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## Reflections on the Freudian Model of the Psychic Apparatus

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Man is a great deep, Lord. You number his very hairs, and they are not lost in your sight: but the hairs of his head are easier to number than his affections and the movements of his heart.

St. Augustine  
*Confessions* IV. xiv.

## Reflections on the Freudian Model of the Psychic Apparatus

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MICHAEL E. EGAN, S.J.

### INTRODUCTION

**F**REUD'S construction of the psychic apparatus of man leaves itself open to several difficulties. These are: a) an inadequate conception of the Id which seems too greatly to isolate it from the world-at-large; b) a mislocation of the phenomenon of conscience and the moral sense, with the consequent difficulties presented to the Christian disciple when treating of the traditional concepts of sin and temptation; c) lastly, the difficulty of the ordinary layman who recognizes to some degree the truth of what Freud proposes, and who thereupon seeks to integrate that truth with the whole body of 'truths' he sees and accepts.

In this paper, I would like to suggest a few thoughts which may serve to clarify these difficulties; at least the paper is the expression of one who struggles to understand and to integrate and as such may stand only as a first and tentative attempt at *seeing*.

## EGO AND ID: AN APPROACH TO OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE

A. *The Phenomenon of Man*

A first postulate: the human organism at birth, an undifferentiated mass of psychic needs and drives,<sup>1</sup> is neither separate nor separable from the whole thrust and direction of the evolving world. Huxley stated that man is "evolution become conscious of itself,"<sup>2</sup> and this statement is being more and more verified scientifically. It is, perhaps, more difficult to understand the weight and meaning of such a statement than it is to verify it in a scientific way. We must note immediately that evolution is, of its nature, a dynamic process, a continuous 'happening'. Not only is the species of man thus related to the tide of evolution, but also the individual human being, to the amazing extent that an individual could not today be existing unless in some attenuated fashion his roots had been present from the first moment of creation.<sup>3</sup> Whatever it was that was in the beginning—some eight billion years ago—it was the seed of all that is today. Further, the emergence of consciousness upon the scene of the world was no accident; the radial energy directing the progress of evolution was from the first oriented towards the emergence of consciousness in man, or else consciousness would never have appeared.

It is essential to realize this intimate relationship of man with the world in attempting to understand his psychology. It

<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality," *Great Ideas in Psychology* (New York: Bantam Matrix edition, 1966), pp. 92-93. See also *Freud: Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1966), which quotes chapter 1 of *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*: "It contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is fixed in the constitution—above all, therefore, the instincts...." and chapter 3 of *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*: "It is the obscure inaccessible part of our personality... a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement... it has no organization and no unified will, only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs...."

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961). Quoted on page 230. Teilhard's thought has greatly influenced the thoughts expressed in this paper. His ideas on evolution are accepted in *specie* to be valid.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

is also essential to realize that this evolution which once crossed the threshold of consciousness continues to do so today and ever and again reaffirms its universal drive toward consciousness in the individual human being. The individual also carries within himself this drive towards greater and greater consciousness—in his social awareness, his desire and need to love and be loved, in his thirst for knowledge and so on—and this is precisely so because the individual is part of the world, rooted in the whole stuff of the universe. It is true that he has been conditioned to feel at times isolated from the world of nature and of other men; to feel in fact that he is at times at an inimical focal point of the world. And yet man, the individual man, has a very fundamental affinity with the world he sees and feels and tastes: he *is* world; he is world become conscious of itself!

We speak of ourselves as *facing* the world, as the center of all we see and do. This certainly has some truth to it. Phenomenologists will speak of the arms of the individual as the physical expression of his psychic reaching out in the direction of the world he encounters; likewise the feet of the individual exist because there is a world to walk on. Yet here is the mystery of the involuted creature man: he is also world; a *continuity* with the world he *faces* because of the fibres of evolution within him. Man both is and faces world, a hard concept to grasp when one is used to a rather rigid body-soul dualism. To sum up: the individual is riding the crest of a wave of evolution billions of years old; he is part of that evolving world, rooted in it from the first and the most perfect expression yet of that evolving world's drive toward consciousness.

We come then to the first problem with regard to Freud's model. Freud speaks of the Id as being cut off from the external world,<sup>4</sup> and thus this bundle of instincts becomes rootless; the child becomes an isolated datum.

