

## DREAMS, KATHARSIS AND ANXIETY

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Over the centuries, the importance and the nature of the relationship of “inside” and “outside” in human experience have shifted, with consequences for notions of mind and body. This paper begins with dreams and healing in the Asklepiian tradition. It continues with Aristotle’s notions of *psuche* and how these influenced his conception of katharsis and tragedy. Jumping then to the 17th century, we will consider Descartes’ focus on dreams in his theories of thinking. Finally, we will turn explicitly to Freud’s use of dreams in relation to his theories of anxiety, of psychic processes and of the Oedipus Complex.

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### INTRODUCTION

Having participated in many interdisciplinary seminars focusing on psychoanalysis and other disciplines, I have been struck by how difficult it is for psychoanalytically oriented practitioners of varying disciplines to engage one another. Matters are further complicated by the proclivity of psychoanalysts to dismiss those who are not practicing “psychoanalysis” as dilettantes, interested in applied psychoanalysis, whereas the analysts themselves deal with “real” psychoanalysis; all others could only play at it like children, not to be taken seriously. When analysts disagree among themselves, one of the most damning criticisms that generally brings dialogue to a full stop is: “what you are doing is not psychoanalysis.” Clearly, we are lacking a larger canvas.

All of these experiences have only reinforced the importance of my own confusion over how parental values, perceptions and experiences get “inside” their children, and how then internal conflicts get “outside” as shared cultural values; how one distinguishes incorporation from

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identification, and identification from internalization. And then, there are the analytic concepts associated with externalizing what was internal, leading to a dismissal of cultural beliefs and belief systems by explaining them away as delusion and paranoia.<sup>1</sup> Finally, to add to the confusion, there is projective identification. Freud's solution to getting from "inside" to "outside" is to jump over notions of family dynamics, culture or social organization and to go "universal." to proceed from a definition of the Oedipus Complex in hysterics and neurotics to the history of the species, from the individual to the universal (Freud, 1912–1913; 1930).

Modern philosophy is haunted by assumptions that one is fated to begin with the inside and then must attempt to reach the outside from there, a little like trying to reach 0 in mathematics. However, there is always the nagging anxiety that one can never quite get there.

### ASKLEPIOS AND ARISTOTLE

Psychoanalysis is intimately associated with the concept of the unconscious, what is inside the inside (Kilborne, forthcoming). Moreover, Freud's concept of the unconscious revolves around the central importance of dreams. However, although Freud approaches dreams as what lies innermost in the mind, the ancient Greeks did not subscribe to the same inner/outer dichotomy. Therefore, there is a broader context in terms of which it is possible to review Freud's approach to dreams: that of the guild of physicians, the Asklepiads. The tradition of Asklepios, including Hippocrates and Galen, focuses on divine (external) powers and their impact on human beings. The healing dreams associated with Asklepios were believed to come from a world beyond that of mortal concerns, from "outside" and not from "within."

Medicine began in temple complexes devoted to Asklepios, the God of Healing who appeared in dreams with his two snakes and staff (today the caduceus, symbol of the medical profession). The snakes in the caduceus were symbols of the passage between the visible world of life and the invisible netherworld. Snakes shed their skins, and so escape from what was assumed to be the mortal coil. The cults of Asklepios began as cave cults, cults of the dead. In legend, the tutor of Asklepios, the one who taught him the healing arts, was none other than Chiron, the ferryman of the dead.<sup>2</sup>

Asklepios himself had divine powers to heal, deriving from his ability to navigate between worlds. Cults of Asklepios<sup>3</sup> were the foremost competitors of the early Christian church, and Christ, who also healed the sick and brought the dead to life, was often assumed to be a manifestation of Asklepios.

Snakes, flutes and staves can, of course, all be phallic symbols, and indeed cave cults were frequently fertility cults as well. In short, because the history of medicine begins with cults of the dead, it is not surprising that historians of medicine, wishing to avoid a religious/divinatory past for their profession, have associated the caduceus with Hermes (Mercury), and not with Asklepios.

Moreover, the sanctuaries to Asklepios were temple complexes comprising not only the *abaton*, where the afflicted slept in order to be visited by Asklepios and cured in dream. Asklepiian temple experiences included also spaces for the performing arts (music, dance and theater). In the Asklepiian tradition, dreams were related to the Greek word *psuche*, widely translated as “breath” or “soul.” If one turns for clarification to Aristotle’s *De Anima*, the concept of *psuche* clearly designates a principle of life, having little to do with the Christian concept of an immortal soul. As such, the concept of *psuche* may be directly related to dreams and dreaming. We awaken from dreams, thereby proving that we are not dead; life and dreams may thereby be fundamentally connected. So dreams are, a bit like Asklepios, conduits between life and death.

