THE QUEST(ION) OF ORIGIN: FREUD'S CONCEPTION OF EFFECTIVITY

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It has often been noted that throughout Freud's psychoanalytical theory there is an incessant though vain quest for origin. The persistence of this desire—as it is shown in Freud's insistence on the existence and effect of primal narcissism, primal scene, primal repression, primal phantasies, and the ever-fleeting Nirvana Principle—is often understood as a structural necessity for his theory, a move that Freud has to make in order to hold all the pieces of his analyses together. Or, to put it in terms of C. S. Pierce's concept of "abduction," Freud's move is to generate from known facts (pathological behavior) new hypotheses (explanations for the behavior) which, though situated outside the world of observable phenomenon (behavior), can nevertheless explain the world of phenomenon (behavior). (Herein lies Freud's alleged Platonism.) In that sense, what Freud is seeking turns out to be a certain kind of empty space, not only because the origins are usually the so-called "primal" ones which Freud himself admits to be (re-)constructions during analyses; but more importantly because the so-called origins often establish their meaning and significance only after the fact- that is, during later experiences or displaced manifestations. Interestingly, these primal concepts are intricately related to each other and all of them somehow gesture toward the common origin of human (physical and psychical) life.

As far as the origins derive their existence from later manifestations or from deferred effect, and as far as there are dialectical relationships between the origins and their manifestations, the present paper proposes to demonstrate that Freud's postulation of the existence of these origins and their impact on the later psychic life of an organism introduces an interesting conception of effectivity. According to this Spinozian conception, an origin is present precisely in its effects and *only* in its effects. A conception of effectivity in these terms not only helps us re-conceptualize the widely disputed notion of phylogeny but also reveals the ever-evolving as well as ever-repeating nature of human psychic life.

Perhaps an appropriate place to start the examination would be Freud's constant reference to "the primal." The most famous ones on the list seem to be primal scenes, primal repression, and primal narcissism. In each case, the postulation of these processes points to early stages in human or individual development of which we have no positive knowledge nor any real means of verification. What Freud reiterates then is that these early stages of human or individual development have serious impacts on the later course that the organism takes. Interestingly enough, the direction in which Freud presents his explanation of the involved mechanism is never moving from the origin to its effects, but always moving from the present (pathological) behavior backward to the (constructed) origin. While we may explain that by resorting to the actual

sequence of the unraveling during analysis, it is more significant that this constant transport back to the beginning is always grounded in obtained facts or recounts of facts gathered through analyses conducted in the present.

An example of this groundedness is the emergence of the problem of primal scenes in Freud's analysis of neurosis. The analysis of the famous "Wolf Man" case brought the term "primal scene" to the fore as an explanation for the infantile roots of the Wolf Man's neurosis. (The term was first used by Freud in the 1890s and was featured in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.) It had been initially stipulated that the Wolf Man's first sexual inquiries followed his experience of being seduced by his sister into sexual practices at an early age (when he was three and half years old). Even though he had rejected her seduction, upon reflection of this incident the Wolf Man was now ashamed of the passive role he played in that scene. But Freud was left with the problem of explaining the strong sense of guilt which was believed to be at the root of the Wolf Man's masochistic symptoms and anxiety. The solution was found in a peculiar but distinctive dream the Wolf Man reported to have had at the age of four. In this dream he saw six or seven white wolves sitting on a big walnut tree in front of his window. The wolves had big tails like foxes and their ears pricked like dogs. Out of a fear of being bitten by the wolves, the boy woke up.

Making full use of the dream analysis he had perfected by then, Freud moved ahead to construct the real meaning from this dream. It was then alleged that the dream was actually about the primal scene that the boy must have had witnessed at an earlier age. To be more exact, at the age of one and half years, the boy happened to witness sexual coitus between his parents, with his father adopting the posture of standing upright and his mother that of bending down like an animal. The act was understood by the child as an aggression by the father in a sado-masochistic relationship, through which the child discovered the vagina and the biological significance of masculine and feminine. The scene also gave rise to sexual excitation in the child while at the same time providing a basis for castration anxiety:

> The steps in the transformation of the material, "primal scene wolf story–fairy tale of 'The Seven Little Goats,' " are a reflection of the progress of the dreamer's thoughts during the construction of the dream, "longing for sexual satisfaction from his father realization that castration is a necessary condition of it–fear of his father." It is only at this point, I think, that we can regard the anxiety dream of this four-year-old boy as being exhaustively explained.[1]

The significant thing here is that this is a case of "deferred action" in Freud's terms. The description of the dream was given by the patient at the age of twenty-five remembering the impressions and impulses of his fourth year, which at that early age he would never have found words for. The dream is then analysed as a delayed manifestation of an anxious state when the child was one and a half, to which he had been unable to react adequately. At the age of four the anxiety was revived by another

sexual excitation, but the full impact of the first scene, or even the acknowledgement of its existence, was not possible until much later when the patient was twenty-five.

