

## Freud's psychoanalysis: A moral cure

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*That psychoanalytical treatment in its classical Freudian sense is primarily a moral or ethical cure is not a very controversial claim. However, it is far from obvious how we are to understand precisely the moral character of psychoanalysis. It has frequently been proposed that this designation is valid because psychoanalysis strives neither to cure psychological symptoms pharmaceutically, nor to superficially modify the behaviour of the analysand, but to lead the analysand through an interpretive process during which he gradually gains knowledge of the unconscious motives that determine his behaviour, a process that might ideally liberate him to obtain, in relation to his inner desires, the status of a moral agent. There resides something appealing in these claims. But it is the author's belief that there is an even deeper moral dimension applying to psychoanalytical theory and praxis. Freudian psychoanalysis is a moral cure due to its way of thematizing psychological suffering as moral suffering. And this means that the moral subject – the being that can experience moral suffering – is not primarily something that the psychoanalytical treatment strives to realize, but rather the presupposition for the way in which psychoanalysis theorizes psychological problems as such.*

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### Introduction

That psychoanalytical treatment in its classical Freudian sense is primarily a moral or ethical cure is not a very controversial claim. However, it is far from obvious how we are to understand precisely the moral character of psychoanalysis. It has frequently been proposed that this designation is valid because psychoanalysis strives neither to cure psychological symptoms pharmaceutically, nor to superficially modify the behaviour of the analysand, but to lead the analysand through an interpretive process during which he gradually gains knowledge of the unconscious motives that determine his behaviour, a process that might ideally liberate him to obtain, in relation to his inner desires, the status of a moral agent (e.g. Tauber, 2010). To state it on its most general level, and in accordance with the classical credo of the Enlightenment: knowledge and self-awareness enable man to leave behind his unauthoritative form of existence, making it possible for him to take responsibility for his own life, and it is precisely in these terms that psychoanalytical treatment ought to be described as a moral cure.

There resides, of course, something appealing in these claims. But it is my belief that there is an even deeper ethical or moral dimension applying to psychoanalytical theory and praxis. My ambition here is to develop an

argument according to which Freudian psychoanalysis is a moral cure due to its way of thematizing, on the fundamental level, psychological suffering as moral suffering, i.e. a kind of suffering that affects our *being* in our capacity as moral subjects, and not, in the first place, our 'mind' or 'psyche'. Or, to put it in another way, that which constitutes the aetiological ground for psychological suffering in the Freudian sense, i.e. the primitive means of repression and other defence mechanisms, are, basically, morally motivated activities.

This means that the moral subject – the being that can be held morally responsible and that can experience moral suffering – is not primarily, as *telos*, something that the psychoanalytical treatment strives to realize, but rather the *a priori* presupposition for the way in which psychoanalysis theorizes psychological problems as such. Only a moral subject can experience psychological suffering in the Freudian sense.

But did not Freud (along with other thinkers, and here we think most of all of Nietzsche), go down in history as one whose theories presented a profound challenge to, or even a downright rejection of, the definition of man as a free, moral agent? In Freud's theories, it might seem, freedom is never a presupposition for suffering. Rather, the opposite seems to be the case: we suffer due to our lack of freedom, due to our way of being determined by irrational desires that are beyond our control and that we have no part in choosing. How, then, can our psychological suffering be characterized as moral suffering?

### Freud on moral suffering

On one level, however, it may seem obvious that psychic suffering, in a psychoanalytic sense, is moral suffering. According to Freud's own description of the historical development of psychoanalysis, the birth of psychoanalysis itself had to do precisely with the fact that he himself, during the last decade of the 19th century, came to interpret psychological suffering in this way (Freud, 1925). First of all, Freud realized that it was *repression* (and not what his colleague of that time, Josef Breuer, called 'the hypnoid state') that caused the hysteric's memories of traumatic and sexually tinged experiences to get relegated to a dissociated part of the personality, so that the emotions corresponding to the trauma could not be discharged or bind in any other way than through hysterical reactions. Soon afterwards, Freud also abandoned the thought of the traumatic experience itself as a necessary, aetiological precondition for hysteria, and from this point Freud's theory acquires a clear structure in these matters: it is not the suffering itself that motivates repression, but rather *the forbidden* and unacceptable character of emotions and fantasies that the developed and socially adjusted subject does not want to recognize – emotions and fantasies with their roots in the infantile sexuality. Here, a whole arsenal of moral concepts becomes actualized within Freud's theories. From this point on, his descriptions of psychic suffering are replete with terms like inner conflict, anguish, shame, guilt, lies, escape, super-ego, and all this against the backdrop of a profound, antagonistic relation between the social sphere and the drives of the

individual psyche. Dora, Little Hans, the Rat Man, Schreber, the Wolf Man – are they not all precisely, in Freud's descriptions, morally suffering individuals?