It follows from what has been said regarding evolution that the Id, *my* Id, is in some radical sense one with the

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<sup>4</sup> Freud, *Dictionary*. Quoting, on page 78, chapter 8 of *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*.

world. Of all the world I know and see and experience, the Id is most mine, the most real, the closest of all the world. It is, from the first, my unmediated, immediate contact with the world, for it is that which the world has produced. How this matters we shall shortly see.

Within the very structure of the Id and because of the rather unique nervous system (centrated in the human brain) provided the Id by evolution, consciousness is to emerge. To Freud the Id is always unconscious, while the Ego spans the three layers of unconscious, preconscious and conscious. In speaking of the Ego, I prefer to limit myself only to the last two layers. The reason for this limitation will become obvious further in the paper.

Now, Freud states that the Ego owes its origin to its relation to the real external world.<sup>5</sup> We might therefore say that the Ego is 'shocked' into existence by contact with the external world. Freud further states that while the Ego was developed out of the cortical layer of the Id, it so differentiates itself in time that Ego and Id become quite distinct.<sup>6</sup> Freud finds it almost difficult to avoid speaking of the Ego and the Id as two 'parts' of the human psychic structure.

I would like to suggest that the Ego—here taken to mean the conscious or preconscious pole in man—is nothing more than the *Id become conscious of itself*. For we feel forced to admit that even as the individual human being would never have crossed the threshold of existence were he not present in some attenuated fashion in the seed of the universe, so the Ego would never emerge were it not in some fashion present from the very first in the seed which is the Id. Id is the unconscious pole in man, by all means; but it is that which is capable of becoming conscious, or which is in the process of

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<sup>5</sup> Freud, "Dissection," pp. 94-95. Note the statement: "...the ego is that portion of the id which was modified by the proximity and influence of the external world... has taken on the task of representing the external world to the id—fortunately for the id, which could not escape destruction if, in its blind efforts for the satisfaction of its instincts, it disregarded that supreme external power." p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> This is implicit throughout, so clear as not to merit explicitation.

becoming conscious! To reiterate: Ego is Id become conscious of itself or the achieved 'part' of the world which has come to consciousness. Id is the seed of the Ego, the reservoir of world which is the individual and which is capable of becoming, or is actually in the process of becoming conscious of itself.

Thus the evolving world's thrust toward consciousness realizes itself first in the individual and continues in the individual to drive toward greater and greater consciousness.

I would further like to suggest that the emergence of consciousness (which is really an inward and not an outward movement) is forwarded by the development of love. Teilhard has this interesting statement: "The ego only persists by becoming ever more itself, in the measure in which it makes everything else itself."<sup>7</sup>

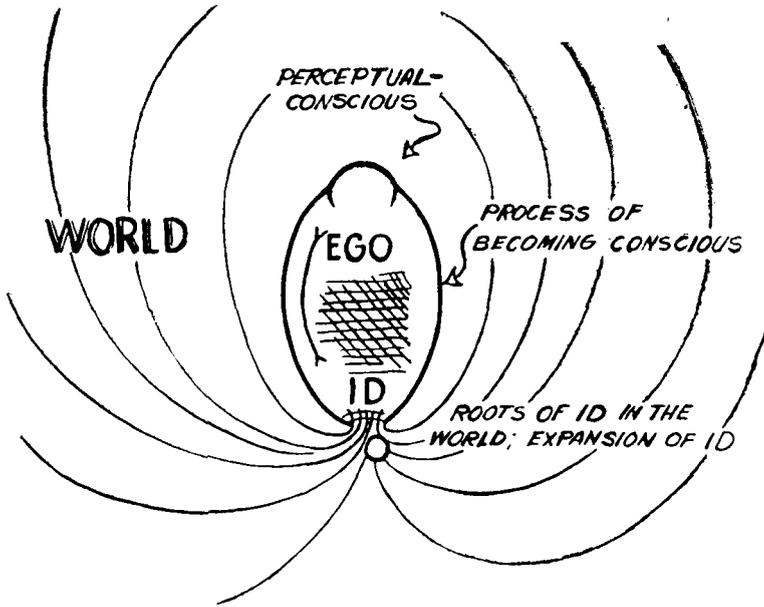
A few conclusions before going on. 1) The individual's Ego is his Id become conscious of itself; 2) the individual is emerging towards full consciousness, and in this sense much of his Id can be considered to be in a state of 'preconsciousness'; 3) while the individual *is* world by virtue of his Id, he is also able to *face* the world by virtue of his Ego, so that he becomes an organism of amazing polarity: he feels himself being felt; he struggles to find himself, though he is already himself; he is world and faces world; he is and yet exists as a process of becoming; he is, therefore, a child of two worlds which are really one world, but he alone has access to both the within and the without of this world.

