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DOOMED BY NATURE: THE INEVITABLE FAILURE OF OUR NATURALLY SELECTED FUNCTIONS

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PPP

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IN THEIR VERY THOUGHTFUL and stimulating replies, the three commentators foreground several topics crucial for both psychoanalysis and philosophical psychiatry. In my short response, I focus primarily on what the commentators believe to be the paper's main shortcomings. The first critique reads as follows: Freud never claimed that the *Homo sapiens* is a fundamentally sick animal, but in fact thought that normalcy is possible and that normal behavior need not be interpreted as neurotic, perverse or psychotic. The second is that current Darwinian psychiatry does not substantiate the view that *Homo sapiens* is essentially an ill animal, whatever Freud's position might be. Third and last, the proposal that all human beings are ill to the core seems to be more of a religious slogan than a scientifically useful description.

WHAT FREUD REALLY SAID

A transhistorical approach to Freud's work is far from simple, considering that it spans a period of over forty years and that it underwent considerable changes during that time. Not only

did Freud introduce some radically new concepts during that time, such as narcissism and the death drive. Also, he regularly changed his position on the aim of psychoanalytic therapy, the ontogenesis of anxiety, and the nature of human sexuality. That Freud sometimes saw homosexuality as an inborn drive did not keep him on other occasions from thinking that homosexual desire was a result of the repression or projection of an oedipal (heterosexual) drive. Examples like these show that any exegesis of Freud's writings inevitably has to deal with some tensions. Freud's work contains numerous apparent, as well as real, contradictions, so that it is no surprise at all that Katherine Morris can produce textual evidence "proving" that Freud never held the view I attribute to him. According to her, Freud thought that we are not all neurotics and that normalcy is possible.

I do not deny that several passages in Freud's work underscore the possibility of non-neurotic normalcy. Indeed, Freudian theory even describes processes—sublimation, the transformation from Id to Ego, the resolution of the oedipal complex, among others—that explain how human beings can escape neurosis and other mental disorders. But Freud's illustrations of these mechanisms or processes make clear that he could not conceive

of a nonpathogenic psychodynamics. Consider, for instance, how Freud emphasizes throughout his study of Leonardo da Vinci that Leonardo's sublimations make him extremely vulnerable to psychic exhaustion or "neurasthenia" (1910). Freud never tires of repeating that there is only a gradual difference between a neurotic patient and Leonardo da Vinci, the sublimating ("healthy") artist and scientist.

Morris (2005) is right, of course, in arguing that a gradual difference between normality and mental illness does not imply that there is no difference at all. Quantity should not be thought the opposite of quality, because small quantitative differences can transform an "articulation" into a "breach." To use Hegel's famous example, there is a continuum between 110° C and -10° C, but everybody knows that that water evaporates above 100° C and freezes below 0° C. Applied to mental disorders, quantitative differences in levels of testosterone and serotonin may lead to qualitative differences in behavior; in other words, categorical and dimensional approaches to mental illnesses are not mutually exclusive. Having established that, we now need to take a closer look at how Freud articulated the differences between seemingly normal individuals and the mentally ill.

Freud held that neurosis, psychosis, and perversion are caused by the interplay between instincts and defense mechanisms. Further, he thought that the pathogenic instincts were almost exclusively sexual. Now, although it is true that he sometimes recognized that the fear of death and the death drive are important factors for psychic life (Deeley 2005) and for the etiology of psychosis, more often than not he interpreted the fear of death as a symbolization of castration anxiety (Freud 1926). And although the death drive might account for numerous phenomena, its most instinctual expression has always been masochism (Freud 1924).

Masochism and other sexual instincts must be warded off because their unmodified gratification would be dangerous. However, the defenses against the sexual drives are far from innocent themselves: they cause neurosis because they produce more suffering than strictly necessary. "Nor-

mal individuals" and neurotics are not substantially different: they both have the same sexual instincts, and they both use the same defenses against those instincts, although these defenses are all equally inadequate in warding off the sexual dangers. "Freudian" slips do not merely resemble neurotic symptoms, they *are* neurotic symptoms, just as dreams are psychotic symptoms. Freud was well aware that the "normal individual" suffers less than the neurotic and the psychotic patient, but that never led him to revise his basic intuition that every defense against our innate sexual drives is inadequate. Freud would probably agree that "many of us can spend much of our life in contented fulfillment" (Deeley 2005, 340), but he would nevertheless still uphold the view that unnecessary suffering is inevitable for human beings.