Aristotle wrote his *De Divinatione per Somnum* [On Divination in Sleep] in the 4th century BCD. Significantly, Aristotle’s father, Nichomachus, was a renowned physician and member of the Asklepiads, a revered father to whom Aristotle dedicated his work on ethics (the *Nichomachean Ethics*).<sup>4</sup> Nichomachus was court physician to Amyntas II, the King of Macedon and the father of Philip the Great, whose son, Alexander III (otherwise known as Alexander the Great) Aristotle tutored. Probably trained in dissection and the natural sciences, and headed for a career in medicine, Aristotle turned to philosophy. Significantly, Aristotle inherited membership in the physician guild of the Asklepiads from his father Nichomachus.

Divination is essential for an understanding of Aristotle’s ideas about dreams and dream interpretation. In the tradition of Asklepios and in Ancient Greece, dream interpretation occupied the most prominent place among *divinatory* practices. Broadly speaking, divination is the assignation of meaning to events, signs or omens by “making sense of” them. H. J. Rose (1926) in his article, “Divination” in the *Hastings’s Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* provides us with a list of common divinatory techniques. At the head of the list is divination through dreams (oneiromancy).

In approaching the matter of dream categories (Kilborne, 1987), Aristotle borrows ideas from his *Nichomachean Ethics*. Here, Aristotle’s ideas about dreams meet his theories of tragedy and of ethics: they all function to ennoble humankind by rendering them more socially responsible and more

alive. Aristotle knew fully well the relation between dreams and physicianly skills, explaining that skill in dream interpretation depended upon an ability to recognize resemblances, which he compared with “the faculty of observing forms reflected in water” (*De Divinatione per Somnum*, p. 630). If the water is in motion, then skillful indeed would be the interpreter who could “rapidly discern, and at a glance comprehend, the scattered and distorted fragments of such forms, so as to perceive that one of them represents a man, or a horse, or anything whatsoever.” The metaphor is carefully chosen as Aristotle chooses water in motion, a running river or stream, or the sea itself, all associated with the flow of life.

Aristotle’s emphasis on recognizing resemblances is essential for an understanding of how dream interpretation works, whether one believes that one links a particular dream with a prior expectation, whether one uses a dreamed experience through which to view subsequent events, whether the interpreter selects dream symbols on the basis of what he or she already knows of the life of the dreamer combined with available symbols in dream books (or theories of archetypes) or whether the interpreter uses associations and instinct theories.

Thus for Aristotle, the skill of the dream interpreter would be the selfsame skill of the naturalist and botanist as the very concept of nature in Aristotle “is not the outward world of created things; it is the creative force, the productive principle of the universe.”<sup>5</sup> (Butcher, 1951, p. 116) It would thus appear that for Aristotle, nature is neither “outside” nor “inside.” Rather, it is a “creative force” whose locus is irrelevant; it is everywhere. When Aristotle firmly places man in the context of nature, he does not oppose mankind to nature. He underscores the essential helplessness of mankind and by so doing implicitly embeds him in a larger context precisely because his will is limited. “Man, who is her highest creation, she brings into the world more helpless than any other animal,—unshod, ..., unclad, unarmed” (*De Anima* iv. 10.687 a 24), an observation directly pertinent to his theory of tragedy and of *katharsis*. The prominent German philologist, classicist and philosopher, Jacob Bernays, uncle of Freud’s wife, Martha, and a towering orthodox Jewish intellectual, believed that *katharsis* is medical metaphor, an analogy between health and sickness of the soul/mind and those of the body. Thus, Bernays takes a position that Freud will pointedly ignore.

The concept of *katharsis* appears in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, a theory of tragedy written about 320 BC. According to Aristotle, the value of tragedy lies in its *kathartic* effect, most commonly translated as a purgation involving the emotions of both pity and fear. Viewed from the perspective of the Asklepiian tradition, *katharsis* restores balance to the psyche while, simultaneously, strengthening the sense of social responsibility, ethics and empathy.<sup>6</sup>

In his *Politics*, Aristotle speaks of *katharsis* in its relation to music and ecstasy (enthusiasm), and describes *katharsis* as a process that works by, as it were, providing a jolt of energy causing patients to “fall back into their normal state as if they had undergone a medical or purgative treatment” (*Politics* v (viii) 7. 1342 a 15). It is useful to remember that Greek theater began as bacchic ecstasy and wild enthusiasm, associated also with music.