And yet, to complicate matters: once we begin to look further into Freud's explicit theories on the genealogy of morals and on moral motivation, we realize that, *against the backdrop of this general, theoretical framework*, the characterization of psychic suffering as moral suffering becomes slightly problematic.

Freud's theories on the genealogy of morals are well known. If we describe them briefly, and only in their formal aspects, we get something like the following (cf. Freud, 1914, 1923, 1930). Freud traced our fundamental motivation for submitting ourselves to the demands of morality back to the oedipal phase of the child's psychosexual development. Under threat of castration, and from fear of losing the love and care of his parents, the individual represses the incestuous desires and aggressive impulses inherent in the oedipal conflict, to internalize instead the moral prescriptions of his parents and of the surrounding culture, thus generating within himself the kernel of the psychic formation that Freud calls the super-ego. The parental prohibitions move into the individual and the super-ego becomes the morally judging part of the psyche from which our conscience arises and whose overall aim is to temper, from within, our amoral sexual drives and aggressive impulses.

This means that some of the sexual and aggressive energies previously directed outwards are now transformed into intrapsychic affects and behaviour. But, in Freud's characterization, at least on an explicit level, the voice of our morals and our conscience is still to be thought of as something external, and more specifically in relation to the central part that, in the structural model of the psyche, is called the ego. In Freud's frequently cited set of metaphors, the ego stands out as the "poor creature" or "servant" whose assignment it is to mediate between its three "severe masters" or "tyrants": the id with its amoral drives, the super-ego with its threats of moral punishment and the external world with its demands of accommodation to real circumstances (Freud, 1923, p. 345; 1932, p. 495). And, again a little simplified, the psychic suffering that interests psychoanalysis has its aetiological ground in the failure of the ego to accomplish this complicated task, so that it has instead to resort to the primitive means of repression and other defence mechanisms.

Even though Freud's theory on the genealogy of morals is highly sophisticated (a sophistication to which I am here far from doing justice), and even though we have to keep in mind that his theory is generated first of all from his ambition to understand neurotic suffering, it still results in a basically naturalistic account of moral motivation. In Samuel Scheffler's words, a naturalistic account of moral motivation is an account according to which "our motivation for behaving morally stems ultimately from our natural attitudes, sentiment, or inclinations, or from other features of our psychology" (1992, p. 91f.). Moral naturalism, to put it differently, thinks that moral motivation can be explained by reference to desires, needs and inclination that can be characterized *independently* of moral categories. And

when it comes to Freud's theory, as we have seen, our motivation to behave morally derives, to a large extent, from our fear of the super-ego's punishment and our desire for its love and approval.

But let us here get back to our guiding question: can our psychic suffering, against the backdrop of this description of moral motivation and of the place of morality in our lives, still be characterized as moral suffering? Maybe not for the following, conceptual reasons: to suffer morally is not the same thing as being afraid of punishment; to act morally is not to act on the basis of pressure or on the basis of a desire to be loved; and to be well adjusted is not the same as being moral.

As the philosopher Ilham Dilman has noted, we cannot explain moral behaviour by referring to impersonal, psychological circumstances because this means, in the end, to *explain away* precisely the moral character of our behaviour (2000a, pp. 45–64; 2000b). The moral aspect of an individual's behaviour is not founded in psychology but in morality. That is, the moral actions of a person are founded in his or her moral beliefs and values which provide a certain perspective on the situations in which the person acts. And since Freud describes the formation of the super-ego primarily in terms of internalizing an external *authority*, a punishing psychic *instance*, his theories to a large extent lack conceptual resources to be able to provide an interpretation of the ego's reactions in relation to unconscious drives, impulses and fantasies as rooted in *moral* fear or *moral* anguish (cf. Dilman, 1983, p. 100).

