

## ORGANIC FOUNDATIONS OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS-References By Richard G. Klein

The reason why I have collected these references is that once Freud had studied with Charcot in Paris (Oct.1885-Feb.1886) and had seen that there exists hysterics with physical symptoms with no known organic lesions, Freud, in effect, had given up his allegiance to the school of Helmholtz, Du Bois-Reymond and Ernst von Brücke which is summarized by Du Bois Reymond as follows:

“Brücke and I pledged a solemn oath to put into effect this truth: ‘No forces other than the common physical and chemical ones are active in the organism. In those cases which cannot at the time be explained by these forces, one has either to find the specific way or form of their action by using the physical-mathematical method or to assume new forces equal in dignity to the chemical-physical forces inherent in matter reducible to the form of attraction and repulsion’ ” cited by Sulloway in *Freud, Biologist of the Mind*, p.14

This Helmholtz oath appears to be a negation or dialectical opposition to the previous position held by psychology called the *Naturphilosophie*. This position which entails a large metaphysical system embodying romantic and philosophical themes, represented in Goethe’s “Essay on Nature” views the universe as” one vast organism, ultimate consisting of forces, of activities, of creations, of emergencies” as characterized by Bernfeld (1944). *Naturphilosophie* can be traced back to the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), who taught that the objective world can be understood not only by empirical observation, but by an intuitive understanding of natural phenomena. Such intuition reveals that nature, in both animate and inanimate forms, possesses a ‘world soul’, a concept that, of course, was theological as well as speculative. These ideas, which penetrated the thinking and outlook of most eighteenth and early nineteenth-century German intellectuals, were an amalgam of Greek thought (particularly that of Heraclitus and Democritus) and theological speculation.

Even though he gave up the belief in the Helmholtzian theory (I call it the ‘pledge of a lesion theory’) implicitly after his studying with Charcot in Paris, every once in a while throughout his life and works, it’s as if he had temporarily forgotten this original experience with Charcot that there exists hysterics with physical symptoms with no known organic lesions. He then seems to fall back into the scientific materialistic belief of the Helmholtz school. Or perhaps it is this other thread of thought, “*Übersehe ich da doch etwas Organisches?* Did I overlook something organic? This phrase seems to be a thread running throughout Freud’s entire opus.

The question is, where and how many times in his writings does he show this “*pledge of a lesion*” and what significance does it have? Is it possible to maintain both positions at the same time? And if the Helmholtzian position is the only one and true theory, would that make the entire content of *The Interpretation of Dreams* null and void? Because, if everything is determined by a material or chemical substrate, then dreams have no meaning and are just chemical imbalances in the brain, as scientists have argued even before *The Interpretation of Dreams* was even written. Funnily enough, Freud addresses this very problem in his introduction to *The Interpretation of Dreams*!

This is problematic. Just because he makes these statements supporting the Helmholtz school, more or less a dozen times, I don't think it necessarily destroys the logical consistency of his entire theory, even though he seems to be giving lip service to the Helmholtz oath.

A more sophisticated choice of theories than I have just gone over is enumerated in the book, *A Moment of Transition* by Mark Solms and Michael Salling. On pages 92 to 110, they write that Ola Andersson (1962) believed that Freud endorsed the epi-phenomenalist view of the mind-body problem.

The epi-phenomenalist view implies a strictly one-way causal relationship: the physical causes the mental, but the mental never causes the physical. It implies that mental events are totally dispensable. This would seem to be the Helmholtzian theory that I have mentioned above.

The identity theory is what Amacher (1965) believed that Freud subscribed to. According to this theory, mental states are isomorphic with certain brain states. To say that an individual is in a certain frame of mind is to say that a certain event is occurring in the brain, that they are literally the same event. Amacher understood that Freud assumed the workings of the mind and those of the brain to function according to identical principles.

The interactionist theory is what Silverstein (1985) believes Freud claimed in his earliest writings. That is physical events cause mental events and that these mental events, in their own right, cause physical events. Silverstein thinks that Freud's interactionism reflected that these mental events, in their own right, cause physical events.