In his famous definition of tragedy for which he takes Oedipus as the prototype, Aristotle writes that tragedy

is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude ... through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions (*Poetics*, p. 23)—Tragedy, Aristotle continues—is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear or pity. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise ... (*ibid.*, p. 39). Thus in the Oedipus, the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus and free him from his alarms about his mother but by revealing who he is, he produces the opposite effect ... (*ibid.*, p. 39).

The best tragedies for Aristotle entail both *recognition* and *reversal*.

The best form of recognition is coincident with a Reversal of the Situation, as in the Oedipus ... this recognition, combined with Reversal, will produce either pity or fear ... The change of fortune presented—Aristotle continues—must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity; for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy ... it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear. (*ibid.*, p. 41)

Aristotle’s theories about tragedy depend upon the *combined* feelings of *pity* and *fear*. Good tragedy requires both; a focus on one or the other will not suffice. “Pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves”. (*ibid.*, p. 41)

Aristotle’s tragic hero, such as Oedipus, then, is “a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some *error* or *frailty*,” by what makes us human. This notion of frailty and human failing is conveyed by the Greek word *hamartia* and is intimately related to Aristotle’s notions of *helplessness* and *morality*.<sup>7</sup> For Aristotle, then, tragedy, like all art, needs to draw its meaning and its power from life itself,<sup>8</sup> including far more than reason alone.

The common original, then, from which all the arts draw is human life—its mental processes, its spiritual movements, its outward acts issuing from deeper sources; in a word, all that constitute the inward and essential activity of the [*psuche*]. (*ibid.*, p. 124)

Significantly, although both Aristotle and Freud take Sophocles' "Oedipus Tyrannus" (Oedipus Rex) as the centerpiece of their theories, there are important differences. In Aristotle, Oedipus functions as the exemplar of *katharsis* of the power of the feelings of pity, fear, and life-giving forces; in Freud, Oedipus functions to illustrate his theories of psychic processes, drives and anxiety. Freud does not speak of pity.

Comparing Aristotle's version of Oedipus with that of Freud, several features stand out. Freud focuses on aggressive drives, on the amoral character of Oedipus (wanting to kill his father and possess his mother) and not on his frailty or *hamartia*. Aristotle focuses on the combination of pity and fear that the story of Oedipus elicits, and on the ethical effect of this combination of emotions, whereas Freud focuses on the horror of murderous and incestuous wishes together with the full spectrum of their conflicts.

Whereas for Aristotle, the concept of *psuche* designates that which gives life, that which fortifies the feelings of humanity, for Freud the concept (as in psycho-analysis) designates only what is "inside" the psychic apparatus, "das ich." It would seem that for Aristotle the very antithesis of "inside" and "outside" is irrelevant, as what matters most is what makes us human and that entails an implicit notion of nature as a living, creative force that is everywhere.

Furthermore, Aristotle emphasizes the human frailty of Oedipus. Aristotle explicitly links *katharsis* to the moral and socializing emotions (the social body), and implicitly to the physical body. The backdrop of his concept is the Asklepiian tradition. Freud, by contrast, emphasizes thinking over feeling, downplays the body, treating it as a manifestation of his theory of drives; for Freud, Oedipus serves as the exemplar of universal incestuous, rivalrous and murderous impulses.

In Sophocles (and also in Aristotle), Oedipus is an orphan who has no idea that he is an orphan, and is deluded in thinking that he is free of dependency on parental figures, indeed of dependency on oracles. For Freud, the orphan status of Oedipus makes Oedipus the sole architect of his own destiny and not a fragile, abandoned being driven by incomprehensible family dynamics and intergenerational trauma and caught in the webs of fate. Freud's emphasis on guilt and aggression significantly transformed the Oedipus saga, left out shame, helplessness and fate, and shriveled up the entire saga of Oedipus against the backdrop of preceding generations, neglecting the sequence of tragedies in the line of Kadmos. When seen against that backdrop, the tragedy of Oedipus is far more about intergenerational trauma than it is about universal drives, far more about human helplessness and shame than it is about will and guilt.

Aristotle explicitly uses the shame of family relationships in illustrating *katharsis*.