#### B. A Different Psychic Model

Based on these reflections, I would like to propose an altered form of Freud's psychic model, omitting the area of the repressed, but including the superego, which will in effect be discussed later, and a shaded area which represents the process itself of becoming conscious. The model:

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<sup>7</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *Phenomenon*, p. 172.



Several other thoughts and clarifications suggest themselves upon reflection on this model. We must note first that the Ego alone does not mediate between the external world and the Id, as Freud suggests.<sup>8</sup> Rather the Ego (the realized Id) experiences the world *as today*, not just in or through body. I seem here to have identified Id and body, and feel justified, provided the latter is not taken in the dualistic sense of some lifeless corpse distinct from its life principle, but in an evolutionary sense as that living organism which has evolved from the world. *Primarily*, Ego experiences the world as Id, since it is Id become conscious of *itself* and since its first and immediate contact with the world is with and as Id. Openness to the world, therefore, is first of all openness to Id. In achieving this openness the whole notion proposed by the self-theorists regarding the self of awareness and the self of experience enters. For these two interlocking sets should eventually unite in a healthy individual. The conscious man must in attitude

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 5. Also pp. 97-98 of "Dissection," where Freud states: "The id has intercourse with the external world only through the ego. . . ." Freud then goes on to state that he is not sure to what extent his diagram of the psychic structure is correct.

accept all of himself. He cannot grow in consciousness unless he accepts Id, and by so doing, he achieves a very fundamental and deep integration of himself. He does not in self-defense isolate his Ego from both the internal and the external worlds, but rather pushes more deeply into the internal world, which is his Id, and thus into the external world in which his Id is rooted. Consciousness and growth in consciousness is not therefore a forward probe; it is rather a blossoming from within. Id becomes conscious.

I hope I make myself clear. Man's openness towards the world must first, consciously, be directed towards himself, towards making conscious all the stimuli he receives, all the feelings operative within him. It may begin by some practice of trying at various moments to enumerate in accurate terms all the data then and there received by his senses; it may continue on a deeper level by a resolution to be sincere with himself. This is nothing more than a fundamental openness and honesty and fidelity to the person he is, and to the person he can become. To be thus sincere means that all the thoughts, feelings (internal and external) and emotions experienced by the person enter the level of awareness. They all strive to reach consciousness; if they can achieve it without fear, they will do so. If attitudes such as these become habitual, consciousness and love will grow.

Challenges to such an inward (not introverted) way of life arise. The challenge of accepting oneself for what one is; the challenge of being willing to feel the insecurity which may come from questioning previously accepted 'givens' as such questions arise, provoked by experience; the challenge of living a life of reflected experience, and of thus seeing the inner dimensions of all one does and is; the challenge of creativity, of being willing to die in order to grow, to abandon former structures of thought and action and of being unwilling to impose new structures on the experience received; the challenge of a life of tension: the tension for the end which cannot be reached this side of death because man is always a being in process and a being capable of becoming all (growth even in his Id!) by love, as was previously suggested; the challenge, finally, of

trusting with a deep and basic faith in the goodness of reality, even the reality which one is.

One wonders whether a real breakthrough in communion with all of reality is not possible through communion with the Id. A person who lives according to experience, that is, according to the way the world-become-conscious in himself speaks to him, may at times feel a deep but as yet untouchable 'power' to communicate with all reality. Who can say how many blocks we throw up on the path of the growth of consciousness; and communion with all reality should be a real possibility, since man is the world become conscious of itself. Such a possibility might serve to explain such phenomena as 'poltergeists'. Perhaps even Christ's saying that a man of unwavering faith need only tell a mountain to cast itself into the sea to have it realized does not have to be explained only on a 'supernatural' plane. A breakthrough in communion with the Id is a breakthrough in communion with the world. Perhaps if we had more of the simplicity of a small child who in a very real sense is totally open to his experiences, neither structuring nor distorting them by pre-conceived categories, we would achieve this radical communion.

#### INTEGRATION OF THE EGO AND THE ID, AND CONSCIENCE

In the previous section of this paper, I hope to have 'healed' a possible split between the world and the Id, and between the Id and the Ego. In this section I would like to push the insight (if such it is) to another area, that of conscience. Bound as this area is within the Christian tradition in terms of sin and temptation, it becomes a sore point to one who accepts the Freudian school of thought. I do not intend (even were I able) to give a full exposé of these doctrines; rather I wish to point to a path where, I feel, integration of Freudian and Christian thought is quite attainable.

