

Appendix: Freud's Misanthropy and Misogyny—
 Historiographical Reflections

The subject of Freud's misanthropy at large and his misogyny in particular is indeed a sensitive one. Enmeshed in it is a history of transference issues and complexities of historiographical understanding, all of which optimally call for judicious judgements and carefully made discriminations. I limit myself to a dozen reflections:

First, in many ways Freud harbored a negative attitude towards humanity (whom he often called Gesindel [trash] or its equivalent) and more specifically towards his patients. Freud maintained such an attitude throughout his life, from adolescence to old age. Seen within an intercultural context, Freud would certainly not merit a distinguished place in the Buddhist pantheon—its ideal of oceans of compassion did not figure eminently in his scale of social values.

Freud went on in equally strong terms to define his uppermost commitment this way: "During my whole life I have endeavored to uncover truths. I had no other intention and everything else was completely a matter of indifference to me. My single motive was the love of truth" (Sterba, 1982, p. 114). What is most telling is that Freud often spoke of the love of truth (Wahrheitsliebe—17 times in the Gesammelte Werke) but not once did he mention its inverse, the truth of love. Indeed, a chiasmic feature characterizes Freud's psychic life: relatively speaking, he was professedly driven more by the love of truth than by the truth of love. And on the balance, it was not so much compassion for mankind that drove Freud; rather, it was a benevolence oxymoronically mixed with disdain.

Second, Freud's misanthropy can be best evaluated if placed along a spectrum. He is nowhere to be found at that end of the spectrum where misanthropic attitudes are carried out in physical violence. Nor is he to be found at the spectral midpoint characterized by massive social hostility and isolation; Freud, we know, was by and large eminently courteous and observed the decorum proper to his station. His misanthropy was rather of the benign sort situated at the other end of the spectrum.

Third, the honest acknowledgement of Freud's social disdain offers a number of advantages:

- a) It fulfills his own analytic ideal which I quoted earlier, namely, that psychoanalysis is above all the honest quest to detach oneself from one's illusions.
- b) It permits us to have a better understanding of Freud's social isolation and the extent of his successful sublimatory struggles; ironically, the picture given by the Freud bashers of the idealizing variety actually downplays his social alienation and to that degree diminishes and thereby falsifies the measure of his achievement.
- c) Taking the true extent of Freud's internal struggles increases our appreciation also of his textual successes. Consider the following. Freud's post-publication depression was more than that of the typical writer. In his writings Freud often resorted to the dialogic manner of floating objections, answering them and thereby controlling an inscribed imaginary audience, yet once his texts were published, Freud was overcome by distinctively overdetermined post-publication depressive feelings, for he now became helplessly submitted to an audience whom he could not see and whom he distributed. Once his dialogic control over the imaginary reader was past, that is, he

succumbed to the fate of having the doubly impossible task of trying to educate about the psychoanalytic profession which he himself dubbed as an impossible one.

d)there remains the sobering realization that Freud's monomaniacal preoccupation with the love of knowledge rather than the knowledge of love might have facilitated if not allowed his painful journey in discovering psychoanalysis.Said in other words,had Freud been more emotionally engaged with his fellow man,perhaps he would never have gained the necessary distance to arrive at his profound insights into human suffering.

Fourth,alongside his general misanthropy Freud was his particular misogyny (for extensive documentary evidence of these positions,see Mahony,2004).I'll begin with one of Freud's later essays (Freud,1925b) in which he clearly considered the woman's sense of morality and judgment to be inferior to the man's.Here's what Freud said:

[Her superego] is never so inexorable,so

impersonal,so independent of its emotional

origins as we require it to be in men.

Character-traits which critics of every

epoch have brought up against women--that they show less sense of justice than man,that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life,that they are more often influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility--all these would be amply accounted for by the modification in the formation of their superego

. . . . We must not allow ourselves to be deflected from such conclusions by the denials of feminists,who are anxious to force us to regard the two sexes as completely equal in position and worth (pp.253-258).

Prescinding from moral and intellectual considerations and going to libidinal ones, Freud (1901, p. 181fn.) categorically excluded a complete resistance on the part of any woman being raped. Often in his private letters, we should also add, Freud used the degrading term Frauenzimmer (literally, women's apartment or room) to refer to a woman. Although one might imagine that the word Zimmer bore primarily sociological implications, for Freud they were primarily sexual. And whether or not Freud (1900, pp. 352, 354; 1915-16, pp. 162-163) was right in believing that the term Frauenzimmer universally symbolized the woman's genitals, such a universal attribution bears all the more validity and pertinence about Freud's private, overdetermined conception.