The psycho-physical parallelist theory is a view that Solms and Saling (1986) believe that Freud openly endorsed in 1891. The parallelist sees the mental and the physical as two absolutely independent domains, each with their own causality. Hughlings Jackson was a parallelist, whom Freud greatly admired.

His doctrine had three beliefs about the relation of consciousness to nervous states.

- 1) states of consciousness(or mind) are utterly different from nervous states.
- 2) That the two things occur together—that for every mental state there is a correlative nervous state
- 3) That although the two things occur in parallelism, there is no interference of one from the other. This is the Doctrine of Concomitance.

Jackson's doctrine of concomitance freed psychology and neurology from each other.

The above paragraphs are either quotes or paraphrases from *A Moment of Transition*, pages 92-97.

The authors, Solms and Saling, take each of Freud's early works and try to determine which of the four above-mentioned philosophical positions that each of the particular writing exemplifies. Freud appears to shift positions from article to article, finally moving in to a psycho-physicalist parallelist position.

Another related problem, is that scientists gives what I call '*the promissory note of science*', which goes something like this. "We can't explain just yet what is the cause of mental illness, but we are currently doing research on it and in just a few years we will solve the problem". From this enunciation, they act as if the problem is already solved or answered and that any other answer or speculation that is not based on their current research is already automatically null and void.

Another way of summarizing this problem, is that if some were to ask me, have you read Edward O. Wilson's book yet, *Consilience*? And I answer, "Oh, you mean *Cunt-silience*?"

The contents of the entire book of Edward O. Wilson cannot explain how and why I made this questionable joke! Again, it is *the unbridgeable gap* between the neuron and the signifier.

## HERE ARE THE REFERENCES, FROM THE STANDARD EDITION

S.E. VII Three Essays on Sexuality (1905), p215, "In any case, what we already know of the part played by the thyroid-gland in sexuality fits in with this new biological discovery. It seems probable, then, that special chemical substances are produced in the interstitial portion of the sex-glands; these are then taken up in the blood stream and cause particular parts of the central nervous system to be charged with sexual tension. (We are already familiar with the fact that other toxic substances, introduced

into the body from outside, can bring about a similar transformation of a toxic condition into a stimulus acting on a particular organ.) The question of how sexual excitation arises from the stimulation of erotogenic zones, when the central apparatus has been previously charged, and the question of what interplay arises in the course of these sexual processes between the effects of purely toxic stimuli and of physiological ones—none of this can be treated, even hypothetically, in the present state of knowledge. It must suffice us to hold firmly to what is essential in this view of the sexual processes: the assumption that substances of a peculiar kind arise from the sexual metabolism.”

S.E. VII My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Neuroses (1905) p. 278-9, “We have been led on imperceptibly from the question of the causation of the psychoneuroses to the problem of their essential nature. If we are prepared to take into account what has been learnt from psycho-analysis, we can only say that the essence of these illnesses lie in disturbances of the sexual processes, the processes which determine in the organism the formation and utilization of sexual libido. It is scarcely possible to avoid picturing these processes as being in the last resort of a chemical nature; so that in what are termed the ‘actual’ neuroses we may recognize the *somatic* effects of disturbances of the sexual metabolism, and in the psychoneuroses the *psychical* effects of those disturbances as well.”

S.E. XI Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood (1910) p.136 “Instincts and their transformations are at a limit of what is discernible by psycho-analysis. From this point it gives place to biological research. We are obliged to look for the sources of the tendency to repression and the capacity for sublimation in the organic foundations of character on which the mental structure is only afterwards erected. Since artistic talent and capacity are intimately connected with sublimation we must admit that the nature of the artistic function is also inaccessible to us along psycho-analytic lines. The tendency of biological research to-day is to explain the chief features in a person’s organic constitution as being the result of the blending of male and female dispositions, based on [chemical] substances. Leonardo’s physical beauty and his left-handedness might be quoted in support of this view.”

