

ON THE POLITICAL RHETORIC OF FREUD'S INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY†

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Psyche and Politics

Freud's model of the psyche originated in the mechanistic tradition of neurophysiology during the second half of the nineteenth century. In his 'Project for a Scientific Psychology', addressed to his colleague neurologists, but left unpublished until after his death, he attempted 'to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of material particles' in a reflex-arc.¹ In *The Interpretation of Dreams* he reiterated that 'reflex processes remain the model of every psychical function',² even though by then he had abandoned his attempted neurophysiological reduction of mental processes. All of Freud's theoretical writings are permeated by hydraulic images, references to the 'flow' of a hypothetical psychic energy from a 'reservoir', through 'intercommunicating vessels' or 'channels', to its 'damming-up' or 'discharge' by 'safety-valves'.³

However, in order to keep in contact with 'the popular mode of thinking'⁴ and to appeal to the large audience of the educated lay-public from which his followers and patients were to come, Freud used a repertoire of secondary analogies through which he intended to make his model of the mental apparatus more accessible. He rejected scientific neologisms based on what he mocked as 'orotund Greek names'.⁵ Instead he chose a mould of social analogies and metaphors—the latter are condensed analogies—by means of which he shaped the invisible inner world of the mind in terms of the outer

† Throughout this article references to Freud's writings are to *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London, 1953–74), 24 volumes; indicated are year of publication, volume and page according to the 'Alphabetical List of Freud's Writings' in Volume XXIV. Throughout the article, emphasis in quoted passages is mine, not Freud's.

¹ 1950a, I: 298.

² 1900a, V: 538.

³ cf. 1950a, I: 298, 301, 312, 336; 1900a, V: 579; 1912c, XII: 231; 1916–17, XVI: 345; 1923b, XIX: 45.

⁴ 1926e, XX: 195.

⁵ *Ibid.*

world of society. In their creation of a cognitive and affective link between a known social reality and an unknown mental domain these social and political images of the mind fulfil an ideological function: 'they can', writes Freud, 'make one feel more at home'.⁶ Well aware of their use, he defends them even where he admits their crudeness,⁷ for his theories have to be intelligible to his patients, who, Freud admits, 'are often very intelligent, but not always learned'.⁸

In this paper I shall discuss Freud's political analogies and metaphors, the persuasive discourse by means of which political values are presupposed, concealed, criticized or justified in his individual psychology. It is the aim of my paper to challenge the claim that, as for instance Richard Wollheim suggests, 'to try and find in Freud's writings an articulated or coherent social theory or ethic . . . is a vain task.'⁹ On the contrary I shall argue that even Freud's individual psychology contains a political thesis, formulated in metaphors and analogies borrowed from the experience of the social world and used as structuring principles in the elusive realm of the mind. In other words, on the one hand Freud dissects the individual as a microcosm analogous to the social macrocosm, and on the other hand he conceives of society in terms of an individual writ large. Hence, any assumption or contention of logical precedence of the psychological over the political would be fallacious. Freud's individual psychology is firmly rooted within political discourse and does not form its 'factual' preamble. Rather it is part of one conceptual process in which two theories are developed, one referring to the nature of man and the other to the structure of social organization. Because both domains are mapped by the same cartographer and therefore bear boundaries drawn by the same hand, neither can be taken as proof for the correctness of the other.

Much has been written about Freud's understanding of society analogous to the psyche of the individual, with the masses corresponding to the irrational id, with great men representing the cultural super-ego of an epoch and with the notion of a collective unconscious that underlies most of his argument in his writings of the thirties about social questions. But so far, little attention has been paid to the fact that Freud's anthropomorphic conception of society corresponds to a sociomorphic understanding of the psyche where forces analogous to those in society oppose each other, driven by contradictory

⁶ 1933a, XXII: 72.

⁷ 1916-17, XV: 246.

⁸ 1926e, XX: 195.

⁹ R. Wollheim, *Freud* (Glasgow, 1979), p. 219.

motives in pursuit of their goals and divided by defences, resistances or censorships. This raises a number of important issues concerning the possible circularity of his argument, but these are questions which will have to be discussed with reference to the nature of hermeneutics and political philosophy in general and, for lack of space, have to be left open in this paper.

I shall show that Freud's rhetoric pictures the mind as a social hierarchy whose classes are engaged in civil war for the power to determine the actions of the individual as a whole. I agree in this respect with Herbert Marcuse that 'psychoanalytic categories do not have to be "related" to social and political conditions—they are themselves social and political categories'.¹⁰ Freud considers internal conflict as perpetual and inevitable because of the scarcity of mental energy and because the mental hierarchy allows only one part of the psyche to gain direct access to motor functions and thereby to determine the course of human action directly.

