

Freud: on libido, Eros, and life instinct (and death instinct)

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The following excerpts are taken from Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920, vol. 18). Some of them relate very directly to the topic in question and some do not. I have chosen the excerpts on their basis of their relevance in general, not only to this particular topic, but to others that you have indicated an interest in.

"In the theory of psycho-analysis we have no hesitation in assuming that the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle. We believe, that is to say, that the course of those events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension--that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure." (7).

"We have ~~be~~ decided to relate pleasure and unpleasure to the quantity of excitation that is present in the mind but is not in any way 'bound'; and to relate them in such a manner that unpleasure corresponds to an increase in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a diminution. What we are implying by this is not a simple relation between the strength of the feelings of pleasure and unpleasure and the corresponding modifications in the quantity of excitation; least of all--in view of all we have been taught by psychophysiology--are we suggesting any directly proportional ratio; the factor that determines the feeling is probably the amount of increase or diminution in the quantity of excitation in a given period of time. (7-8).

"The facts which have caused us to believe in the dominance of the pleasure principle in mental life also find expression in the hypothesis that the mental apparatus endeavors to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant. This latter hypothesis is only another way of stating the pleasure principle; for if the work of the mental apparatus is directed towards keeping the quantity of excitation low, then anything that is calculated to increase that quantity is bound to be felt as adverse to the functioning of the apparatus, that is as unpleasurable" (9).

"'Fright', 'fear' and 'anxiety' are improperly used as synonymous expressions; they are in fact capable of clear distinction in their relation to danger. 'Anxiety' describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. 'Fear' requires a definite object of which to be afraid. 'Fright', however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise" (12). Strachey ~~(XXX)~~ here makes the comment that Freud is very far from always carrying out the distinction he makes here. "More often than not [notes Strachey] he uses the word 'Angst' to denote a state of fear without any reference to the future." (note, page. 13).

Freud then presents the example of the small child who would throw a wooden reel with a piece of string tied to it out of his bed and then reel it in with the expression of "o-o-o-o." Freud's interpretation is that this was related to renunciation of instinctual ~~sex~~ satisfaction which he made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. It may be that "...her departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return and that it was the latter that lay the true purpose of the game. But again, this must be counted the observed fact that the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending.... On an unprejudiced view one gets the impression that the child turned his experience into a game from another motive. At the outset he was in a passive situation--he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took an active part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not. But still another interpretation may be attempted. Throwing away the object so that it was 'gone' might satisfy an impulse of the



child's, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him. In that case it would have a defiant meaning: 'All right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself.'...We know of other children who liked to express similar hostile impulses by throwing away objects instead of persons. We are therefore left in doubt as to whether the impulse to work over in the mind some overpowering experience so as to make oneself master of it can find expression as a primary event, and independently of the pleasure principle" (15-16).

"It is clear that in their play children repeat everything that has made a great impression on them in real life, and that in doing so they abreact the strength of the impression, and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation. But on the other hand, it is obvious that all their play is influenced by a wish that dominates them the whole time--the wish to be grown-up and to be able to do what grown-up people do. It can also be observed that the unpleasurable nature of an experience does not always unsuit it for play. If the doctor looks down a child's throat or carries out some small operation on him, we may be quite sure that these frightening experiences will be the subject of the next game; but we must not ~~overlook~~ in that connection overlook the fact that there is a yield of pleasure from another source. As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the disagreeable experience to one of his playmates and in this way revenges himself on a substitute. Nevertheless, it emerges from this discussion that there is no need to assume the existence of a special imitative instinct in order to provide a motive for play. Finally, a reminder may be added that the artistic play and artistic imitation carried out by adults, which, unlike children's, are aimed at an audience, do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable. This is convincing proof that, even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind. The consideration of these ~~cases and~~ cases and situations, which have a yield of pleasure as their final outcome, should be undertaken by some system of aesthetics with an economic approach to its subject-matter. They are of no use for our purposes, since they presuppose the existence and domination of the pleasure principle; they give no evidence of the operation of tendencies beyond the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it" (16-17).

Psychoanalysis was at first an art of interpreting unconscious material to the patient. But it became clear that the aim to make what was unconscious conscious was not completely attainable by the method of interpretation. "The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. Thus he acquires no sense of conviction of the correctness of the construction that has been communicated to him. He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past. These reproductions, which emerge with such unwished-for exactitude, always have as their subject some portion of infantile sexual life--of the Oedipus complex, that is, and its derivatives; and they are invariably acted out in the sphere of the transference, of the patient's relation to the physician" (18).

The physician must get the patient to re-experience some portion of his forgotten life, but must also see that the patient retains some degree of aloofness, which enables him to recognize that what appears as reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past. "In order to make it easier to understand this 'compulsion to repeat', which emerges during the psycho-analytic treatment of neurotics, we must above all get rid of the mistaken notion that what we are dealing with in our struggle against resistances is resistance on the part of the unconscious. The unconscious--that is to say, the 'repressed'--offers no resistance whatever to the efforts of the treatment. Indeed, it itself has no other endeavour that to break through the pressure weighing down on it and force its way either to consciousness or to a discharge through some real action. Resistance during treatment

arises from the same higher strata and systems of the mind which originally carried out repression. But the fact that, as we know from experience, the motives of the resistances, and indeed the resistances themselves, are unconscious at first during the treatment, is a hint to us that we should correct a shortcoming in our terminology. We shall avoid a lack of clarity if we make our contrast not between the conscious and the unconscious but between the coherent ego and the repressed. It is certain that much of the ego is itself unconscious, and notably what we may describe as its nucleus; only a small part of it is covered by the term 'preconscious'. Having replaced a purely descriptive terminology by one which is systematic or dynamic, we can say that the patient's resistance arises from his ego, and we then at once perceive that the compulsion to repeat must be ascribed to the unconscious repressed" (19-20). This work was written in 1920; in 1923 Freud elucidated on these concepts in The Ego and the Id.

