5

A Theoretical Excursus

Before turning to the development of psychoanalysis per se and the thoroughly untheoretical, which is to say the tumultuous, erotic and affective dimension of Freud's relationship to Wilhelm Fliess in which it developed, some theoretical considerations might prove helpful.[1]

When Hans Loewald set out to determine the implications of the pre-Oedipal turn for classical Freudian theory, he steered clear of the schismatic debates – often motivated as much by psychoanalytic politics as by theoretical considerations – that were widespread in the field in the decades following the Second World War. Instead of debating the primacy of Oedipal versus pre-Oedipal development – of the paternal versus the maternal dimension of psychic life – he asked a different question: What is the relationship between the two phases of development, and how do they become hierarchically structured in the psyche? It was in pursuit of these questions that Loewald introduced the distinction between Freud's "official" and "unofficial" positions, and it is within that scheme that I will structure my narrative of Freud's life and work.[2]

Both positions can be elucidated across three dimensions: reality and the ego, the psychic apparatus and the pleasure principle, and mastery and maturity.

In Freud's "official" position, the "relationship between the organism and environment, between individual and reality," Loewald observes,

[1] While this theoretical discussion is intended to make the underlying orientation of this biography more perspicuous, it is not essential and may be skipped by the less technically inclined reader.

[2] See Joel Whitebook, "Hans Loewald: a radical conservative," *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 85 (2004), 97–115.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139025119.006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

centers on the father and is "understood as antagonistic."[3] The "primal psychical situation" that exists at the beginning of development is envisioned as one of separation and opposition. It pictures a self-enclosed infantile psychism, governed exclusively by one set of principles, opposed to an external "reality" that operates according to a different set of principles.[4] This picture of the initial stage of development gives rise to the impossible theoretical task of explaining how a primitive psyche thus conceived could break out of its monadic enclosure, turn to reality, and form a relationship with the "object." The notorious "pessimism" of Freud's late "cultural" writings – in which he argues that the "programme" of the pleasure principle that "dominates the operation of the mental apparatus from the start" is "at loggerheads with the world" – is in fact a logical consequence of this "official" conception of the relation of the psyche and reality.[5]

If the "official" position views reality as external and hostile to the psyche, then it follows that the ego's primary function is understood as defense. The ego's task is to protect the psyche from the dangers emanating from its (inner and outer) world. Its *synthetic function* – that is, its capacity to *integrate* reality rather than defend against it – is, if not entirely overlooked, largely minimalized.

Freud's "official" position contains two closely related theses: that the father comprises the primary representative of reality and that the child's entrance into reality is essentially violent. First, during the pre-Oedipal period, the father intrudes into and breaks up the infant's dyadic, symbiotic, and libidinous relationship with the early mother of the oral phase – the so-called breast-mother – thereby forcing the child to turn to the external world for gratification. Later, the violent induction into reality culminates with the "resolution" of the Oedipus complex, when the boy – "official" theory is almost exclusively concerned with the boy – under the threat of paternal castration, renounces the mother as an object of phallic desire, submits to the father, and is offered identification with him as compensation for his renunciation. Because this resolution results in a qualitative advance in internalization and in the structuralization of the psyche, it is seen as a major advance in the solidification of the ego and its relation to reality.

[3] Loewald, "Defense and reality," 28.

[4] Freud, "Instincts and their vicissitudes," 134.

[5] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its discontents*, 76.

Freud's "official" theory, which subscribes to a "discharge" or "tension-reduction" model of the mental apparatus, contains three interrelated postulates. The central task of the psychic apparatus, defined by the "constancy principle," is to reduce stimuli to a minimal point or to zero – that is, eliminate it completely. Because it accomplishes this task by "discharging" – "getting rid of" – instinctual stimuli, the tension-reduction model is an "exclusionary" model of the mental apparatus. The "constancy principle" is logically connected with the "pleasure/unpleasure" or simply the "pleasure principle," which defines pleasure as a decrease and "unpleasure" (pain) as an increase in tension. (The psychosexual roots of this *exclusionary* model are, it should be noted, located in the oral phase, where the baby *spits out* everything it experiences as unpleasant and retains everything it finds pleasurable.) Rather than growing through the integration of instinctual stimuli into itself, the exclusionary ego develops by ejecting such stimuli from its boundaries, which is to say, by narrowing rather than expanding its domain.