However, I still believe that psychic suffering in a Freudian sense can be understood in terms of being a moral suffering. But then we have to leave aside Freud's explicit moral philosophy to focus instead on his concrete theorizing about the psychodynamics of our inner lives. But before we enter into that discussion, let me first try to provide what might be a more appropriate philosophical and moral conceptual framework for this kind of theorizing. Let me for a moment leave Freud aside, to try to sketch, in broadly Aristotelian and existentialist terms, how we could reinterpret, at least on a rudimentary level, the role of morality in our lives and the authority of moral motivation. According to the Aristotelian way of thinking, our moral motivation cannot be based on natural attitudes and desires, or on purely rational principles of conduct, as in Kant's practical philosophy, but rather on the development of character.

### **The role of morality in our lives**

In the field of philosophy after Kant and Hegel a distinction is often made between the concept of 'morality' and the concept of 'ethics'. Here, I am using the concepts as interchangeable: in their most formal sense, both these concepts have to do with *our lives with moral values*. The concept of a 'moral subject' thus refers to a being that lives a life with moral values, while the concept of 'moral problems' refers to certain kind of conflicts that may only arise within the course of such a life.

The concept of ethics was first defined by Aristotle (1894) who derived it from the Old Greek noun *ethos*, meaning roughly custom, habit or usage.

The ethical life, Aristotle believed, is a refined form of life where human desire has been organized in harmony with a general goal that he termed 'the good life', an organization that will in each unique situation pave the way for rational, practical action.

The cultivation of the ethical self and the organization of human desires of course do not occur automatically or by nature, but demands moral education. Through the engagement of parents, teachers and other role models, the child is brought up to good values and habits through exercise, repetition, reinforcement and retribution. The refined ethical life, thus, is founded on a kind of habit-formation that will eventually give rise to what, for example, John McDowell (1994) has termed 'a second nature'. However, it must be clear from the beginning that this second nature consists of something more than merely habits established in an unreflective way. If the moral education would merely generate certain patterns of behaviour the person in question would not have learned anything moral, in the full sense of the word.

The establishment of a second nature rather means the achievement of an *attitude*, a *posture*, a certain way of orienting to oneself, to one's life and to the surrounding world. A moral education worthy of its name does not primarily alter the behaviour of the individual, but *affects his way of being*. What this development presupposes is a sound type of internalization, if I may use the concept in this context, a type of internalization of values that makes these *my own* rather than something that merely reflects the demands and expectations of others. In this way, a certain perspective is generated in which situations may gain meaning and get evaluated in terms of interest, disinterest, importance, lack of importance, truth, falsity, attraction, repulsion, and so on. On this foundation, we start to live, or we start *leading our lives*, in terms of what we care about, what engages us, what we stand up for, what we take to be meaningful – and this will serve as a background for, and thereby make possible, such things as judgements, deliberations, decisions, responsibilities.

The ethical cultivation of the second nature thus means the generation of a meaningful world, a moral place, a field of motivations and affects where one's actions, at least principally, come *from oneself* and not from one's psychology. Or, to put it in another way: only when an ethical sphere arises, can something like a life of actions come into being. Acting will no longer be a mere behaviour, a set of reactions on psychological and physical stimuli. Instead it will gain the character of being precisely an acting, i.e. a *response to a claim* that an organized situation (in terms of value and meaning) in each instance confronts me with.

In Aristotle's way of thinking, the moral education will ideally give rise to a 'virtuous' individual, a person who not only acts in accordance with internalized virtues such as honesty, fairness, courage and kindness, but who has really begun to *feel* in accordance with these virtues. That is to say that the development of virtues does not first of all aim at making us act virtuously in spite of the fact that our desires may strive in other directions, but rather aims at organizing our desires so that we find satisfaction in acting virtuously, and come to suffer from acting badly. Thus, only a being

with a second nature, a being with an ethical sensitivity, an individual whose desires are organized to form a person with a moral outlook on the world, may hear and respond to what we call the call of conscience.

## Freedom

With this way of conceptualizing our moral character we have explicitly entered into the sphere of self-understanding and self-interpretation, which is not, in the first place, a kind of quality or capacity added to our lives, but something that changes the very concept of life. In our capacity of beings with a second nature we not only *are*, i.e. we are not only beings among other beings in the world, but we are beings constantly actualizing – either implicitly or explicitly – the question of *how* it is to be. Or to express it in the terminology used by Heidegger (1927): it is a constitutive aspect of our being-in-the-world that this being constantly *concerns us*, it is a *task*, something we *care about*, something we *relate to* (if only in terms of complete indifference). This is what the existential philosophical tradition defines as *freedom*, which is something philosophers of this tradition consider being an essential feature in the constitution of the moral subject, i.e. the subject which, at least principally, can act *in the light of* and not only *according to* internalized values and norms.