When the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another—if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son a son his mother, or any other deed of the kind is done—these are the situations to be looked for by the poet. (ibid., p.51)

Aristotle here suggests that Oedipus prompts us to feel pity and fear precisely because he is driven by powerful and unrecognized family relationships and trauma and not, as Freud emphasized, because of his internal drives, not because of guilt and aggression.

For Aristotle, pity is relationship-based. “We pity others where under like circumstances we should fear for ourselves” (ibid., p. 256). The object of pity is one who in Aristotle’s words “is undeserving,” not “a wholly innocent sufferer, but rather a man who meets with sufferings beyond his deserts” (ibid., p. 258). “Fear through an alliance with pity, is divested of a narrow selfishness, of the vulgar terror which is inspired by personal danger” (ibid., p. 265). Correspondingly, “the more exclusive and self-absorbed a passion is, the more does it resist *kathartic* treatment” (ibid., p. 271). “The pain is expelled when the taint of egoism is removed” (ibid., p. 268).

#### ARTEMIDOROS AND OTHER INFLUENCES IN DREAM INTERPRETATION

The *Oneirocritica* (*Interpretation of Dreams*) by Artemidoros is the most influential dream book to appear before Freud’s (1900) *Interpretation of Dreams*, and the one on which countless dream books have been based. Written in the 2nd century by Artemidoros, it discusses social class and the meanings of dreams, political power and the importance of dreams, and provides an observational, socially conscious approach to the entire process of dream interpretation.

Truth and deceit in dreams became a more substantial problem as the divide between body and mind deepened. Early Christians discredited dreams as sources of legitimate knowledge, as that was supposed to come not from within individuals (or there would be risk of heresy), but rather from the church (what St. Augustin called the city of God).

In the Talmud dreams are viewed as inherently meaningless, and therefore altogether dependent on the interpretation given to them. In fact, interpretation is believed to transform any dream. Thus, if a frightening dream or nightmare is interpreted positively, the dream can have no ill effects. The Jewish expression *hatovat chalom* literally means making a bad dream good. Everything depends upon the interpretation of the rabbi. As a Jew,

Freud was keenly aware of the rabbinical tradition of powerful interpretations and implicitly called upon it in his *Interpretation of Dreams* and in his theories of interpretation more generally.

### DESCARTES: DOUBT AND THE COGITO

By placing dreams front and center in his approach to the need for certainty, the 17th century Descartes fundamentally departed from the conceptual world of Aristotle and made thinking implicitly an individual process in which the point of departure was the “inside.” In this approach, Descartes was building upon Christian conundrums about dreams, truth and the problems of both prophecy and heresy.

The two great works of Descartes, *Discourse on the Method* (1637) and *The Meditations* (1641) are haunted by his anxiety over how to know what is a dream and what is not. Unable to assert his reality with respect to an “outside,” Descartes relies on his own thinking to bring himself into existence. Hence *cogito ergo sum*.

However, there is more. Descartes goes on to assert that if he can think, and he can think of God, then God exists. “The whole force of the argument of which I have here availed myself to establish the existence of God, consists in this, that I perceive I could not possibly be of such a nature as I am, and yet have in my mind the idea of a God, if God did not in reality exist” (1641, p. 97). Descartes’ thinking leads him irrefutably to believe in the existence of God (not in relationships or the outside world), and God, then, keeps the little deceitful devil at bay.<sup>9</sup>

For both Descartes and Freud, reasoning depends upon a radical separation of mind and body. Descartes is explicit: “there is a vast difference between mind and body ...” (ibid., p. 120). Moreover, he states even more explicitly in the *Discourse*:

I thence concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in thinking, and which, that it may exist, has no need of place, nor is dependent on any material thing; so that “I”, that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body, and is even more easily known than the latter, and is such, that although the latter were not, it would still continue to be all that is. (1637, p. 31)

In his *Meditations*, doubt, and anxiety about truth are rolled into one, and then worked through in a sequence of three dreams (Lewin, 1958; Freud, 1929). In the first dream, Descartes is sitting in his bathrobe before his fireplace, fire blazing, when suddenly he is caught by a whirlwind and spun round and round repeatedly, leaving him quite helpless. In the second dream, he is once again sitting in his bathrobe in front of a blazing fire, but the spinning is not as fast and does not last as long. In the third dream,

he is in front of the fire writing feverishly; all whirlwinds have vanished. When he awakes, he begins work on his *Discourse on the Method*. Significantly, the subtitle of Descartes' *Discourse* is "On the method of rightly conducting the reason, and seeking truth in the sciences."