S.E. XIV On Narcissism (1914), p.78, “Thirdly, we must recollect that all our provisional ideals in psychology will presumably some day be based on an organic substructure. This makes it probable that it is special substances and chemical processes which perform the operations of sexuality and provide for the extension of individual life into that of the species.”

S.E. XVI Introductory Lectures (1916-1917), Chap xxiv.p.389 “The theoretical structure of psycho-analysis that we have created is in truth a

superstructure, which will one day have to be set upon its organic foundation. But we are still ignorant of this.”

S.E. XVIII Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), Chap VI. p 60 “The deficiencies in our description would probably vanish if we were already in a position to replace the psychological terms by physiological or chemical ones.

and,

“Biology is truly a land of unlimited possibilities. We may expect it to give us the most surprising information and we cannot guess what answers it will return in a few dozen years to the questions we have put to it. They may be of a kind which will blow away the whole of our artificial structure of hypotheses.”

S.E. XX An Autobiographical Study (1925) p. 32. “The subdivision of the unconscious is part of an attempt to picture the apparatus of the mind as being built up of a number of *agencies* or *systems* whose relations to one another are expressed in spatial terms, without, however, implying any connection with the actual anatomy of the brain. (I have described this as the *topographical* method of approach.) Such ideas as these are part of a speculative superstructure of psycho-analysis, any portion of which can be abandoned or changed without loss or regret the moment its inadequacy has been proved.”

S.E. XX The Question of Lay Analysis (1926) p. 231. “In view of the intimate connection between the things that we distinguish as physical and mental, we may look forward to a day when paths of knowledge and, let us hope, of influence will be opened up, leading from organic biology and chemistry to the field of neurotic phenomena. That day still seems a distant one, and for the present these illnesses are inaccessible to us from the direction of medicine.”

S.E. XXI Female Sexuality (1931) p. 240, “Since we cannot dismiss the notion that sexual excitation is derived from the operation of certain chemical substances, it seems plausible at first to expect that biochemistry will one day disclose a substance to us whose presence produces a male sexual excitation and another substance which produces a female one. But this hope seems no less naïve than the other one—happily obsolete to-day—that it may be possible under the microscope to isolate the different exciting factors of hysteria, obsessional neurosis, melancholia, and so on. Even in sexual chemistry things must be rather more complicated. For psychology, however, it is a matter of indifference whether there is a single sexually exciting substance in the body or two or countless numbers of them.”

Freud prospectively hitting out against his dismissal by neurochemistry (he very much anticipated the discovery of testosterone and estrogen it seems):

**S.E. XXI Female Sexuality (1931) p. 240**

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Even in sexual chemistry things must be rather more complicated. For psychology, however, it is a matter of indifference whether there is a single sexually exciting substance in the body or two or countless numbers of them. Psycho-analysis teaches us to manage with a single libido, which, it is true, has both active and passive aims (that is, modes of satisfaction). This antithesis and, above all, the existence of libidinal trends with passive aims, contains within itself the remainder of our problem."

Female Sexuality (1931)

**S.E. XXIII An Outline of Psycho-Analysis (1940), p.182** "The future may teach us to exercise a direct influence by means of particular chemical substances on the amounts of energy and their distribution in the mental apparatus. It may be that there are other still undreamt-of possibilities of therapy."

## **CONTRADICTIONS TO THE ABOVE:**

**SE. IV, The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) p. 93** "For the intervening nine years have produced nothing new or valuable either in factual material or in opinions that might throw light on the subject. In the majority of publications that have appeared during the interval my work has remained unmentioned and unconsidered. It has, of course, received least attention from those who are engaged in what is described as 'research' into dreams, and who have thus provided a shining example of the repugnance to learning anything new which is characteristic of men of science. In the ironical words of Anatole France, '*les savants ne sont pas curieux*'. If there were such a thing in science as the right to retaliate, I should certainly be justified in my turn in disregarding the literature that has been issued since the publication of this book. The few notices of it that have appeared in scientific periodicals show so much *lack* of understanding and so much misunderstanding that my only reply to the critics would be to suggest their reading the book again—or perhaps, indeed, merely to suggest their reading it"

SE. IV, The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) p. 336 “What is presented to us in these words is the idea of *psychical locality*. I shall entirely disregard the fact that the mental apparatus [seelische Apparat] with which we are here concerned is also known to us in the form of an anatomical preparation, and I shall carefully avoid the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion. I shall remain upon psychological ground...”