Freud states that the conscience is a function of the superego.<sup>9</sup> It is formed as a rather direct result of the Oedipal stage of a child's development, and represents echoes of the

<sup>9</sup> Freud, "Dissection," p. 79. Quoting chapter 8 of *Civilization and Its Discontents* the *Dictionary* (pp. 28-29) states the same.

parental superego, echoes of the values and mores to which his elders ascribed.<sup>10</sup>

As such, the superego is a rather childish sort of thing, but its effects are quite marked: feelings of guilt, the drive for reparation and punishment, the moral sense and other related phenomena stem from this expression of the introjected parental superego.<sup>11</sup>

We are aware of several possibilities arising from the interaction of the ego and superego as well as from that of the ego and the id. And in these possibilities, I believe, we will be able to find the real basis for the Christian moral sense; indeed, for the deepest human moral sense. While I have no intention of denying the existence of the superego and its operative force, I do feel that to limit the perception of good and evil (the work of conscience) to a function of the superego is to distort the depths to which the human moral sense reaches. In this regard, I must presume that the healthy personality is, in time, able to distinguish what he in his deepest being perceives as right or wrong from what has been 'given' him as right and wrong by his parents, culture etc. There need not be a conflict, but one would lead a very childish and unreflected life were he to live according to the demands of superego alone. Likewise the mature and healthy personality should be able, at least in rough, to discern in himself the differences between compulsion and commitment, between an irrational feeling of guilt and a rational fact of guilt. He should in time be so able to free himself from the demands of superego as to decide for himself, with at least relative freedom, what course would best be followed by him in any particular situation. How this might be possible is discussed below.

The possibilities resulting from the interaction between the Ego and the Id or between the Ego and the Superego are well

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81 and 86.

<sup>11</sup> On the moral sense, Freud states that we are not born with this. Rather it too is a function of the superego, and stems from the tension between the ego and the superego. See *ibid.*, p. 80. He then states that morality is a periodic phenomenon and has not been given by God, as commonly supposed. See also pages 81 and 84.

stated by Brenner in speaking of the Ego's manner of dealing with repressions. He states:

We must point out that if a repression is weakened and is about to fail, or even if it does fail to some degree, this does not mean that the struggle is necessarily ended between the ego and the id about those impulses and that the impulses will hereafter have fairly direct and free access to consciousness as well as the ego's help in achieving gratification. This outcome of course is a possible one. . . . However another outcome is also frequent. As soon as the id impulse starts to break through to consciousness and to satisfaction, the ego reacts to the breakthrough as a new danger and once more produces the signal of anxiety, in this way mobilizing fresh strength for a renewed defense against the unwanted and dangerous impulse.<sup>12</sup>

We note here the tension between the Id and the Ego along certain frontiers; the Id strives only for gratification. Now, according to Freud, and here is where I would take exception, the Ego mediates between the impulses of the Id and reality (the external world) all the while observed by and under the rigid demands of the superego. Hence conscience, guilt and so on.<sup>13</sup>

We must again recall that the Ego is the Id become conscious of itself, while the Id is world—individual world. That is to say, Ego is world become conscious of itself, reality itself conscious of itself. That there is and that everyone feels the tension between Id and Ego is for certain. Id tries to push the Ego toward the satisfaction of its impulsive desires. Ego resists or chooses. Why? Basically, I believe it is because Ego is free to choose who I am and who I am to become. The tension is the tension of becoming. The struggle is not therefore because of the demands of the external world; nor should it be because of the demands of a strict superego. The struggle comes to birth only in view of the fact that I am a process of becoming—that is, *I am*, and yet *I am becoming*—and must choose what I want to be.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Brenner, M.D. *An Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1955), p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Freud, "Dissection," pp. 96-97. Again, please note that the claims of morality to Freud are the expression of the tension between ego and superego, not between ego (in its self-consciousness) and id.

In a mature and healthy individual, Ego should not be trapped by three counterposing forces: the Id, the world, the superego. It is caught up rather in the tension of becoming what it wills to become. Ego is reality become conscious of itself. If there is a struggle, it is because a new directional impulse has been introduced, and the Ego must again choose or reaffirm its choice of what it wants to be. This really comes down to saying that it must choose according to the lines of what it is and it is reality become conscious of itself.