Freud's rhetoric is rich in metaphors and analogies, but it is always a rhetoric of domination and subjugation, one that extols the virtues of control and warns against the dangers of equality which it links with inefficiency. In this context the assumption of ubiquitous conflict and the fiction of a primary state of nature fulfil the same function in Freud's argument for an authoritarian mental structure as they do in Hobbes's argument for the Leviathan. Finally, in a discussion of the responses open to the superior part of the psyche to counter the threat of anarchy looming within the mind's own boundaries I shall consider Freud's conception of therapy in terms of warfare and assess Freud's understanding of individual autonomy.

The map of the tyranny

Freud developed two major models of the psyche, a first topographical one which he introduced in the seventh chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, and a second structural metaphor which he introduced in *The Ego and the Id* in 1923.¹¹ Both of them are divided into three parts, but the boundaries in each of them are drawn according to different criteria.

Freud constructs the psychical topography around the question of accessibility to consciousness of the mind's contents. He distinguishes *conscious* perception on the one hand from *preconscious* material on the other hand. The latter does not form part of the individual's consciousness at the moment, but is readily available. Both conscious and preconscious content are separ-

¹⁰ H. Marcuse, *Five Lectures* (Boston, 1970), p. 44.

¹¹ 1900a, IV/V; 1923b, XIX.

ated from material that is not accessible and remains *unconscious*. With this model he demonstrates how crucial determinants of human conduct can remain unknown to the acting individual because they are barred by dynamic counterforces, described by Freud metaphorically as 'censorship', 'internal police force', or 'watchman'.¹²

The topographical model suggests a dimension of depth in its distinction of layers, its '*hierarchy of superordinated and subordinated agents*'.¹³ It proposes a country divided into '*Bezirke*' ('provinces') within which, and between which mental processes take place and whose boundaries act as frontiers which mental energy can sometimes cross, where it can be held up and refused entry or forced into a different shape.

It has often been overlooked that the rhetoric of the topographical model combines the spatial with the social or political, a point which is dramatized beautifully in a passage of Freud's *Introductory Lectures* where he compares

the system of the unconscious to a large entrance hall in which the mental impulses jostle one another like separate individuals. Adjoining this entrance hall there is a second, narrower room—a kind of drawing-room—in which consciousness, too, resides. But on the threshold between these two rooms a *watchman* performs his function: he examines the different mental impulses, acts as *censor*, and will not admit them into the drawing-room if they displease him.¹⁴

Those impulses which have to turn back at the door are considered by Freud to be '*bewusstseinsunfähig*', that is, 'inadmissible to consciousness', a term which he adopted from Breuer in the *Studies on Hysteria*, where it had been constructed analogous to '*hoffähig*', i.e. 'admissible to court'.¹⁵ In Freud's topographical model consciousness is a privilege analogous to social privileges, access to the psychical drawing-room is granted in virtue of an idea's social acceptability, of its fitness for good society. The reflection of imperial court procedure in Freud's individual psychology also becomes apparent in his use of the term '*Instanz*' (translated as 'agency') for the elements of the

¹² 1900a, V: 567; 1916–17, XV: 295; 1932c, XXII: 221. For further literature on Freud's use of metaphors cf. B.D. Lewin, 'Metaphor, Mind and Manikin', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 50 (1971); H. Nash, 'Freud and Metaphor', *Archive for General Psychiatry*, 7 (1962); G. Pederson-Krag, 'The Use of Metaphor in Analytic Thinking', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 25 (1956).

¹³ 1917a, XVII: 141; cf. 1900a, V: 615.

¹⁴ 1916–17, XV: 295.

¹⁵ 1895d, II: 225 n.

psyche, since '*Inстанz*' has strong connotations of legal bureaucracy or administrative echelons.¹⁶

In Freud's empire of the psyche social privileges are a matter of birth. Impulses born in the province of the unconscious remain unworthy of them even when they have acquired a high degree of sophistication in the course of their development. As Freud writes:

Their origin is what decides their fate. We may compare them with individuals of mixed race who, taken all round, resemble white men, but who betray their coloured descent by some striking feature or other, and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges of white people.¹⁷

With time Freud became dissatisfied with this model because of its insufficient consideration of external factors and he developed his second, structural model in order to account for them. From 1923 onwards Freud divides the psyche into three functional centres of activity, each of which is situated in a distinct relationship *vis-a-vis* the two others and toward the outside world. The *superego* is typically the 'critical agency', fulfilling the functions of self-assessment, self-punishment, providing moral ideals and judgments. The *ego* represents reason, contemporary demands from reality or necessity; its activities are directed toward safety and self-preservation and follow the criteria of the useful or the pragmatic. The *id* represents irrational passions, desire for immediate satisfaction and pleasure, mainly in a sexual sense. Both *id* and *superego* stand for interests of the past, are constituted partly by heredity and partly by infantile experience, while the *ego* is fully attached to the present.

