

Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921): Addendum and Transition

“If we are to die ourselves, and first to lose in death those who are dearest to us, it is easier to submit to a remorseless law of nature, to the sublime *Ανάγκη* [Necessity], than to a chance which might perhaps have been escaped. It may be, however, that this belief in the internal necessity of dying is only another of those illusions which we have created ‘*um die Schwere des Daseins zu ertagen*. [“to bear the burden of existence”]”—*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

Freud’s 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* is the second of three key works that form the center of his middle period, that of the second topography. In some ways it is a transitional work between *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), which is the most speculative of the three, and *The Ego and the Id* (1923), which sets out the fully developed system of id, ego, and superego. Yet *Group Psychology* can be said to also function as an addendum to Freud’s earlier *Totem and Taboo* in that it uses the notions of social (or group) psychology as a means to further support the earlier primal myth of the murder of the father-tyrant.

Basic Concepts in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

1. The pleasure principle involves the drive toward pleasure, which is located in the stability of psychophysical movement, and the consequent shielding of itself from pain.
2. The reality principle, by involving the ego’s self-preservation, postpones pleasure and tolerates unpleasure (*UnLust*), and thereby causes pleasure to be obtained by discursive methods. Human identity is located in the delay of gratification and the balance of pleasure and unpleasure.
3. The posttraumatic disorders of many WWI veterans, Freud theorizes, manifest themselves in non-localized fright, rather than a specific fear of a specific cause, and in expectant anxiety (*Angst*), which seeks to protect against fright. Rather than their dreams functioning as wish-fulfillments, which assist the person in enabling the mind to resolving inner conflicts, the dreams of trauma victims tend to replay the traumatic event that they underwent.
4. Freud recalls a young boy who repetitively threw away his toys, saying *fort* (“gone”) and *da* (“there”). Rather than a joy repetition, Freud thinks that the boy may have a compulsion to repeat his action is a protection against memories of his mother’s absences.
5. The compulsion to repeat, on the surface, overrides the pleasure principle, and Freud draws an analogy between the behavior of the child and that of trauma and neurosis. Such a compulsion suggests that there must be another primary drive to be accounted for.
6. At the center of Freud’s speculations is the notion of tendency, and the need for centers of life to protect themselves against destructive stimulation, and yet to also be able to sample the forces external to itself. “*Protection against stimuli* is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of stimuli*” (30).
7. He meditates upon the formation and destruction of single cells which possess an imbalance of energy, and then he applies speculates that multi-cellular organisms have an unconscious conservative instinct to return to their initial state of non-living equilibrium.
8. The death instinct, Freud speculates, was organic life’s first instinctive drive by which it could reduce external stimulation and return to a stable balance.
9. The death instinct is in conflict with the libido (or life instinct), and Freud refuses a belief in any *élan vital*, or life force. The seeming desire to press forward is really just a form of repression. Instead, ego-instincts move back towards equilibrium and death.
10. Freud draws on Plato’s *Symposium* and its myth of the “third” gender of humanity divided from itself and seeking to be united in the lovemaking of the other two, so perhaps sadism is an aspect of the death instinct.

Overview & Discussion Questions

I. Introduction: Freud sets up the basic assertion that social psychology is concerned with the individual's psychology.

II. Le Bon's Description of the Group Mind & III. Other Accounts of Collective Mental Life: Freud explores the collective behavior theories of Gustave Le Bon and W. McDougall because of their parallels with his own psychoanalytical theories.

1. How does Freud tie Le Bon's theories to his key ideas about children, "primitives," dreams, words, neurotics, and the religious?
2. Why is the leader's role important in establishing group psychology?
3. Why is McDougall's distinction between stable and revolutionary groups important to Freud?
4. What role does compulsion play in group conformity?

IV. Suggestion and Libido: Freud rejects the term "suggestion" as too wide and loose for theorization, and instead theorizes that libido forms the base of the love-ties that hold groups together.

V. Two Artificial Groups: the Church and the Army: He, then, looks at this libidinal energy in two groups, that of the army and that of the Church.

1. Does Freud understand the psychology of the army or the Christian church? Why and/or why not?
2. Is he correct to argue that panic ensues when the group loses its sense of love?
3. Does history support Freud's argument that the religious love each other but turn toward hating outsiders?

VI. Further Problems and Lines of Work: All loves contain some measure of hostility because all of them are finally narcissistic. The group does tone down aggression and narcissism.

VII. Identification: The libidinal tie with the leader is a form of identification. The divided ego (real ego and ego ideal) varies from individual to individual.

VIII. Being in Love and Hypnosis: Freud looks at Eros' overvaluation (idealization) of the one beloved, and suggests that the narcissistic libido is still present, though the ego is now projected onto the one loved, and thus the causes for self-sacrifice, humility, and so on. "*The object has been put in the place of the ego ideal.*" (57).

1. Is Freud correct to suggest that groups with leaders are a more primitive (evolutionary basic) type than egalitarian ones? (40)
2. What roles does empathy play in group psychology?
3. Interpret Freud's diagram on page 61.

IX. The Herd Instinct & X. The Group and the Primal Horde: These two chapters most specifically address the ideas in Freud's earlier *Totem and Taboo*. Freud traces the fear of being alone back to early separation from one's mother. He also retells the "just-so" myth of primal genesis.

1. Why does Trotter see an analogous multicellular gregariousness in group behavior?

2. Why is the demand for group equality not extended to the leader?
3. What analogy does Freud draw between the rapport of the hypnotist and the mana of the leader?
4. What roles do the uncanny and “a thirst for obedience” have in group behavior?
5. In what ways is the group leader a reworking of the primal father?

XI. A Differentiating Grade in the Ego: The energy of the book decreases considerably here as Freud begins to meander somewhat. The chapter is held together by the difference or coincidence of the real and ideal egos. Likewise, he explores the differences between the coherent conscious ego and the repressed portion, as well as the role of carnival.

1. How can individuals be part of numerous overlapping groups?
2. Speculate how the “ideal ego” prepares for Freud’s more developed super-ego.
3. How close are Freud’s observations about depression and mania to current theories?

XII. Postscript: A series of five further areas for speculative research:

- A. (Not) Identifying with the leader
- B. A theory as to how the first poet and his poem’s hero derive from this primitive murder event.
- C. Sublimation and “Pauline” love
- D. Sexual intercourse versus herd instinct
- E. Being in love, hypnosis, group formation, and neurosis in relation to libido theory

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“We may conclude these suggestions with a short survey of the paths leading to object-choice.

A person may love:

(1) According to the narcissistic type:

- (a) What he is himself (actually himself).
- (b) What he once was.
- (c) What he would like to be.
- (d) Someone who was once part of himself.

(2) According to the anaclitic type:

- (a) The woman who tends.
- (b) The man who protects;

and those substitutes which succeed them one after another.”

--“On Narcissism: an Introduction” (1914)