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The Mindless Self: Freud Triumphant

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In the heat of the anguished nineteenth–century debate over evolutionary theory, Samuel Butler declared that Darwin had banished mind from the universe. But it was in fact Freud, with his insistence on sex as the fundamental force in human development, who delivered the death blow to man's confidence in himself as a rational being. The act of thinking, distinguished by Aristotle as a peak of human experience, became in Freudian theory most notable as a neurotic exercise designed to inhibit awareness of instinctual needs. Excluded from this interpretation was, of course, the product of Freud's mind–psychoanalytic theory itself.

The defining need of human consciousness to understand nature and to gain what control it can over external circumstance, Freud relegated to the status of an offshoot of sexual curiosity. Following philologist Hans Sperber, he further decided that language, too, originally derived from sexual needs. But children ask not only, "Where did I come from?" but "Where will I go when I die?", encapsulating the rebuttal to Freud's strangely attenuated vision of the source of intellectual inquiry; and one imagines men being first impelled to speech by purposes that separated them from animal life, rather than in consequence of the evolutionary continuities.

Still, Freud's *ideae fixe*, his sexual theory–the shibboleth by which he tested the loyalty of his followers–has penetrated as deeply into contemporary Western culture as have Darwin's views. By locating the central problem of existence in the struggle between the instincts of the individual and the restraints of society, Freud was positioned for an unremitting use of his intellectual faculties to denigrate mind in favor of sex.

The pre–scientific world saw man's struggle as primarily internal, and in the contest between body and soul, reason versus desire, higher and lower proclivities, there was no question as to what was most truly human. But nineteenth–century science, scuttling what was neither visible nor quantifiable, enrolled man firmly in the animal kingdom. With Darwin, the shift in perspective attained the authority of Holy Writ and Freud, deeply influenced by him, became, as Frank Sulloway has so carefully documented, a "Biologist of the Mind," relegating mental productions to elaborations or justifications of instinctual needs.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud borrowed Darwin's conception of the primal horde, consisting of a dominant male and dependent females with their offspring, as the earliest social grouping. Darwin's deductions, based on the habits of the higher apes, concluded that the sexual jealousy of the male resulted in the killing or driving out from the horde of rival males by the strongest, thus preventing promiscuity in a state of nature and determining the structure of the group.

Resonating to the idea of sexual jealousy as the decisive, organizing social factor, Freud brought to it his own peculiar intensity of experience as the adored first child of a beautiful young mother, with a father old enough to be his grandfather and half–brothers his mother's age. The inventor of the Oedipus complex, having elaborated his preoccupations into a worldview, now combined his personal myth with the biological formulations of Darwin and others, and was ready with his own primal theory. In the beginning was a violent, jealous father who kept all the females for himself and drove away the growing sons.

One day the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde. Perhaps some advance in culture, like the use of a new weapon, had given them the feeling of superiority. Of course these cannibalistic savages ate their victim. This violent, primal father had surely been the envied and feared model for the brothers. Now they accomplished their identification with him by devouring him and each acquired part of his strength.

Freud assures us that with this "memorable criminal act" began social organization, moral restrictions, and religion. It is, accordingly, the "sense of guilt of the son," corresponding with the now–repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex, that forms the basis of society–thus grounding ordered social behavior in sex and violence. Dressed up with references to anthropological observations of the time and seriously offered as science, Freud's tale takes no cognizance whatever of the gifts of the human mind, which he transforms into a servant of the body, its adaptive qualities ignored in favor of biological simplifications encouraging predictability.

That man is unique in the animal kingdom in his consciousness of the inevitability of his own extinction, and that it is this consciousness, not guilty repression of instinctual aims, which directs his attempts at order and meaning, was what Freud could never confront. Preoccupied with his reputation as a scientist, he sought to build his theory on Darwin's truths, to make it an extension and enhancement of, but not a departure from, evolutionary theory. Thus was born Freud's great paradox: a system of thought designed to destroy the conception of mind as the central expression of human existence.

