

RELATIONAL APPROACH TO IDENTITY IN FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYSIS: ETHICAL LIMITS OF "EXPRESSING ONESELF"

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Abstract

In the article, the author suggests that Freud not only presents a descriptive model of mental life, but also shows the goals of mental life: not narcissistic love among people and reduction of suffering. The author concludes that although in Freud's thought (on the descriptive level) the ego is an array of relations and processes, although the identity of ego is unstable, the therapy is possible to be considered as the attempt of formation of a stable identity (the ability to formulate higher-order volitions). *Psychoanalytic therapy is a process of psychosynthesis of ego and non-ego (a never-ending process of gaining self-knowledge)*. According to author, a therapeutic effect lies in the fact that man determines some ethical limits of sexual and aggressive expressing oneself. These limits are more or less consistent with the formula of partnership recognized in modern psychiatry and sexology.

Psychoanalysis has many opponents – is considered not only as naturalistic theory (Anzenbacher, 2008, p. 205; Pajor 2009), but is also accused of encouraging to unlimited self-expression – which is seen as culturally and socially destructive (Kořakowski, 1984, pp. 46-67). This attack comes from the fact, that Freud accepts the hypothesis of unconscious mental processes, agrees that the mind is not transparent to itself, that is conditioned. This means that the *ego* is not completely conscious of everything (the identity of *ego* is unstable). That fact leads to the questioning of independence of morality and to attempts to explain moral behavior by reference to natural causality. So usually in psychoanalytic theory the *ego* is not considered to be free (entity is dependent on the object of his desire⁵), it cannot therefore be regarded as moral (responsible). In this article I have chosen this reading of Freud's works to highlight things which constitute a universal anthropological model. I would like to show that in Freud's thought we have not only the level of description but also a normative one. The psychoanalytic model can indicate certain moral limits for various forms of sexual and aggressive "self-expression" (the ego might be considered as potential free – this is the main aim of the development of psychic life).

⁵ The drive which is considered without his object (a person or an idea) is an biological power (instinct).

Firstly, I would like to present that – based on the reconstruction of an Freudian anthropological model – we could agree that, in psychoanalytic theory identity is considered as unstable. The *ego* is not an entity or a substance (like for example in Cartesian model) but an array of relations and processes. Secondly, I would show – based on the reconstruction of the psychoanalytic therapy technique – that psychoanalytic therapy is a never-ending process of gaining self-knowledge: *ego* and *super-ego* act within a man in a partially unconscious manner, but, *ego* can take a stance both on itself and *super-ego*, can achieve self-awareness, which translates into self-control (Stoic-Epicurean notion of balance). The main goal of this process is to achieve the ability to formulate higher-order volitions. It is the best confirmed by dialectical interpretation of psychoanalysis by Jon Mills (Mills, 2004, pp. 127-164) and by Alfred I. Tauber describing psychoanalysis as moral theory (Tauber, 2010, p. 209). Freud not only presents a descriptive model of mental life, but also shows the goals of mental life: not narcissistic love among people and reduction of suffering. In the context of determining the limits of human sexuality (and aggression) it is more or less consistent with the rulings of modern psychiatry and sexology standards expressed in the formula of partnership (Izdebski, 2010).

According to Freud, the mechanism of the formation of identity is the Oedipus complex – the theory of the crisis of childhood, which is constitutive of the human condition (Freud, 2010, pp. 271-273)⁶. Freud suggests that, this is the mechanism through which the biological/psycho-sexual being becomes a moral – a member of the society. On the right interpretation, this theory describes all people. In its “simplified form” the child will be attracted erotically to the parent of the opposite sex; and will identify with the same sex parent – such kind of identification is the “earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person” (Lear, 2005, p. 179). Of course, the erotic interest in children is not the same interest as in adults – it’s not directed to reproduction but to get pleasure – different types, not only genital pleasure (Freud, 1925, p. 6). In Freud, term: *erotic* is understood broadly as the enjoyment of the whole body, of the different parts of the body. So the little boy has erotic feelings towards his mother and wants be his father; the little girl wants to identify with his mother and has erotic feelings towards the opposite sex parent. These emotions coexist, but eventually the child sees the same-sex parent as an obstacle to having the other parent and develops hostile feelings towards the same-sex parent. Overall, then, as is stressed by Lear, the child’s relation to the same-sex parent is ambivalent (Lear, 2005, p. 182). This is the familiar structure of the Oedipus complex – and Freud basically admits that it never occurs (Freud, 2010, pp.

⁶ In this context, empirical studies on the Oedipus complex are not important, since I am going to discuss psychoanalysis as a certain anthropological model.

271-273). What actually occurs, Freud thinks, is more complicated. This issue is not usually undertaken by researchers of Freud's thought.