This structural model places the individual into a historical and social continuity whose demands are represented by actors internal to the mind. It is by referring to *id*, *ego* and *superego* as *dramatis personae* to whom interests and intentions are ascribed which they are said to promote against the will of others that the psychoanalytic *lingua franca* reveals itself most openly as sociomorphic, that is, portraying the psyche as a social system composed of humunculi.

¹⁶ 1900a, V: 537 n.

¹⁷ 1915e, XIV: 191.

The tyranny established

For Freud the aim of the psyche's micro-society and indeed of nervous life in general, is to master stimuli, to rid itself of all tensions and—were it feasible—to 'maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition'.¹⁸ Stimuli, reaching the mind from the body and from the outside world, are experienced as disturbances of an original state of rest to which the human being wants to return by satisfying the needs to which they give rise. All of Freud's basic postulates, models and metaphors deal with one or another aspect of this homeostatic principle, with the sources, pressure and pathways of stimuli, with their effect on the mind and the means for their mastery as well as with the problems encountered in the attempt to master them. The achievement of this task, that is, the reduction of psychic tension, is experienced as pleasurable.¹⁹ With this negative and quantitative definition of pleasure Freud established the economic foundation of the what he called 'pleasure principle'.

However, according to Freud there is no possibility of remaining in a condition of quiescence or of getting rid of stimuli as soon as they arise in order to return to the original condition. The infant is born into a world which it experiences as a source of excitation with which it is unable to cope but from which it cannot escape. Hence, concludes Freud, the infant's primary response to this hostile world is one of hatred and repudiation.²⁰ It withdraws into an inner world of imagination where it simply hallucinates the satisfaction of its desires whenever they arise. Naturally, this primary mental process does not provide an effective short-cut to pleasure and satisfaction. Its magic is impotent. On the contrary, in the absence of real objects—of a real mother's breast for instance—hallucinations provoke an increasing feeling of frustration—the mental image of the mother's breast does not allay hunger, instead it creates a false expectation of gratification. To stop this increasing frustration a thorough reorganization of the mental processes takes place, turning attention from its restricted orientation towards pleasure to all perceptions and ideas, even if they happen to be unpleasurable.²¹ The infant becomes conscious of the world around it and learns to tolerate a certain measure of unpleasure in the hope of ultimately obtaining real satisfaction.

Under the rule of the pleasure principle, mental energy was channelled into useless constructs of imagination, only with the introduction of reality principle did the mind learn how to work with minute amounts 'in order not to

¹⁸ 1915a, XIV: 120.

²⁰ 1915c, XIV: 119.

¹⁹ 1916–17, XVI: 356.

²¹ 1900a, V: 565 f.

drain away the *quantity of energy* it could use for the external world'.²² Freud compared this to the careful way in which a general shifts small figures about on a map before setting his large bodies of troops in motion.²³ This ability to test reality with small units of energy, to anticipate possible consequences of action endows man with the capacity to consider the *useful*, not only the *pleasurable*.

The ultimate goal, however, remains the same throughout life. The pleasure principle can never be dethroned or nullified: we all remain in its 'inexorable' grip. Seen in this light, says Freud, all our thoughts are 'nothing but a substitute for a hallucinatory wish'.²⁴ Yet, realistic thought is in many respects superior to the unrealistic and blind hallucinatory thought processes. Although the claim to pleasure has become more modest, it has become more real at the same time, since it allows purposeful action, adaptation to and control over real objects, and succeeds thus in providing real pleasure. The subject becomes master over himself through his ability to handle inner and outer demands and to resist the demands for immediate and full satisfaction which, as Freud put it, 'would often lead to perilous conflicts with the external world and to extinction'.²⁵

However, this is not the end of the conflict between pleasure and reality, for the forces of reality encounter opposition, 'a *resistance* stirs within us against the relentlessness and monotony of the laws of thought . . . Reason becomes the *enemy* which withholds from us so many possibilities of pleasure.'²⁶ One domain of the mind refuses to be subjugated and withdraws into the fantastic world of wishful thinking. Freud compares this to nature reserves 'which are set up to preserve the *original state of the country*, protected from the changes brought by civilization'.²⁷ As long as these fantasies are kept within their reservations they are not dangerous. Freud uses the metaphor of *front* and *hinterland*: while the front requires strict organization because of the enemy's proximity, things can be more relaxed in the hinterland.²⁸ As long as the self can separate its fantasies from reality, imagination from perception, fantasy can in fact have a beneficial compensatory effect in which frustrating reality,

²² *Ibid.*, V: 599 f.