The resistance of the conscious and unconscious ego operates according to the pleasure principle: "it seeks to avoid unpleasure which would be produced by the liberation of the repressed. Our efforts, on the other hand, are directed toward procuring the toleration of that unpleasure by an appeal to the reality principle. But how is the compulsion to repeat--the manifestation of the power of the repressed--related to the pleasure principle? It is clear that the greater part of what is re-experienced under the compulsion to repeat must cause the ego unpleasure, since it brings to light activities of repressed instinctual impulses. That, however, is unpleasure of a kind we have already considered and does not contradict the pleasure principle: unpleasure for one system and simultaneously satisfaction for the other. But we come now to a new and remarkable fact, namely that the compulsion to repeat also recalls from the past experiences which ~~we~~ include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to instinctual impulses which have since been repressed" (20).

"Patients repeat all these unwanted situations and painful emotions in the transference and revive them with the greatest ingenuity. They seek to bring about the interruption of the treatment while it is still incomplete; they contrive once more to feel themselves scorned, to oblige the physician to speak severely to them and treat them coldly; they discover appropriate objects for their jealousy; instead of the passionately desired baby of their childhood, they produce a plan or a promise of some grand present--which turns out as a rule to be no less unreal. None of these things can have produced pleasure in the past, and it might be supposed that they would cause less unpleasure to-day if they emerged as memories or dreams instead of taking the form of fresh experiences. They are of course the activities of instincts intended to lead to satisfaction; but no lesson has been learnt from the old experience of these activities having led instead only to unpleasure. In spite of that, they are repeated, under the pressure of a compulsion" (21).

".....we shall find courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle. Now too we shall be inclined to relate this compulsion to the dreams which occur in traumatic neuroses and the impulse which leads children to play. But it is to be noted that only in rare instances can we observe the pure effects of the compulsion to repeat, unsupported by other motives. In the case of children's play we have already laid stress on the other ways in which the emergence of the compulsion ~~to repeat~~ may be interpreted; the compulsion to repeat and instinctual satisfaction which is immediately pleasurable seem to converge here into an intimate partnership. The phenomena of transference are obviously exploited by the resistance which the ego maintains in its pertinacious insistence upon repression; the compulsion to repeat, which the treatment tries to bring into its service is, as it were, drawn over by the ego to its side (clinging as the ego does to the pleasure principle)....The least dubious instance (of such a motive force) is perhaps that of traumatic dreams. But on maturer reflection we shall be forced to admit that even in the other instances the whole ground is not covered by the operation of the familiar motive forces. Enough is left unexplained to justify the hypothesis of a compulsion

to repeat--something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual that the pleasure principle which it over-rides" (22-23).

"The fulfillment of wishes is, as we know, brought about in a hallucinatory manner by dreams, and under the dominance of the pleasure principle this has become their function. But it is not in the service of that principle that the dreams of patients suffering from traumatic neuroses lead them back with such regularity to the situation in which the trauma occurred. We may assume, rather, that dreams are here helping to carry out another task, which must be accomplished before the dominance of the pleasure principle can even begin. These dreams are endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing ~~an~~ the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis. They thus afford us a view of a function of the mental apparatus which, though it does not contradict the pleasure principle, is nevertheless independent of it and seems to be more primitive than the purpose of gaining pleasure and avoiding unpleasure....But it is impossible to classify as wish-fulfillments the dreams we have been discussing which occur in traumatic neuroses, or the dreams during psychoanalyses which bring to memory the psychical traumas of childhood. They arise, rather, in obedience to the compulsion to repeat, though it is true that in analysis that compulsion is supported by the wish (which is encouraged by 'suggestion') to conjure up what has been forgotten and repressed" (32).

"In the case of children's play we seemed to see that children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively. Each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of" (35).

"But how is the predicate of being 'instinctual' related to the compulsion to repeat? At this point we cannot escape a suspicion that we may have come upon the track of a universal attribute of instincts and perhaps of organic life in general which has not hitherto been clearly recognized or at least not explicitly stressed. It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life" (36).

"..it is possible to specify this final goal of all organic striving. It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never yet been attained. On the contrary, it must be an old state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living does for internal reasons--become inorganic once again--then we shall be compelled to say that 'the aim of all life is death' and, looking backwards, that 'inanimate things existed before living ones' (38).

"These circuitous paths to death, faithfully kept to by the conservative instincts, would thus present us to-day with the picture of the phenomena of life. If we firmly maintain the exclusively conservative nature of instincts, we cannot arrive at any other notions as to the origin and aim of life. The implications in regard to the great groups of instincts which, as we believe, lie behind the phenomena of life in organisms must appear no less bewildering. The hypothesis of self-preservative instincts, such as we attribute to all living beings, stands in marked opposition to the idea that instinctual life as a whole serves to bring about death. Seen in this light, the theoretical importance of the instincts of self-preservation, of self-assertion and of mastery greatly diminishes. They are component instincts whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those whose are immanent in the organism itself....What we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion" (39).

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"The instincts which watch over the destinies of these elementary organisms that survive the whole individual, which provide them with a safe shelter while they are defenceless against the stimuli of the external world, which bring about their meeting with other germ-cells, and so on--these constitute the group of the sexual instincts. They are conservative in the same sense as the other instincts in that they bring back earlier states of living substance; but they are conservative to a higher degree in that they are peculiarly resistant to external influences; and they are conservative too in another sense in that they preserve life itself for a comparatively long period. They are the true life instincts. They operate against the purpose of the other instincts, which leads, by reason of their function, to death; and this fact indicates that there is an opposition between them and the other instincts, an opposition whose importance was long ago recognized by the theory of the neuroses" (40).