### FREUD, DREAMS AND ANXIETY

Freud wrote his dream book in response to his father's death (Grinstein, 1968). Both Descartes and Freud formulated their anxiety-driven dream theories that, to be persuasive, needed to exclude the terrifying outside world and to defend against uncertainty. For Descartes, this led him to write a book subtitled "on the method of rightly conducting the reason, and seeking truth in the sciences," and for Freud, to the reassurance that he had discovered a science of the unconscious.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud saw himself as having discovered the "secret" of dream interpretation (the secret of life?).<sup>10</sup> His discussion of Oedipus appears in the section entitled "dreams of the death of persons of whom the dreamer is fond" (Freud, 1900, p. 248). Freud's "discovery" of conflicting love and hatred in children toward their parents brings him to the legend of King Oedipus, which "confirms" his "discovery" (ibid., p. 261). Moreover, he comments, "King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, merely show us the fulfillment of our own childhood wishes" (ibid., p. 262). Freud reinterprets the notion of a tragedy of destiny to designate what will become his drive theory, writing explicitly (against Aristotle) that those who have believed that the Oedipus of Sophocles entails a "realization of his own impotence" (ibid., p. 262) are gravely mistaken.

Freud's insistence that psychoanalysis be a science, together with his own anxieties over death, led him to assume a radical divide between mind (the seat of intellect) and body (the source of our human limitations), a divide nowhere to be found in Aristotle and the Asklepiian tradition.

There is, I think, a direct link between Freud's dream book written early in his career, and his theory of anxiety formulated in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) that Freud wrote to refute categorically the argument of Rank (see Dupont, 2012), that birth trauma was the deciding factor in the nature of anxiety. For Rank, coming from the "inside" to the "outside" was incomprehensible and traumatic to the infant, who had no idea how he got from one to the other. By implication, the "inside" was safe, whereas the "outside" was dangerous. In his refutation of Rank's theories, Freud argues explicitly that the primary cause of anxiety is internal conflicts, and not external trauma or traumatic relationships. It is the "inside" that is dangerous; "outside" dangers are but projections.

Interestingly, Rank (1924) did not view his work as seditious. He gave his book, *The Trauma of Birth*, as a birthday present to Freud on Freud's birthday, May 6, 1923.<sup>11</sup> Like Ferenczi (1933), he emphasizes the essential importance of trauma, with the human helplessness and terror associated with it. Ferenczi creatively focuses on the role of trauma in understanding analytic treatment, with the result that for him all analysis become relationship based; for him, the analytic process depends on responses to traumatic experiences (including those with the analyst). Ferenczi recognizes forces outside the psyche (i.e. war, sexual abuse), and stresses the importance of monitoring the effect of the analyst (and his entire personality) on the patient. Like Rank, Ferenczi assumes that the mother and mother/infant relationship are the necessary starting points in understanding relationships.<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, Freud stoutly asserts that the (drive-driven) seduction fantasy prevails over external trauma and helplessness. Like Descartes, Freud grounds his theories of thinking in the internal world. For example, Freud interprets Dora's wish to seduce Herr K as hers and hers alone, having nothing to do with the desires of Herr K, the dynamics of complex family relations, the turn of the century morals of Vienna and their effect on her (Freud, 1905).

Along these same lines, Freud asserts that anxiety is the central problem in neurosis (Freud, 1926, p. 144) and that the earliest anxiety is castration anxiety, not birth anxiety, not birth trauma.<sup>13</sup> Freud writes, "the motive force for repression [in the cases of Little Hans, 1909, and of the Wolf Man, 1918] was fear of castration" (1926, p. 108). Freud holds that castration anxiety (whatever this is thought to mean), is the direct consequence of repression, which then "develops into moral anxiety—social anxiety—and it is not so easy now to know what the anxiety is about" (ibid., p. 139).<sup>14</sup>

Freud continues, "The final transformation which the fear of the superego undergoes is, it seems to me, the fear of death (or fear for life) which is a fear of the superego projected on to the powers of destiny" (ibid, p.140). Fear of death becomes a projection rather than an inevitable fact of human existence, a projection that demonstrates the fundamentally *internal* character of anxiety; banished as a reality, death anxiety becomes a fear projected onto a concept (destiny).

