

Freud: Prophet or Heretic?*

By Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

"I am actually not at all a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter, not a thinker. I am by temperament nothing but a conquistador".¹

- Sigmund Freud

The 20th century has been heralded as the Freudian century and while over a hundred and sixty years have passed since the birth of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and nearly eighty years have passed since the originator of the doctrine of the "talking cure" or psychoanalysis's death, the same is not true for Freudian theory as it lives on. No matter how *catastrophic* and harmful his ideas have been, even diabolical in nature, to be clear *Freud is not dead*. His work continues to bear influence in that it has erected the superstructure upon which all contemporary approaches of therapy, mental health and psychology have been constructed. For this reason contemporary psychology finds itself in a quandary, if not a crisis, and at an impasse that is often undetected or minimized as it is situated on an erroneous epistemological and ontological foundation which has presumed to uproot and eclipse the metaphysical and spiritual domain.

It is not as simple as selecting what is good or useful from the "talking cure" and discarding what is not. The situation is more complex. Comprehension and discernment are needed as Freud's ideas make up the very bedrock of modern psychology and continue to assert influence within the therapeutic and mental health structures that exist today, and they cannot be easily purged without bringing into

* For an in-depth analysis see Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, *Psychology Without Spirit: The Freudian Quandary* (Chicago, IL: Institute of Traditional Psychology/Kazi Publications, 2018).

¹ Sigmund Freud, "Letter to Wilhelm Fliess - February 1, 1900," in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 398. "Charles Darwin was Freud's only real competitor as a modern cultural conquistador." (Peter Gay, "The Question of a Jewish Science: 'A Title of Honor'," in *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987], p. 140).

question the entire edifice of contemporary psychology. Perhaps it is impossible for someone to be wrong about everything all of the time, and while this includes Freud, it is at the same time thought-provoking and no less challenging to determine what was in fact accurate about the psychoanalytic doctrine. If the question is posed obversely and one asks “what is right about Freudian theory?”, this all depends on the underlying worldview. It is worth pointing out that in this topsy-turvy era where the *normalization of the abnormal* continues and the divine Norm has been inverted, if not supplanted, the suggestion that Freud was a heretic is not taken seriously and is readily dismissed. Yet that very fact points to the predominance of the modernist ethos, its dominance over the traditional worldview of religion and spirituality, and the rise of secularist mindsets in academia. As a result Freud is regarded as founder of the greatest revolution in psychology, while for others he remains irrefutably “the greatest con man in the history of medicine.”²

If the decolonization of psychology or of the “science of the soul” should occur, and if we are to move into a truly post-colonial psychology that recognizes the validity and efficacy of therapies existing outside the hegemony of modern Western science, then the roots that are the superstructure of modern psychology—those of behaviorism and psychoanalysis as the “first” and “second” forces—need to be properly examined and understood for what they truly are, namely, an attack on what it means to be fully human and to have healing modalities that correspond to sacred science, metaphysics, and the distinct sapiential traditions.

Freud’s arrival in the New World on August 29, 1909, on the steamer *George Washington* which docked in the New York Harbor, accompanied by his onetime disciples Sándor Ferenczi (1873-1933) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), is indicative of his quintessential attack on Western civilization, unapologetically attempting to undermine it at its core, at its metaphysical and spiritual roots. On that occasion, he made the providential pronouncement: “They don’t realize we’re [the psychoanalytic

² Quoted in Raymond Greene, “Foreword,” to E.M. Thornton, *The Freudian Fallacy: An Alternative View of Freudian Theory* (Garden City, NY: Dial Press, 1984), p. vii.

movement is] bringing them the plague.”³ It needs to be underlined, as Freud later disclosed in a confidential letter that: “I regard myself as one of the most dangerous enemies of religion, but they don’t seem to have any suspicion of that.”⁴

The paradigmatic and megalomaniacal implications of the Freudian colonization of the human psyche are made known through his triumphant pronouncement: “it was no small thing to have the whole human race as one’s patient”.⁵ Freud in no uncertain terms was aware of the nefarious and destructive implications of his theory that was cloaked in the dress of modern science, which would come to challenge the very foundations of Western civilization. He unabashedly acknowledges the antinomian roots of his doctrine: “it [psychoanalysis] is calculated to undermine religion, authority and morals”.⁶

Freudian psychology reached a turning point in 1908, when it became a totalizing worldview or *Weltanschauung*. The open-ended application of psychoanalysis beyond the couch was stressed by Freud himself “nothing that men make or do is understandable without... psycho-analysis”⁷ or again when he confessed “we have so often been obliged to venture beyond the frontiers of the science of psychology.”⁸ He has also stated, “There was... a scientific duty, to apply the... methods of psychoanalysis, in regions far remote from its native soil”.⁹

³ Sigmund Freud as remembered by C.G. Jung, quoted in Jacques Lacan, “The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 336; Sigmund Freud, quoted in Octave Mannoni, “Afterward: The Future of a Dissolution,” in *Freud: The Theory of the Unconscious* (London, UK: Verso, 2015), p. 168.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Letter to Marie Bonaparte - April 26, 1926,” quoted in Ernest Jones, “Fame and Suffering,” in *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 3: The Last Phase, 1919-1939* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1957), p. 124.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, “The Resistances to Psychoanalysis” (1925), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), p. 261.

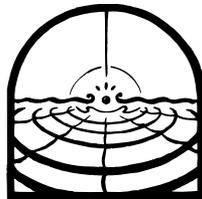
⁶ Sigmund Freud, “Psychoanalysis” (1922), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), p. 249.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Explanations, Applications and Orientations” (1933 [1932]), in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), pp. 179-180.

⁸ Sigmund Freud, “The Psychological Apparatus and the External World” (1940 [1938]), in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), p. 52.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, “Psychoanalysis and Religious Origins” (1919), in *Character and Culture*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1963), p. 224.

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