Freud's myth of creation included original sin–the murder of the father–but it provided no possibility for regeneration. In his view of the life stages of the individual–a biological catalogue of oral, anal, and genital–the highest stage involves neither the intellect nor the spirit, but rather the ability to seek a sexual object outside the self. This remarkably meager assessment of human potential certainly bore no relation to Freud's own ambitions. His unceasing intellectual speculations and a consuming desire for influence and recognition, the latter captured in his reference to himself as a "conquistador," marked his adult life. As an intellectual of his time and as a Jew in predominantly Catholic Vienna, he was almost virulently anti–religious while transferring his feelings of credulity, his capacity for veneration, and his need for orthodoxy to the dogmas of nineteenth–century science. As he went about his work of squeezing his psychological conception of man into a biogenetic framework, he apparently took no notice of his own failure to fit his model.

But all accepted models of human behavior produce, in varying degrees, what they describe. Freud's theory of the primary importance of sex has changed society, and nowhere more conspicuously than in the acceptance of the nineteenth–century invention of the homosexual–a creature defined by sexual preference alone.

Many nineteenth–century scientists and sexologists–most importantly, Wilhelm Fliess, Freud's longtime friend and associate, as well as Albert Moll, Havelock Ellis, and others–produced theories of infantile sexuality, complete with developmental stages. As Frank Sulloway has remarked, the conception of infantile sexuality was "a discovery in *theory* as much as a discovery of *facts*," meaning that long–observed behavior was now perceived in a different context. It was Freud's literary rather than scientific style of presentation, together with his gift for dramatizing and sensationalizing his material, that early gained him popular attention, as did his tireless cultivation of practitioner disciples for psychoanalysis. The latter was to him a "movement," a system to change social practice, as well as a treatment, and the control of this movement was his jealously guarded prerogative. Dominating psychoanalysis with the authority of a religious leader in his lifetime, he demanded from his followers, not the initiative appropriate to an intellectual endeavor, but faith; and the rock upon which his church was built was his sexual theory.

Carl Jung, to whom Freud wished to bequeath the leadership of the psychoanalytic movement, steadily attempted–without success–to widen the meaning of Freud's term "libido" to make it stand not just for the sexual drives, but for a general mental energy. In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung recounts how he soon began to see Freud, however brilliant, as "a tragic figure . . . a man in the grip of his daemon." He writes of a meeting in 1910 that foreshadowed their subsequent estrangement: "I can still recall vividly how Freud said to me, 'My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.' He said this to me with great emotion, in the tone of a father saying, 'And promise me this one thing, my dear son, that you will go to church every Sunday.' "

But of their very first face–to–face encounter in 1907 Jung had noted: "Wherever in a person or in a work of art, an expression of spirituality (in the intellectual, not the supernatural sense) came to light, he suspected it and insinuated that it was repressed sexuality. . . . I protested that this hypothesis, carried to its logical conclusion, would lead to an annihilating judgment upon culture. Culture would then appear as a mere farce, the morbid consequence of repressed sexuality. 'Yes,' he assented, 'so it is, and that is just a curse of fate against which we are powerless to contend.' "

In fact, Freud appeared to enjoy presenting variations on this theme and prided himself on having delivered, in the name of science, the third great blow to what he regarded as "the universal narcissism of mankind." In this frequently quoted series, the cosmological blow came when Copernicus asserted that the earth was not the center of the universe. The biological blow was the insistence of Darwin and his supporters that man was not separate from the lower animals in the organic scheme of things. The psychological blow was, he thought, delivered by psychoanalysis with the revelation that "the ego is not master in its own house." But nineteenth–century science was very far from proclaiming that it was, and Freud's blow, energized by his combative misanthropy, owed far more to the prevailing intellectual ambiance than to his personal "discoveries."

Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) was an explication of how sexual selection acts independently of natural selection: making, for example, cumbersome physiological characteristics, such as the giant tail fan of the peacock, serve purposes either of courtship or battle among males for possession of the females. Thus the survival of the fittest is mitigated by sex, and Darwin lays the foundation for his theoretical premise that love and hunger–these two instincts and no others–are the basis of all animal behavior. Writing in 1939, Havelock Ellis observed: "The immense importance of sex is indeed implicit in the biological conception of life as it began to take shape in the middle of the last century and the ancient dictum that hunger and love are the pillars of life became developed in all the human sciences."