Then Freud speaks of how the ego can protect itself. Once again, it does not need protection from outside threats, but rather from internal ones. A psychic defense is "the protection of the ego against instinctual demands" (ibid., p. 164). Speaking of protection, Freud is called upon to assess the difference between "real" and "neurotic" danger. "Neurotic danger is thus a danger that has still to be discovered. Analysis has shown that it is an

instinctual danger. By bringing this danger which is not known to the ego into consciousness, the analyst makes neurotic anxiety no different from realistic anxiety, *so that it can be dealt with in the same way*". (ibid., p. 165) (my italics)

What is "real" is physical, whereas what is "psychic" is instinctual, what is "real" is dangerous; what is "traumatic" is instinctual.<sup>15</sup> Freud then comes to redefine anxiety:

Anxiety is the original reaction to helplessness in the trauma and is reproduced later on in the danger-situation as a signal for help. The ego, which experienced the trauma passively, now repeats it actively in a weakened version, in the hope of being able itself to direct its course. (ibid., p. 167)

Freud here gerrymanders the definition of trauma by linking helplessness to signal anxiety rather than to real experience. Freud elaborates:

The ego defends itself against an instinctual danger with the help of the anxiety reaction just as it does against an external real danger, but this line of defensive activity eventuates in a neurosis owing to an imperfection of the mental apparatus (ibid., p. 167).

However, it seems, Freud's ego<sup>16</sup> has difficulty distinguishing between internal and external dangers. He writes:

We have also come to the conclusion that an instinctual demand often only becomes an (internal) danger because its satisfaction would bring on an external danger—that is because the internal danger represents an external one. (ibid., pp. 167–168)

And he concludes unambiguously:

In relation to the traumatic situation, in which the subject is helpless, external and internal dangers converge, whether the ego is suffering from a pain which will not stop or experiencing an accumulation of instinctual needs which cannot obtain satisfaction, the economic situation is the same, and the motor helplessness of the ego finds expression in psychical helplessness. (ibid., p. 168)<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, this brings Freud to a summary of his argument against Rank and his theory of birth trauma. What is traumatic, what produces anxiety, Freud concludes, is not the actual birth but rather the "loss of perception of the object (which is equated with the loss of the object itself)<sup>18</sup> ... Pain is thus the actual reaction to loss of object, while anxiety is the reaction to the danger which that loss entails and, by a further displacement, a reaction to the danger of the loss of object itself". (ibid., p. 170)

Freud seems to be saying that the real event of birth cannot be the true source of anxiety. Rather, says Freud, we can only know birth trauma through memory, and inasmuch as this is so (and we cannot know it

directly), it must therefore be associated with anxiety-arousing experiences and memories of loss. However, the situation is further complicated by the effect of trauma on anxiety, such that signal anxiety can become indistinguishable from “real” anxiety. At this point in his argument, Freud gets all snarled up, perhaps because of his own anxieties about loss. Freud’s theories of the Oedipus Complex and his theories of drives grew, at least in part, out of his response to the loss of his father and the ways in which that loss called up many before it. It was a real loss that Freud had difficulty dealing with. Therefore, in introducing loss when speaking about how birth anxiety is not the real anxiety, Freud would seem to be wrestling with his wish to make of a real loss a fantasized loss. The result is a significant confusion in which his theory of anxiety intermingles fantasized loss with real loss, signal anxiety with trauma and pain with anxiety.

In this way, Freud implicitly transforms the meaning of trauma and psychic pain so that they designate only the internal reactions to what can be indifferently assigned either to internal or external experiences. Moreover, he makes helplessness the helplessness of the ego rather than the helplessness of human beings in the face of forces they cannot understand, and finally, in the face of death.

No wonder then he clung to Oedipus as he did. Oedipus was an orphan, and so alone, cut off from his parents. Freud’s father dies, and Freud is left alone, wishing to defy his father’s pronouncement that “this boy will come to nothing,” negating his relationship with his now absent father by identifying himself with an orphan (Appelbaum, 2012). However, Freud could not contend with the power of absence. Rank’s theory of birth trauma centered around the trauma of the *loss of connection*, an idea that threatened Freud’s own defenses against anxiety by challenging his theories of instincts and thinking. It also challenged Freud’s Cartesian assumptions about the priority of mind over body. Much of psychoanalytic thinking, following Freud, has focused on separation/individuation, thus continuing Freud’s creative and defensive confusion.