Freud first articulated his "official" model in 1895, when he wrote the *Project for a scientific psychology*. It was not until 1920, in *Beyond the pleasure principle*, that he was compelled to introduce a qualitatively new concept, *eros* – conceived as a countervailing synthetic force in mental life that strives to create greater unities by integrating and binding energy – into his thinking. Then in 1924, when his theory entered a profound crisis, with great reluctance Freud was forced to acknowledge the existence of "pleasurable tensions and the unpleasurable relaxation of tensions."[6] While these developments negated the fundamental postulates of his "official" doctrine, Freud did not pursue their implications with much vigor – something that would have resulted in a fuller articulation of his "unofficial" position.

Freud's "official" concept of maturity, Loewald argues, is a product of the nineteenth century's belief in "the dignity of science" – that is, the belief that, ontogenetically and phylogenetically, the scientific stage of development represents "a stage of human evolution not previously reached." According to Loewald, "scientific man is considered by [the official – JW] Freud as the most advanced form of human development"

[6] See Sigmund Freud, *Project for a scientific psychology* (1897), *SE* 1: 283–398, and "The economic problem of masochism" (1924), *SE* 19: 160.

and "has its counterpart in the individual's stage of maturity."[7] In his "official" mode, Freud in other words elevated the perspective of modern science into a prescription for both collective and individual development.

As many philosophers and social theorists have argued, the modern scientific world-picture contains the domination of nature as one of its innermost possibilities. *"Mastery" in this context thus means "domination."* When the scientific idea of maturity is postulated as the goal of individual development and psychoanalytic practice, the concept of *mastery qua domination* is implicitly posited at the same time.[8] When mastery thus conceived is directed outwards, it results in the domination of outer nature; the imperious ego attempts to unify the "multifariousness" of external nature under its principles. When it is directed inwards, the outcome is the domination of "inner nature," where the ego subjects the diffuseness of unconscious-instinctual life to its unifying principles.[9] It is important to note that both cases involve the forced integration of the heterogeneous – "bad synthesis."

Freud's "official" notion of maturity envisages what the philosopher, psychoanalyst, and social theorist Cornelius Castoriadis calls a "power grab," in which the more "advanced" strata of the psyche dominate the more "primitive": the ego dominates the id, consciousness dominates the unconscious, realistic thinking dominates fantasy thinking, cognition dominates affect, activity dominates passivity, and the civilized part of the personality dominates the instincts.[10] This official notion led to two of

[7] Hans Loewald, "On the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis," *The essential Loewald: collected papers and monographs* (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 2000) 228.

[8] On psychoanalysis as "a technique of emancipation" as opposed to "a technique of domination" see Paul Ricoeur "Technique and nontechnique in interpretation," *The conflict of interpretations: essays and hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde, trans. Willis Domingo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 177–195.

[9] A central thesis of the Frankfurt School, which provided the basis of their attempt to integrate psychoanalysis and critical theory, was that *the domination of external nature and the domination of internal nature mutually entail one another*. See especially Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of enlightenment*. See also Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and utopia: a study in psychoanalysis and critical theory* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), chapter 3.