Thus freedom in this sense does not mean that man is in the possession of a completely autonomous intellect or a free will able to act apart from all drives, emotions, inherited cultural views, norms, conceptual structures and so on. Nor does it mean that human beings would be, as when we use the term casually, ‘free to do what they want’ – even the most socially and economically privileged among us of course fail to obtain total freedom in that sense.

Rather, man’s freedom signifies the fact that she essentially ‘transcends’ or constitutes something *more* than all the biological, psychological, and social forces, mechanisms and structures working in and on her – forces, mechanisms and structures possible to describe in a complete way from the characteristic third-person perspective of the sciences. What I *am* is primarily not determined by these things, but is rather determined by what I *do* with them, how I understand and relate to them. That man is free, that she, in Sartre’s (1956) Hegelian idiom, is ‘for’ herself and not ‘in’ herself, means that she essentially has to *respond* to that which makes a claim on her being.

Thus, by virtue of her freedom it becomes possible to attribute *responsibility* to a human being. What she does, feels or thinks is not determined in a blind way by causes possible to describe from a third-person perspective: within the framework of her second nature the outer causes instead acquire the character of *reasons*. That is, the outer causes are transformed into something that, unlike mere causes, can be subjected to *evaluations*; they are transformed into something that opens up a space for questions concerning *grounds* and *justifications*. To give an example: does the fact that I have been made aware of suffering from a fatal disease give me the right to act egoistically, to feel bitterness and to curse God? Does the fact that I have been raised in a culture where animals are seen as less valuable than human

beings give me the right to eat meat? For a free being, this kind of question is not always articulated or actualized, but is always principally possible. And for the same principal reason: only a being that has entered into the sphere of grounds and justifications can be said, conversely, to be 'imprisoned' (e.g. in his socio-economical class), 'blind' (e.g. to an inherited religious prejudice) or 'determined' (e.g. by his aggressive impulses).

To sum up, according to the view presented here, a moral subject or person is someone who has a moral outlook on the world, against the background of which things and situations acquire meaning and value, and against the background of which the subject can be ruled by motivations and conduct actions coming from him- or herself. Furthermore, the moral subject is constituted by freedom in the sense of a self-relation enabling him to evaluate his own life, his motivations and his actions, enabling him also, potentially, to ask questions to himself concerning such things as responsibility, justifications and grounds.

This having been stated, we will soon turn our attention to Freud's theories about the psychodynamics of our inner lives. But I want to point out, firstly, that Freud's way of thematizing psychic suffering actually presupposes that the suffering person has the character of being a moral subject in exactly the sense defined above. And the psychological problems that Freud himself analyses are, when we look at them closer, moral problems, i.e. problems where the person at a deep level is engaged in a struggle *with himself*, and not with an external law or punishing authority. Moral dilemmas are conflicts within the framework of our second nature, that is, they are conflicts within the ethical organization of desire which constitutes the subject or the person himself. Moral dilemmas do not primarily have the character of 'How should I act?' or 'On which principles should I base my own actions?', but rather take their beginning in the more fundamental question: 'Who am I?' Briefly stated, our whole life and being are at stake – a courageous person would, acting cowardly, jeopardize nothing less than his whole existence.

### **Freud on the inner dynamics of our psychic life**

Psychology is an ambiguous concept. On the one hand, it is something that we all do in our daily life as we try to understand and to explain our own feelings, thoughts and actions as well as those of others. On the other hand, psychology is an academic field of science for which the human psyche and its expressions have become a realm of research where we bring into use experimental methods inspired by those of the natural sciences.

Experimental psychology works under a methodological imperative rooted in the scientific revolution of the 17th century: to explain something in an objective manner requires the ability to explain it in terms independent of direct experience, i.e. in terms that remain valid beyond all our subjective experiences. In this way, psychology has come to see psychological expressions as the objective results of hidden and sub-personal causes ('stimuli', 'processes' and 'mechanisms') in the hope of discovering and formulating universal, causal laws from which it can then become possible to predict the workings of the human psyche.

