

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

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Bibliography

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

Paper

Freud, Sigmund (1923). **The Ego and the Id** (German: Das Ich und das Es). *Internationaler Psycho-Analytischer Verlag (Vienna)*, W. W. Norton & Company

Motivation

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

Foundational Work

This work develops a line of reasoning as a groundwork for explaining various psychological conditions. These conditions result from powerful internal tensions:

- ▶ Between the Ego and the Id,
- ▶ Between the Ego and the Super-Ego,
- ▶ Between the love-instinct and the death-instinct.

This was Freud's single most enduring and important idea, that the human personality has more than one aspect to it.

Introduction

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

► **Consciousness And The Unconscious**

All concepts in *The Ego and the Id* are built upon the presupposed existence of conscious and non-conscious thoughts. Freud states, "*... the division of mental life into what is conscious and what is non-conscious is the fundamental premise on which psycho-analysis is based*".

He further distinguishes between two types of non-conscious thoughts: *preconscious* ideas, which are latent yet fully capable of becoming conscious; and *unconscious* ideas, which are repressed and cannot become conscious without the help of psychoanalysis.

Introduction

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

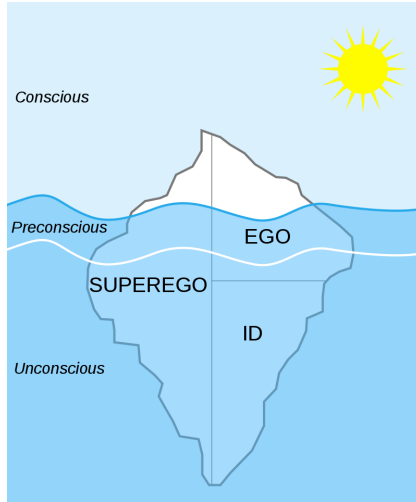
Conclusion

► **Consciousness And The Unconscious**

Unconscious and the conscious map directly onto the Id and the Ego, respectively. Freud argues that the supposedly conscious Ego can be shown to possess unconscious thoughts when it unknowingly resists parts of itself. Thus, a third kind of non-conscious thought seems to be necessary, a process that is neither repressed nor latent, but which is nonetheless an integral part of the Ego.

Introduction

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis



CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

Introduction

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

► What Is Id?

The Id is the impulsive part of our psyche which responds directly and immediately to the instincts. The Id is not affected by reality or logic, as it operates within the unconscious part of the mind.

It operates on the pleasure principle which is the idea that every wishful impulse should be satisfied immediately, regardless of the consequences. When the Id achieves its demands, we experience pleasure when it is denied we experience displeasure or tension.

Introduction

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

► What Is Ego?

It is the decision-making component of personality. Ideally, the Ego works by reason, whereas the Id is chaotic and unreasonable.

Like the Id, the Ego seeks pleasure and avoids pain, but unlike the Id, the Ego is concerned with devising a realistic strategy to obtain pleasure. The Ego has no concept of right or wrong; something is good simply if it achieves its end of satisfying without causing harm to itself or the Id. Ego is weak relative to the Id, and the best the Ego can do is stay on, pointing the Id in the right direction.

Introduction

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

- ▶ Since Ego is essentially a system of perception, so it must be closely related to the preconscious. Thus, two primary components of Ego are a system of perception and a set of preconscious ideas. The Ego merges into the Id. He compares the dynamic to that of a rider and a horse. The Ego must control the Id, like the rider, but at times, the rider is obliged to guide the horse where it wants to go. Likewise, the Ego must, at times, conform to the desires of the Id.

Introduction

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

The Ego And The Super-Ego

- ▶ Ego comprises of two parts: the Ego itself and the Super-Ego.
- ▶ His argument for the formation of the Super-Ego hinges on the idea of internalization. He gives the example of sadness resulting from the loss of an object. The subject, in his sadness, constructs a new mental image of the object within the Ego to compensate the pain of loss. The love of the Id is redirected away from the external world, and turned inward.

Introduction

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

- ▶ Freud arrives at his conclusions about the Super-Ego by combining the idea of internalization with that of the Oedipus complex. During childhood, an individual forms an important identification with the father. The attitude toward the father then becomes mixed, for the paternal figure is simultaneously identified and yet perceived as an obstacle. Later, the entire dual-natured complex is taken internally, forming a new part of his Ego. The Super-Ego compels the Ego to be like the father and simultaneously places an injunction upon the Ego, compelling it not to be like the father.

Methodology

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

Two Classes Of Instincts

- ▶ Freud goes on to elucidate the forces that act within that structure — namely, the love instinct and the death instinct. The former is the tendency to create; the latter, the tendency to destroy. He props up his argument for these forces by appealing to cosmology and by implicitly invoking ideas of entropy and Newton's third law of motion (that of equal and opposite forces). Besides this purely aesthetic reasoning, Freud gives no further argument for the existence of these two opposing instincts.

