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## Freedom – the abyssal ground of Freudian psychoanalysis

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### ABSTRACT

Freedom is an a priori condition for the way in which Freudian psychoanalysis thematizes the development, the structure and the dynamics of our psychic life; the human psyche is essentially constituted by freedom. What this really means is that psychoanalysis lacks a foundation or ground – both as a psychological science and as a kind of clinical treatment. Freedom is the abyssal ground of psychoanalysis.

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### Introduction

Ever since Freud created psychoanalysis more than 120 years ago, it has been characterized by institutional, cultural and intellectual confusion and homelessness. As a scientific discipline, its place within academic life has never been obvious, and as a clinical method of treatment, it has often been regarded with suspicion by the established faculties of medicine and by the psychiatric wards. Even within its own ranks, a considerable amount of doubt has always lingered behind the self-confident facade. The questions entailed in this self-doubt form themselves a familiar part of the history of psychoanalysis. For example: Should we formulate our theories in a terminology oriented toward mechanistic and causal explanations, or should we rather formulate them in motivational, intentional and teleological terms? Is it possible to conduct empirical research in the clinical situation or ought we rather turn to non-analytical sciences such as neuropsychiatry or experimental development psychology in order to get our theories or hypotheses verified or falsified? How do we define ‘psychological problems’? How do we define ‘therapeutic success’? And can we really, after all, define psychoanalysis as a form of treatment? But if not, how are we then to define it?

In spite of its rather long history, psychoanalysis seems to lack, both in its theoretical and practical facets, a stable ground in the form of securely verified results and discoveries, as well as in the form of a fixed method or a fixed set of well-defined concepts. Psychoanalysis thus lacks what would make it prone to develop into what the philosopher Thomas S. Kuhn has termed

‘normal scientific research’ (1962), the kind of research that, due to the fact that it relies on a solid foundation of generally accepted results, methods and concepts (what Kuhn would call a ‘paradigm’), can take on the form of a continuous and accumulative activity in which scientific methods are applied, hypotheses are tested, knowledge is generated, debates are provoked, old results are questioned and replaced by new ones etc.

Here, it might be objected that psychoanalysis has indeed developed certain generalized theories and conceptual structures. Unlike other sciences, however, it has never reached the point where a firm core of knowledge and concepts can withdraw from our critical attention to form a stable ground in the form an unquestioned paradigm within which a normal scientific activity may be established. For some reason, psychoanalysis seems to remain within what might be termed, again with Kuhn, a ‘permanent revolutionary stage’, a stage characterized not merely by a continual struggle over the most basic aspects of a discipline, but also by a kind of chronic, philosophical confusion expressed in a series of attempts to critically question the fundamental concepts and to formulate speculative outlines of new theories and methods.

The inability of psychoanalysis, in spite of its long history, to establish itself as a normal scientific research procedure, and likewise its inability, in praxis, to develop into a rigorous and thus pedagogically adaptable method, has made it a sitting duck to a number of accusations from the external world as well as from within its own ranks. If we are to believe a number of critical voices, psychoanalysis has been unable to develop one single inch since Freud’s own

days. It has been unable to prove even its most fundamental hypotheses, for example, those concerning the existence and the workings of the unconscious. And Freud's own theories are discussed today as though they were up-to-date research! The so to speak epistemological subject of psychoanalysis seems to have been constantly unable to assume the role of being the one who actually *knows*, the one who is in possession of the scientific knowledge concerning the research area of psychoanalysis. (And here, when I speak of the epistemological subject of psychoanalysis, I do not talk about individual psychoanalysts who often have tended to assume a different attitude, not seldom for narcissistic reasons as I would have it.) However, I think there are essential reasons as to why the epistemological subject of psychoanalysis has never been able to, and should indeed abstain from even trying to, assume this role. And thus, we approach the central topic of this paper.