Freud himself is not blind to the fact that Jung, among many other people, maintains that scenes from early infancy are not reproductions of real occurrences; rather, they are products of the imagination, which "serve as some kind of symbolic representation of real wishes and interests, and which owe their origin to a regressive tendency, to an aversion from the problems of the present."[2] Freud's response, however, is varied at different points of the discussion. Sometimes he makes the modest claim that what matters is that "the patients themselves gradually acquire a profound conviction of the reality of these primal scenes, a conviction which is in no respect inferior to one based upon recollection."[3] At other times, he insists that "it is impossible that it can be anything else than the reproduction of a reality experienced by the child."[4]

The shiftiness of Freud's response to other people's challenges may be symptomatic of his own uncertainty about the reality of these primal scenes, but Freud is generally steadfast in his claims of the inevitable reality of the witnessing of the primal scene. "For a child, like an adult, can produce phantasies only from material which has been acquired from some source or other..."[5] Freud's insistence on setting the experience at a temporal moment in the earliest years of the patient's life is a kind of self-misunderstanding: due to the nature of his own historical moment he could not fully comprehend the implications of his hypothesis. The realization of these implications has to wait until 20th century hermeneutics finds the words for it.

As Paul Ricoeur puts it, " 'facts' in psychoanalysis are in no way facts of observable behavior. They are 'reports.' "[6] And as reports to be deciphered, translated, and interpreted the "fact" of the primal scene has its existence in the intricacies of discourse, in the recounts of a dream that the now 25-year-old Wolf Man had at the age of four, a dream that is then deciphered as concerning a scene the boy allegedly had witnessed at the age of one and half. As such, that "fact" of the primal scene is at least twice removed from any hypothetical "real" moment of being. Its moment of becoming lies actually in the verbalizations during the later analysis and treatment. Its presence is, then, propped upon its effects the discourse about the neurosis. Consequently, the matter is no longer an effectivity in the usual sense as prescribed by the natural sciences. Instead, it is an effectivity that has done away with the insulation of origin from its effect and has established a totality formed by the indivisibility of origin from effects. In short, being entangled in discourse, the effectivity established here is to be comprehensible only in terms of hermeneutics. As such, the primal scene the origin of neurosis has no need for any metaphysical or ontological existence/privilege. The origin, as the "cause" of the neurosis, lies exactly where its effects are, in the discourse produced by the (pathological) anxiety.

It is clear from the above discussion that the primal scene is not to be understood as a mysterious moment—outside the patient's neurosis or the later recount of the dream in the history of an individual or mankind in general; nor is it to be taken as

the direct chronological "cause" of the later neurosis. Instead, the primal scene is to be seen as inherent in its manifestations in the discourses surrounding the dream, the phantasy, and the neurosis. Or, to put it more succinctly, the origin has its existence precisely in its many distorted, displaced, perverted manifestations. Consequently, the search for origin is to be located in close analyses of the discourse and symptoms at hand, rather than the ceaseless debate of the reality or falsehood of the primal moment.

This rather strange "cause-effect" relationship finds substantiation not only in the dimension of discourse as demonstrated in the case of the primal scenes, but also in the economic dimension of the motility of quantities. For this we turn to Freud's theory of "primal repression" and "the return of the repressed."

Freud himself always considers the theory of repression as "the pillar on which the edifice of psycho-analysis rests"[7]—the foundation from which the notion of "the unconscious" derives its meaning—and it is in the context of this important notion that the dialectical relationship between the origin and its effects finds an apt demonstration. In his clinical experience, Freud repeatedly notices that when he analyzes a neurotic patient without the help of hypnosis, he is confronted with unexplainable failures of memory on the patient's part, which then oppose and block the analytic work. These failures of memory, according to Freud, do not mean a total loss of the memory of certain experiences but signal the allocation of these memories to a realm inaccessible to consciousness. Or to put it differently, these ideas are repressed, barred from entering consciousness.