"Let us make a bold attempt at another step forward. It is generally considered that the union of a number of cells into a vital association--the multicellular character of organisms--has become a means of prolonging their life. One cell helps to preserve the life of another, and the community of cells can survive even if individual cells have to die. We have already heard that conjugation, too, the temporary coalescence of two unicellular organisms, has a life-preserving and rejuvenating effect on both of them. [This ~~provisionally~~^{as} discussed in a previous section when Freud was attempting to give proof for the biological basis of both life and death instincts.] Accordingly, we might attempt to apply the libido theory which has been arrived at in psycho-analysis to the mutual relationship of cells. We might suppose that the life instincts or the sexual instincts which are active in each cell take the other cells as their object, that they partly neutralize the death instincts (that is, the processes set up by them) in those cells and thus preserve their life; while other cells ~~themselves~~ do the same for them, and still others sacrifice themselves in the performance of this libidinal function. The germ-cells themselves would behave in a completely 'narcissistic' fashion--to use the phrase that we are accustomed to use in the theory of the neuroses to describe a whole individual who retains his libido in his ego and pays none of it out in object-cathexes. The germ-cells require their libido, the activity of their life instincts, for themselves, as a reserve against the later momentous constructive activity. (The cells of the malignant neoplasms which destroy the organism should also perhaps be described as narcissistic in this same sense: pathology is prepared to regard their germs as innate and to ascribe embryonic attributes to them.) In this way the libido of our sexual instincts would coincide with the eros of the poets and philosophers which holds all living things together. Here then is an opportunity for looking back over the slow development of our libido theory. In the first instance the analysis of the transference ~~was~~ neuroses forced upon our notice the opposition between the 'sexual instincts', which are directed toward an object, and certain other instincts, with which we were very insufficiently ~~acquainted~~ acquainted and which we described provisionally as the 'ego instincts'. A foremost place among these was necessarily given to the instincts serving the self-preservation of the individual. It was impossible to say what other distinctions were to be drawn among them" (50-51)....."Psycho-analysis, which could not ~~escape~~ escape making some assumptions about the instincts, kept at first to the popular division of instincts typified in the phrase 'hunger and love'. At least there was nothing arbitrary in this; and by its help the analysis of the psychoneuroses was carried forward quite a distance. The concept of 'sexuality', and at the same time of the sexual instinct, had, it is true, to be extended so as to cover many things which could not be classed under the reproductive function; and this caused ~~no~~ little hubbub in an austere, respectable or merely hypocritical world. The next step was taken when psychoanalysis felt its way closer toward the psychological ego, which it had first come to know only as a repressive, censoring agency, capable of erecting protective structures and reactive formations. Critical and far-seeing minds had, it is true, long since objected to the concept of libido being restricted to the energy of the sexual instincts directed toward an object. But they failed to explain how they had arrived at their better knowledge or to derive from it

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anything of which analysis could make use. Advancing more cautiously, psycho-analysis observed the regularity with which libido is withdrawn from the object and directed on to the ego (the process of introversion); and, by studying the libidinal development of children in its earliest phases, came to the conclusion that the ego is the true and original reservoir of libido, [This concept was changed to the id as the reservoir of libido in The Ego and the Id, but back again in New Introductory Lectures (1933) to the ego being the reservoir of libidio. Strachey devotes an appendix in The Ego and the Id to a discussion of these alternating versions.] and that ~~it is only~~ it is only from that reservoir that libido is extended on to objects. The ego now found its position among sexual objects and was at once given the foremost place among them. Libido which was in this way lodged in the ego was described as 'narcissistic'. This narcissistic libido was of course also a manifestation of the force of the sexual instinct in the analytical sense of those words, and it had necessarily to be identified with the 'self-preservative instincts' whose existence had been recognized from the first. Thus the original opposition between the ego instincts and the sexual instincts proved to be inadequate, A portion of the ego instincts was seen to be libidinal; sexual instincts--probably alongside others--operated in the ego. Nevertheless we are justified in saying that the old formula which lays it down that psychoneuroses are based on a conflict between ego instincts and sexual instincts contains nothing that we need reject to-day. It is merely that the distinction between the two kinds of instinct, which was originally regarded as in some sort of way qualitative, must now be characterized differently--namely as being topographical" (51-52)....."But it is all the more necessary for us to lay stress upon the libidinal character of the self-preservative instincts now that we are venturing upon the further step of recognizing the sexual instinct as Eros, the preserver of all things, and of deriving the narcissistic libido of the ego from the stores of libido by means of which the cells of the soma are attached to one another. But we now find ourselves suddenly faced by another question. If the self-preservative instincts too are of a libidinal nature, are there perhaps no other instincts whatever but the libidinal ones? At all events there are none other visible. But in that case we shall after all be driven to agree with the critics who suspected from the first that psycho-analysis explains everything by sexuality, or with innovators like Jung who, ~~making~~ making a hasty judgment, have used the word 'libido' to mean instinctual force in general. Must not this be so? It was not our intention ~~at~~ at all events to produce such a result. Our argument had as its point of departure a sharp distinction between ego instincts, which we equated with death instincts, and sexual instincts, which we equated with life instincts.... Our views have from the very first been qualitative, and ~~to-day they~~ to-day they are even more definitely dualistic than before--now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego instincts and sexual instincts but between life instincts and death instincts. Jung's libido theory is on the contrary monistic; the fact that he has called his one instinctual force 'libido' is bound to cause confusion, but need not affect us otherwise. We suspect that instincts other than those of self-preservation operate in the ego, and it ought to be possible for us to point to them. Unfortunately, however, the analysis of the ego has made so little headway that it is very difficult for us to do so." (52-53).