In this biological enterprise, Freud followed the "fundamental biogenetic law" as advanced by Ernest Haeckel and other late–nineteenth–century evolutionary thinkers, basing his developmental schema on the principle that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny"; that is, in man, the development from conception to birth (ontogeny) recapitulates all of evolutionary history (phylogeny). Thus, in his psychoanalytic approximation of this principle, Freud pronounces that human psychological development recapitulates the biologically determined experience of earlier animal forms. In his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud comments: "Consider how in one class of animals the genital apparatus is brought into the closest relation to the mouth, while in another it cannot be distinguished from the excretory apparatus, and yet in others it is linked to the motor organs. . . . Among animals one can find, so to speak in petrified form, every species of perversion of the (human) sexual organization."

Here is the basis for Freud's theory of infantile erogenous zones and his absolute insistence on the sexual nature of the oral and anal phases. What might be granted to be sensual pleasure must for Freud be acknowledged as directly sexual, to allow him to fit his psychoanalytic theory into what he regarded as immutable evolutionary law. His commitment to a narrow and rigid extension of biogenetic principles to human psychological development was coupled with a never–abandoned belief in the now long–discredited Lamarckian doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Thus in solving the puzzles he set for himself, Freud was focused not primarily on the past of individual patients, but on the past of the race and of the animal kingdom, with which he constantly associated the human past.

He remarked in 1919, summing up this approach, that through the study of dreams and neuroses, one ultimately perceived "a phylogenetic child–a picture of the development of the human race, of which the individual's development is in fact an abbreviated recapitulation influenced by the chance circumstances of life."

The *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*–hailed by James Strachey, the English translator of the standard edition of Freud's works, as being, beside the *Interpretation of Dreams*, his "most momentous and original contribution to human knowledge"–contains Freud's fundamental unification of biology with psychology and normality with neurosis and perversion. The *Three Essays* owes a very great debt to the sexual biology of Freud's friend, Wilhelm Fliess, but the smooth flow of intellectual theorizing about the developmental phases of infancy and childhood as set forth in essays two and three was at no point impeded by direct observation. Although Fliess kept a daily record of his firstborn son's every activity, with particular emphasis on the sexual, and though such close observation and preserving of data in regard to their offspring was not unusual among intellectuals, Frau Freud once remarked: "Psychoanalysis stops at the door of the children's room." Jung recalled how surprised he was in 1907 to discover that Freud's wife knew "absolutely nothing" about her husband's work. Freud himself, in correspondence with Fliess, excused his inability to answer a question on early childhood attitudes toward excrement by saying that his work day gave him no time for such researches, adding that "the womenfolk do not back me in my investigations."

Freud began a psychoanalysis of his youngest child, Anna, only when she had reached the age of twenty–three, declared her intention of becoming a psychoanalyst like her father, and, having read many of his works and attended psychoanalytic seminars, was already thoroughly indoctrinated with his formulations. And, of course, Freud's practice was with adults; "Little Hans," his only published case of the psychoanalysis of a child, was carried on through the boy's father.

The completely speculative nature of Freud's developmental theory partakes of the paradox at the center of his work. How is one to account for his own intellectual efflorescence using only the limited mechanical model he so insistently propagated? Most frequently the problem has been solved by attributing to Freud philosophical and psychological intentions that broaden his scope, deepen his meaning, and allow for the kind of systematic hermeneutics and exegesis reserved, prior to the advent of psychoanalysis, for religious texts. No matter that Freud's fervid insistence on the scientific nature of his theory makes plain that he would not have thanked his admirers for their efforts: such justificatory reinterpretation has become a major scholarly activity since his death.

Thus Ernest Becker, in *The Denial of Death*, endorses Norman O. Brown's "existential" recasting of Freud's idea of anality, and himself observes:

. . . the basic key to the problem of anality is that it reflects the dualism of men's condition. . . . Nature's values are bodily values, human values are mental values, and though they take the loftiest flights, they are built upon excrement, impossible without it, always brought back to it. The anus and its incomprehensible, repulsive product represents not only physical determinism and boundness [sic], but the fate as well of all that is physical: decay and death. . . . We now understand that what psychoanalysts have called "anality" or anal character traits are really forms of the universal protest against accident and death. . . . Nature mocks us and poets live in torture.

And indeed Swift declared baldly in one of his poems:

Nor wonder how I lost my Wits;
Oh! Caelia, Caelia, Caelia shits!

But it is Swift and Brown and Becker who are confronting the paradox of human existence, not Freud. For him anality is an aspect of the biogenetic law that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: it is a demonstration of man's animal nature and thus a blow to "the universal narcissism" of mankind; it is a scientific "discovery" of psychoanalysis. It would have enraged him to learn of the philosophical attenuation of his assault on "the human values [that] are mental values" invoked by Becker.