The matter of how dreams define an *inside* has confronted philosophers with many a headache. Descartes relieved his anxiety by attributing to his “cogito” powers to explain away the problem by the invocation of God, a *deus ex machina*. As God was all-powerful, so was what he could know of his own thinking (as it was through thought that he could connect with God). So, essentially, Descartes usurped divine omnipotence in order to banish his own doubt and establish truth.

Freud similarly made his thinking all-powerful by confounding trauma and internal anxiety. Descartes and Freud both relied on dreams (the source of doubt) to assert the power of mind over matter, to clothe claims of truth

in the omnipotence of thought. Freud added a twist: that life is a dream to be interpreted.

Freud's Oedipus Complex isolates Oedipus from his disconnection to his parents, suspends him, as it were, beyond the reach of *hamartia*, of tragedy, of *katharsis* and of social connections. Freud's definition of the Oedipus Complex relies upon fear split off from pity, thus departing categorically from the tragic vision of Aristotle, and from Aristotle's ethical theories<sup>19</sup> stemming from his definition of man as essentially a social animal aware of his helplessness.

If seen in the light of the Asklepiian tradition, Aristotle's integration of *katharsis*, tragedy and Dionysian frenzy and enthusiasm can provide essential resources for psychoanalysis. Harmony for Aristotle depends on his definition of man as essentially a social animal who exists in nature as a fish in water. For Freud, by contrast, the concept of harmony refers to the internal workings of the tripartite model of the psyche, the ego, id and superego. In his mistrust of passions, the body and the outside, Freud is closer to Descartes and Descartes to Plato. If for Descartes the senses deceive and cannot be trustworthy, then his mistrust of the senses rationalizes his preoccupation with thinking.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it would seem, for both Descartes and Freud, preoccupation with "truth" discounts the value of ethics.

Paradoxically, because Freud relied on his theories of dreams and dream interpretation to establish his "science," he could dispel anxiety about knowing whether a given dream is *true* or *false* by placing the determination of truth in the hands of the interpreter. By claiming scientific status for his descriptions of the workings of the unconscious and for psychoanalytic interpretations, Freud followed Descartes in defending against feelings of uncertainty, in asserting truth and in relying upon dreams to drive a wedge between mind and body.

The legacy of *The Interpretation of Dreams* depends on the idea of translating the language of dreams in order to understand the manifestations of the unconscious. Freud saw himself as the modern Champollion, *silently* deciphering the language of a previously unknown world. However, bestowing extraordinary powers on interpretations carries with it the risk of silencing both teller and listener, and of shutting out the external world of others, of real traumatic events such as wars, tragedies and death. Furthermore, it picks up on one of the functions of dreams in screening out the body and the outside.

For Freud, dreams were, like his own analysis, *soundless*. He never heard himself telling them, nor did he listen to how another person was hearing them. The total absence of sensual context for the dream made it purely a product of the mind, a text to be interpreted, made the dream "senseless." There have always been risks in making of psychoanalysis a solipsistic

system. Freud's criticism of Rank and Ferenczi brings home just how threatened he was by the theories of trauma, helplessness and shame.<sup>21</sup> However, one can argue that trauma theories, relationship-based theories, and theories that allow for shame and helplessness can save psychoanalysis from being a delusional system. Doubting the senses, in itself quite sensible, led Freud to a form of psychic determinism (not unlike what Kant called the "censorship of reason," (Quoted in Landesman, 2002, p. 6), which silenced the body and made the outside world a figment of the imagination.

There are good reasons why Freud and Descartes both rely on their own dreams; for both, dreams lead to the writing of monumental texts that will assure their fame and immortality; for both, their literary project seems to be a response to feelings of helplessness and fears of death. Freud identifies with Oedipus the orphan. The story of Oedipus reveals to all the world how very cut off (disconnected) Oedipus really was, all the while pretending to be powerful and connected. Freud's own disconnection was silenced because his analyst was himself, condemned to be forever listening for the penny to hit the water in the well.

Like patients who wish they had been orphans to spare them the pain of family relationships, Freud made use of the Oedipus. But his ocean could never be vast enough for the expanse of human needs, for the incomprehensible, and for the longing for connection and anxieties over disconnection and death. It is time that as analysts we make full use of our human and social resources, of the central importance of human connection, to challenge constricting assumptions about the dominance of separation/individuation, and, inspired by Aristotle and the tradition of tragedy, widen our scope to take in the full expanse and depth of the sea.