The child, as it is stressed by Freud, will also typically have erotic feelings towards the same-sex parent and will identify with the parent of the opposite sex. In this version, for example, the little boy would like to be his mother and have erotic feelings towards his father, would like to be his father and have erotic feelings towards his mother. This is so called full-blown Oedipus complex (Freud, 2010, pp. 272-274). If we translate it on the language of philosophy can be concluded that Freud describes "emotional ambivalence towards all the important people in one's environment" (Lear, 2005, p. 182).⁷

What are the philosophical implications of this? Usually Freud is seen as a biological determinist (Pajor, 2009). Biological determinism is the hypothesis that biological factors completely determine how a system behaves or changes over time; that biological differences between sexes organize human psychosocial life. So for the biological determinist masculinity and femininity is an innate characteristic. But even if men and women have different bodies, different sex organs we may ask what does it mean at the level of psychosocial? Dividing mankind into two sexes may seem natural and obvious when taking into account biological predispositions, but there is no doubt that it is not a man or woman, but the man who conceives himself as a man or the woman who conceives herself as a woman. In Freud, one has to identify himself with someone or something to get his psychosocial identity (this is unconscious process). Besides one has to interpret one's physicality (children castration fantasy). Since according to Freud the child identifies with both parents, Freud could no longer be seen as a biological determinist. Child identifies with both parents, with femininity and with masculinity. So man has becoming a man or woman, femininity or masculinity is not innate. In Freud, we have a distinction between sex (sex biologically specified) and gender. Gender denotes sex as socially and culturally shaped; is a contract, depending on culture, education. In Freud, gender may or may not be determined by sex. This mechanism of identity (including gender identity) makes that the identity is always unstable. Besides Freud suggests that the child represses his unconscious feeling with because of fear of lack of love (in some interpretations of the fear of social rejection (Butler, 1990). In this reading, the *ego* is not an entity or a substance (like for example in Cartesian model) but an array of relations and partly unconscious processes. The *ego* is constituted by the culture, the most important persons encountered in life (*super-ego*), close environment. This means that a person expresses some random reality in which he lived (man is the resultant of the expectations of others) – it is hard to blame man for an independent life circumstances that determine his choices. According to Freud,

⁷ This agrees with the theory of *Eros* and *Thanatos*.

neurotic is someone who fails to successfully resolve the Oedipus complex, who is in an emotional dependence on parents (his *super-ego* is “personal”) – is someone who passively meets the expectations of others. In his opinion all people are more or less neurotic (Freud, 1922, p. 397). It is a descriptive level, let's move on to the level of normative.

Freud describes psychoanalysis as the work during which repressed psychical content becomes conscious (Freud, 1924, pp. 136-139; Freud, 1922, p. 335) – so psychoanalytic therapy is psychosynthetic process, a never-ending process of psychosynthesis of *ego* and *non-ego* (a never-ending process of gaining self-knowledge). A certain type of unconsciousness, ignorance about psychical processes, which should become transparent for an individual Freud defines as *illness*. Illness is a weakening of *ego*, when *ego* cannot sustain its structure and autonomy due to internal conflicts (Freud 1922, p. 242). As we see, Freud includes ethical value judgments into his draft of the development of the psychic life (Freud, 1922, pp. 308-309; Freud, 2010, pp. 263-277). The aim of psychic life is to make consciousness what is unconsciousness – some kind of autonomy *ego* (the ability to formulate higher-order volitions). As rightly observed by Tauber (2010, pp. 131-145), Freud rejected "philosophy," but in fact psychoanalysis rests upon a basic Kantian construction: Freud divided the mind between an unconscious (grounded in the biological), and a faculty of autonomous reason, lodged in consciousness and free of natural forces to become the repository of interpretation and free will. Tauber adds that herein lies the philosophical foundation of psychoanalytic theory, a paradox in which determinism and freedom are conjoined. But in my opinion there is something more – Freud writes about it in a suggestive way. In his opinion, psychoanalytic therapy is not new, because also the philosophy of Socrates was a way of re-orientation through self-knowledge (Freud, 1922, p. 242). A specific Freudian method to achieve this self-knowledge is new – the psychoanalyst helps patients realize the forces acting on them – both blocking them and constructive, helping them to fight off the first and second to mobilize. Freud argues that consciousness does not mean having the information, but the knowledge (Freud, 1922, p. 243). This kind of knowledge must meet one requirement: cannot be the intellectual knowledge, but it should be turned into an emotional experience. Patient must feel and be conscious of specific ways in which these factors operate in him, and specifically as manifested in his own life, past and present – this entails responsibilities for himself and his actions (becomes self-conscious and free, can choose from a variety of options and control himself, can formulate higher-order volitions – but this morality is closer to the concept of philosophy of dialogue than to Kantian theory). The pathogenic conflict must become normal (a solution must be found, the patient himself should consciously find it). Lear rightly suggests that the *super-ego* is formed “via unconscious process of identification in order to avoid angry feelings towards the parent” (Lear, 2005, p. 189). In his opinion “the transformation of *super-ego* during the therapy came about in

more or less the same way as the *super-ego* was originally formed: during the course of the analysis, the analysand identified with her benign analyst” – and this is still, according to him, an infantile solution to an infantile problem” (Lear, 2005, p. 188). It is difficult to agree with this. Freud writes that the analyst should be neutral, he should not interfere into completing the treatment – is important that the patient could take independent, conscious decisions: the *super-ego* must become non-personal (Freud, 2011, pp. 135-138).