Again, attributing to Freud attempts to answer the questions that preoccupied them, Brown and Becker recast in similar ways Freud's precise formulations as to the source and meaning of castration anxiety, penis envy, and the Oedipus complex. Thus Becker, following Brown, sees castration anxiety as resulting from the child's fear of dependence on the mother, a fear that becomes focused on sexual differentiation. But, according to Becker, the process of differentiation is a means of combat: it is now possible to deny the mother her primary place in creation. The "horror at the mutilated creature" and the "castrated mother" that Freud so dramatically presented become for Brown and Becker the genesis of an adaptive measure in the child's struggle for independence.

Further continuing his version of what Freud *really* meant, Becker declares that the mother's genitals

are used as a convenient focus for the child's obsession with the problem of physicalness. . . . He sees her tie to the earth, her secret bodily processes that bind her to nature: the breast with its mysterious sticky milk, the menstrual odors and blood, the almost continual immersion of the productive mother in her corporeality. . . . And so we understand not only the boy's preference for masculinity, but also the girl's "penis envy." Both boys and girls succumb to the desire to flee the sex represented by the mother; they need little coaxing to identify with the father and his world. He seems more neutral physically, more cleanly powerful, . . . represents the vast world outside of the home, the social world with its organized triumph over nature, the very escape from contingency that the child seeks.

Plausible perhaps, but most certainly not what Freud had in mind: castration anxiety loses the quality of instinctive animal fear that was fundamental for Freud and is separated from another of its definitive aspects–Freud's belief that it constituted a "phylogenetic endowment." Expounded in his *Introductory Lectures* (1916–1917) and reflecting his refusal to give up the Lamarckian doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, this phylogenetic endowment was viewed by Freud as a result of castrations that were "once real occurrences in the primeval times of the human family." Castration and Oedipal anxieties, he insisted until the end of his life, derived their terrifying force from phylogenetic residues of actual deeds. And intellectual adaptation to these biologically transmitted anxieties is almost invariably represented by Freud as a neurotic overlay, exacerbating rather than mitigating the inherited burden of man's primitive past. The feeble hope he offers through psychoanalysis is based, not on the use of reason, which is contemptuously dismissed as "intellectualizing," but on the transference of emotion to the person of the analyst, with a subsequent emotional "working through." In this process, mind is relegated to a strictly subservient position; necessary for the recall of experiences, it is not to be used for the seeking of solutions. Freudian theory envisions neurotic defense mechanisms–rationalization, displacement, projection, denial, and more–as the likeliest result of intellectual efforts to come to grips with life's problems.

The Oedipus complex, the critical formulation for both Freud's developmental theory and his theory of neurosis, is again an attempt to fit human psychology into the straitjacket of nineteenth–century evolutionary biology, albeit with Lamarckian and mythic undertones. Resulting, as Freud saw it, from the incestuous desire for the sexual possession of the mother on the part of primitive man, it produced, as described in *Totem and Taboo*, the murder of the primal father and a consequent inherited endowment of guilt for the persisting, biologically determined desire for the mother. Still, the male gives up hope of possessing the mother in Freudian lore because the sight of her "mutilated genitals" gives rise to the castration anxiety that generates identification with the father.

And for Freud, sharing the perspective of the Spanish biologist, Maraneon, who compared woman to a male organism arrested in its development, female genitals were not an acceptable fact of nature. The clitoris was an inferior "phallic" organ, productive of much difficulty in the unfolding of female sexuality. The little girl, he felt assured, wished to possess her mother erotically in just the same way as did the male. But whereas castration anxiety terminates the Oedipus complex for the boy, leaving him with the gratification of ownership of a penis, the little girl's development is much more difficult and perilous of outcome. She must give up the mother only to recapitulate the process of desire and loss with the father, at the same time bearing the burden of her "castration" and the necessity of transferring her interest from the "phallic" clitoris to the vagina. Assuming such complications resulting from inferior physical endowment, Freud was ready to assert that the Oedipus complex was "all too often not surmounted by the female at all," and even that the level of what is "ethically normal" differed for the sexes–women of course being less ethically normal than men.