[10] Cornelius Castoriadis, *The imaginary institution of society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 104. See also Hans Loewald, "Ego and

Freud's more objectionable proclamations. In the first, he likened the work of analysis (and the work of civilization) to "the draining of the Zuider Zee." Maturity would thus consist in a state where all the "primitive" sludge of unconscious-instinctual life has been dredged out of mental life.[11] The second problematic remark is contained in "Why war," his exchange with Albert Einstein. Although Freud admits the proposition was utopian, he nevertheless declares that in principle "a dictatorship of reason" represents the "ideal" solution to the human predicament – as though he was totally unaware of the critique of reason to which he had made such a substantial contribution.[12]

Freud's "unofficial" position centers on the figure of the mother and holds that psychic life begins not with separation but with relatedness and unity. Likewise, from the "maternal" perspective, reality is viewed as neither external nor hostile to the psyche. "The primal psychical situation" is envisaged as what Mahler calls a "dual unity," in which mother and child are in some sense symbiotically "merged," but which also contains ego precursors that are the seeds of the infant's differentiation that constitute the precursors of the ego.[13] Equipped with innate developmental potentialities, children, when they experience otherness (canonically in the form of hunger), begin to *differentiate out* of – "detach" themselves from – the dual unity, and the ego precursors that are contained in the relatively undifferentiated state begin to develop into the mature ego.[14]

Where Freud's "official" paternal position begins with separation – that is, the self-enclosed psychic monad confronting an external object – and must explain how the infant can break out of its monad and establish a

reality," *The essential Loewald: collected papers and monographs* (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 2000), 20.

[11] Sigmund Freud, *New introductory lessons on psycho-analysis* (1933), *SE* 22: 80.

[12] Sigmund Freud, "Why war" (1933), *SE* 22: 215. Jonathan Lear observes that in *The Republic* Plato advocates the same "oligarchic" model for integrating the *polis* and the psyche. In both cases, unity is achieved when "the rational element" expels the entity's disruptive and undesirable contents, that is, the poets and the drives, from its domain. Jonathan Lear, "Inside and outside *The Republic*," *Open minded*" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 219–246.

[13] Mahler, Bergmann, and Pine, *The psychological birth of the infant*, 55. Loewald uses a similar term: "undifferentiated psychical field."

[14] In this respect, the unofficial position also involves an element of pain. See Freud, *Civilization and its discontents*, 68.

relation with the object, the maternal perspective begins with unity, and separation emerges out of it. Once the process of separation has been set in motion, the nascent ego is faced with a new task: to reintegrate the equally nascent object – that is, to integrate what has become external reality – which has also emerged in the process of the differentiation. This alternation of differentiation from and reintegration of the object, Loewald argues, establishes the lifelong developmental process through which the psyche must continually negotiate and renegotiate its relation to reality – its separateness from and relatedness to the object. If this process comes to a halt, development becomes arrested, and one of the central tasks of clinical psychoanalysis is to set it back into motion. Indeed, while the arrest of this developmental process is one way to define psychopathology, its complete cessation would constitute psychic death.

If Freud's "official" position conceptualizes the primary function of the ego as *defense*, his "unofficial" position understands it as *synthesis*. "What distinguishes the ego," he writes, "is a tendency to synthesis in its contents, to a combination and unification in its mental processes."[15] As opposed to the "exclusionary" model where the unity of the ego is achieved through expelling or getting rid of psychic material, in this case the ego integrates itself by preserving the material of unconscious-instinctual life and holding it together, synthesizing it into larger and more differentiated unities.

For Freud, the plenum-like existence of the "primal psychical situation" – which is devoid of otherness, privation, and negativity and where each instinctual demand is "magically" eliminated by the mother's ministrations as soon as it arises – defines perfection.[16] Once that undifferentiated plenum has been dissolved, memory traces of it, as Castoriadis observes, exert a continuous "magnetic attraction" on the psyche, and this leads to our lifelong striving to recapture its perfection in one form or another. In addition to whatever neurological processes underpin the process, these memories constitute the developmental source of "the irresistible advance towards unity in mental life."[17] That Freud did not systematically address

[15] Freud, *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis*, 76.

[16] The way Freud characterizes the perfect state of primary narcissism invites comparison with the way Aristotle describes the autarchic perfection of god as a *nous theos*.