In his introductory lectures of 1932, Freud defines psychoanalysis as 'the science of the living soul' – *die Wissenschaft vom Seelenleben* (1932, p. 6). If we take this literally, and I think it will be instructive to do so, psychoanalysis is a science of the soul and *not* a special type of psychology – at least not in the sense that this last term has taken on during the last century, when psychology has developed into an empirical science whose aim is to explain, as it were objectively, psychic expressions in terms of their underlying causes, and then to gradually discern causal laws on the basis of which we may predict future psychological occurrences. As a number of philosophers have pointed out (e.g., Gaita, 2002, p. 238), *psyche* and *soul* are not equivocal concepts. For example, we can meaningfully state that someone has 'lost' or 'sold' his soul, that his soul can be 'saved', that suffering may 'lacerate' his soul or that a stretch of nature or a piece of music has 'soul', but it would sound awkward if we said that someone has sold or saved his *psyche*, that suffering lacerated his *psyche* or that a piece of music has *psyche*.

In what follows, I shall argue that what essentially characterizes the soul is *freedom*, which makes of freedom something that essentially characterizes the subject matter of Freudian psychoanalysis. *It is for this reason*, if I am right, that psychoanalysis, both as theory and clinical praxis, cannot obtain a stable ground. Due to the essential freedom of the soul, there can be no such thing as 'how the soul works', and therefore there are no such things, in this area, as secure and fixed scientific results and discoveries, or rigorous methods, or once and for all fixed set of concepts etc. Freedom as the ground of psychoanalysis is at the same time its theoretical and methodological *abyss*.

But let me first ponder a bit on what we may refer to when we start employing the highly ambiguous notions of 'soul' and 'freedom', and when we start to establish a necessary connection between them.

### Soul and freedom

To be endowed with a soul, in the sense that concerns us here, does not mean possessing a certain metaphysical entity that may eventually get separated from the body and that may or may not live on after death. To be endowed with a soul means here rather to live a certain kind of life: a life that is *formed* in such a way that makes it possible to use, in a meaningful way, such phrases as 'having lost' or 'having sold' one's soul. One can only lose one's soul within a life that is, for example, formed or organized in moral terms such as dignity, pride, humiliation and self-respect, a life in which such aspects are vital. Plants do not live that kind of life and thus do not possess a soul in the sense we are after here.

A being endowed with a soul lives a life that has *meaning* – from the first-person perspective. My life has meaning because *it means something to me*. My life, as a whole, *concerns me*, even if I should adopt an attitude of complete indifference toward it. As a being endowed with a soul, thus, it will be possible to meaningfully refer to me by such statements as 'He does not live a good life', 'He has wasted his life', 'He really takes his life seriously', 'He might as well go and kill himself!' etc. The category 'my life' is so to speak an organizing factor in my life. My particular actions, emotions, thoughts, wishes and expectations acquire sense, identity and direction only within the greater *framework* of organization, according to differentiations of sense and value, which is my life as a whole. It is within this greater framework of dreams, skills, interests, ideals, ideas, expectations and identifications that I can find the reasons for me wanting to become a psychoanalyst or getting upset about the weather during my vacation.

A being that is in want of a soul – that is, a being whose particular experiences are not organized within the framework of a meaningful life – may suffer, but it may not 'curse the day it was born'. It can feel joy, but it cannot sense happiness. It can sense fear, but it cannot despise itself for its own fear (Gaita, 1991, p. 116). Neither are distinctions as that between truth and falsity possible to apply to their states and experiences: they only *are* – or not. Only in matters of the soul are the deeper distinctions motivated, and we would not speak of 'soul' where those questions are absent. When a state or an experience takes place within the framework of a meaningful life, it becomes possible to ask: Was I true to myself when I reacted like that? Am I really happy? Do I really want to do this? Is my engagement really genuine? Is my belief in

this really authentic? Questions like these cannot be meaningfully posed to a being in want of a soul. A being without a soul has no depth – it cannot enter into a deep conflict with itself.

That the human being is endowed with a soul and that her life thereby comes to mean something to her, this also means that she is able, essentially, to *relate* to herself and to her own life. But it really is too superficial to claim that this is something that we are ‘able to do’. Our self-relation is not something that we happen to fall into once in a while, or a property that we may have or lack. That we stand in relation to ourselves and to our lives, this fact rather constitutes *the very form* of our lives, it fundamentally determines the meaning of our lives. It makes it possible to claim, for example, that someone is ‘leading a superficial life’.

