

**Susan Sugarman.** *What Freud Really Meant: A Chronological Reconstruction of his Theory of the Mind.* Cambridge University Press 2016. 206 pp. \$94.99 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781107116399); \$29.99 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781107538559).

As many have noticed, the status of Sigmund Freud both as theorist about human psychology and as the founder of an approach to psychotherapy has been in decline since the 1960s. In psychiatric practice, slow, unreliable analytic techniques have largely been replaced by psychopharmacology, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and a range of other approaches which focus on results in the near-to-middle term. Freudian social theory and the accounts of human nature on which it was based have been the subject of animated criticism, beginning with the 1960s onslaught coming from various directions: by analytic philosophers of science, feminists, anti-psychiatrists and the followers of Deleuze and Guattari. Freud's work might get a passing reference in a psychology course on the history of the discipline, as might that of William James, John Watson or Edward Titchener. Residents in psychiatry and trainees in psychotherapy might learn about analytic techniques as Freud and his followers practiced them if only because some patients may still present to them after having had such treatment. At least one university campus teaches a course in 'Psychoanalysis,' but offers it in its philosophy department, and Jonathan Lear, the author of the one highly approachable recent study of Freud (*Freud*, Routledge, 2015) is a well-regarded Professor of *Philosophy* as well as a lay analyst. Freud's work might well be considered a clinical and scientific dead letter, historically interesting perhaps and currently regarded as a kind of quasi-sacred text subject to competing interpretations by shrinking schools of followers well outside any current intellectual mainstream. Many may also regard it as a still widespread bit of Euro-American mythology, good to think of (for some at least) when a lay person is casting about for an explanation of a striking quirk of speech or behaviour when nothing more obvious is ready to hand.

In this cultural background Professor Sugarman's project is a courageous one. She is a Professor of Psychology, a discipline highly inclined to regard Freud as a myth spinner, at a prominent North American University (Princeton), who began as a student of human development. She need not have taken on the sympathetic, disciplined explication of Freud's theoretical views that this book constitutes, but is its great merit. Having decided to do so, she could have distanced herself from the theory more definitively, as a prudent intellectual historian might have done. Instead she takes Freud's work seriously as a developing effort to answer certain explanatory questions about the development of the mind in a way that can extend its reach both to common behaviour patterns and to the sorts of pathology that Freud met with in his clinical practice. Since she presents this work as a theory undergoing development, she operates chronologically, beginning with the very accessible *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* that Freud delivered to prominent psychologists and others at Clark University during his only visit to North America in 1909, and moving through discussions of the Pleasure and Reality Principles in 1911, the discussion of ambivalence in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), and his wartime discussions of narcissism, the instincts, repression and the unconscious. Chapters then follow on the great revision of his views in the major post-war theoretical works: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *The Ego and the Id* (1923), a rethinking of pleasure in a 1924 paper on masochism and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). A closing 'Epilogue' recapitulates the key points of her account and distinguishes Freudian theory as she understands it from such large movements in the Freudian tradition as ego psychology, object relations theory and attachment theory.

In my view this final section, with its distinctions and clarifications, reveals the extent of Sugarman's commitment to an understanding of Freud's work that some might call 'orthodox.'

She sees the theory as rooted in an elaboration of postulates about ‘instincts,’ and a biologism which motivates even the most speculative aspects of this elaboration. These instincts come in two main forms, first indicated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: *Eros* and *Thanatos*. This distinction supersedes an earlier one between ego-instincts and sexual instincts, although that division retains a secondary application. The death instinct, *Thanatos*, is not to be confused with an instinct to Aggression (163-4). It is instead a tendency to return to a prior, less aroused state from one of nervous excitation whether derived from internal or external causes, while aggression can be construed as a redirection of destructive tendencies under the influence of the life instincts. These life instincts constitute a tendency to consolidate and connect, rather than to loosen and dissolve. Late efforts to explain masochism in a satisfactory manner (Chapter 10) reveal that insofar as the erotic instincts can be connected with the aim of pleasure, they cannot (as Freud had once thought) be merely a tendency to discharge tension, but must sometimes involve the aim of increasing certain types of stimulus. The interaction of particular instinctual tendencies with a not-always-compliant physical and social environment leads to gradual development of an ego-world distinction, an insertion within the ego, by identification and introjection, of the set of social expectations represented in the first instance, by the inevitably limiting parental response to the child’s inherently unlimited demands, to an early and essential tendency to narcissism, and to its replacement with erotic focuses on external objects and a more developed type of self-love.

Much of this development takes place by unconscious processes and motivates behavior which has equally unconscious sources even when the agent can also rationalize it by appeal to conscious beliefs and desires. The results are new patterns. Sugarman does not see a person’s derived or developed instinctual patterns and the apparatus used by that person to pursue new objects of interest as reducible to (165) the primitive or initial instincts even though their character can be explained by a history of interactions and conflicts between individual manifestations of those instincts and the psychobiological, environmental and social contexts in which they occur.

This book presents Freudian psychology as a tool for offering genetic explanations of emergent complexity in human behavior. How can it be of interest to the philosopher as well as to the historian of psychology? Despite its subtitle, it does not provide what many philosophers might count as a satisfactory theory of mind. We are offered no arguments in favour of considering the instinctual forces as mental, and no account of how mental events can ever be ‘unconscious.’ Freud never took the objections of philosophers contemporary to him against unconscious mentality seriously, but neither do we get reasons for such a dismissal. There is no clear discussion of the relation of the features of events and processes that Freud would call ‘mental,’ to the neurobiological activities that are necessary for them. Perhaps, since the book is an exposition of works in which nothing more than casual remarks are ever made about these things, it cannot be faulted for never presenting what was never there. It does not undertake the sort of discussion Lear gives in *Freud* of the connection between the aims of analysis, self-knowledge and the flourishing life, themes of classical ethics, traceable through the virtue ethics tradition down to the present day. What is more, analysis and its techniques are little discussed either as a therapeutic craft or a means to gather data. Thus many difficult questions of method of investigation are underplayed, and concerns about the ethics of treatment, particularly where transference is involved, are ignored.

Instead the book has three great philosophical merits. The first is expository. Before philosophical admirers of Freud claim that his theory is a source, rather than a stimulus, for claims they would make, it is useful to have a conscientious reconstruction of his developed views and their motivations. This book provides that. The second merit lies in its provision, on a second order level, of a model of the sort of explanation it alleges Freud attempts in the first order. Freud explains developed mentality as the result of interactions between a number of simple forces and

capacities with internal and environmental pressures as received by the organism responding to them. Sugarmans's account of Freud's development can be seen the same way: a basic set of explanatory sketches and data give rise to structures that elaborate as the reception of new data (the tendency of some sufferers to have repeating nightmares) or recognition of new factors (the need to place social values, to properly account for masochism) are confronted.

Third, while one might worry that Freud's explanatory effort are *ad hoc*, they remind us, as did Nietzsche and the anxious Kant of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, that our own motives may not always be accessible to us, and that a capacity to offer a reasons for our actions may tell at best a limited explanatory story about them, points any reflective actor should remember.

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