Methodology

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

Two Classes Of Instincts

- ▶ Using these opposing instincts as the basis for further inquiry, Freud notes that there are cases where love seems to transform into hate and where hate transforms into love. This would seem to indicate that there are not, in fact, two opposing instincts. However, Freud resolves the matter by asserting the presence of a neutral energy, which can be applied to furthering either instinct. And as the energy flow shifts, it can create what appears to be the transformation of one instinct into its opposite.

Methodology

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

The Subordinate Relationships Of The Ego

- ▶ According to Freud, Ego finds itself to be a victim to the stronger Super-Ego and Id (which tend to work together). *"The Super-Ego is always in close touch with the Id and can act as its representative in relation to the Ego"*. Freud cites his experiences in psychoanalysis, in which people exhibit a sense of guilt that makes them resistant to conquering their pathology. His explanation is that the Super-Ego condemns the Ego — *"particular severity and against the Ego with the utmost cruelty"* and giving it a deep-seated, mysterious feeling of guilt.

Methodology

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

The Subordinate Relationships Of The Ego

- ▶ This is what happens when the death instinct takes hold of the Super-Ego and turns on the Ego. During the process of sublimation—the love-instinct and death-instinct become separated; and the latter ends up in the Super-Ego causing it to “rage” against the Ego. Sometimes (in the case of sadness) the Ego has identified with a forbidden love - object so strongly, that it can't bear the Super-Ego's criticism and gives up — with suicide. At other times the object is still external to the Ego, but its feelings for it are repressed, resulting in acts of external aggression.

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

Methodology

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

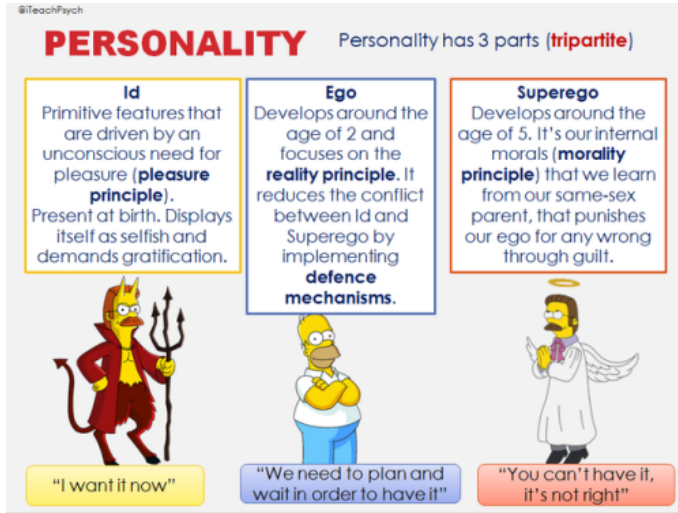
Conclusion

The Subordinate Relationships Of The Ego

- ▶ On the opposite front, the Ego stands on a middle ground between the Id and the outside world, trying to make the Id conform to societal rules, while trying to make the world conform to the Id's innermost passions. This task falls to the Ego because it is the only part of the mind capable of exercising direct control over the actions of the body. The relationship of the Ego to the Id is, at the same time, a mutually beneficial one and a submissive one.
- ▶ Thus the Ego finds itself beset by potential dangers from the Super-Ego, the Id, and the external world.

Methodology

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis



Criticism

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

No Biological Basis To Id

Carl Jung, Freud's protégé, eventually created a separate school of analytical psychology.

For Jung, the unconscious was not purely biological, consisting of drives that required repressing, but rather a depository of ancient wisdom, the spiritual heritage of human history. He also introduced the term *Persona* (an archetype with characteristics similar to the Super-Ego), and rejected Freud's distinction between Ego and Super-Ego.

Criticism

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

CS399 Seminar:
Ego, Id and
Super-Ego for
Psychoanalysis

Shikhar Jaiswal
1601CS44

Paper

Motivation

Introduction

Methodology

Criticism

Conclusion

Different Sources Of Motivation

Alfred Adler, another former student of Freud, also developed his own approach, known as individual psychology. He believed feelings of inferiority and striving for significance to be the motivating forces of human life. Thus, like Jung, he rejected Freud's emphasis on biological drives, primarily sexual desire, as the primary source of motivation.

Conclusion

CS399 Seminar: Ego, Id and Super-Ego for Psychoanalysis

- ▶ Despite heavy criticism, Freud's basic idea that the mind is not monolithic, or homogeneous, led to major developments within psychology, and continues to have an enormous influence on our understanding of human nature.
- ▶ In terms of research impact, Freud is the most cited researcher in the history of mankind, with more than 500,000 citations.



Id:
Instincts



Ego:
Reality



Superego:
Morality