One might object and say that sexuality as such is not pathogenic. Unaided by civilization, "human nature" would never have produced neurosis (Morris 2005). In the absence of (internalized) cultural restrictions on instinctual life, defense mechanisms such as repression would be redundant and the majority of the people could, and would, be healthy. This may be plausible, but it is not Freud's view. Freud believed that sexual drives are repressed when their gratification causes more pain than pleasure, which is to say that cultural taboos on sexuality are liable to increase the dangers of sexual activities. Be that as it may, Freud always insisted that there are more fundamental motives for the repression of our sexuality (Geyskens 2001), that, in the end, people repress their oedipal, sadistic, coprophilic tendencies for biological rather than for cultural reasons (Freud 1912, 1919). Human anatomy, the double beginning of human sexuality, and human bisexuality make our sexual instincts absolutely unsatisfiable. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud even suggests that the biological factors causing neurosis were likewise responsible for hominid speciation:

With the assumption of an erect posture by man and with the depreciation of his sense of smell, it was not only his anal erotism which threatened to fall victim to organic repression, but the whole of his sexuality; so that since this, the sexual function has been accom-

panied by a repugnance which cannot further be accounted for, and which prevents its complete satisfaction and forces it away from the sexual aim. (Freud 1930, 99)

Upright posture, human bisexuality, and other “typically human traits” all make it quite unlikely that our sexuality would be well-adapted to any environment whatsoever. What makes us human makes us mentally ill, regardless of the culture we are part of. Consequently, typically human activities should be interpreted first and foremost in psychiatric terms. It is interesting, in this respect, to note that both examples from psychoanalytic philosophy discussed by Hinshelwood originate in an analysis of dysfunctional phenomena (Hinshelwood 2005): Waddington’s natural ethics relied heavily on an investigation of pathological morals and Bion’s epistemology focused primarily on the rather dramatic failure of the alpha function in schizophrenic patients.

Psychoanalysts are convinced that the psychiatric clinic is the privileged birthplace of theories about human nature, and Freud even thought that Darwin’s theory of evolution lent credence to this conviction. In particular, he believed that evolutionary theory could explain why we are all ill to the core.

TAKING FREUD SERIOUSLY

Darwin relied on Crichton Browne’s observations about the Wakefield asylum to provide the solid foundation for his theory about the expression of the emotions (Darwin 1872/1998; Neve and Turner 1995). Still, even if Darwin also saw the psychiatric clinic as some kind of anthropological lab, he did not for all that hold the view that all human beings are mentally disordered by nature. Freud, in other words, had to develop his own Darwinian or evolutionary psychiatry, which he did, though unfortunately, more along Lamarckian and Haeckelian than Darwinian lines. This being the case, can neo-Darwinian theory provide a solid foundation for a Freudian philosophy?

To answer that question, we first have to define just how “Freudian” this philosophy has to be. In my opinion, such a philosophy would have to emphasize (1) the dysfunctional nature of *Homo sapiens* and (2) the psychodynamic origin

of this fundamental dysfunction. That is, a Freudian philosophy is Freudian enough if it holds that (1) we are all mad and (2) this unavoidable sickness is due to inappropriate solutions for intrapsychic conflicts. Whether or not these conflicts originate in sexual instincts is less important for the Freudian character of this philosophy. After all, Freud’s own definition of sexuality was broad enough to encompass nearly all human desires, attitudes, and activities, including love, curiosity, art, and even philosophy.

There are some evolutionary researchers who have studied unavoidable intrapsychic conflicts. MacLean’s triune brain hypothesis, for instance, can be seen as an attempt to explain our species’ vulnerability to mental disorders. Particularly in *Homo sapiens*, the neo-mammalian brain (neo-cortex) is not immune to being hijacked by the reptilian and paleo-mammalian brains (MacLean 1985). That said, it is also true that the triune brain hypothesis cannot be used as an evolutionary foundation for the Freudian project, if for no other reason than because MacLean’s model is inconsistent with more recent understandings of evolutionary change (Butler and Hodos 1996). The commentators (Deeley 2005; Morris 2005) correctly point out that the often-used genome lag model is likewise not fruitful to the articulation of a Freudian philosophy, because it implies that modern disorders were adaptations in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness and that they are still adaptive in any other environment sufficiently similar to the environment of evolutionary adaptedness.

In short, it is by no means easy to provide Freudian philosophy with an evolutionary foundation; still, I do not believe that it is completely impossible. Two potential topics of research can help to substantiate this belief. I already mentioned the first topic in my paper, where I sketch out the possibility that there is an essentially pathogenic interplay between metaphysical or existential problems and our naturally selected defenses. Our defenses may be triggered by metaphysical problems because these problems resemble “natural problems.” Freezing is adaptive when a predator is chasing you, but it is highly unlikely that it can help one to escape God’s

judgment, or mortality, or life's futility. However, because attacks by a predator and metaphysical problems are both experienced as situations of imminent doom, the freezing defense can be triggered in both cases (Moskowitz 2004); it is a very inappropriate defense against the metaphysical problems, because it creates more problems than it solves (Vieira 1972). In broad terms, this means that our evolved metaphysical nature can and will corrupt our evolved defenses.