Right and wrong can then be understood only within this context. A thing is good and right if it coincides with what I am and want to be; a thing is evil and wrong if it cuts cross-grain to what I am and want to be.

From its presence to itself (reality), Ego opposes certain motions of Id. The tension between the two directions—call them right or wrong, reality or unreality, or whatever you will—is what in Christianity is known as temptation. This is a very ontological sort of phenomenon, for it enters at that point where I am most acutely myself, where I must choose what, in my evolving self, I will to be. Christianity represents a violent break from the quasi magical rituals of so many other religions, including in a manner the type of Judaism in which Freud was schooled, the Judaism which made many external and burdening precepts the moral and saving precepts of God, thereby externalizing law and making salvation possible only by a determined adherence to one's rigid superego.<sup>14</sup> Christianity represents the return to reality, the breakthrough in interior freedom from law, the re-endowing of right and wrong with an ontological value.

The state of disintegration which results when the Ego abandons itself to the impulses of the Id, breaking off the unpleasant tension by committing itself in this direction, however unreal in terms of what the person is and wants to become, this is roughly what Christianity calls sin. A break from reality is a break from God. And, admit it or no, man meets God in reality, even in the reality which is himself. Sin

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<sup>14</sup> Peter R. Dempsey. *Freud, Psychoanalysis, Catholicism* (Cork: Mercier Press, Ltd. 1956), pp. 39-46.

therefore is not the breaking of a law or of an internalized external precept (the parent's command); sin is the breaking with the reality which is oneself, it is a surrender to disintegration, a falling back on an already acquired possession instead of a going forward in the process of becoming.

Freud perhaps was biased by his own background when he placed both the moral sense and demands of conscience as functions of the superego. They are, rather, results of the continual process of becoming more and more conscious that is a human being. We can expect difficulty today also, less perhaps from religion alone as from an interaction of our democratic system and religion. One who grows up in a democracy has an added difficulty in separating his true conscience (a function of the Ego which determines what it wills to be) from his superego. For on the one hand he has the laws of his country: if he breaks the law (speeding, for instance) and is uncaught, he feels no guilt about it; if he is observed or caught, he suddenly finds himself feeling guilty; if he finds a loophole in the letter of the law, he may exploit it with impunity; if he is ignorant of the law, his ignorance pleads nothing before authority. The Christian law, this new-found freedom (would that all Christians realized the depths of its freedom!) is utterly different. Yet how difficult a thing to educate a child who has two very different concepts of the law to live with.

Both by way of summarizing this last thought and of going into its implication, I wish to say something to those who feel that living according to experience is pure subjectivism, and that all controls would be swept away (as if the law represents an effective control).

Subjectivism is as much a distortion of reality as is objectivism. It imposes a structure on reality, only now an internally wrought one. But I do not speak of subjectivism and of personal experience (the data found by the Ego) as though they were one. Experience is necessarily subjective, yes; but note that it stems from my Ego which is my Id, my world, become conscious of itself. And this reality is greatly objective, insofar as it exists without my willing it, without my having willed it. I am in contact with reality, because I am

reality. If I am open to the world-I-am and become more conscious through love, what I am doing is knowing reality. Surely there is no danger here. For I am not to be judged according to the law, but according to what I have become. And is this not besides what Rogers and others suggest should be done when they refer to the necessity of a mature person having an internal locus of evaluation?<sup>15</sup>

#### CONCLUSIONS

It is found that the ideas of the Ego, Id and the functions of the Id expressed here differ quite markedly from those expressed by Freud. However if the above is true, then it cannot be left where it stands. A person who resolves to open himself to the world can live no longer "in his eyes" as Augustine termed it, but must look within to find reality (and God in and through it) speaking to him. A person also who has achieved a certain integrity of his conscious and unconscious life must also express this in the manner Rogers designates 'congruence'—a oneness of experience, awareness and communication.<sup>16</sup> If he is himself, a person must be himself before others. Somehow a person who synthesizes what he is (at root level of awareness and experience) and what he chooses to do (to become) also finds a great deal of happiness and freedom, and feels as well that it is easy to be with others, to communicate with them (even on that deepest level of communication which is love) and to understand them. Finally, a person who bases his moral sense (his conscience) on experience finds he cannot do so unless in some way he has encountered another person before whose face he lives and from whom he has his being. The person who is God.

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<sup>15</sup> Carl R. Rogers. *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 234.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 339 ff.