To live in a relation to one’s life and oneself, moreover, will only be possible for a being essentially characterized by *freedom*. Freedom in this sense – a concept closely related to modern, existentialist philosophy (Heidegger, 1927; Sartre, 1956 etc.) – does not mean that the human being would possess a fully autonomous faculty of reasoning or something like a completely ‘free will’ and therefore would be able to act in total independence of drives, affects, environmental conditions, traditional norms, conceptual structures etc. Freedom here rather means that the human being, in virtue of her self-relation, essentially ‘transcends’ (or is constituted by something ‘more’ than) everything that exists within the world and that can be described in a complete way from the conventional third-person perspective of empirical science. The human being is not only a being among the other beings entailed in the psychophysical order – she never *merely* exists but does so always in terms of *how it is* to exist. When we deal with a being endowed with a soul, a being essentially characterized by freedom, thus, ‘a good life’, to take just one example, can never be defined by describing a series of external conditions. In virtue of her freedom, the human being is this problematic creature that may possess good health, beauty, wealth, success, popularity, and even have the signal substances of her brain in perfect balance – and yet lead a miserable life! Something similar is not possible for, let’s say, a dog (and when I say this I am not trying to state anything about the capacities of dogs, but merely to state something about our conceptual geography). A healthy dog with nice owners who take good care of it and give it food, shelter, love and exercise leads a good life – period.

In virtue of her being endowed with a soul, thus, the life of the human being can never be conceived exclusively in terms of being a *result*, a result of all those biological, material, cultural, psychological and social forces, mechanisms, processes and structures working in and upon her and her life. An ever so complete scientific description of

all of this would do little to answer the question about *who I am*. Who and what I am, as a being endowed with a soul, is not primarily determined by such aspects but is rather determined by *what I make* of all this, how I actively relate and react to it – up to and encompassing a stance of total indifference. Within the life of the soul, the external causes inevitably assume the stature of ‘reasons’: here, the external causes are transformed into phenomena of signification, into things that mean something to me. In virtue of her freedom, thus, the human being is not just pushed and pulled in the causal order of nature but is thinking, feeling and acting on the basis of her meaningful relation to herself, her life and her environment. The human being – conceived of as a being endowed with a soul – is living her life in the *logical space of reasons*.

On closer inspection, we find that our thinking, feeling and acting, in each specific instance, take on the form of *answering upon a call*. Our psychic reactions are thus essentially *expressive*. It is not so with stones, for example. That they get warm under the rays of the sun does not mean that they ‘answers upon a call’ from the sun. But when a human being is ashamed, for example, over having failed a test, she emotionally answers to what failing the test actually *means*, to what the bad test-result actually *says* within the framework of her life. To live in the logical space of reasons does not mean, thus, to automatically react, act, feel, think *in accordance with* the reasons provided by the rest of my life, but rather to react, act, feel, think *in the light of* these reasons.

This also means that, at least in principle, there is a space of reflexive distance between the call of the reasons and the human response. A principal possibility of *answering otherwise* will always remain open. Without this reflexive distance, without this spectrum of possibilities – that is, if freedom was not a constitutive aspect of the human life – our very practice of explaining human expressions in terms of their reasons would collapse. Therefore, without recourse to our ability of *responding*, it would also become impossible to ascribe to us *responsibility*. And for the same principal reason, lastly, it is only of a free being – someone living in the sphere of reasons, attitudes and responsibilities – that we can say, for example, that she is ‘trapped’ (within her socio-economical class), that she is ‘blind’ (to her inherited, religious prejudice) or that she is ‘determined’ (by her aggressive impulses).