[17] Freud, *Group psychology and the analysis of the ego*, 105.

this unifying conatus in psychic life until he introduced the concept of *eros* in the 1920s – and then did so only hesitatingly and inadequately – will be especially significant for our account of his intellectual biography.[18]

When the exclusionary/discharge model of the psychic apparatus was modified, it became necessary, Winnicott recognized, to reconceptualize the concept of pleasure that had been contained in it.[19] Winnicott attempted to do this by introducing a distinction between "climactic" and "nonclimactic" pleasure. The first is what Freud had in mind with the pleasure/unpleasure principle. It is tied to the demands of the body, equates pleasure with the reduction of tension, and corresponds to the discharge model of the psychic apparatus. The classic prototype is the satiated infant at the mother's breast after she has gratified his bodily needs.

The second type of pleasure, nonclimactic or "ego pleasure," as Winnicott describes it, lacks "instinctual backing" and has "no discharge."[20] The paradigm crisis that Freud's drive-reduction model of the psychic apparatus experienced in 1924 forced him to admit the existence not only of "nonclimactic" pleasures, but also of "pleasurable tensions."[21] To acknowledge an *increase of tension could itself be pleasurable*, however, was to implicitly negate the pleasure principle, one of the fundamental axioms of his entire theory. But Freud did not pursue the consequences of his new formulations in much detail, for to do so would have entailed a radical reformulation of his position that he was not prepared to undertake.

It should be pointed out that to deny tension can be pleasurable leads to an unacceptable conclusion, namely, that ego functioning and psychological development, which consist in the binding and synthesizing of the contents of unconscious-instinctual life and require an increase of tension, are only painful. It is impossible, in other words, to conceive of growth as in any sense a pleasurable process.

[18] See Jonathan Lear, "The introduction of eros: reflections on the work of Hans Loewald," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4 (1996), 673–698.

[19] See D.W. Winnicott, "The location of cultural experience," *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 48 (1967), 369–370. See also Loewald, "Sublimation: inquiries into theoretical psychoanalysis," *The essential Loewald: collected papers and monographs* (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 2000), 468; Ricoeur, *Freud and philosophy*, 322; and Castoriadis, *The imaginary institution of society*, 315.

[20] Winnicott, "The location of cultural experience," 369–370.

[21] See Freud, "The economic problem of masochism," 157–170.

By replacing the discharge/exclusionary model of the psyche with an inclusionary model, recognizing the ego's synthetic or integrative tasks alongside its purely defensive functions, and rejecting the equation of pleasure with tension-reduction, the "unofficial" theory also entails a reconceptualization of the "official" concepts of mastery and maturity, which, as we have noted, can be partly traced to the modern scientific worldview. "I believe it to be necessary and timely," Loewald writes, "to question the assumption, handed to us from the nineteenth century, that the scientific approach to the world and the self represents" the highest and most "mature evolutionary stage of man."[22] Loewald in fact goes further and suggests that "in its dominant current . . . psychoanalytic theory has unwittingly taken over much of the obsessive neurotic's" notion of the relation of the ego and reality – where maturity is defined as the ego's domination over the other dimensions of psychic life – and made it its own.[23] In other words, it has elevated a *pathological* conception of ego-formation into a *prescriptive* one. Moreover, the mature *qua* obsessional model of the ego – encapsulated in the Zuider Zee metaphor – is not only "an inaccessible objective" but also, as Castoriadis maintains, undesirable *in the extreme*.

> How [he asks] can we conceive of a subject that would have entirely "absorbed" the imaginative function [tied to unconscious-instinctual life – JW], how could we dry up this spring in the depths of ourselves from which flow both alienating phantasies and free creation truer than truth, unreal deliria and surreal poems, the eternally new [and] how can we eliminate what is at the base of, or, in any case what is inextricably bound up with what makes us human beings – our symbolic function, which presupposes our capacity to see and to think in a thing something which is not?[24]

However, as opposed to romantics like Georg Groddeck (the man for whom the term "wild analyst" was coined) and the young Michel Foucault, the point is not to idealize unconscious-instinctual life – to celebrate the "demonic" and ignore its dark side. It is rather to recognize that it constitutes a repository of material that is essential for human flourishing.

[22] Loewald, "On the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis," 228.