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"In the obscurity ~~which~~ that reigns at present in the theory of the instincts, it would be unwise to reject any idea that promises to throw light on it. We started out from the great opposition between the life and death instincts. Now object-love itself presents us with a second example of a similar polarity--that between love (or affection) and hate (or aggressiveness). If only we could succeed in relating these two polarities to each other and in deriving one from the other! From the very first we recognized the presence of a sadistic component in the sexual instinct. As we know, it can make itself independent and can, in the form of a perversion, dominate an individual's entire sexual activity. It also emerges as a predominant component instinct in one of the 'pregenital organizations', as I have named them. But how can the sadistic instinct, whose aim it is to injure the object, be derived from Eros, the preserver of life? Is it not plausible to

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suppose that this sadism is in fact a death instinct which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced away from the ego, and has consequently only emerged in relation to the object? It now enters the service of the sexual function.... It might indeed be said that the sadism which has been forced out of the ego has pointed the way for the libidinal components of the sexual instinct, and that these follow ~~xxxxxxx~~ after it to the object. Wherever the original sadism has undergone no mitigation or ~~x~~ intermixture, we find the familiar ambivalence of love and hate in erotic life. If such an assumption as this is permissible, then we have met the demand that we should produce an example of a death instinct--though, it is true, a displaced one." (53-54).

"The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the 'Nirvana principle', to borrow a term from Barbara Low)--a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle; and our recognition of that fact is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of death instincts" (55-56).

"I do not dispute the fact that the third step in the theory of instincts, which I have taken here, cannot lay claim to the same degree of certainty as the two earlier one--the extension of the concept of sexuality and the hypothesis of narcissism. These two innovations were a direct translation of observation into theory and were no more open to sources of error than is inevitable in all such cases. It is true that my assertion of the regressive character of instincts also rests upon observed material--namely on the facts of the compulsion to repeat. It may be, however, that I have overestimated their significance. And in any case it is impossible to pursue an idea of this kind except by repeatedly combining factual material with what is purely speculative and thus diverging widely from empirical observation" (59).

(Long footnote, pp. 60-61: "I will add a few ~~xx~~ words to clarify our terminology, which has undergone some development in the course of the present work. We came to know what the 'sexual instincts' were from their relation to the sexes and to the reproductive function. We retained this name after we had been obliged by the findings of psycho-analysis to connect them less closely with reproduction. With the hypothesis of narcissistic libido and the extension of the concept of libido to the individual cells, the sexual instinct was transformed ~~x~~ for us into Eros, which seeks to force together and hold together the portions of living substance. What are commonly called the sexual instincts are looked upon by us as the part of Eros which is directed toward objects. Our speculations have suggested that Eros operates from the beginning of life and appears as a 'life instinct' in opposition to the 'death instinct' which was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance. These speculations seeks to solve the riddle of life by ~~xx~~ supposing that these two instincts were struggling with each other from the very first. (Added 1921:) It is not so easy, perhaps, to follow the transformations through which the concept of the 'ego instincts' has passed. To begin with we applied that name to all the instinctual trends (of which we had no closer knowledge) which could be distinguished from the sexual instincts directed towards an object; and we opposed the ego instincts to the sexual instincts of which the libido is the manifestation. Subsequently we came to closer grips with the analysis of the ego and recognized that a portion of the 'ego instincts' is also of a libidinal character and has taken the subject's own ego as its object. These narcissistic self-preservative instincts had thenceforward to be counted among the libidinal sexual instincts. The opposition between the ego instincts and the sexual instincts was transformed into one between the ego instincts and the object instincts, both of a libidinal nature. But in its place a fresh opposition appeared between the libidinal (ego and object) instincts and others, which must be presumed to be present in the ego and which may perhaps actually be observed in the destructive instincts. Our speculations have transformed this opposition into one between the life instincts (Eros) and the death instincts" (60-61).)

"Let us make a sharper distinction than we have hitherto made between function and tendency. The pleasure principle, then, is a tendency operating in the service of a function whose business it is to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation or to keep the amount of excitation in it constant or to keep it as low as possible. We cannot yet decide with certainty in favour of any of these ways of putting it, but it is clear that the function thus described would be concerned with the most universal endeavour of all living substance--namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world. We have all experienced how the greatest pleasure attainable by us, that of the sexual act, is associated with a momentary extinction of a highly intensified excitation. The binding of an instinctual impulse would be a preliminary function designed to prepare the excitation for its final elimination in the pleasure of discharge. This raises the question of whether feelings of pleasure and unpleasure can be produced equally from bound and from unbound excitatory processes. And there seems to be no doubt whatever that the unbound or primary processes give rise to far more intense feelings in both directions than the bound or secondary ones. Moreover the primary processes are the earlier in time; at the beginning of mental life there are no others, and we may infer that if the pleasure principle had not already been operative in them it could never have been established for the later ones. We thus reach what is at bottom no very simple conclusion, namely that at the beginning of mental life the struggle for pleasure was far more intense than later but not so unrestricted: it had to submit to frequent interruptions. In later times the dominance of the pleasure principle is very much more secure, but it itself has no more escaped the process of taming than the other instincts in general. In any case, whatever it is that causes the appearance of feelings of pleasure and unpleasure in processes of excitation must be present in the secondary process just as it is in the primary one" (62-63). "Here might be the starting-point for fresh investigations. Our consciousness communicates to us feelings from within not only of pleasure and ~~unpleasure~~ unpleasure but also of a peculiar tension which in its turn can be either pleasurable or unpleasurable. Should the difference between these feelings enable us to distinguish between bound and unbound processes of energy? or is the reeling of tension to be related to the absolute magnitude, or perhaps to the level, of the cathexis, while the pleasure and unpleasure series indicated a change in the magnitude of the cathexis within a given unit of time? Another striking fact is that the life instincts have so much more contact with our internal perception--emerging as breakers of the peace and constantly producing tensions whose release is felt as pleasure--while the death instincts seem to do their work unobtrusively. The pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts. It is true that it keeps watch upon stimuli ~~from~~ from without, which are regarded as dangers by both kinds of instincts; but it is more especially on guard against increases of stimulation from within, which would make the task of living more difficult. This in turn raises a host of ~~questions~~ other questions to which we can at present find no answer. We must be patient and await fresh methods and occasions of research" (63-64).