For everyday psychology, the exact opposite is the case. To give an example: that the neighbour's wife quit her job and then left her family to rush off to Spain and start a café – this might become understandable from the fact that she married and had children at a very young age and that she now, as the children are grown up enough to take care of themselves, succumbed to a long-felt desire to be free and to realize herself. And that she returned home after only three months abroad ... well, maybe this was due to loneliness in combination with an inherited sense of duty that finally got the upper hand.

In these explanations of everyday psychology we presuppose that the actions, thoughts and emotions belong to a person or a moral subject with a certain perspective on himself and on his life, a perspective bringing organization into his world in terms of meaning and value, and against the background of which the person becomes able to let himself be guided by such things as motivations, wishes and reasons. This kind of explanation also presupposes a certain degree of coherence in the psychic life of an individual; that his life consists of a complex network of sufficiently rational relations between his different personal emotions, wishes, desires, ambitions, convictions, attitudes, etc. Lacking this kind of inner coherence, i.e. lacking the kind of rational organization of mental items that constitute what Freud called the 'Ego', our attempt at explaining an individual's behaviours, emotions and thoughts would loosen its grip on the person to whom the behaviours, emotions and thoughts that we try to explain must be integrated parts of. In short, within its own framework everyday psychology has a hard time explaining what we casually speak of as madness.

Along with a number of theorists (e.g. Hopkins, 1988; Wollheim, 1993; Gardner, 1993), I here take the position that the radical nature of psychoanalysis as a model for psychological explanations stems from the fact that Freud annexed his own theory to the original, everyday conception of the human psyche, and that he expanded and added to this conception. Here, however, I fear that Freud himself would not at all agree with these claims. Towards the end of his life, Freud boldly declared that the discovery of the unconscious "enabled psychology to take its place as a natural science like any other" (1940, p. 158). With the postulate of a unconscious determination of behaviours, thoughts and emotions – with the postulate of something with the character of 'id' rather than 'I' or 'ego' – Freud assumed that psychoanalysis aligns itself to the natural sciences; that it should, like them, attempt to explain the occurrences of our psychic lives in terms independent of our experiences, i.e. without having to introduce the person or the subject to whom this psychic life belongs.

If Freud was right about this, my insistence here, that we should characterize the psychic suffering that psychoanalysis strives to understand as moral suffering, will have been futile. However, as soon as we leave Freud's own programmatic statements aside, to focus instead on his concrete, psychological theories, another perspective comes to the fore.

To begin with, it was "a gain in meaning" that formed Freud's original motive for "going beyond the limits of direct experience" (1915a, p. 167). That the assumption of the existence of the unconscious would produce "a



gain in meaning”, enabling us to explain seemingly irrational phenomena like dreams, errors or psychic symptoms, implies a view of the relation between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche (on whichever layer in the superego–ego–id triad we place these aspects) is not a causal relation, but rather an internal relation defined in terms of meaning. The unconscious aspects of the psyche are precisely ‘aspects’ rather than ‘components’: they cannot exist and maintain their meaning and identity *independently* of the entirety or context constituted by the individual himself.

Thus, it is also impossible for the unconscious aspects of the human psyche to exist from the start, i.e. they cannot come into being prior to a certain level of development pertaining to our second nature. Only after a certain level of organization of our psychological and moral identity has been obtained, only after the transition from what might be termed the ‘functional’ to the ‘libidinous’ registers has been achieved, can our infantile tinged impulses, struggles and fantasies become *incompatible* and thus become subjected to a “primary repression” that Freud feels forced to postulate as an archaic predecessor to the “proper repression” – a primary repression that he, despite his own hesitance, tends to place at the oedipal phase of our psychosexual development (Freud, 1915b).

To link the concept of the unconscious to the theory of repression is another indication of the need to think of the unconscious aspects of the psyche as belonging to the overall organization constituted as personality, as subjectivity. Otherwise, there would be no motives for a defensive act like the one provided by repression, and that is essentially different from all kinds of escape from threats coming so to speak from the outside. It is, rigorously defined: “*turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*” (Freud, 1915b, p. 147).