²⁶ 1933a, XXII: 23.

²³ 1933a, XXII: 89.

²⁷ 1924e, XIX: 187.

²⁴ 1900a, V: 567.

²⁸ 1926e, XX: 196.

²⁵ 1940a, XXIII: 198.

although known, is temporarily put aside, 'bracketed', in order to protect the individual from unnecessary unpleasure.²⁹

However, freedom from the monotonous laws of thought, and from the pragmatic motive, means freedom from man's proper interest—that is from self-preservation. It turns out to be a dangerous chimera, capable of bringing death to the individual who does not confine it to the limits of the nature reserve and lets the sloppiness of the hinterland spread to the front. Fantasy must be forced to accept the consequences of its blindness; after withdrawing from reality it cannot be allowed to obtain power over action taking place in that reality. Fantasy also has to be constricted for reasons of mental economy. Mental energy, a scarce good, has to be used efficiently in order to change the real world into a more pleasurable one and cannot be wasted on unnecessary products of the mind.

The primary process functions are banned into the unconscious depth of the mind, divorced from reality and consciousness even of the individual himself. This unconscious core of the psyche remains inhabited by what Freud compares to its '*aboriginal population*'.³⁰ In this core all the infantile impulses which characterized the individual at the beginning of his life are retained. Unlike the historical past, the mental past cannot be destroyed. Earlier stages in the development are merely overlaid and continue to exist alongside what developed from them.³¹ The primitive nucleus of the mind knows nothing 'that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time, and . . . no alteration in its mental processes produced by the passage of time.'³² The core of the psyche remains, as Freud said, 'a chaos, a cauldron full of seething expectations'.³³ Hobbes's state of nature is, as I indicated in the beginning, an apt analogy for what Freud contends we all hide in our mind. For in Freud's theory the id never achieves a unified will; it is full of contradictory demands and has no understanding of incompatibility, negation or doubt. It is the realm of a never-ending war of all against all, without law or restraint, literally outside history.

²⁹ 1916–17, XVI: 371 f.; J. Sandler and H. Nagera, 'Aspects of the Metapsychology of Fantasy', *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 18 (1963), p. 184.

³⁰ 1915e, XIV: 195.

³¹ 1913j, XIII: 184.

³² 1933a, XXII: 73.

³³ *Ibid.*

Similar to Hobbes, Freud builds a political theory of the mind using a fictitious state of nature outside the domain of history and civilization in order to legitimize the existence of the Leviathan. Again similar to Hobbes, Freud reaches his conclusion about this state of nature by logical inference, 'by setting aside completely the historically acquired characteristics of man'.³⁴ Freud's notion of the primary process can hardly be taken as a statement about what human beings actually are or want at the beginning of life. The assumption of an organism starting life by pursuing its death and being forced to life by deprivation seems rather implausible in biological terms. Freud's concept of the primary process is a statement about what the adult individual would do, were he freed from the teachings of reality. Man's captivity in the hands of the 'inexorable' grip of the pleasure principle turns his internalized state of nature into a looming threat, an ever-present potentiality of chaos. This threat assumes a strategic position in Freud's argument justifying tyranny as necessary to prevent the potentiality from turning into overwhelming actuality.

However, even where this threat is not apparent in the same way, Freud prefers tyranny to other forms of organization. This can be shown in the example of the sexual development of the individual.

It is the sexual drives, wishes and desires which can resist education through reality and withdraw into the unconscious, because at first they are not directed toward objects of their own. Made up of many components which have their sources in different erotogenic zones of the body they are attached to bodily functions which gain importance in certain periods of the child's life, like the mouth or the anus. Thus they derive satisfaction from sucking in the oral stage and from defecating in the anal stage. Pre-genital sexuality is not clearly centred, and the attempts of component drives to achieve supremacy so as to impose a clear order are abortive. It is, in Freud's terms, a situation of 'anarchy', in which each of the component drives pursues pleasure independently.³⁵ He argues that only with the 'subordination of all the component sexual drives under the primacy of the genitals'³⁶ sexuality changes from its infantile form into a mature one. In this respect Freud's remarkably tolerant attitude toward what he called 'perverse' sexuality—this he did not mean as a reproach—is interesting to note. In his eyes there is hardly any relevant difference between normal and perverse sexuality. As he puts it,

³⁴ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford, 1962), p. 21.