That our emotions, thoughts and actions are essentially *free answers* upon a call means, thus, that the ‘movements’ of our souls take place outside of nature’s chains of blind causality. The states of things are nothing more than the processes that determine them, whereas the results of movements in the soul are always something whose significance entail *something new* (however small the difference may seem) in relation to the processes and

forces that the soul was answering up to. This kind of results cannot be calculated, with mathematical precision, beforehand: the movements of the soul do not obey firm laws. In its essential character of being the human existence is always, with Heidegger, ‘on its way’ (1927). If it was not like this, a human being would not possess any individuality. If the movements of my soul were not free answers that added something to the processes and forces that they responded to, I would not be an individual person with an individual life and an individual history of sedimented experiences. I would no longer possess an *idiom*. I could no longer differentiate between myself and my peers. In that case, you could get to know me by taking a general, scientific interest in the facts of mankind. But the sciences examining us *as a species* have got nothing to tell us in questions concerning our souls. As a being endowed with a soul I am *a person*, and the person may not be objectified lest you should want to dissolve it. The person does only exist in the free and idiosyncratic realization of the life of the soul.

This being concluded, it is time to return to Freudian psychoanalysis – ‘the science of the living soul’.

### Psychoanalysis and freedom

Freudian psychoanalysis is a science of the soul and the soul, we have concluded, is essentially characterized by freedom. At first glance, this may seem strange: how can I claim that the research matter of psychoanalysis is characterized by freedom when Freud himself went down in history as one of the most ardent critics of the notion of human beings as ‘free subjects?’ Did Freud not show, precisely, and by way of his discovering the unconscious (in all of its aspects), that we are determined by irrational forces beyond our control, forces that are in no way governed by our own choices. Yes, but even if that much is granted, remember that I am here not talking about freedom as a contingent property, something that we may possess or lack, but rather as a constitutive, fundamental form of our psychic lives: the movements within our souls are essentially *answers to calls*. And this is something every psychoanalyst within the Freudian school presupposes, a priori, in our spontaneous ways of listening to, relating to and theorizing about our patients. Freedom is the ‘unthought known’ of psychoanalysis, and here I borrow an expression from Christopher Bollas (1987), and this has vast consequences for our way of understanding psychoanalysis, both as a theory and as therapeutic treatment.

Psychoanalysis was created in the first decade of the previous century as an attempt at understanding and explaining *psychologically*, in a primordial sense of the term, such phenomena as dreams, parapraxes and

neurotic symptoms. To Freud, it became obvious that what characterizes a psychological explanation is that it tries to render intelligible a thought, an emotion, a reaction or an act, by referring to the *reasons* that, on the basis of a person’s life, may explain the thought, the emotion, the idea, the reaction or the act. Hence, Freud was able to conclude in his introductory lectures: ‘neurotic symptoms have a sense, like parapraxes and dreams, and, like them, have a connection with the life of those who produce them’ (1915–1917, p. 257f). The phenomena that psychoanalysis wants to understand and explain obtain their ‘sense’, in each specific case, within the framework of the ‘life’ of the person – and this is crucial for what Freud means when he speaks of psychoanalysis as ‘the science of the living soul’.

This kind of psychological explanation – let us call it the spiritual explanation model – seems of course plausible as long as we try to explain why I chose to become a psychoanalyst or why I was so disappointed over the poor weather on my vacation: these things make sense – that is, they come to the fore as rational choices and reactions – in the light of my whole life of experiences, values, interests, ideals, identifications, ideas, expectations etc. My choice and my disappointment are rational answers to a call from a situation that gains its form and obtains its meaning within the greater, organizational framework which is my spiritual life, my *Seelenleben*. However, it is undeniable that we encounter difficulties as soon as we try to adapt our spiritual explanation model to *irrational phenomena* such as parapraxes, dreams and neurotic symptoms. In order to be able to do this, Freud had to make certain theoretical, and intimately interconnected, innovations.

*First*, Freud held that our psychological development ought to be perceived in terms of being a psychological achievement. Our development is determined by the degree to which the psyche succeeds in dealing with the external and internal ordeals that it, undoubtedly, will encounter along the way. This means that a certain part of the psyche may develop prematurely, while other parts may lag behind on more primitive levels. *Second* – and in accordance with this theoretical outline – Freud imagined that a developed psychic life contains aspects that remain unconscious, un-integrated, primitive, maladapted to reality etc. And then *third*, Freud held that our psychic lives hereby come to contain an unconscious activity containing such aspects as repressions, projections, introjections, fixations, associations, reversals, condensations, displacements and so on – an unconscious activity with its own kind of idiosyncratic creativity, an activity obeying a different and more archaic agenda than the psychic activity we in our everyday lives talk about in terms

such as thinking, acting, expecting, believing, wanting, meaning, intending and so on.