This work seems to be primarily an introduction to the concept of the death instinct and Freud does not elaborate very much at all on the concept once he has introduced it. However, he does so in some later works, such as Civilization and its Discontents (1930), which I will be covering in a further review of Freud's evolving concept of aggression and destruction.



Part II

Freud: on libido, Eros, and life instinct: I have already covered much of this topic in my review of Beyond the Pleasure Principle (which is the first part of this paper), as well as in my summarizations of Freud's writings on the death, instinct, destructiveness, aggression, etc. What I will attempt to emphasize below is Freud's differing points of view as regards the libido: first, as the energy used by the sexual instincts, and secondly, his later concept of libido as at the service of Eros.

Freud's first use of the term "libido" occurs in an article written in 1894 and published in 1895. It is found in Section II of his first papers on anxiety neurosis: "On the grounds for detaching a particular syndrome from neurasthenia under the description 'anxiety neurosis.'" Vol. 3. In this section Freud discusses the incidence and etiology of anxiety neurosis. One example he gives is that of "Anxiety in senescent men. There are men who have a climacteric like women, and who produce an anxiety neurosis at the time of their decreasing potency and increasing libido" (101-102). Strachey, in a footnote on p. 102, observes "This seems to be Freud first published use of the term 'libido'. Its occurrence here contradicts his apparent statement that it was used by Moll in 1898.... and, indeed, at the beginning of...Civilization and its Discontents (1930)..., he mentions having introduced the term himself, presumably in the present passage." In his introduction to these papers, Strachey notes the following: "It is also advisable to bear in mind in reading these early papers that Freud was at the time deeply involved in an attempt to state the data of psychology in neurological terms--an attempt which culminated in his abortive 'Project for a Scientific Psychology'...and which thereafter foundered completely. He had not yet wholly adopted the hypothesis of there being unconscious mental processes.... Thus in the present paper he distinguishes between 'somatic sexual excitation' on the one hand and 'sexual libido, or psychical desire' on the other. 'Libido' is regarded as ^{things} ~~some~~ exclusively 'psychical' though, again, no clear distinction seems yet to have been made between 'psychical' and 'conscious'. It is interesting to note that in an abstract of this paper which Freud ~~wrote~~ himself wrote only a couple of years later (1897)..he evidently already accepts the view of libido as something potentially unconscious and writes: 'Neurotic anxiety is transformed sexual libido.' But in whatever terms he expressed this theory, it was one which he held till very late in life, though with a number of qualifying complications. For a long series of changing opinions lay ahead, some account of which will be found in the Editor's Introduction...to the last of his major works of the subject, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety (1926)." (88-89).

Here is the pertinent section of Strachey's introduction to Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety (1926, vol. 20): "(a) Anxiety as Transformed Libido. It was in the course of investigating the 'actual' neuroses that Freud first came upon the problem of anxiety, and his earliest discussions of it ~~will~~ will be found in his first paper on the anxiety neurosis (1895) and in the memorandum on the subject which he sent to Fliess a little earlier, probably in the summer of 1894.... At that time he was still largely under the influence of his neurological studies and he was deep in his attempt at expressing the data of psychology in physiological terms. In particular, following Fechner, he had taken as a fundamental postulate the 'principle of constancy', according to which there was an inherent tendency in the nervous system to reduce, or at least to keep constant, the amount of excitation present in it. When, therefore, he made the clinical discovery that in cases of anxiety neurosis it was always possible to discover some interference with the discharge of sexual tension, it was natural for him to conclude that the accumulated excitation was finding its way out in the transformed shape of anxiety. He regarded this as a purely physical process without any psychological determinants. From the first the anxiety occurring in phobias or in obsessional neuroses raised a complication, for here the presence of psychological events could not be excluded. But, as regards the emergence of anxiety, the explanation remained the same. In these cases--in the psychoneuroses-- the

reason for the accumulation of undischarged ~~x~~ excitation was a psychological one; repression. But what followed was the same as in the 'actual' neuroses: the accumulated ~~x~~ excitation (or libido) was transformed directly into anxiety. Some quotations will show how loyally Freud maintained this view. In 'Draft E' (1894), referred to above, he wrote: 'Anxiety arises from a transformation of the accumulated tension.' In The Interpretation of Dreams (1900): 'Anxiety is a libidinal impulse which has its origin in the unconscious and is inhibited by the preconscious' (vol. 4, 337-338). In Gradiva (1907): 'The anxiety in anxiety-dreams, like neurotic anxiety in general, ...arises out of libido by the process of repression.' (vol. 9, 60-61). In the metapsychological paper on 'Repression' (1915): After repression 'the quantitative portion [of the instinctual impulse-- i.e., its ~~sexuality~~ energy] has not vanished, but has been transformed into anxiety.' (vol. 14, 155). Finally, as late as in 1920, Freud added in a footnote to the fourth edition of the Three Essays: 'One of the most important results of psycho-analytic research is this discovery that neurotic anxiety arises out of libido, that it is a transformation of it, and that it is thus related to it in the same kind of way as vinegar is to wine.' (vol. 7, 224). It is curious to note, however, that at quite an early stage, Freud seems to have been assailed by doubts on the subject. In a letter to Fliess of November 14, 1897..he remarks, without any apparent connection with the rest of what he has been writing about: 'I have decided, then, henceforth to regard as separate factors what causes libido and what causes anxiety.' No further evidence is anywhere to be found of this isolated recantation. In the work before us [Anx., Symp. & Inhib.] Freud gave up the theory he had held for so long. He no longer regarded anxiety as transformed libido, but as a reaction on a particular model to situations of danger. But even here he still ~~xxx~~ maintained (p. 141) that it was very possible that in the case of anxiety neurosis 'what finds discharge in the generating of anxiety is precisely the surplus of unutilized libido.' This last relic of the old theory was to be abandoned a few years later. In a passage near the end of his discussion of anxiety in Lecture XXXII of his New Introductory Lectures (1933) he wrote that in the anxiety neurosis, too, the appearance of anxiety was a reaction to a traumatic situation: 'we shall no longer maintain that it is the libido itself that is turned into anxiety in such cases.'" (78-80).