³⁵ 1916–17, XVI: 328.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

In both of them *a well-organized tyranny* has been established, but in each of the two a different family has seized the *reins of power*.³⁷

He contrasts this situation with infantile sexuality where 'component drives have *equal rights*'³⁸ and lack the authoritarian organization which structures mature sexuality and directs it toward the outside world. The best sign of maturity is thus genital sexuality, in which the sexual aim is linked to procreation and hence necessitates contact with another person, a sexual object. This purposeful pursuit of satisfaction in the external world, the finding of an object, and the alteration of reality for the purpose of pleasure, all this is only possible in conditions of a well-established internal tyranny—perverse or normal. Hierarchy, subordination and superordination are signs of maturity, while equal rights belong to infantile stages in sexual development.

Outside intervention and the restoration of order

In order to do justice to Freud, his authoritarian stance is not to be confounded with an absolutist one. He—like the ego whose primacy he advocates so fiercely—opposes both those who claim too much for liberty and equality and those who claim too much for oppressive authority. Reason is not only the drives' antagonist, it is also their helper, and should never oppose them in an absolutist fashion or attempt to crush and extirpate them. These attempts would be doomed to failure since dangerous impulses cannot simply be turned away and kept in the unconscious. Such a strategy does not increase the control of reason over the drives, but allows them to withdraw into what Freud called '*internal foreign territory*', where they will form—to use another of Freud's metaphors—'*a State within a State*, an inaccessible party with which cooperation is impossible'.³⁹ It is through its imprudent defence that the ego has forced itself into an endless struggle against an enemy which has become inaccessible and invincible and in the ensuing guerilla war the ego loses energy which it could have used in its fight against the unfriendly external reality.⁴⁰ It becomes increasingly unable to master its difficult task and ultimately the repressed impulses break into consciousness forcing the ego into a compromise—that is, neurotic symptoms.

Freud describes mental illness in political terms as '*a rebellion on the part of the id against the external world*'.⁴¹ It is indeed a successful rebellion, but the id should have listened to the voice of the prudent ego and submitted to the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁴⁰ 1916–17, XV: 358.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ 1924d, XIX: 185.

³⁹ 1939a, XXIII: 76.

'exigencies of reality'. In its eagerness for pleasure it has produced a situation that is at once unpleasurable and wasteful. Since the weakened ego is not able to recover its legitimate position of sovereignty over the psyche, it appeals for outside intervention that will help it to redress the balance in its favour.

It is the domain of the military which provides Freud with the largest single repertoire of analogies and metaphors. They are frequent throughout his writings and suggest similarly to his political metaphors that one side has to dominate the other. The military and war are the realm where balance and equality are conceived as danger while superiority and victory create a feeling of security. When Freud comes to speak of the therapeutic process, he uses almost exclusively comparisons to war. Put together, Freud's images form the legend of a 'pact' between the analyst and the patient's ego 'in a *civil war* which has to be decided by the assistance of an *ally* from outside.'⁴² Its 'battlefield' is the transference and it is there that 'all the *mutually struggling forces* should meet one another' and that '*victory* has to be won'⁴³ against enemies who defend themselves by a whole range of tactical and strategic resistances.⁴⁴ The aim of therapy is in all cases 'a *progressive conquest* of the id'.⁴⁵

How is this to be achieved? Therapy is designed to lift repression and thereby to allow the hitherto repressed impulses to become conscious. However, sexuality is liberated, as Freud pointed out at a meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, 'not in order that man may from now on be dominated by sexuality but in order to make *supression* possible.'⁴⁶ What he objects to is the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the repressive mechanism, but not its aim. Even though mental conflict cannot be disposed of completely, what can be accomplished is a 'taming' ('*Bändigung*') of the drives, a state where sexuality 'no longer seeks to go its independent way to satisfaction'.⁴⁷

⁴² 1940a, XXIII: 173.

⁴³ 1916-17, XVI: 454; 1912b, XII: 108.

⁴⁴ 1912b, XII: 103, 104 n1; 1920a, XVIII: 163; 1926e, XX: 224.

⁴⁵ 1923b, XIX: 56.

⁴⁶ *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, ed. H. Nunberg and E. Federn (New York, 1962-74), Vol. II, p. 89.