On the basis of these theoretical innovations, Freud succeeded, thus, in maintaining the spiritual explanation model even when it comes to dreams, parapraxes and neurotic symptoms. How did he accomplish this? Let us look closer at an illustrative example from Freud's own writing.

In a vignette from the case history commonly referred to as 'The Rat Man', the following is told (1909, p. 188): One day during a vacation journey, The Rat Man is struck by the idea of being too fat and having to lose weight immediately. So, he virtually stops eating and feels compelled to go out running in the hot August sun. Finally, he is on the brink of physical collapse. Also, he starts having compulsory thoughts about committing suicide, by throwing himself off a cliff.

When Freud had taken in the Rat Man's story, and listened to how the psychological life might be constituted in which this episode is placed, he presented the following interpretation of the Rat Man's neurotic behavior. The Rat Man's girlfriend proved to have come along on the vacation, accompanied by an English cousin whose name was Richard. Unconsciously, the Rat Man was so jealous that he felt a strong urge to kill Richard. The psychological situation where the Rat Man developed his symptoms, thus, was of an oedipal character. Had the Rat Man, during his earlier development, resolved his oedipal complex in a somewhat more mature or 'healthy' manner, we may imagine that he would also have dealt with this situation as the grown-up man he was. But the Rat Boy's solution of his Oedipus complex was far from that recommended by the IPA, and his solution left him with an overly punishing super-ego, making it impossible for the grown-up Rat Man even to feel, on a conscious level, such things as murderous impulses in this situation. The Rat Boy's specific solution to his oedipal complex, thus, both rendered oedipal meaning to the situation and, at the same time, rendered the Rat Man deaf to the oedipal call of the situation – thereby did him unable to deliver, consciously, a fairly adequate, emotional answer. Unconsciously, however, his answer was definite.

Richard's nickname was 'Dick', which is German for 'thick' or 'fat'. Unconsciously, this opened for a creative solution to the Rat Man's strained, psychological situation – and it is here that the creative, idiosyncratic and unconscious psychological activity enters the picture. Along associative paths, the Rat Man's urge to kill Richard was displaced and redirected, from Richard, via the nickname 'Dick', toward the Rat Man's own fat. And so the possibility was opened up to get rid of Richard through self-starvation and compulsory training, at least, as Freud would express it, in a

'hallucinatory' way. At the same time, of course, this whole development formed into a compromise. On the one hand, the symptomatic actions of the Rat Man aimed at satisfying his unconscious and murderous impulses toward Richard, on the other hand, they aimed at satisfying the Rat man's punishing super-ego – in fact, the Rat Man was near a physical collapse in the process.

This vignette is thus an illustrative example of how Freud managed to deliver an explanation of a neurotic symptom by situating it within the context of the spiritual life (*Seelenleben*) of that person who produced the symptom. To apply the spiritual explanation model in this extended way, however, requires a corresponding widening of the way in which we perceive of our spiritual life, a widening by virtue of which Freud's explanation could not be taken as a *rationalization* of the symptom – one could not say, of course, and however benevolent our interpretation is, that the Rat Man's starving of himself is a rational way to get rid of Richard! And yet, Freud's explanations succeeded in pointing to, if not a rationality so at least a curious form of meaning in the Rat Man's symptoms: the Rat Man's compulsory behavior cannot be reduced to a series of causally determined events in the world, but do have their own and slightly awkward intelligibility – there is some kind of 'method to the madness' (cf. Lear, 1998). Just like dreams, in other words, the Rat Man's compulsory neurosis is 'a psychical structure which has a meaning', as we read already on the first page of the break-through work of psychoanalysis, *On the Interpretation of Dreams* (1900, p 1).