Repression, as “turning something away” and as “keeping it at a distance”, does not *primarily* mean to make oneself “not conscious” of a forbidden impulse or fantasy, but to avoid *identifying oneself* with its content. And this, I think, pertains to all defence mechanisms. Think, for example, of a defence mechanism like projection. In projection, we are altogether conscious of what is rejected, just not conscious of it as *belonging to oneself*. And this goes to show that, thinking of the unconscious as something absent from consciousness cannot be analogous to, for example, a pen being absent from a desk. And thus, also, there is of course an essential difference between being determined by the unconscious and being determined by what is not conscious.

And yet, while it is true that the unconscious aspects of the psyche belong to the sphere of subjectivity, we must also remember that the unconscious does not form a kind of secondary consciousness within consciousness. What Freud sees himself as having proven is hence, in his own words, “not the existence of a second consciousness in us, but the existence of psychic acts which lack consciousness” (1915a, p. 170). And it is of course here that we find Freud’s biggest contribution to and expansion upon everyday psychology. That the unconscious acts of the psyche lack consciousness does not mean that they lack a specific quality that we name being-conscious-of-something, but rather that they are *unintegrated* and

*anachronistic*, viz. they lack the organizational level which characterizes consciousness as a coherent and dynamic system of interrelated wishes, desires, fantasies, fears, thoughts, beliefs, convictions and so on.

Thus, since the unconscious aspects are withdrawn from the rational level of organization, Freud also discovers here a kind of psychic activity to which everyday psychology in itself must by necessity remain blind: he discovers an idiosyncratic, archaic and unconscious creativity that he refers to in terms like projection, introjection, fixation, regression, association, conversion, disjunction, condensation, displacement and so on. The general term for this kind of activity is of course ‘defence mechanisms’, mechanisms that are profoundly unconscious and that despite the defensive flavour of the concept itself are not only aimed at fending off forbidden impulses and wishes but rather to create possibilities of alternative kinds of satisfaction, either through compromise or by substitution, thereby enabling the psyche to retain a kind of equilibrium of energies. The effect of the unconscious upon the conscious should thus not be defined in terms of causal determinations from a position beyond or behind the lived experience of the subject. Rather, these effects have their source, not in the not-subjective, but in the *desubjectivized or deidentified deep structures* of the lived experience; that is, structures that take part, associatively rather than mechanically, in constituting the often multi-faceted, complex and irrational meaning of our conscious experiences (symptoms, dreams, errors, etc.).

### **Moral suffering**

To reconnect to my general question: how can I claim that the psychic suffering that interested Freud is to be characterized as moral suffering, when it seems that the suffering of which he speaks is grounded in a type of activities that, being deeply unconscious, archaic and de-subjectivized, deserves the heading of ‘mechanisms’? Does not a moral dilemma, a situation where a person enters into profound conflict with herself, require a certain measure of consciousness, a certain presence of a reflexive self-relation that enables the person to evaluate his life, his motivations and his actions?

One thing that remains clear is that the psychic mechanisms that Freud discovered do not have the character of moral *actions*. At a purely conceptual level, it seems to us that the idea of an action presupposes that the action always has a reason, a reason that on closer inspection indicates what the subject wants and believes about the given situation, so that the action stands out as a reasonable way of striving towards a certain goal. Surely, we may criticize someone for acting on false beliefs or on dubious moral motivations, but if we are to understand his behaviour as being an action a minimal requirement seems to be the presence of at least some minimal level of rationality. In brief, an action presupposes that it comes from somebody; that someone stands behind it.

At face value, all this seems to become irrelevant when we think of the psychic mechanisms of which psychoanalysis speaks. There are no conscious decisions and rational deliberations behind repressions, projections, displacements, etc.; they seem to lack a motivational ‘because’. But this

does not mean that these mechanisms ought to be described as purely impersonal or arbitrary occurrences. The radical nature of psychoanalysis resides precisely in its refusal to limit itself to the conceptual alternatives of either 'deliberate, rational action' or 'causally determined event'.

The psychic mechanisms are neither actions nor events but *activities* (cf. Gardner, 1993, p. 188f.; Wollheim, 1984, pp. 59ff.). They encompass, if not motivations and reasons in the everyday sense of these terms, at least a *motivational direction* within the organization of meaning and value which is equivalent to the personality or character. They are answers to a claim, responses to a problematic inner situation, and not mere physical reactions such as occurs when mixing oil with water (cf. Hällén, 2011, p. 42). In a seemingly paradoxical way, psychic activities may be described as functions occurring in the interest of subject, even though they are not consciously staged by the subject to serve these interests. They express, and have the formal structure of, the 'concernedness', the 'task', the 'care' and the 'attitude' that characterize the second nature and that existential philosophers designate by the term *freedom*. They are morally or ethically motivated responses in the sense that they serve to maintain the balance of the fragile organization of the second nature, this organization of meaning and value that may be more or less developed, more or less stable, but that always rests upon struggle and achievement, and that are thus always vulnerable and challenged – *from within*.