Fifth, the most astounding expression of Freud's misogyny appears in his symbolic conception of America.

No matter what genre Freud wrote in--scientific treatise, dialogue, history, biography, autobiography, letters, case-history narratives, you name it, America came to his mind as a ready example of what was bad. And no matter what subject Freud discussed--dreams, clinical theory, psychoanalytic treatment, history, or social issues--America emerged as an immediate association of what was bad. The omnipresence of the "unfree" association throughout the gamut of the most diverse communicative occasions represents a return of the repressed in his compulsive associating--wherever, whenever, to whomever. And more than that: whereas Freud changed his mind on many topics, he never altered his vehement, virulent anti-Americanism which came from the depths of his being.

Far from being just a simple relation of the part to the whole, Freud's disdain of America played an integral and indispensable role in his psychic functioning and in his social attitudes at large. Freud's specific conception of the American woman as an asocial

and anti-cultural phenomenon reveals an extraordinary perturbation in his psychic organization. In its difference from vehement anti-Americanism then and now, Freud's disdain had a private symbolic meaning which centered around the woman, mostly the preoedipal one. In my view, Freud defensively protected a celestial motherly image (SE 22, p.133) by relying on the idea of a phylogenetic heritage on one hand, and on the other, splitting off a negative elaboration of the celestial mother and compulsively reserving for its transatlantic embodiment. Attention to that phenomenon undercuts the contention of Freud's biographers that he rarely spoke of the preoedipal mother. The truth is, he could not stop speaking of her.

Sixth, like Freud's misanthropy, his misogyny must be evaluated along a spectrum. He is not at that extreme end of physical violence, nor is he to be located at the midpoint marked by expressions of social avoidance or confrontational verbal abuse. Rather, Freud's misogyny appears as of the benign sort. And yet, as opposed to the first order of distinctions I made for his misanthropy, a second order of distinction is necessitated for his misogyny. His benign type should in turn be differentiated according to its virulent, moderate, and least noxious modalities. Freud's unabated virulence towards the symbolized mother would thus place his misogyny in the benign-virulent category in the second order of distinction.

Seventh, the foregoing matters about the general category of Freud's misanthropy and subcategory of his misogyny demand to be clarified within a larger context of historiographical understanding. In contrast to its radical political and religious forms, a relatively benign form of fundamentalism has persisted within psychoanalysis itself. A

number of its more eminent members have gone beyond admiring Freud to idealizing him, as if they ignored the maxim that in order to have one perfect virtue, you must have all of them. Correspondently, the idealizers have denigrated those persons who proved difficult to Freud, be they colleagues or patients; such names as Fliess, Dora, and Ferenczi come immediately to mind. A balanced reaction, however, would hold that any indiscriminate attitude toward Freud and his acquaintances, whether negative or positive, bashes them by disallowing their humanness. It follows that any idealization of Freud or any minimization of his deficiencies denatures him whereas a realistically based appreciation leaves his humanity intact.

Eighth, Freud set down a general guideline to be observed in psychoanalytic investigation: "analysis is in the first place an honest establishment of the facts. A squeamish concern that no harm must be done to higher things in man is unworthy of an analyst" (letter of July 25, 1922, to Pfister).

Ninth, insofar as the duty of every generation is to evaluate its icons, one of our tasks would be to take into balanced account the full range of Freud's personal and professional life. It needs be said that in these days when analysts' sexually acting out happens all too frequently (a practice admirably abhorred by Freud), one must countenance neither Freud for his non-sexual transgression with some patients nor, for example, the analyst, who, though observing sexual restraint, then feels free to discuss the price of his expensive suit and shoes in order to impress a prospective millionaire patient in an initial interview.

On the balance, we should avoid the reality-distorting all or nothing, univalent, attitude toward Freud; and we should proceed beyond an ambivalence

and engage in a multivalent evaluation of him. The spirit of such a balanced evaluation would exemplify these imperatives: whatever Freud's personal offenses were, let us criticize them; and again, whatever Freud's inevitable scientific limitations were, let us in fairness understand them as inevitable; finally and likewise, whatever Freud's far-ranging achievements were, let us give them our unstinting recognition and accord him our gratitude.

Tenth, one often reads how Freud bashers of the idealizing variety overreact to negative criticisms of their hero: biographical data of any sort do not affect the basis and truth of Freud's theories. Those idealizing bashers are both right and wrong. Right, in the sense that scientific truth stands on its own and its value is to be estimated according to standards of scientific verifiability. Wrong, in the sense that psychoanalytic approach to creativity also involves the enriching investigation of overdetermined evolution of theory and technique. It is curious that sometimes the very people who have objected outright to a negative publication about the person Freud and his findings approve such coalescences when they were laudatory, such as in Jones' The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud (1953-1957), Schur's Freud: Living and Dying (1972), and most recently, Gay's Freud: A Life for Our Time (1988).