The spiritual explanation model hence presupposes that we think of our spiritual lives, a priori, in terms of freedom. As we have come to acknowledge, this does not necessarily imply that the soul's movements or activities are founded upon conscious and rational discriminations about the situation where the activity is taking place. The Rat Man never *decided* to repress his murderous impulses and to let their aggressive energy wander from Richard, through his nickname 'Dick', to the Rat Man's own fat, and finally to starve himself to collapse. This whole process *just happens*, far beyond the control of the ego. This is why, these activities deserve to be called 'mechanisms' ('defense mechanisms'). And yet, they too always come into being as *answers to a call*.

Such activities lack motifs or motivations in a developed sense, and yet they do possess a *motivational direction* within the organization of meaning that is called 'the life' of 'a person'. They are meaningful responses to a problematic situation, a situation that 'tells us something' within the framework of the Rat Man's *Seelenleben*: these activities are 'strategical' in an emotional as well as moral

sense, rather than just being physical reactions like, for example, the one between oil and water when they are mixed together (cf. Hällén, 2011, p. 42). Thus, The Rat Man's psychic activities may be described as serving his interests, even though they are not staged, by the Rat Man, in order to serve these interests. They express the fact that the Rat Man's psychic life *concerns him*, that his own life is something that he himself *relates to*. These activities are *his* activities, *his* way of dealing with his own life, *his* response. To be determined by one's own *unconscious* is essentially something very different from being determined by the *not conscious*. Unlike, for example, chemical processes in a brain, the series of unconscious activities are not merely something that *happens to* the Rat Man, something that *controls him*, but rather something that *expresses* his personality, that tells us something about *who he is* – as a person. And this also means that the activities of a soul, in a case like this, are essentially creative and idiosyncratic: it remains principally possible for the soul to react in an alternative way. The answer of the soul can thus never be pre-calculated with mathematical precision. Principally, the soul does not obey any fixed laws: the fundamental form of the soul is spelled *freedom*.

### Freedom as the abyssal ground of psychoanalysis

In the introduction to this paper, I stated that there is no such thing as 'how the soul works', and therefore there are no secure scientific results and discoveries in this domain of knowledge, nor can we formulate a definite and pedagogically fixed method, nor can we define a replete series of basic concepts. Let me finish by pondering a bit further on this theoretical stance.

To have the life of the soul as subject is really to have no subject at all. The soul itself transcends the totality of things in the world. However thoroughly we may research into psycho-physical world, and however sophisticated instruments of measurement we may possess, and however refined methods of research we may use, we will never reveal, by such efforts, the specific subject matter of psychoanalysis. The soul is no happening in the world, so to speak but is the happening *of the world itself*. To study the life of the soul means to engage in the creative dynamics of opening up a sphere of meaning within which delimited objects and defined subject matters may at all exist. The soul does not exist as an object within the world, but only exist in the idiosyncratic and free manifestation of the spiritual life. The soul can never be explained as long as we try to sort it in as something specific under something general. We may never

understand the activities of the soul as long as we attempt to place them under some causal laws of which they are then taken to be instances.

Psychoanalysis, hence, as the science of the living soul, will thus remain unable to establish a 'research method' in the modern sense of this term, viz., it cannot define a method resting on such a secure ground that it could be turned into a manual or a set of rules that would guarantee a continuous objective access to the scientific field. We cannot engage in the life of the soul on the basis of preestablished knowledge. The so-called research methods that are utilized in the psychoanalytical situation, our research laboratory – the free flow of associations, the evenly suspended attention, the emotional responsiveness of the analyst in the field of transference etc. – these are in reality no 'methods'. Rather, these ways of conducting therapy ought to be characterized as 'ethical attitudes' that have as their aim to render the interaction in the consulting room *open*, that is, to work against the natural tendency that makes the analyst (and the patient) prone of, in Freud's own words, 'never finding anything but what he already knows' (1912, p. 112). And from this vantage point, we may approach the practical aspects of clinical psychoanalysis.