⁴⁷ 1937c, XXIII: 225.

Through the lifting of the repressions the ego can recover the energy which hitherto it expended wastefully for maintaining its barrier against sexual desires. As Freud puts it, the ego has become 'enlarged' or 'enriched' and therefore more conciliatory towards the claims of sexuality which it now judges rationally in terms of what is possible within the limits of reality.⁴⁸ According to Freud, a certain portion of repressed sexual impulses can be allowed by the ego to find direct satisfaction; these are the sexual desires which can be gratified under the given circumstances without provoking danger to the individual. Another portion of impulses—mainly the pregenital ones—have to be brought 'truly and thoroughly under *control*'. Its energies are deflected by the ego on to another aim, a socially valuable substitute, and allowed gratification there. Sublimation is a compromise that is forced upon the drives by the domination of the ego and combines the socially and rationally useful with the pleasurable, in contrast to repression whose compromise gave neither pleasure nor practical benefit in terms of ego achievements.

For a third possible solution, rejection, pleasurable mental images are divested of their energy and remain but powerless memories in the mind. Rejection is thus the inverse of repression, in which a mental image was rejected from consciousness, but allowed to retain its energy on an unconscious level.

Tyranny and autonomy

The therapy reinstates the ego in its position of domination and of free and autonomous choice among different options.

The business of the analysis is to secure the best possible psychological conditions for the functions of the ego; with that it has discharged its task.⁴⁹

Freud even leaves the patient the choice to reproduce the neurotic symptoms, if he considers them appropriate⁵⁰ and warns against the imposition of rules of conduct by the analyst. Therapy should lead to *autonomy* of the individual, who has to assume rational and conscious control over all he does, because he is responsible for all his actions and because it is the most *expedient* and *pleasurable* way to act and to live.

⁴⁸ 1916–17, XVI: 455; 1933a, XXII: 171.

⁴⁹ 1937c, XXIII: 250.

⁵⁰ 1923b, XIX: 50 n; compare to earlier statements: 1904a, VII: 252; 1905e, VII: 16.

Freud's ethic of self-mastery finds expression in the dualism characteristic of all of his discourse, in the fusion of objective economic forces and of subjective emotional experience which correlates efficiency to pleasure as well as waste to unpleasure. In this dualism Freud makes external freedom contingent upon internal domination. For only the ego's hegemony can assure the expedient use of scarce mental energy which enables a person to choose freely. Freud's argument for the rule of reason is not based on an ethical essentialism, that is, on the assumption that men ought to be rational because reason is what essentially differentiates them from other animals, a suggestion which can be found in Kant or Aristotle for instance. Freud's argument for the rule of reason is both *hedonistic*—promising a reduction in suffering and an increase in pleasure—and *economic*—promising less waste and more efficiency. Freud's ethical argument is, one might say, *non-moralistic*. Men ought to be rational because only the ego is prudent, knowledgeable, in contact with the external world and able to fulfil a synthetic function. The other agencies of the mind are divisive and ignorant (the id) or cruel and merciless (the superego). In Freud's later theory of Eros and death drive they are said to be propelled by the latter, leading to the destruction of the self. While the id stands for lawlessness and chaos, Freud compares the superego to a 'garrison' set up in a 'conquered city'—it is only the rule of the ego that provides true autonomy whereby the city of mind is ruled by its own laws.⁵¹

Freud's therapeutic intervention in the psyche's 'civil war' is designed to set an end to the pathological condition in which a multiplicity of authorities lead to anarchy or heteronomy. He argues—like Hobbes—that only an undisputed sovereign can bring about efficient and effective action by giving precedence to the interest of the whole—in this case of the whole individual—over particular interests. The *natural community* of mind must fail, as Freud tells us in his fiction of the primary process, and it is as a consequence of the individual's painful realization of this failure that the mind's *civil association* emerges in the transition to the secondary processes.

One could almost describe the mature and rational individual in Freud's theory in the words used by Hobbes for the *Leviathan* in the Preface to the Latin Edition of his work and call him 'an artificial man made for the protection and salvation of the natural man, to whom it is superior in grandeur and power.'⁵² And again, comparable to the *Leviathan*, what a rational organization has to offer is not happiness, but the removal of at least some of the obstacles to satisfaction, promising in Hobbes's words 'continual success

⁵¹ 1927c, XXI: 124.