Here is another early quote from Freud from his papers on anxiety neurosis, vol. 3, 1895. Here he is equating sexual libido and psychical desire: "A further point of departure is furnished by the observation, not so far mentioned, that in whole sets of cases anxiety neurosis is accompanied by a most noticeable decrease of sexual libido or psychical desire, so that on being told that their complaint results from 'insufficient satisfaction', patients regularly reply that this is impossible, for precisely now all sexual need~~x~~ has become extinguished in them. From all these indications--that we have to do with an accumulation of excitation; that the anxiety which probably corresponds to this accumulated excitation is of somatic origin, so that what is being accumulated is a somatic excitation; and, further, that this somatic exdtation is of a sexual nature, and that a decrease of psychical participation in the sexual process goes along with it--all these indications, I say, incline us to expect that the mechanism~~x~~ of anxiety neurosis is to be looked for in a deflection of somatic sexual excitation from the psychical sphere, and in a consequent abnormal employment of that excitation" (107-108). And later in the same paper: "Abstinence consists in the withholding of the specific action which ordinarily follows upon libido. Such withholding may have two consequences. In the first place, the somatic excitation accumulates; it is then deflected into other paths, which hold out greater promise of discharge than does the path through the psyche. Thus the libido will in the end sink, and the excitation will manifest itself sub-cortically as anxiety. In the second place, if the libido is not diminished, or if the somatic excitation is expended, by a short cut, in emissions, or if, in consequence of being forced back, the excitation really ceases, then all kinds of things other than an anxiety neurosis will ensue" (109-110).

These early quotes may indicate that Freud conceived of libido as psychical energy, but nevertheless it was energy with a direct and specific connection to sexuality. As Strachey has indicated about these papers: 'Libido' is regarded as something exclusively 'psychical' though, again, no clear distinction seems yet to have been made between 'psychical' and 'conscious'." (88).

Here are two quotes from the ~~introductory~~ The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), vol. 4, which also equate libido with the sexual life: "In a short paper on anxiety neurosis [what I have quoted above--1895], I argued some time ago that neurotic anxiety is derived from sexual life and corresponds to libido which has been diverted from its purpose and has found no employment. Since ~~then~~ then this formula has met the test of time; and it enables us now to infer from it that anxiety-dreams are dreams with a sexual content, the libido belonging to which has been transformed into anxiety." (161-162). And: "Anxiety is a libidinal impulse which has its origin in the unconscious and is inhibited by the preconscious. When, therefore, the sensation of inhibition is linked with anxiety in a dream, it must be capable of generating libido--that is, it must be a question of a sexual impulse" (337-338).

And here is a quote from Five Lecture on Psychoanalysis, written 1909, published 1910, vol. 11. [Not having volume 7 in which the Three Essays are to be found in which he traces the libidinal development, I have not quoted it here. However, I believe that gist of what is in those essays will be found in the excerpts below.] "Alongside these and other auto-erotic activities, we find in children at a very early age manifestations of those instinctual components of sexual pleasure (or, as we like to say, of libido) which presuppose the taking of an extraneous person as an object" (44).

A quote from his papers on Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood (1910), vol. 11: "At the summit of his life, when he was in his early fifties--a time when in women the sexual characters have already undergone involution and when in men the libido not infrequently makes a further energetic advance--a new transformation came over him" (133-134).

It seems fairly clear that when Freud is referring to the development of the libido, he is talking about the development of the sexual instinct. In fact, lecture XXI of the Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, 1917, vol. 16, is titled: "The development of the libido and the sexual organizations." Here is one quote to the point: "...from the point of view of theory the most interesting phases of sexual, or as we will say, of libidinal, development lie earlier than this point of time [i.e., less than three years of age]." (326). And here is a footnote by Strachey to Lecture XXVI on Libido Theory and Narcissism: "The term 'ego-interest', sometimes in the alternative forms of 'egoistic interest' or simply 'interest', occurs frequently in this lecture. Freud had first used the term in his paper on narcissism (1914)...and it also appears several times in the metapsychological papers of 1915. The term is used regularly in those passages (as it is in the present one) to distinguish self-preservative forces from the libido. The introduction of the concept of narcissism made this distinction less clear-cut; but it is evident that all through this lecture...Freud was at pains to keep ego-libido (or narcissistic libido) separate from ego-interest (or the self-preservative instinct). Not long afterwards, however, he abandoned this attempt and declared (in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)...) that narcissistic libido 'had necessarily to be identified with the 'self-preservative instinct'.' He continued to believe, nevertheless, that there were object-instincts other than libidinal ones--namely those which he described as destructive or death instincts. But after the present work the term 'interest' ceased to appear" (414-415).

It was in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) with his introduction of the concept of the death instinct and the life instinct that Freud extended the concept of libido as at the service of a specifically sexual purpose to the



view of the libido as the energy of the life instinct in general. I have quoted at length from this work in Part I of this paper. However, as I recall, in that paper, he never did specifically take up the question of a biological or a physiological basis for his extended concept of libido. (See, in particular, page 5 of my review in Part I). It's as though he extended his libido theory to "the mutual relationships of cells" without ever specifically indicating that he was now viewing libido as energy having more than a specifically sexual function....as he had viewed libido earlier.