[23] Loewald, "Defense and reality," 30.

[24] Castoriadis, *The imaginary institution of society*, 104.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139025119.006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

That material, however, must be symbolized, sublimated, and integrated into "new synthetic organizations" of the psyche in which the "vital links" between "the lowest" and the "highest in human nature" are preserved.[25]

Mastery in this case, Loewald suggests, consists not in "domination" but in "coming to terms" with the material of unconscious-instinctual life by representing and articulating it.[26] Instincts are not dammed up or excluded, but channeled and organized in order to create richer and more differentiated structures of the psyche.

It must be emphasized that, in criticizing Freud's "official" doctrine, Loewald is not suggesting that we simply replace it with his "unofficial" position. The way to correct the one-sided hypostatization of Oedipal theory over pre-Oedipal is not, he observes, to substitute "a paternal concept of reality" with "a maternal one" – or, as André Green puts it somewhat more graphically, to replace "the Father of the horde with the Great Mother Goddess."[27] The psyche's central task is to achieve optimal integration with reality; contrariwise, the primary threat it faces is the loss of reality integration via the loss of the self or via the loss of the object. With regard to this task and its accompanying danger, the "paternal" and "maternal" perspectives each have their complementary advantages and disadvantages, and they themselves must be *integrated* into a more encompassing position.

Because the paternal castration threat contains its own dangers vis-à-vis reality integration, it is incorrect to consider it as "the prototype of reality" *as such*. But not to recognize it as "one factor in the constitution of reality" is also incorrect.[28] The father's intervention into the relatively undifferentiated infant–mother matrix, as we have seen, initiates the process through which the ego and reality differentiate out from each other.

The danger with the paternal perspective, however, is that the integration of psyche and reality will misfire because *too much distance* is created between ego and object. In that case, we are confronted with the classical Oedipal configuration, which envisages a detached imperious ego standing over against an objectified world that has been so roundly criticized by

[25] Loewald, *Sublimation*, 453.

[26] *Ibid.*, 461.

[27] Loewald, "Ego and reality," 14, and Green, *On private madness*, 253.

[28] Loewald, "Ego and reality," 14.

feminists, anti-positivists, and ecologists. The ego's apparent sovereignty is deceptive, for insofar as they have lost their relatedness to one another, both the ego and the object are relatively lost in the Oedipal constellation. Contrary to what might be assumed, ego and the object develop not in opposition to each other, but through their mutual integration.[29]

The paternal configuration, however, is not solely negative, nor is it entirely hostile. The danger that arises with the maternal perspective is the obverse of the one we have examined with the Oedipal structure: Reality integration can fail because of insufficient separation and distance. Since the maternal situation begins with a merger-like state, relatedness is not a problem; it is there *ab initio*. Difficulties arise when the ego fails to differentiate itself adequately or when, once it has achieved a degree of separation, the archaic mother's Siren song sucks it back and it merges into the maternal matrix. If the threat in the paternal case is *castration*, the danger in the maternal one is the loss of self and object through *reengulfment* by "the overpowering, annihilating mother." In short,

> the original unity and identity, undifferentiated and unstructured, of psychic apparatus and environment is as much of a danger for the ego as the demand of the "paternal castration threat" to give it up altogether.[30]

It is at this point that the "positive non-hostile side of the father figure" comes into view: "Against the threatening possibility of remaining in or sinking back into the structureless unity from which the ego emerged stands the powerful paternal force."[31] To use Lacan's terminology, the "significance of the phallus" resides in its creation of a barrier between the incipient ego and the archaic "imaginary" mother.[32] Furthermore, in addition to his castration threat, the father also invites his son to identify with him as an "active, nonpassive" figure who can resist the mother's regressive pull.[33]

[29] For this reason the opposition of ego psychology to object relations theory is spurious.

[30] Loewald, "Ego and reality," 15.

[31] *Ibid.*, 15.

[32] Jacques Lacan, "The significance of the phallus," *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink et al. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006), 575–584.