This is why I think that the psychic suffering that Freudian psychoanalysis is concerned with ought to be described as moral suffering. Neurotic symptoms cannot be reduced to impersonal psychic disturbances, but form deeply integrated parts of a personality. They are not something that merely 'happen' to the person or that claim control over him from the outside, but rather something that *express his personality* and *say something about who he is*. It is of course no coincidence that the problems for which people enter into psychoanalysis (be it social phobia, sex- or drug-abuse, generalized anguish symptoms, etc.) frequently provoke patterns of moral guilt where the analysand himself regards the whole neurosis *as his own moral failure*. In brief, in contrast to, for example, allergic reactions, psychological problems are *personal* problems. They can exist only within the framework of a moral universe, a universe constituted by freedom, that is, by at least the principal possibility of *providing a response*.

For these reasons, it is my conviction that Freudian psychoanalysis must not primarily be seen as a treatment aiming to resolve certain symptoms separated from or in conflict with the ego, but that it is rather, essentially, what use to be termed character analysis. As Jurgen Reeder (2006) has shown with such clarity, this means that psychoanalysis never really fits into the kind of medical paradigm to which it has been clinging for recognition. In Reeder's excellent formulation, psychoanalysis is not a form of cure, but the psychoanalytical experience is rather "an occurrence with ethical implications" (p. 162).

And perhaps this becomes even clearer when we think of the self-knowledge or self-insight that psychoanalytical praxis strives to generate. If this quest for knowledge was directed toward impersonal, psychological

processes, the psychoanalytical cure would first of all face an *epistemological* assignment – an assignment whose only moral aspect would be to enable me to regain control over what dominates me. But if the quest for knowledge is directed instead towards poorly integrated aspects of myself, my own personality, then the psychoanalytical cure indeed faces a *moral* assignment, an assignment of ‘opening up’, ‘acknowledging’, ‘permitting’, ‘avowal’, and that, if it is accomplished successfully, will profoundly change the ‘object’ to which it is directed. To put differently, when it comes to the self-knowledge that we strive to generate in the clinical practice of psychoanalysis, we cannot make a firm distinction between epistemological *truth* and moral *truthfulness*. To make the unconscious conscious therefore requires what Freud termed a process of ‘working-through’, a process which will, in the ideal case, modify the organization of meaning and value that constitutes nothing less than *my own being*.

### Translations of summary

**Freuds Psychoanalyse - eine moralische** Behandlung im klassischen Freudschen Sinn in erster Linie eine moralische oder ethische Kur ist, wird kaum jemand bestreiten. Was genau unter dem moralischen Charakter der Psychoanalyse zu verstehen ist, ist jedoch alles andere als offensichtlich. Man hat häufig die Ansicht vertreten, dass diese Bezeichnung berechtigt sei, weil die Psychoanalyse weder bestrebt ist, psychische Symptome medikamentös zu heilen, noch das Verhalten des Analysanden oberflächlich zu verändern sucht; stattdessen führt sie ihn durch einen Deutungsprozess, in dem er nach und nach die unbewussten Motive kennenlernt, die sein Verhalten determinieren – ein Prozess, der ihm im Idealfall die Freiheit gibt, gegenüber seinen inneren Bedürfnissen den Status eines moralischen Akteurs zu beziehen. Diese Behauptungen wirken durchaus ansprechend. Ich bin jedoch überzeugt, dass der psychoanalytischen Theorie und Praxis eine noch tiefere moralische Dimension eignet. Die Freudsche Psychoanalyse wird durch die Art und Weise, wie sie psychisches Leiden als moralisches Leiden thematisiert, zu einer moralischen Kur. Und das bedeutet, dass das moralische Subjekt – das Wesen, das moralisches Leiden zu erleiden vermag – keineswegs in erster Linie etwas ist, das die psychoanalytische Behandlung zu realisieren versucht; vielmehr ist es die Voraussetzung für die Art und Weise, wie die Psychoanalyse psychische Probleme als solche theoretisiert.