I am now going to quote in full, Freud's encyclopaedia article entitled (B) The Libido Theory, (~~1923~~ 1923), vol. 18.:

"Libido ~~is~~ is a term used in the theory of the instincts for describing the dynamic manifestations of sexuality.....Contrast between Sexual Instincts and Ego Instincts.--Psycho-analysis ~~was~~ early became aware that ~~all~~ mental occurrence must be regarded as built on the basis of an ~~an~~ interplay of the forces of the elementary instincts. This, however, led to a difficult predicament, since psychology included no theory of the instincts. No one could say what an instinct really was, the question was left entirely to individual caprice, and every psychologist was in the habit of postulating any instincts in any number that he chose. The first sphere of phenomena to be studied by psycho-analysis comprised what are known as the transference neuroses (hysteria and obsessional neurosis). It was found that their symptoms came about by sexual instinctual impulses being rejected (repressed) by the subject's personality (his ego) and then finding expression by circuitous paths through the unconscious. These facts could be met by drawing a contrast between the sexual instincts and ego instincts (instincts of self-preservation), which was in line with the popular saying that hunger and love are what make the world go round: libido was the manifestation of the force of love in the same sense as was hunger of the self-preserved instinct. The nature of the ego instincts remained for the time being undefined and, like all the other characteristics of the ego, inaccessible to analysis. ~~There was no means of deciding whether, and if so what, qualitative differences were to be assumed to exist between the two classes of instincts.~~ [In regard to ego psychology, this seems like a very interesting comment about the characteristics of the ego being inaccessible to analysis.] There was no means of deciding whether, and if so what, qualitative differences were to be assumed to exist between the two classes of instincts. (255).

"Primal libido.--C. J. Jung attempted to resolve this obscurity along speculative lines by assuming that there was only a single primal libido which could either be sexualized or desexualized and which therefore coincide in its essence with mental energy in general. This innovation was methodologically disputable, caused a great deal of confusion, reduced the term 'libido' to the level of a superfluous synonym and was still in practice confronted with the necessity for distinguishing between sexual and asexual libido. The difference between the sexual instincts and instincts with other aims was not to be got rid of by means of a new definition. (255-256).

"Sublimation.--An attentive examination of the sexual trends, which alone were accessible to psycho-analysis, had meanwhile led to some remarkable detailed findings. What is described as the sexual instinct turns out to be of a highly composite nature and is liable to disintegrate once more into its component instincts. Each component instinct is unalterably characterized by its source, that is, by the region or zone of the body from which its excitation is derived. Each has furthermore as distinguishable features an object and an aim. The aim is always discharge accompanied by satisfaction, but it is capable of being changed from activity to passivity. The object is less closely attached to the instinct than was at first supposed; it is easily exchanged for another one, and, moreover, an instinct which had an external object can be turned round upon the subject's own self. The separate instincts can either remain independent of one another or--in what is still an inexplicable manner--can be combined and merged into one another to perform work in common. They are also able to replace one another and to transfer their libidinal cathexis to one another, so that the satisfaction of one instinct can take the place of the satisfaction of others.

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The most important vicissitude which an instinct can undergo seems to be sublimation; here both object and aim are changed, so that what was originally a sexual instinct finds satisfaction in some achievement which is no longer sexual but has a higher social or ethical valuation. These different features do not as yet combine to form an integral picture. (256).

"Narcissism. 3--A decisive advance was made when the analysis of dementia praecox and other psychotic disorders was ventured upon and thus the examination was begun of the ego itself, which had so far been known only as the agency of repression and opposition. It was found that the pathogenic process in dementia praecox is the withdrawal of the libido from ~~x~~ objects and its introduction into the ego, while the clamorous symptoms of the disease arise from the vain struggles of the libido to find a pathway back to objects. It thus turned out to be possible for object-libido to change into cathexis of the ego and vice versa. Further reflection showed that this process must be presumed to occur on the largest scale and that the ego is to be regarded as a great reservoir of libido from which libido is sent out to objects and which is always ready to absorb libido flowing back from objects. Thus the instincts of self-preservation were also of a libidinal nature: they were sexual instincts which, instead of external objects, had taken the subject's own ego as an object. Clinical experience had made us familiar with people who behaved in a striking fashion as though they were in love with themselves and this perversion had been given the name of narcissism. The libido of the self-preservative instincts was now described as narcissistic libido and it was recognized that a high degree of this self-love constituted the primary and normal state of things. The earlier formula laid down for the transference neuroses consequently required to be modified, though not corrected. It was better, instead of speaking of a conflict between sexual instincts and ego instincts, to speak of a conflict between sexual instincts and ego instincts, and ego-libido, or, since the nature of these instincts was the same, between the object-cathexes and the ego. (256-257).

"Apparent Approach to Jung's Views.--It thus seemed on the face of it as though the slow process of psycho-analytic research was following in the steps of Jung's speculations about a primal libido, especially because the transformation of object-libido into narcissism necessarily carried along with it a certain degree of desexualization, or abandonment of the specifically sexual aims. Nevertheless, it has to be borne in mind that the fact that the self-preservative instincts of the ego are recognized as libidinal does not necessarily prove that there are no other instincts operating in the ego.

"The Herd Instinct.--It has been maintained in many quarters that there is a special innate and not further analysable 'herd instinct', which determines the social behavior of human beings and impels individuals to come together into larger communities. Psycho-analysis finds itself in contradiction to this view. Even if the social instinct is innate, it may without any difficulty be traced back to what were originally libidinal object-cathexes and may have developed in the childhood of the individual as a reaction-formation against hostile attitudes of rivalry. It is based on a peculiar kind of identification with other people" (257-258).

"Aim-inhibited Sexual Impulses.--The social instincts belong to a class of instinctual impulses which need not be described as sublimated, though they are closely related to these. They have not abandoned their directly sexual aims, but they are held back by internal resistances from attaining them; they rest content with certain approximations to satisfaction and for that very reason lead to especially firm and permanent attachments between human beings. To this class belong in particular the affectionate relations between parents and children, which were originally fully sexual, feelings of friendship, and the emotional ties in marriage which had their origin in sexual attraction." (258).