[33] Loewald, "Ego and reality," 16.

Loewald pulls together the different strands of his analysis of "the profoundly ambivalent relation with parent figures at work in the constitution of ego and reality."[34] On the one hand, "the unstructured nothingness" that would result from the dedifferentiation of "ego" and "reality" – from the dissolution of the *prinicipium individuationis* – in maternal reengulfment "represents a threat" that is "as deep and frightening as the paternal castration threat." Both entail a loss of reality. "Reality is lost if the ego is cut off from objects (castration threat)," and it "is lost as well if the boundaries of the ego and object are lost (the threat of the womb)."[35] As Loewald observes, "the ego pursues its course of integrating reality" and displays its "remarkable striving toward unification and synthesis" by navigating between these two dangers.[36] He also calls our attention to one final paradox that points to the thorough ambivalence of the concept of "unity." The same original experience of unity that occurs in the "primary psychical situation" and, when it is projected ahead of the ego, posits the *telos* of development as *differentiation*, *structuralization*, and *synthesis*, also poses the greatest threat to development – that is, regression back into that *undifferentiated* and *unstructured* unity. The question is: in what manner is that *telos* pursued?

Loewald's elucidation of Freud's "unofficial" position and his call for the integration of the paternal and maternal, Oedipal and pre-Oedipal perspectives on reality constitute a rejection of the "power grab" model of maturity. Maturity can no longer be understood as the domination of the supposedly more advanced strata of the psyche over the supposedly more archaic; rather, it must be reconceptualized, as Castoriadis observes, as involving "another relation between" them.[37] "The so-called fully developed, mature ego," Loewald observes,

> is not one that has become fixated at the presumably highest or latest stages of development, having left the other behind it, but is an ego that integrates its reality in such a way that the earlier and deeper levels of ego-reality integration remain alive as dynamic sources of higher organization.[38]

[34] *Ibid.*, 17.

[35] *Ibid.*, 16.

[36] *Ibid.*, 17.

[37] Castoriadis, *The imaginary institution of society*, 104.

[38] Loewald, "Ego and reality," 20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139025119.006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Freud makes a similar suggestive observation relatively *en passant* in *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*, when he asserts that too much distance between the ego and the id is as pathological as too little. "The ego," he notes, "is an organization," and ideally it aims at maintaining "free intercourse" with all the other parts of the psyche so that they can "reciprocally influence" each other.[39] Unfortunately, he does not explore this ideal in sufficient detail.

Whatever the case, Freud's use of the term "intercourse" implies that the goal of development is not "an attained state" but, Castoriadis argues, an ongoing "active situation," in which the individual is "unceasingly involved in the movement of taking up again" the contents of his psychic life and reworking them into richer and more differentiated synthetic configurations. It does not, in other words, comprise a state of "'awareness' achieved once and for all," where the ego has established its dominance over the "lower" parts of the psyche. Rather, the aim is to institute "*another relation* between the conscious and the unconscious, between lucidity and the function of the imaginary . . . *another attitude* of the subject with respect to himself or herself, in a profound modification of the activity-passivity mix, of the sign under which this takes place, of the respective place of the two elements that compose it."[40] Far from a "dictatorship of reason," what is being suggested is a less repressive organization of the psyche, a more propitious integration of its heterogeneous parts.

We remain loyal to Freud's intentions not by slavishly repeating and defending his ideas, but by subjecting them to an immanent critique and critically reappropriating them. One of the central aims of this intellectual biography is to do just that. It is too easy to find the mistakes in Freud's thinking; they are manifold and all-too-familiar. But this can also be said of Plato and Kant. The more fruitful enterprise is to elucidate the inner tensions in his project – in the problematic that he has bequeathed us – so that we can address its deficiencies and advance it beyond the point where Freud reached the unavoidable limits of his background and his personality.

With these theoretical considerations in mind, let us turn to the concrete history of Freud's creation of psychoanalysis.

[39] Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety* (1926), *SE* 20: 98.

[40] Castoriadis, *The imaginary institution of society*, 104.