But Robert Stoller, a psychiatrist who has specialized in working with gender disturbances, propounds a theory that accounts for the far greater frequency of such disturbances observed in males. His view is that it is the female whose sexuality is more firmly grounded, since the normal mother–infant symbiosis can only augment a girl's identity, while it is the male who requires an extra, difficult step: he must "disidentify" from the mother to whom he is equally bound in infancy. It is also the case that contemporary research refutes Freud's view that maleness is the firmer, more natural biological state. The human embryo starts as female in fetal life and maleness is the result of the production, at the critical perinatal period, of the masculinizing hormone, androgen.

Further, Stoller distinguishes, as Freud does not, between sexual development and sense of gender, the latter being taught to the child by the adults in his life and apparently established a little after the beginning of the child's second year. Manifesting itself with infinite variety historically and geographically, sense of gender is a peculiarly human aspect of sex–a product of mind and culture–whereas the Oedipus complex as imagined by Freud is an instinctually based universal experience in which fear is the primary element for males and envy the chief female component. A joyless, preordained script with none of the delightful particularities of culture, its processes are triggered by inevitable, always disturbing, life experiences.

But, ignoring Freud's mythic biologizing, his misanthropy, and his lifelong focus on process rather than meaning, Brown in *Life Against Death* grandiloquently credits Freud with deep philosophical import: "The Oedipus project is not as Freud's earlier formulations suggest, a natural love of the mother. . . . The essence of the Oedipal complex is the project of becoming God . . . it plainly exhibits infantile narcissism perverted by the flight from death."

In the same vein, Becker asserts: "The Oedipal project is the flight from passivity, from obliteration, from contingency: the child wants to conquer death by becoming the creator and sustainer of his own life."

Matters of the greatest significance certainly, but nothing to do with Freud, who surely did not envision the Oedipus complex as a coming to grips with the existential problems that his formulations assiduously avoided. Confronting death only by constructing it as an *instinct* needed to explain aggressive impulses, Freud firmly ignored the effects on the psyche of the uniquely human foreknowledge of the end of existence. Schopenhauer's remark that the problem of death stands at the beginning of every philosophy tells us more about the nature of human motivation than all of Freud's sexual theories. It is the awareness of the finite number of our days that awes, terrifies, and prods us into efforts that transcend the quotidian.

But Freud could imagine only a mechanical model for man with stasis as the goal and pleasure construed as the easing of physiological tension–a chilling vision that his enormous influence has helped to bring closer to reality. As for a theory of mind, it is represented chiefly in the conception of defense mechanisms: mind for Freud is the vehicle for denying or distorting instinctual aims. Uninterested in investigating the powers of reasoning, about which he has no theory at all, and lacking any positive conception of creativity, Freud treated all mental products essentially alike, as emanations of the unconscious. As such, they lack validity for the outside world: interpretation must take the place of discrimination. Art, says Philip Rieff, is retracted by Freud into neurosis, but the theory is far more encompassing, far more destructive: thought is retracted into maneuvers against the unconscious.

Unremitting conflict is the condition of mental life as posited by Freud–the id and superego forever at war with the ego, which, vaporously and metaphorically, eludes us. We know that the id represents our animal nature, the powerful forces of instinct, that the superego is the internalized voice of social exhortation and prohibition. But the ego is a center that will not hold, a slippery negotiator of the compromises between nature and society. Unable to conceptualize the seat of reason, Freud could assign to the ego nothing more than tactical maneuver–encouraging a view of the use of intellect as synonymous with manipulation. The process of this manipulation acting on unconscious motivation constitutes Freud's highly truncated theory of mental life. And motive is always base, discovered over and over again to exemplify his nihilistic vision of the "universal narcissism of mankind" in the service of animal nature.

Historically and logically, Rieff has pointed out, it is the imputation of variety that is connected with optimism. Theologians found God's creation good and beautiful in part because of its fascinating variety, a stimulus to both mind and spirit. But, grounded in Freudian hermeneutics, contemporary culture is omnivorously engaged in annihilating the intellectual discrimination through which the existence of variety is perceived. Dominant theories of literary criticism, adopting Freud's approach to content as no more than a code to be deciphered, go on to insist that pulp fiction, daily newspapers, rock video, clinical case studies, and imaginative literature belong on the same level; and arguments over university curricula increasingly reflect this view.

