<sup>16</sup> Op. Cit., Freud, 'Chapter Eight', p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Letter to Wilhelm Fliess—February 6, 1899," in Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris (eds.), *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1954), p. 276.

<sup>18</sup> C.G. Jung, "Letter to Sigmund Freud—February 11, 1910," in William McGuire (ed.), *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*, trans. Ralph Manheim and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 294.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick Crews, "The Verdict on Freud," *Psychological Science*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (March 1996), p. 63.

of which it pretends to be the cure.”<sup>20</sup> It is not as simple as selecting what is good or useful from the ‘talking cure’ and discarding with what is not. The situation is more complex and dire. Comprehension and discernment is needed, as Freud’s ideas make up the very bedrock of modern psychology and continue to assert influence within the therapeutic and mental health structures that exist today, and they cannot be easily purged without bringing into question the entire edifice of contemporary psychology.

Perhaps it is impossible for someone to be wrong about everything all the time, and while this rule applies to Freud, it is at the same time thought-provoking and no less challenging to determine what was accurate about the psychoanalytic doctrine. If the question is posed the other way around, and we ask not what is wrong, but what is right about Freudian theory, the answer depends on the point of view taken. It is worth noting that in this topsy-turvy era in which *the normalization of the abnormal* continues and the divine Norm has been supplanted, if not inverted, the suggestion that Freud was dangerous is not taken very seriously; or else it is taken as an additional sign of the modern world’s conquest of religion and spirituality and the rise of secularism. However, we are reminded of the Apostle Paul who warned: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world” (Colossians 2:8). As a result, Freud is regarded as the founder of the greatest revolution in psychology, while for others he is irrefutably “the greatest con man in the history of medicine.”<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, it is up to every individual to decide for him or herself, whether the Freudian doctrine of the ‘talking cure’ is a plague or a panacea; yet when all things are considered, there is nothing neutral about Freud or his psychodynamic theory. ▲

---

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Szasz, “Kraus and Freud: Unmasking the Unmasker,” in *Karl Kraus and the Soul-Doctors: A Pioneer Critic and his Criticism of Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p. 24. “Psychoanalysis is an illness that pretends to be a cure.” (Frederick S. Perls, “A Life Chronology,” *Gestalt Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2 [1993], p. 8).

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in Raymond Greene, “Forward,” to E.M. Thornton, *The Freudian Fallacy: An Alternative View of Freudian Theory* (Garden City, NY: Dial Press, 1984), p. vii.