It is in Part II of his "Project" that Freud first deals directly with the work of repression as it is demonstrated in a pathological phenomenon—compulsion—found in his hysterical patients. He describes compulsion as excessively intense ideas which emerge into consciousness with special frequency but without the course of events justifying their persistent appearance. What Freud discovers in analysis is that an incongruent idea A, that drives the patient to tears, is capable of doing thus only because the real "cause" of tears, an unconscious idea B, is barred from entering the consciousness and has taken up A as its displacement. Freud terms idea A as "compulsive" and idea B as "repressed." Thus the repressed idea B returns to the consciousness of the patient only under the guise of the conscious idea A. What needs to be remembered here is that it is the idea that is repressed; its cathexis is yet to find an alternative route for discharge. The mechanism that dominates this process is cast in purely economical terms; that is, the compulsion is described in terms of the excessive quantity it has attracted and the repressed in terms of the quantity of which it has been deprived.

In a later essay titled "Repression" Freud modifies and substantiates this brief case demonstration in the "Project." He now divides the scope of repression into three phases. In the first phase, there is "primal repression," the "already" formed nucleus of the primally repressed material in the unconscious, which functions as a strong cathexis and attracts any ideational representation that may show the slightest

connections or similarities with the primally repressed. The second phase, repression proper, is where the attraction from the primally repressed and the repulsion from the censorship agency work together to keep the now repressed idea from entering consciousness. During the third phase, return of the repressed, the affect that has been stripped from the now repressed idea emerges into consciousness in the guise of symptoms, dreams, etc. In other words, because of the repression, the affect has to go through various transformations before it can gain entrance into consciousness.

Many questions remain unanswered in this later delineation of the theory of repression. The most immediate one is of course the question of primal repression. If the primally repressed ideas form a nucleus of high cathexis and attract late-coming ideational representations, how is that formation initially effected? How is the high cathexis maintained? And finally, what are these primal ideas that are repressed? Freud certainly does not help much in providing answers to these questions. All we are told is that these ideas are memories of "archaic experiences." If pursued further, Freud would probably refer to phylogeny for elaboration. As in the case of primal scenes, the existence of the primally repressed is only arrived at through examining its twice removed derivation the return of the repressed.

Furthermore, if the ideas are repressed, which means they could never enter consciousness without disguise, Freud is left to work with and from only the observed but displaced manifestations of this repression as displayed in "the return of the repressed." The question then becomes: how do we recognize what the "repressed" was if it has already been distorted beyond recognition? On top of the problem of linguistic entanglement, there is now the added problem of displacement.

Here we end up in the same situation we were in the case of primal scenes. What we do know are only recapitulations and disfigurations of the original, never the real thing. Significantly, Freud's move is to do his best to reconstruct the repressed wish, the distorted desire- the "repressed" that is seeking to return. Freud's analysis of the return of the repressed can thus be seen as an interesting version of his pursuit of origin.

It has already been stated that what is repressed is the ideational representation of an instinct craving for satisfaction; the activated instinctual impulse still drives on for satisfaction. The accumulated quantity/energy has to find discharge. What arises then in many cases is a compromise-formation in the guise of which the repressed memory may gain entrance to consciousness, as we have discussed in the case of memory A taking up the affect stripped from repressed memory B. The most prominent example of these compromise formations may be Freud's famous target--dreams.

While most dream analyses in history have focused on the manifest content of the dreams, Freud instead chooses to postulate that the manifest content is not all there is. Instead, it is the result of complicated dream work which transforms latent dream-thoughts into manifest dream-content. He goes on further to claim that it is possible to reconstruct the complicated processes of dream work and thus retrieve the latent

dream thoughts. Further, it can be demonstrated that the dream thoughts, taken together, fulfil conscious or, most often, repressed wishes of the dreamer—these wishes are the true origin of the dreams. These repressed wishes, since they are repressed, are in no way apparent to the dreamer; nor do they stand in any simplistic relationship with the dream content. (Consider the mediation of dream work.)

What dreams are, in the final analysis, is then precisely the return of the repressed in disguise. The economic view has it that the energy associated with the repressed wish—the "origin" of dreams- has to be reckoned with; that is to say, it has to be given an outlet. This driving force then selects those ideas which can be admitted into consciousness, attaches itself to them, and rushes toward realization. This characterization is of course grossly simplistic; the network of disguises is never accidentally established. Priorities are given to those ideas that have optimum chance of entering consciousness and the least chance of being detected as substituting for the repressed idea. The processes of dream work -condensation, displacement, representability, and secondary revision -form themselves into such a structure that although it is only the dream content (effects) that is available for analysis, the presence of the repressed wish (origin) is felt throughout the structure. More precisely, the overriding repressed idea leaves its traces in the choice and arrangement of the dream contents. In the final analysis this unseen presence of the repressed wish is actually the organizing principle of its substitute formations—dreams. The origin and its effects are again indivisible from each other.