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#### NOTES

1. Freud clearly states that beliefs in the evil eye are paranoid and delusional. His position, however, expresses confusion over what is inside and what is outside. See Kilborne, forthcoming.
2. Szczeklik (2005) notes that "katharsis could have been the gift of Chiron, the centaur who brought up and educated Asclepius, 'Chiron, the teacher of music, justice and medicine all in one'" (p. 70).
3. The standard work on Asklepios is that of the Edelstein and Edelstein (1945), who analyze meticulously the testimonials (e.g., Epidauros, Kos, Pergamum). Asklepian Temple records

- included are those found in Greece, the Peloponnese, Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Africa, Spain and Italy (including Sicily).
4. The inscription from the Asklepieion in Africa reads: *Bonus intra, melior exi* [Enter a good person, leave a better one]. Quoted by Wickkiser (2008, p. 106).
  5. Szczeklik (2005) notes that for Hippocrates, the healing forces lie in nature. It is therefore the task of the physician to be “nature’s helper, not its teacher.” The original meaning of the Hippocratic aphorism “do no harm” (*primum non nocere*) indicated that the physician should know how to make use of nature and allow nature to heal. Moreover, he too emphasizes the role of the arts in the temple complexes to Asklepios. “The culmination of these Asklepiian rituals, the dramatic nocturnal events in the temple that restored health, contained an element of the stage, the hallmarks of theater—it was like a play, a work of art. The word *katharsis* also connected it with art” (p. 69).
  6. Aristotle addresses both *ethos* (ethical disposition) and intellectual content (*dianoia*) (p. liii).
  7. Here is a clear contrast with both Nietzsche’s (1886), in *Beyond Good and Evil* and Freud’s (1920), in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, works where there is little room for human frailty and failings.
  8. This is why Aristotle speaks of tragedy as the “imitation” of an action; it is an “imitation” of life, an “imitation” of nature.
  9. However, Descartes uses the little devil of deceit to demonstrate his existence. “Doubtless, then, I exist, since I am deceived” he writes (*Meditations*, 1641, p. 79).
  10. Therefore, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that Freud came to imagine himself as Asklepios. To do so would provide a sense of retaliatory defiance towards his medical colleagues who diminished him (as his father had) and enable to identify with the God who healed the sick and brought the dead back to life. In addition, Freud would have identified himself as a Jew with the most important competitor of Christ.
  11. Tellingly, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, published in February 1926, was the first major work that Freud did not give to Rank to edit before its publication, although Rank had been the managing director of Freud’s publishing house since 1919 (Kramer, 2012).
  12. See Ferenczi’s (1924) *Thalassa*, in which he suggests that fantasies of a return to the womb underlie all sexual activities including coitus.
  13. “The earliest outbreaks of anxiety, which are of a very intense kind, occur before the superego has become differentiated.” (Freud, 1926, p. 94), these are due to the fear of castration.
  14. Curiously, Freud does not mention circumcision as a cause of castration anxiety as circumcision, perhaps because it is practiced on a real penis, is difficult to relate to Oedipal conflicts.
  15. “We shall then have good grounds for distinguishing a traumatic situation from a danger situation.” (Freud, 1926, p. 166)
  16. For Freud, danger is characterized as danger to the ego, rather than to the psyche as a whole.
  17. In speaking of “motor helplessness”, might Freud not also be referring to the motor helplessness in anxiety dreams?
  18. “At birth no object existed and so no object could be missed ...It is to this new aspect of things that the reaction of pain is referable.” (Freud, 1926, p. 170)
  19. Freud (1900) writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* “Like Oedipus, we live in ignorance of these (incestuous and parricidal) wishes, repugnant to morality” (p. 263).
  20. In the *Republic* (x. 606a) Plato banishes poets from his Republic, complaining that “poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of starving them.” By contrast, Aristotle held that

starving the soul was not helpful. On the one hand, then, Plato advocates mistrust of the passions, and on the other, Aristotle enlists them in his theory of tragedy and the social emotions. Here we find an early example of the tensions between abstinence and gratification, tensions that would play so prominent a part in the Freud/Ferenczi relationship and, indeed, in the history of psychoanalysis. Those advocating abstinence mistrust the passions, whereas those whose theories make more room for human helplessness and frailty assume that emotions can be humanizing.

21. Freud dismissed both Ferenczi and Rank as mentally unstable. This is no accident, and may be directly related to the threat their trauma theories presented not only to his internally oriented, solipsistic theory of drives, but, more fundamentally still, to his defenses against death anxiety and to his reliance on the power of thinking.

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