**El psicoanálisis de Freud: Una cura moral.** Sostener que el tratamiento psicoanalítico en el sentido freudiano clásico es, en primer lugar, una cura moral o ética, no es algo que genere controversia. Sin embargo, no es para nada obvio cómo debemos entender este carácter moral del psicoanálisis. Se ha dicho a menudo que esta designación es válida porque el psicoanálisis no trata de curar los síntomas psicológicos farmacológicamente ni modificar superficialmente la conducta del analizando sino que lleva al analizando, a través de un proceso interpretativo durante el cual va obteniendo conocimiento de las motivaciones inconscientes que determinan su conducta, a un proceso que idealmente pueda liberarlo, en relación a sus propios deseos, del estatus de agente moral. Hay algo atractivo en este reclamo. Pero pienso que existe aún una dimensión más profundamente moral que se puede aplicar a la teoría y a la práctica psicoanalítica. El psicoanálisis freudiano es una cura moral debido a su modo de tematizar el sufrimiento psicológico como un sufrimiento moral. Y esto significa que el sujeto moral – el ser que puede experimentar un sufrimiento moral – no es algo que el tratamiento psicoanalítico se esfuerce en primer lugar por realizar, sino más bien la presuposición del modo en el que el psicoanálisis teoriza los problemas psicológicos como tal.

**La psychanalyse de Freud: une cure morale.** L'idée que la cure psychanalytique au sens freudien classique du terme est avant tout d'ordre moral ou éthique ne prête pas à controverse. Cependant, ce que nous entendons précisément par le caractère moral de la cure est loin d'être évident. On a souvent soutenu la validité de cette thèse en arguant du fait que la psychanalyse ne visait ni à guérir les symptômes d'un point de vue pharmaceutique, ni à modifier superficiellement le comportement de l'analysant, mais qu'elle cherchait à amener l'analysant, par le biais d'un processus interprétatif, à acquérir progressivement une connaissance des motivations inconscientes qui sous-tendaient son comportement; ce processus était censé idéalement parler le libérer et lui permettre d'obtenir le statut d'un agent moral. Bien qu'il y ait quelque chose d'indéniablement attrayant dans cette façon d'envisager la question, selon l'auteur de cet article, la théorie et la pratique psychanalytiques possèdent une dimension morale bien

plus profonde encore. La nature éthique de la psychanalyse freudienne réside dans la façon dont celle-ci rapporte la souffrance psychique à une souffrance morale, ce qui signifie que le sujet moral – l'être capable d'éprouver une souffrance morale – loin de représenter ce que le traitement analytique tend à instaurer, constitue bien plutôt le présupposé des modalités selon lesquelles la psychanalyse théorise les problèmes psychologiques en tant que tels.

**La psicoanalisi di Freud: una cura morale.** Che il trattamento psicoanalitico inteso nel senso freudiano classico sia in prima istanza una cura di tipo morale o etico è affermazione non soggetta a particolari controversie; nondimeno, quale sia il modo in cui il carattere morale della psicoanalisi possa venire da noi compreso con precisione è tutt'altro che chiaro. Si è spesso sostenuto che l'uso del termine 'morale' è appropriato in questo contesto in quanto la psicoanalisi non tenta di curare farmacologicamente i sintomi psicologici né di modificare in modo superficiale il comportamento del paziente, bensì di condurlo attraverso un processo interpretativo durante il quale egli diviene gradualmente consapevole delle motivazioni inconse che determinano il suo comportamento: un processo, quest'ultimo, idealmente volto a liberarlo in modo tale che egli acquisisca, rispetto ai suoi desideri profondi, lo status di agente morale. Benché queste idee siano in certo modo attraenti, ritengo tuttavia che alla teoria come anche alla pratica psicoanalitica sia intrinseca una dimensione morale ancora più profonda. La psicoanalisi freudiana è una cura morale in quanto essa tematizza la sofferenza psichica come sofferenza morale, e ciò significa che il soggetto morale – ovvero il soggetto che fa esperienza della sofferenza morale – non è tanto quel che il trattamento psicoanalitico si propone di realizzare, ma piuttosto il presupposto del modo stesso in cui la psicoanalisi teorizza i problemi psicologici in quanto tali.

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