So far we have established that in Freud's quest, the origin is obscured by the linguistic accounts provided by the patients and by the displaced and distorted manifestations of dreams and symptoms. The only footing the "origin" has, ironically enough, is exactly in these discourses and displacements. Besides the linguistic and economical accounts of this motivating origin, there is also the dynamic dimension that we need to consider. And for this discussion we turn to one of the cornerstones of Freud's theory: the death instincts.

As one of the most controversial of the psychoanalytical concepts, this group of instincts are held to denote the fundamental tendency of every living being to return to a previous and inorganic state, that is, to a state of inertia. The notion has its most definite precursor in the "Project" where Freud represents psychical processes as quantitatively determined states of neurones which take as their only goal to divest themselves of quantity (energy/tension) whenever possible. This tendency and process of discharge is believed to be the primary function of neuronic systems and thus of psychic activities in general. Another name for this phenomenon would be "the pleasure principle": the free flowing of quantity toward discharge. In its extreme (archaic) form, the organism generates hallucinations in order to reproduce those ideas that have previously brought satisfaction—which Freud is later to term "primal narcissism." However, this constant drive for self-gratifying discharge means the death of the organism, for isn't this state of no tension/energy the same as death? Furthermore, how can an organism functioning according to this principle survive?

Herein lies the paradox of Freud's analysis. To be an organism, to be alive at all, means the death-like state cannot be. With stimuli coming from the outside world, the organism can resort to flight to induce a cessation of the stimuli. But as endogenous stimuli also arise from somatic elements within the organism—hunger, respiration, sexuality, or as we call them, the facts of life—and their cessation can only be effected if certain definite conditions are realized in the external world, it then becomes necessary that the organism take certain actions in order to satisfy the internal needs. That means, the organism will have to store up a certain amount of energy so as to have it at its disposal when needed. In this case, the energy is bound at first and then flows in a controlled manner, as opposed to the free, unhindered flow in the primary processes.

As evident from the above explication, Freud's discovery is quite dramatic. The very concept of an organism implies that there is a permanent maintenance of an energy level unequal to zero. That is to say, as the organism is "born," its neuronic system is born to capitulate and abandon its original trend toward a reduction of its level of tension to zero, learning "to tolerate a store of quantity sufficient to meet the demands for specific action." This then is the Principle of Constancy—the tendency of the organism to maintain a determinant level of energy. Yet the persistence of the pleasure principle is not eradicated; it is only modified. While energy is maintained at a certain level, "the same trend still persists in the modified form of a tendency to keep the quantity down, at least, so far as possible and avoid any increase in it (that is, to keep its level of tension constant). All the performances of the neuronic system are to be comprised under the heading either of the primary function or of the secondary function imposed by the exigencies of life."[8]

We can clearly see the root of the problem even in this early account of psychic mechanisms. There is a certain tension between complete discharge, which the Principle of Inertia—the so-called original state—requires; and the reduction of quantity to a fixed level but not to zero, which the seemingly derivative Constancy Principle entails. The difference, to put it simply, is the final destination of the return to zero in one case, or to a constant minimum in the other. But this tension is no longer created by discourse, nor by disfiguration, but by a perversion necessitated by life itself. And this tension is to be further polarized as Freud moves beyond his 1920 turning point.

Furthermore, Freud complicates the problem by proposing that "From the first, however, the principle of inertia *is* upset by another set of circumstances" (my underline)[9]—meaning the facts of life itself involve the modification of primary processes into secondary processes. Freud's account on the one hand implies a chronological differentiation between the two processes (and the two principles), but on the other hand emphasizes the co-existence of the two processes (and the two principles) from the start. That means the Inertia Principle is never without the Constancy Principle. In that sense, which is the true basic principle of the neuronic system and of life itself? The real force of the problem is yet to reach its height when the death instincts are

introduced much later.