Only a psychotherapy developed on the basis of the kind of research that takes the human psyche to be an object among other objects in the world, an object *functioning* in certain ways – only such a therapy can assume the form of a 'technique' in the modern sense of this term. We are thinking here of kind of 'psycho-technique' consisting of a number of set procedures that would ideally be pedagogically transmittable to, and then manufactured by, practically anybody. Anybody could then be in charge of such a psychotherapeutic praxis ('praxis', then, in the sense of readily applicable scientific knowledge presentable in the form of a manual).

Psychotherapy in this sense would turn into a kind of technical craft. The skillful psychotherapist would then be someone who, according to the specific circumstances of a case, 'knows how to do it' when it comes to treating such functional disturbances as are commonly called depressions, phobias, general anguish syndromes, affective disorders etc. To go to a psychotherapist, then, is not to consult another person, but rather to 'consult an expert' on the functions of the human psyche, someone who 'knows' and who can act as mediator of the latest research trends and as representative of a scientifically acknowledged technique, most commonly expressed by a new acronym – Kbt, Pdt, Act, Mbt, Istdp and so on.

For psychoanalysis, the situation is totally different: psychoanalysis can never become PA. Since the

psychological problems, in virtue of the a priori of freedom, are essentially *creations of the soul* – creations founded on defense mechanisms that are unthinkable outside of that larger organization that make up the life of the soul – our psychic suffering must be conceived of as ethical suffering, and psychoanalysis should be seen primarily as an ethical or moral kind of treatment (cf. Eriksson, 2014). Our psychic suffering does not even pertain to our ‘psyche’, perceived in a naturalistic sense as an impersonal region of the objective world – no, our suffering pertains to nothing less than our *Being* as subjects and persons, which is revealed already in everyday speech: I say that I ‘am’ worried, unhappy, indifferent, traumatized, guilt ridden etc., but I say that I ‘have’ a headache or that I ‘have’ broken my leg.

A person’s disorders, as we noted earlier in the case of the Rat Man, can thus not be thought of as something that would ‘befall’ him; his disorders don’t merely govern his behavior but rather *express his personality* and *tell us something about who he is*. And this is why it is no mere coincidence, I presume, that the problem which people seek psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic help for often is experienced by themselves as being *moral failures* for which they are themselves responsible. This is an essential aspect of psychic suffering for which modern psychotherapy has become increasingly blind.

Contrary to, for example, allergic reactions, psychological problems, as psychoanalysis perceives them, exist only in a moral universe, a universe constituted by freedom and hence by the, if not always factual so at least principal possibility of personally being able to *re-pond*. And psychoanalytic praxis is precisely such a *re-pond*, a spiritual quest for truth in which the suffering patient, along with his therapist, encounter not so much traditional, epistemological assignments as moral assignments such as *opening up, confessing, permitting, daring, being sincere, being trustworthy, truthful* etc. And these ethical assignments are essentially something that the person must go through himself and assume the essential responsibility for. This is not something that can be delegated to an ‘expert’.

For this reason, psychoanalysis cannot become a psychotherapeutic method or ‘technique’. Such a thing as a psychoanalytic method or technique in the modern sense of those terms *simply does not exist*. Anyone who scrutinizes the works by Freud that are characterized as ‘technical’ will find there a total absence of instructions of ‘how to go about things’. What we encounter in these texts is not an attempt by Freud to formulate a consequent methodology; what we see here is rather his attempt at sketching the outlines of a psychoanalytic ethic, his attempt to characterize ethical attitudes suitable for creating a human environment where human beings may grow and develop precisely *as human beings, as persons*. Throughout these

texts, Freud points out that the psychoanalytical encounter ought to be characterized by truthfulness rather than sentimentality, by sincerity rather than escapism, by the urge to give things their proper names, and as we have seen, he describes the attitude of the therapist as one of ‘evenly suspended attention’, and that the patient, in his turn, shall be free to follow whatever chain of associations he may enter into, without judging what is important or unimportant, vital or parenthetical. This is not a method, nor a ‘psycho-technique’.

What Freud asks of us in his writings is thus not *what we should do* but rather *how we ought to be*.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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