"Recognition of Two Classes of Instincts in Mental life.--Though psychoanalysis endeavours as a rule to develop its theories as independently as possible from those of other sciences, it is nevertheless obliged to seek a basis for the theory of the instincts in biology. On the ground of a far-reaching consideration of the processes which go to make up life and which lead to death, it becomes probable that we should recognize the existence of two classes of instincts, ~~which work~~ ~~in opposite directions~~ corresponding to contrary processes of construction and dissolution in the organism. On this view, the one set of instincts, which work essentially in silence, would be those which follow the aim of leading the living creature to death and therefore deserve to be called the 'death instincts'; these would be directed outwards as the result of the combination of numbers of unicellular elementary organisms, and would manifest themselves as destructive or aggressive impulses. The other set of instincts would be those which are better known to us in analysis--the libidinal, sexual or life instincts, which are best comprised under the name of Eros; their purpose would be to form living substance into ever greater unities, so that life may be prolonged and brought to higher ~~and~~ development. The erotic instincts and the death instincts would be present in living being in regular mixtures or fusions; but 'defusions' would also be liable to occur. Life would consist in the manifestations of the conflict or interaction between the two classes of instincts; death would mean for the individual the victory of the destructive instincts, but reproduction would mean for him the victory of Eros. (258-259).

"The Nature of the Instincts.--This view would enable us to characterize instincts as tendencies inherent in the living substance towards restoring an earlier state of things: that is to say, they would be historically determined and of a conservative nature and, as it were, the expression of an inertia or elasticity present in what is organic. Both classes of instincts, Eros as well as the death instinct, would, on this view, have been in operation and working against each other from the first origin of life" (259).

Here is a short quote from "A short account of psycho-analysis" (1924, vol. 19): "Among the hypothetical concepts which enable the doctor to deal with the analytic material, the first to be mentioned is that of 'libido'. Libido means in psycho-analysis in the first instance the force (thought of as quantitatively variable and measurable) of the sexual instincts directed towards an object--'sexual' in the extended sense required by analytic theory. Further study showed that it was necessary to set alongside this 'object-libido' a 'narcissistic' or 'ego-libido', directed to the subject's own ego; and the interaction ~~between~~ of these two forces has enabled us to account for a great number of normal and abnormal processes in mental life" (203).

In "An autobiographical study" (1925, vol. 20), Freud is reviewing his theory on the development of the sexual functions when he says: "I gave the name of libido to the energy of the sexual instincts and to that form of energy alone. I was next driven to suppose that the libido does not always pass through its prescribed course of development smoothly" (35).

In an article "Psycho-analysis" (1926, vol. 20) for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Freud made this comment: "Theoretical speculation leads to the suspicion that there are two fundamental instincts which lie concealed behind the manifest ego-instincts and object-instincts: namely (a) Eros, the instinct which strives for ever closer union, and (b) the instinct of destruction, which leads towards the dissolution of what is living. In psycho-analysis the manifestation of the force of Eros is given the name 'libido'." (265).

In the New Introductory Lectures, 1933, vol. 22, Freud is reviewing his theory on the development of the sexual instinct. He says: "Our attitude to the phases of the organization of the libido has shifted a little. Whereas earlier we chiefly emphasized the way in which each of them passed away before the next, our attention now is directed to the facts that show us how much of our earlier

phase persists alongside of and behind the later configurations and obtains a permanent representation in the libidinal economy and character of the subject. Still more significant have studies become which have taught us how frequently under pathological conditions regressions to earlier phases occur and that particular regressions are characteristic of particular forms of illness." (190). We see here that Freud is still emphasizing libido as sexual instinct. It seems as if even though he used the term 'libido' to denote the energy of the life instinct in general, he never really got away from emphasizing its relationship to sexual development in particular. It's as though he should have talked about life instinct energy, of which libido was only that part which served the component sexual instincts of the life instinct.

In my review of death instinct, destructiveness, aggression, etc., I quoted at length on pages 11-13, excerpts from Freud's Outline (1940, vol. 23), some of which are as pertinent to this topic of libido as they are to destructiveness. (In general, I have found that to be the case. Instincts and the discussion of libido naturally are intertwined.) I will repeat here only a short significant part: "Throughout the whole of life the ego remains the great reservoir ~~a~~ from which the libidinal cathexes are sent out to objects and into which they are also once more withdrawn....A characteristic of the libido which is important in life is its mobility, the facility with which it passes from one object to another..... There can be no question but that the libido has somatic sources, that it streams to the ego from various organs and parts of the body. This is most clearly seen in the case of that portion of the libido which, from its ~~instinctual~~ aim, is described as sexual excitation. The most prominent ~~part~~ of the parts of the body from which this libido arises are known by the name of 'erotogenic zones', though in fact the whole body is an erotogenic zone of this kind. The greater part of what we know about Eros--that is to say, about its exponent, the libido--has been gained from a study of the sexual function, which, indeed, on the prevailing view, even if not according to our theory, coincides with Eros. We have been able to form a picture of the way in which the sexual urge, which is destined to exercise a decisive influence on our life, gradually develops out of successive contributions from a number of component instincts, which represent particular erotogenic zones" (150-151). So it appears here that Freud sees libido as the general energy of Eros, and a portion of it "is described as sexual excitation", rather than, as I suggest above, talking about life instinct in general, leaving 'libido' to mean specifically what it traditionally has, the energy of the sexual instincts. Earlier in this section, Freud says "We may picture an initial state as one in which the total available energy of Eros, which henceforward we shall speak of as 'libido'....." (149). It seems to me that it would have been clearer to speak of life instinct energy as being energy within cells (biological energy) and libidinal energy as coming from somatic erotogenic sources. But it is confusing as Freud left it...probably because he could not ever really give up his libido theory as centering specifically around the sexual instincts.