⁵² Quoted by M. Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Oxford, 1975), p. 72.

in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth.⁵³ Not unity or harmony will reign, the many do not become one through the rule of reason, conflict remains an inevitable feature of both Freud's mind and Hobbes's society, but the many become represented by the one who has achieved the monopoly over power and acts in their name. No common will develops, but common objects of will are imposed on the self. This coercion is required because of the sexual forces' incessant attempt to acquire control over motility in order to guide action toward immediate satisfaction. Their position is thus inevitably opposed to the ego whose interests in the safety of the individual would be violated by such action. However, it is the ego alone, which in Freud's theory is in control of the motor functions, and the impulses of the id have to coerce the ego to give in to their demands. In these cases Freud compares the position of the ego to that of the *constitutional monarch* whose power is 'a question more of form than of fact' and who will not oppose parliament in any decision.⁵⁴ Or then Freud likens the ego to a *sycophantic politician* 'who sees the truth but wants to keep his place in popular favor'.⁵⁵ In both metaphors an individual with superior insight is coerced by a political system that gives power to the short-sighted multitude to act in a fashion that will show itself to be detrimental to the good of the whole. Freud opposes such an organization avidly.

For our mind, that precious instrument by whose means we maintain ourselves in life, is no peacefully self-contained unity. It is rather to be compared with a *modern state* in which a *mob*, eager for enjoyment and destruction, has to be held down forcibly by a *prudent superior class*.⁵⁶

Conclusions

To sum up: Freud's theory of human development portrays man in a fictional primary stage of unfreedom and irrationality which he overcomes in the wake of his ill-success in procuring satisfaction. After leaving this original state of hallucinatory solipsism all men strive to reach maturity and self-mastery in order to gain a freedom of action which allows for efficient and effective use of mental energy, leading to its pleasurable discharge. However, not all men achieve this natural and normal desideratum because civilization imposes excessive restrictions and inhibitions at an early stage in their life when the ego is weak and resorts to repression.⁵⁷ This predisposes them to illness in which they are incapable of enjoyment unless therapeutic intervention lifts the barriers of repression and puts thereby at the disposal of the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵⁶ 1932c, XXII: 221.

⁵⁴ 1923b, XIX: 55.

⁵⁷ 1926e, XX: 217; 1913j, XIII: 188 ff.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

ego energies which were hitherto either inaccessible or wasted in the effort of maintaining repressions.⁵⁸ In other words, therapy enables the individual to reach his natural *telos* and to become 'what he might have become at best under the most favorable conditions'.⁵⁹ Freud never expresses the ideal of his *naturalistic ethics* in radical or revolutionary language, he states somewhat cautiously that in the end the individual 'has rather less that is unconscious and rather more that is conscious in him than before'.⁶⁰ As he warns in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the '*subjugation*' of the unconscious by the conscious part of the mind is never complete.⁶¹ He does not set out to abolish psychic conflict, but rather to transform a pathological war into a normal confrontation. The difference between health and illness is one of balance and quantity, it is a practical question, not a theoretical or qualitative one.

Freud never prescribes to his patients any particular course of action as the only 'free' one. As he states in his *Introductory Lectures*: by leaving it to the patients to 'decide on their own judgment in favor of some midway position between leading a full life and absolute asceticism, we feel our conscience clear whatever their choice.'⁶² In order to enable the ego to find an autonomous solution to the inevitable conflict between sexual desires and moral prohibitions it has to be reinstated in its position of mastery and supremacy. Freud writes in his letter to Albert Einstein:

Our best hope for the future is that intellect—the scientific spirit, reason—may in process of time establish a *dictatorship* in the mental life of man. The nature of reason is a guarantee that afterwards it will not fail to give man's emotional impulses and what is determined by them the position they deserve.⁶³

In Freud's writings the ego is thus legitimized as the *benevolent tyrant* of the psyche by its attachment to present external reality, its control over the access to motility, its economic organization, and its prudence, self-restraint and conciliation in the pursuit of the interest of the self. Freud opposes the rule of either superego or id because of their *absolutist* character which he sets in stark contrast to the ego's *authoritarian* benevolence.

In Freud's theory autonomy and freedom are made contingent upon the fulfilment of two interrelated conditions: on the one hand he requires an area where the individual is free from external interference and impediments, i.e.

⁵⁸ 1927a, XX: 256.

⁶¹ 1900a, V: 580 f.

⁵⁹ 1916-17, XVI: 435.

