

New Book Announcement

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Freud on a Precipice: How Freud's Fate Pushed Psychoanalysis Over the Edge

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Addendum: A Personal Note

This book, the author's 47th, is about the single most critical turning point in the history of dynamic psychology, the paradigm shift made by Sigmund Freud in 1897 that directed the course of our thinking—for better and in many ways, for worse—about the human mind and the practice of mental healing to the present day.

The book explores the differences between the two theories that Freud forged for psychoanalysis—their assets, liabilities, and flaws—and it presents the means by which they can be united into a comprehensive theory of the human mind and a universally applicable set of therapeutic principles of technique. Also pivotal in the book is the presentation of eight known or reasonably postulated early childhood traumas that were suffered by Freud for which strong evidence is encoded in the many narratives in his writings. Several of these traumas have not been recognized as such and have not been afforded the attention and motivational power they deserve. Nevertheless, these incidents had lasting unconscious effects on Freud and they unknowingly drove him to make the debatable paradigm shift he engaged in early in his career.

Freud's resultant second paradigm of the mind was centered on inner-mental needs and the interactions through which they are negotiated. Its many extensions and broad acceptance, along with the corresponding failure of psychoanalysts to fully develop his first, trauma-centered paradigm (keep in mind Freud's 1914 distinction between a casual affair and a legal marriage) are traced in the book to a human archetype that unconsciously motivates the conscious mind's denial of death in a myriad of ways—an archetype that renders us naturally trauma-phobic. Surprisingly, the book shows that Freud's own universal unconscious anxieties and needs, many of them based on the lasting effects of his early-life traumas, put him on a precipice that, largely through the

unconscious experience of self-punishing guilt and existential death anxieties, actually put his life in danger. In this light it becomes clear that his paradigm shift was a life-saving measure of a kind that we, as humans, turn to automatically when faced with the devastating conscious and unconscious meanings and ramifications of death-related traumas, past and present.

Freud's story is, then, our own story, but it is as well the story of how he unknowingly tried to heal us, along with his and our patients, by sanctifying a series of personally driven, life-saving, death-denying ways of essentially turning away from reality towards fantasy and inner needs. In so doing, he provided us with a series of defensive insights and blindspots for which, nevertheless, he, we, and our patients have paid and continue to pay dearly (although it may be temporarily protective, the use of denial ultimately is disastrous). Based on extensions of Freud's first paradigm, the book offers an understanding of and appreciation for the grim sources of Freud's and later-day analysts' second paradigm efforts, while presenting an alternative and less costly, relatively denial-free and more adaptive solution to our most daunting problems in life—of which death in all of its encumbrances and consequences loom large.

In the spirit of Emerson—“There is no history, only biography”—the book closes with a presentation of the author's early traumas. This leads to the intriguing question, relevant for all therapists, as to the unconsciously mediated effects of early traumas on how we do therapy and live our lives. Answered only in part is the question as to why the author's early traumas, some of them similar to those suffered by Freud, moved him in one direction while it moved Freud and all but a handful of his followers in quite another. This is a fitting end for a book that asks and answers many new questions but also recognizes remaining unsolved puzzles.

The unusual preface to the book can be read on the International Psychoanalysis web site. The link is:

<http://internationalpsychoanalysis.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/langsbookintro.pdf>