SE. XIV, The Unconscious (1915), pp.174-175 “Research has give irrefutable proof that mental activity is bound up with the function of the brain as it is with no other organ. We are taken a step further—we do not know now much—by the discovery of the unequal importance of the different parts of the brain and their special relations to particular parts of the body and to particular mental activities. But every attempt to go on from there to discover a localization of mental processes, every endeavour to think of ideas as stored up in nerve-cells and of excitations as traveling along nerve-fibres, has miscarried completely.<sup>3</sup> The same fate would await any theory which attempted to recognize, let us say, the anatomical position of the system Cs.—conscious mental activity—as being in the cortex, and to localize the unconscious processes in the sub-cortical parts of the brain. There is a hiatus here which at present cannot be filled, nor is it one of the tasks of psychology to fill it. Our psychical topography has for the present nothing to do with anatomy; it has reference not to anatomical localities, but to regions in the mental apparatus, wherever they may be situated in the body.”

S.E. XV, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis (Parts I and II) p. 21, “This is the gap which psycho-analysis seeks to fill. It tries to give to psychiatry its missing psychological foundation. It hopes to discover the common ground on the basis of which the convergence of physical and mental disorder will become intelligible. With this aim in view, psycho-analysis must keep itself free from any hypothesis that is alien to it, whether of an anatomical, chemical or physiological kind, and must operate entirely with purely psychological auxiliary ideas; and for that very reason, I fear, it will seem strange to you to begin with.”

S.E. XV, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis (Part III), page 393 “However that may be, there is no question that the problem of anxiety is a nodal point at which the most various and important questions converge, a riddle whose solution would be bound to throw a flood of light on our whole mental existence. I will not assert that I can give you this complete solution; but you will certainly expect psycho-analysis to approach this subject too in quite a different way from academic medicine. Interest there seems mainly to be centered on tracing the anatomical paths along which the state of anxiety is brought about. We are told that the medulla

oblongata is stimulated, and the patient learns that he is suffering from a neurosis of the vagus nerve. The medulla oblongata is a very serious and lovely object. I remember quite clearly how much time and trouble I devoted to its study many years ago. To-day, however, I must remark that I know nothing that could be of less interest to me for the psychological understanding of anxiety than a knowledge of the path of the nerves along which its excitation pass."

S.E. XX, *Resistances to Psycho-Analysis* (1925), p. 215 "Psycho-analysis took hold of this new realization and began to consider the problem of the nature of the psychical processes which led to these unusual consequences. But the direction taken by this enquiry was not to the liking of the generation of physicians. They had been brought up to respect only anatomical, physical, and chemical factors. They were not prepared for taking psychical ones into account and therefore met them with indifference or antipathy. They obviously had notes whether psychical events allowed of any exact scientific treatment whatever. As an excessive reaction against an earlier phase during which medicine had been dominated by what was known as the 'philosophy of Nature'..."

Letter to Carl Mueller-Braunschweig from the collection of Dr. Edith Weigert, translated by Dr. Helm Stierlein, published in *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes* (vol. 34. August 1971 p.329) quoted in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's *Freud on Women*, pages 340-1.

Wien XIX, Strassberg. 47.

21.7.1935

"I object to all of you to the extent that you do not distinguish more clearly and cleanly between what is psychic and what is biological, that you try to establish a neat parallelism between the two and that you, motivated by such intent, unthinkingly construe psychic facts which are unprovable and that you, in the process of so doing, must declare as reactive or regressive much that without doubt is primary. Of course, these reproaches must remain obscure. In addition, I would only like to emphasize that we must keep psychoanalysis separate from biology just as we have kept it separate from anatomy and physiology; at the present, sexual biology seems to lead us to two substances which attract each other."

...please forgive the inevitable opacity of this critique,

very cordially yours,

Freud"