⁶² 1916-17, XVI: 434.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶³ 1933a, XXII: 171.

where he is allowed free development without unnecessary restriction on sexual satisfaction. Freud recognizes, however, that this free domain has to be limited for the sake of communal life and never supports or advocates an unrestricted sexual life, instead he demands merely that 'certain instinctual impulses with whose suppression society has gone too far, should be permitted a greater amount of satisfaction.'⁶⁴ Here Freud's ideas fall clearly within the liberal tradition of the negative concept of 'freedom from'.

On the other hand, it is only by reaching a certain state of mind that freedom is possible, for unless the ego achieves internal command as the psyche's dictator the individual cannot act as his own legislator. In this language of self-mastery Freud uses precisely that metaphor which Sir Isaiah Berlin condemns so vigorously for providing the momentum which turns the idea of freedom into one supporting oppression and despotism. Freud's division of the self into 'higher' and 'lower' parts is enough to provide him a place on Berlin's list of villains. For with time, Berlin contends, the 'higher' self comes to be conceived of as 'something wider than the individual', and is identified with the race, nation, class or institution to which the individual belongs, thus justifying under the cloak of a 'positive' notion of freedom the coercion of individuals into a 'higher' freedom.⁶⁵

In a recent essay Peter Gay attempts to free Freud from this accusation by arguing that since Freud always left free choice in the hands of the individual his concept of freedom had to be a negative, i.e. liberal, one.⁶⁶ In opposition to both Berlin and Gay I wish to maintain that while Freud's understanding of freedom is definitely not a liberal one, it manages to combine the metaphor of self-mastery with a negative concept of freedom and therefore cannot be relegated to either side of the negative-positive dichotomy; any attempt to do so does injustice to the complexity of Freud's thought.

Freud avoids the flaws which Berlin attributes to the metaphor of self-mastery by dividing the mind into three rather than two elements. This tripartite structure allows Freud to represent outside restrictions, commands which originate from external authorities, by an agency of their own (the superego) and to oppose them to the individual's 'true' and autonomous interests. Freud's model of mind emphasizes in accordance with the liberal

⁶⁴ 1925e, XIX: 220; cf. 1910e, XI: 54.

⁶⁵ I. Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Four Essays on Liberty* (London, 1969), pp. 131 f., and 'Introduction', *Ibid.*, p. xliii.

⁶⁶ P. Gay, 'Freud and Freedom', in *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. A. Ryan (London, 1979), pp. 56 ff.

tradition that participation in the common good is not to be confused with freedom and that social and individual aims are irreconcilably antagonistic. Freedom of the individual is therefore always freedom *from* social interference, even though a certain measure of social restrictions is accepted as the necessary basis of communal life.

The divergence between Freud's and the liberal notion of freedom is a consequence of the difference in their conception of human nature. Liberal man is essentially rational, capable of free and autonomous choice. Unfreedom is explicable in terms of external interference or constraints which may inhibit rational and free choice, but which are extrinsic and removable. Since man is essentially autonomous, his freedom is a good that has to be *defended* against unfavourable *circumstances*. The absence of external impediments or obstacles constitutes thus the necessary and sufficient condition of freedom in the liberal canon.⁶⁷ Freud on the other hand understands freedom as a good to be *acquired* by the initially unfree and irrational individual. Favourable circumstances, albeit necessary, do not provide a sufficient condition for free choice without the means to restore the internal command of the ego, i.e. the capacity to enact desires rationally. Freud's ideal is thus one of *acquisition of freedom*, while liberalism is concerned with its defence.⁶⁸

As Mortimer Adler put it, liberal freedom is wholly circumstantial, while Freud's concept is both circumstantial and acquired. Thus, unlike Berlin and other liberal thinkers, Freud holds that those who achieve self-mastery enjoy a freedom which others do not possess under the same circumstances, without thereby attempting to deny the importance of negative freedom.⁶⁹ Although Berlin acknowledges that it might be impossible to exercise freedom, if internal or material resources for its exercise are lacking, he argues that freedom exists if external conditions allow its exercise, i.e. if external restraints are absent. With Berlin, freedom is an option, not a practice. However, the projection of Freud's model of the mind back on to the domain of the social, from which he borrowed it, demonstrates the inadequacy of this liberal notion of freedom for an understanding of processes in a society divided by a struggle for the means of power or material resources. In this situation the protection of one's option to act freely can only be achieved by a political practice which necessarily requires the expenditure, and therefore the availability, of resources. Like Freud's metaphor of the mind, the real social world

⁶⁷ M.J. Adler. *The Idea of Freedom* (Garden City, 1958-61), Vol. II, pp. 548 f.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 265 f.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

knows no conflict-free sphere where no energies have to be expended for the protection of a free scope of action. Freedom can only be defended by its continuous exercise.

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