We can of course ask some legitimate questions: in that case, the patient should open without restriction to the demands of desire? Whether it is a health? Whether is this a sense of the analysis – to add the patient courage to reject the commonly accepted customs, which are for the patient the source of problems? To answer this question we will have to consider what is the purpose and technique of analysis. Freud writes that the *ego* is autonomous when can carry out important life tasks, and is able to work and take pleasure in life (Freud, 1922, p. 396), when can use its best and loftiest (in my opinion – moral) powers (Freud, 1922, p. 334). In the model of Freudian psychology the *ego* is mostly unconscious, consciousness is a fragile state, continually threatened in its existence. Awareness of human activity can assign motivations that appear to be functional rationalizations which are ruled by the pleasure principle. The process of integrating the psyche of some unconscious content is thus progressing to the next, you can say that a higher stage of development. If the patient opens to demands for the drive, neurotic conflict won't disappear – strong *super-ego* will start tormenting the *ego* and will cause other symptoms. The pathogenic conflict must become normal, patient must find a solution and must take responsibility for the choice.

In this model, the identity can no longer be understood as linked only to a conscious knowledge (like in Cartesian model). Taking into account the difference of different degrees of consciousness, the falsification of consciousness we must to reference to the relational approach to the problem of identity. In this sense, the identity is relation between of human consciousness (which might be simply an illusion) and the truth of oneself, which must to be reached in the process of psychosynthesis *ego* and *non-ego*. The model takes into account the development of the psychic life, at the level of heuristic model (*id*, *ego*, *superego*), as interpreted by the dialectic (Mills, 2004, pp. 127-164), all instances of the soul are one and the same, the level of self-knowledge, a sense of unity with the not-self is a human task which can be achieved through psychoanalytic practice.

Referring to the Freudian heuristic model of psychic life we can add that in a never-ending process of psychosynthesis *ego* and *not-ego* man may discover that he is a part of the whole universe, that is constituted by the culture, the most important persons in his life encountered (*super-ego*), close environment. In *The Future of an Illusion* Freud writes about weakness of

intellect to drives, but he suggests that the voice of intellect is quiet but it does not stop before it exacts obedience, which it gains finally, but after innumerable rebuffs (Freud, 1928, p. 87). According to Freud, we may assume that intellect will set itself the same aims whose fulfillment is expected from a variously conceived God, of course in human moderate dimension as far as it is permitted by external reality, therefore it will try to fulfill the postulate of love among people and reduction of suffering (due to the ability to formulate higher-order volitions). According to psychiatrists and sexologists sexually mature individual is someone able to recognize and to control the own behavior (Izdebski, 2010). A due to employing specific technique facilitating psychosynthesis – which involves doubling of subjectivity, where new meanings may be formed, the analyst offers to a patient the possibility of emphatic understanding of others. The empathy nowadays is also understood more as a social perception (perception and understanding of social norms, coexistence) than a compassion (Gładziejewski, 2011; Kapusta 2010, pp. 257-258). In this context, it's hard not to agree with Freud, that such internal reorganization protects man from evil commonly understood. If a man knows his own strength which are blocking his development, thus it has the knowledge about man and is able to recognize the forces that block the development of others people, encountered along his way. When is an entity that develops itself morally, it is difficult to expect that he might want to block the development of other people, to limit their freedom – unless they want to hurt somebody. If due to specific psychoanalytic technique, an empathy is born in man - man learns to respect the interests of other people, to love, then this carries consequences to the choice of partners or sexual practices. Non-narcissistic, nonsymbiotic love leads to the thinking of the pleasure of a sexual partner – not just my own. Therefore it excludes pedophilia, bestiality, necrophilia or even other forms of sexual perversion, such as fetishism, narcissism, or automonoseksualizm. Freud's solution is consistent, in this interpretation, with the division between deviance and pathology in modern sexology and psychiatry (in some instances is even more restrictive). With therapy, the patient takes a third-person perspective, impartiality, freedom of choice, so is fully responsible for own choices. Not without reason, Butler and colleagues, writing about psychoanalysis is often cited, in this context, the theory of E. Lévinas, which examines the phenomenon of the meeting of two people as the cause of the newborn during the dialogue, a sense of responsibility (Butler, 2005, pp. 83-101). In his interpretation, Tauber comes to a similar conclusion. This is similar to the ideal observer theory, with the proviso that in Freud's thought is emphasized the compatibility of rational choice with the feelings. In my view, psychoanalysis as a theory tries to show how a biological man becomes a moral being, as the child becomes an adult moral, and gains identity. It recognizes that the goal of therapy is freedom of choice. People might be afraid to undergo therapy, which stems from the fear of losing any value, however, it is the fear – In my opinion – completely unfounded. If that someone after therapy

would be wrong, it just could mean that the analyst changed the neurotic at psychopath, turned one mental disorder for different, which means that the patient is not cured at all. Of course, such a situation can happen, but such a situation cannot be taken as an argument against psychoanalytical therapy, as well as medical malpractice is not affected by somatic medicine.

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