Art, for Freud primarily meaningful as a road to the unconscious, has in this century been connected neither with apprenticeship–and thus the acquisition of skills–nor with values or purposes beyond self–expression. Every man's unconscious is as good as his neighbor's, leading to the corollary that intellectual discrimination as to its product is unwarranted and oppressive. Indeed, the very word "discrimination" has been robbed of its meaning and made to resound negatively in our ears. Careful observation of distinctions is subversive of Freud's universal interpretations.

The cherished self–image underlying these interpretations is Freud's hubristic vision of himself as speaker of the unspeakable, truth–teller to self–deluding mankind. Classifying as "occult" any view that separated man from the animal kingdom, he was not able to comprehend either reason or genius, nor did he wish to do so. His aptitude was for the leveling of achievement, a *Weltanschauung* peculiarly appealing to the mass society that developed during his lifetime. Freud's sexual theory–the essence of democratic reductionism–provides a uniform system for decoding all behavior and mental productions through a starkly limited number of mechanisms.

Repression, the chief among these and thus basic to the system, is generally thought to be a purely psychological phenomenon. But, like all of Freudian theory, it derived from his nineteenth–century biogenetic vision of human evolution. Thus, in 1909 in a major statement to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, Freud declared:

We assume that there is no repression that does not have an organic core; this organic repression consists of the substitution of unpleasurable sensations for pleasurable ones. Probably man's detachment from the soil is one of the basic conditions for a neurosis; the olfactory sense is prone, as a consequence of this detachment, toward repression, since it has become useless.

C*ivilization and Its Discontents* (1930) links organic repression with early man's assumption of upright posture. The historical sequence as imagined by Freud assumes that primal man's sexual appetite was aroused principally by olfactory stimuli connected to the periodicity of menstruation; that is, to the time of estrus. With the evolutionary achievement of upright posture, Freud posits that the relationship between the sexes changed dramatically–continuous visual stimuli now replacing the intermittent olfactory ones that had previously governed man's sexual life. Freud's speculations as to the consequences of this change stress organic olfactory repression as the basis of shame and disgust, the drive toward cleanliness and "the deepest root of the sexual repression that marches with culture." Both his evolutionary saga and his theory of neurosis are built upon this conception of "organic repression consequent upon man's adoption of the erect posture and lowering in value of the sense of smell." And through these conjectures Freud once again asserts that all repression has its origins in sexual repression.

But Ernest Becker, crediting Freud with having no illusions about man's "basic creatureliness," nonetheless concludes that the dogma was incorrect: the sexual theory has proved to be wrong. "Consciousness of death is the primary repression, not sexuality," says Becker. "This is the repression on which culture is built, a repression unique to the self–conscious animal."

Freud's inability to deal with the consciousness of death is nowhere more evident than in the conception of a death instinct that emerged in his later writings. And Becker has brilliantly discussed the tortuous formulations that Freud produced to keep intact his earlier instinct theory. By holding that there was an instinctual urge toward death, as well as life, Freud could now explain violent human aggression, hate, and evil with a biological theory. Becker summarizes: "The death instinct represents the organism's desire to die, but the organism can save itself from its own impulsion toward death by redirecting it outward. The desire to die, then, is replaced by the desire to kill, and man defeats his own death instinct by killing others."

This ultimate fiction, in the Grimm's fairy tale world of Freud, transforms death from the primary human problem to a desired instinctual goal. Having substituted sexual fear for anxiety as to all the problems of mastery faced by developing human creatures, Freud now explicitly denied the meaning of the consciousness of death. Source of terror and of achievement, it is not, as Becker suggests, the primary repression: it is, as Schopenhauer said, the beginning of philosophy.

The use of our intellectual faculties, so denigrated in Freudian theory, finds its origins in the challenge of our brief lives. Searching for meaning in the face of death, man has accomplished amazing feats through the use of his intellect, has been capable of valuing his systems of law and justice, his ideas of virtue and the good life, above his individual existence.

But contemporary culture, Freudian in its basic assumptions about the nature of humanity, has altered expectations to confirm Freud's vision. Regarding sex and aggression as the fundamental human drives, imbued with the conviction of the universal narcissism of mankind, profoundly distrusting intellect except in its manipulative aspects, and viewing death as a technological issue: this is the Freudian man we have manufactured. Denying the meaning of death, Freud confined himself to the biological, sexual self and bequeathed a heritage of nihilism that is the basic intellectual mode of our time.

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