In a neglected classic, Faces in a Cloud: Subjectivity in Personality Theory, Stolorow and Atwood delineate how the peculiar personality of Freud, Jung, Reich, and Rank, influenced their psychodynamic theories. Freud himself, we should remark, deemed it significant to make this genetic comment:

Though it was a relief to find honesty and straightforward logic for once taking part

in the dispute,yet I could not feel completely satisfied by Bleuler's essay.He strove too eagerly after an appearance of impartiality; nor is it a matter of chance that our science owes to him the valuable concept of ambivalence (Freud,1925a,p.51).

We might further muse about how much would depth and scope be vitiated if we were to take away the autobiographical documentation pervading The Interpretation of Dreams and The Psychopathology of Everyday Life.To cite another example,the revolutionary treatise Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) that postulated the drive of Thanatos takes on a much richer significance once we arrive at the following realizations:

a) Freud retrospectively (1933,p.103) on his theory formation this way:"Why have we ourselves need such a long time before we decided to recognize an aggressive instinct?Why did we hesitate to make use,on behalf of our theory,of facts which were obvious and familiar to everyone?"

b)during the composition of the treatise dealing with the drives of Eros and Thanatos,Freud was analyzing his daughter Anna whom,a few years earlier in a letter to Ferenczi,Freud explicitly associated with death.

c) during the analysis itself Anna's murderous fantasies were counterbalanced by her father-analyst's acknowledged belief that only his death would resolve Anna's conflicts.

d) although the term Eros appears in the treatise,Thanatos

never does. We know from other of Freud's texts that death may be represented by absence.

e) The youthful Anna did not like her name although her father tried consolingly to point out that it is a palindrome, reading the same backwards and forwards. Enlightened by that nominal concern of father and daughter, we can better appreciate that An(n)a is the middle part of the term Thanatos nominally banished in Beyond the Pleasure Principle.

f) in the treatise Freud expounded on the Janus-faced drives—the forward thrust of Eros and the retrogressive thrust of Thanatos. Those defining backward-forward characteristics, along with the expository character of the treatise as having many anticipations and retrogressions, mimetically relate to the absent nodal point, the palindromic Anna. Indeed, Anna is present in the very expository movement of the treatise. Let us also note that the Austrian official spelling reform in 1901 introduced among other things, a spelling difference between wider (against) and wieder (again) (pertinently, at one time in Middle English again and against had the same meaning). Freud continued afterwards to write wider for both meanings in his manuscripts. In Freud's definitive manuscript of Beyond the Pleasure Principle, wider occurs 127 times! The astounding frequency and condensed meaning of that term mimetically participate in the treatise's very themes of repetition compulsion and bidirectionality of the drives.

Eleventh, Freud self-admittedly preferred to write under the pressure of his unconscious. Many of his writings are actually symptomatic texts, containing uneven mixtures of a self-enabling writing through and a self-disenabling writing out. More than

that, his case histories in particular have functioned like a Rorschach, eliciting a symptomatic reading, as is readily shown in the massive secondary literature on them throughout the decades. The Dora case constitutes a specific, relevant example. If that case had been written by a woman, would she have received the same high praise that Freud the case writer received for over a half a century? Or rather, would that female author have been subjected to . . . a dressing down?

Twelfth, the history of psychoanalysis should be more accurately called the case history of psychoanalysis.

When all is said and done, one may reflect on a nefarious bidirectional thrust affecting psychoanalytic research, namely, the perduring progredient impact of the early idealization of Freud that is embroiled in self-idealization by current analysts who retrogradiently project a global or partial idealization onto Freud. Jones' biography stands as an illustrative example of this. According to Clifford Scott, former President of the British Psychoanalytic Society, for many years that biography was employed along with the Standard Edition to represent the teachings of Freud. In the very introduction to his biography (1953, p. xiii), Jones claimed that he was free of distorting idealizations: "my own hero-worshipping propensities had been worked through before meeting [Freud]." Let us understand: Jones arrived at such an achievement before he had any analysis. In actuality however, the biographer Jones passed over in silence his own "father-complex" which became an explicit source of tension in his correspondence with Freud (Freud, 1993). Why did it take analysts so long before they felt free to criticize Jones' hagiographical efforts? And, mutatis mutandis, how is that self-congratulatory phenomenon being repeated today with Freud's successors?