This early discussion of Inertia-Constancy encounters certain serious challenges as Freud's clinical practices lead him to notice certain acts the patients perform which do not comply with the pleasure principle. First there is the compulsion to repeat which is prevalent in his patients who suffer from transference neurosis. These patients often are compelled to repeat acts which are obviously painful in themselves. Freud has come to the conclusion that these acts function as a substitute for remembering the repressed material. But if the pleasure principle decrees that the lowering of tension is pleasure and the heightening of tension is pain, then these acts obviously cannot be explained by the pleasure principle. The acts in no way produce pleasure; instead of a lowering of tension, they often involve a dramatic increase of tension. Freud is forced to concede that "Pleasure and 'pain' cannot, therefore, be referred to a quantitative increase or decrease of something which we call stimulus-tension, although they clearly have a great deal to do with this factor."[10] This reconsideration of the concept of pleasure directly contributes to the emergence of the notion of the death instincts.

In relation to the compulsion to repeat observed in transference neurosis, Freud also finds the issue of masochism and its tendency to induce pain on the organism itself puzzling. For if the pleasure principle holds true, then masochism would be completely incomprehensible. These perpetual recurrences of the same unpleasurable thing compel Freud to propose that there might be something that is more basic than the pleasure principle, that the compulsion to repeat overrides the pleasure principle and is fed by "the wish ... to conjure up what has been forgotten and repressed."[11] Freud then goes on to assert that "*It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life" (my underline).[12] This reformulation of the basic principle of life ushers in the death instinct.

Within the context of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud rephrases the Principle of Inertia: "The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the 'Nirvana principle,' to borrow a term from Barbara Low) ...."[13] It is here that the original Inertia Principle is clearly transformed into the Nirvana Principle which underlies the death instincts.

The direct consequence of this reformulation is that instead of the pleasure principle, the Nirvana Principle now becomes the motivating force behind life. The organism preserves its life so that it will die in its own time and in its own way, warding off the possibility of returning to inorganic state through means other than those which are immanent in the organism itself. This is the inertia inherent in organic life In other words, the return to zero, ironically, sparks life. Similarly, the organism may have a basic tendency to return to a previous inorganic state as a rule, but the fact

that it is an organism prescribes that the return to zero will always be suspended until a later time. In other words, the existence of life itself has made death, the Nirvana Principle, a deferred reality.

The dynamic relationships between the Nirvana Principle and the Constancy Principle then become the focus of the present inquiry. As the organism emerges to a new stage of development, its original "cause" of being, the Nirvana Principle, is nowhere to be observed. Death is not to be seen in life, yet its presence is felt in all of life's principles. That is to say, the origin of life, which is unobservable, turns out to be the motive force in life itself. The return to zero is then the justification for the development and growth of the organism. But at the same time, to be alive means that the return to zero has been suspended. That is why in the Constancy Principle we do not find a return to zero, only a reduction of tension to a stable minimum: zero has become impossible under these circumstances. But that certainly does not mean that the return to zero has been replaced by the Constancy Principle, for it is exactly in the Constancy Principle that we detect the motive force of the return to zero. The two forces not only work together but also oppose each other. The interesting thing is: the "original" principle finds expression and existence only in its opposite, in a perverted formulation of its self.

Perhaps Freud himself is not aware of this conception of effectivity that his theory implies. But we see evidences supporting that effectivity throughout Freud's work. The quest(ion) of origin emerges as an effort to find an explanation for observed behavior and the explanation has been found. Linguistically, Freud's effectivity is a kind of self-referentiality. Economically, his effectivity is the overall structure in which the return of the repressed is located. And finally, dynamically speaking, his effectivity is the perverted presence of the origin. In short, the origin may be obscured by various factors—the linguistic entanglements of discourse, the distortions and displacements demanded by defence, the antagonistic perversion necessitated by life itself—but it is always to be situated right where these disfigurations are.

NOTES

1. S. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," *Three Case Histories*, trans. by James Strachey (N. Y.: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963) 228.
2. Ibid., 236-7.
3. Ibid., 239.
4. Ibid., 243.
5. Ibid., 243.
6. Paul Ricoeur, "The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings," *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, eds. by Charles E. Reagan & David Stewart (Boston: Beacon, 1978) 186.

7. S. Freud, "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement," *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, 1938) 939.
8. S. Freud, "Project for a Scientific Psychology," *The Origins of Psychoanalysis* (N. Y.: Doubleday, 1954) 358.
9. Ibid., 357.
10. S. Freud, "The Economic Problem in Masochism," *General Psychological Theory*, trans. by James Strachey (N. Y.: Macmillan, 1963) 191.
11. S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by James Strachey (N. Y.: Liveright, 1961) 26.
12. Ibid., 30.
13. Ibid., 49-50.