Mithen's evolutionary archaeology provides a second point of departure for a Freudian philosophy. Mithen argues that the cultural "big bang" of the Middle/Upper Paleolithic transition (new types of artifacts, the production of art, the rise of religion) was caused by a fundamental redesign of the mind (Mithen 1996); *cognitive fluidity* is the name Mithen gives to the result of this redesign. Originally, the early hominid brain consisted of several domain-specific modules, all of which were the result of natural, sexual and social selection. Each of these modules was "encapsulated." Around the time of the Middle/Upper Paleolithic transition, however, some of the modules became applicable to problems that fell outside of their proper domain. Art, for instance, resulted from the mixture of a technical intelligence, a verbal intelligence, and the trace-decoding part of our natural history intelligence. Mithen describes cognitive fluidity as an adaptation, and he argues that it had tremendous advantages for hunting and social communication. He admits, however, that "transmodular creativity" or cognitive fluidity may have had some less advantageous and less adaptive consequences. Racism, he speculates, could be a side-effect of our (evolved) capacity to cross the boundaries of our (evolved) modules (Mithen 1996, 196). At the very least, racism can be understood as resulting from the use of natural history categories in a social context. Following this line of thought, it does not seem too far-fetched to argue that such misappropriations or "category mistakes" are inevitable side-effects of those adaptations that make us human. And it could be that some typically human mental disorders should be seen as just such category mistakes. Can one not argue, for instance, that all human sexuality is

intrinsically perverted because it had selective advantages to use sexuality as a solution for non-sexual problems? Although most of the time the "transmodular use" of sexuality will benefit the individual's inclusive fitness, less advantageous applications of our sexuality are unavoidable. John Money has argued something similar with regard to pedophilia, which he sees as the result of the misuse of our sexual "phylism"—his term for a phylogenetically acquired tendency—in a context of social contact and care. Such misuse is relatively common because of a functional proximity between sexual and social "phylisms" (Money 1997).

A DARWINIAN RELIGION?

Rychlak (1990) argues that a large part of psychoanalysis is profoundly idiographic and introspective, that psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the uniqueness of personality manifestation and that it bases its interpretations on the first person perspective. Conversely, most sciences are profoundly nomothetic and extraspective: they stick to a third-person perspective and construct abstractions or even "laws." Most psychoanalytic theorists have tried to bridge the gap between their idiographic discourse and other, more nomothetic discourses. They called this bridge *metapsychology*. Although, as I have argued, Freud's metapsychology is partially based on evolutionary theory, another part of it is inspired by literature, mythology, and metaphysics—consider those key concepts of psychoanalysis, the Oedipus complex and narcissism. Freud no doubt believed that psychoanalysis needed science to ensure its credibility, but he also believed that it needed myths as a heuristic framework. Sometimes this double cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory led to an awkward mixture of science and mythology, as in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where Freud took arguments from evolutionary theory, genetics (Weissman), metaphysics (Empedocles), and literature (Goethe) to justify the introduction of the death drive (Freud 1920).

Some deplore the confusion of science and myth, but Freud himself did not seem to bother. He even wrote that "[d]rive theory is our mythology" (Freud 1933, 95). Like many of his

contemporaries, Freud also believed that science was only possible when inspired by some general ideas that furnish a method and means of explanation. And these general ideas are the work of philosophers, writers, and religious thinkers, all of whom need a metaphysical scaffolding to conceive such ideas (Ellenberger 1970). So it can be no surprise that Freud's psychoanalytic metapsychology has a lot in common with religious and metaphysical systems, as Deeley notes. True, this may cause "a persistent ambiguity about the factual or scientific status of psychoanalytic theory itself" (Deeley 2005, XX), but this ambiguity might just be the very reason why a philosophical system can emerge from psychoanalytic theory. The claim that all humans are ill to the core smacks of religion and theology. But Freud's thesis is founded on a psychoanalytic account that provides the proximate causes for *Homo sapiens*' dysfunctional nature, whereas evolutionary theory gives the ultimate causes of the same. As much as Freud's thesis may sound like a religious slogan (*Doomed by Nature*), it is in fact a theory-laden description. I have tried to argue that this description can be used as an heuristic device for philosophical anthropology, that it provides a starting point for a philosophical theory of human nature in which different pathological variants are understood or interpreted as intrinsic possibilities of human existence.

Freud's choice to link his metapsychology to evolutionary theory was probably determined by historical as well as by other, extra-theoretical factors, such as the fact that Darwinian ideas played an overwhelming role in the cultural and scientific life of the early twentieth century (Ellenberger 1970). But there is also no lack of good; intra-theoretical reasons for linking Freud's philosophical thesis to evolutionary theory. First, a naïve interpretation of evolutionary theory sees all organisms as being extremely fit, so that Darwin's widely accepted theory appears to contradict Freud's claim that all human beings are to some degree mentally disordered. If you can argue that this apparent enemy is in fact on your side—or at least that Darwinism does not exclude the feasibility of your project—you gain thereby both scientific and philosophical credi-

bility. Second, a philosophical anthropology should never ignore the *nature* in "human nature"; that is, every philosophical account of what it means to be human has to acknowledge the biological forces that drive us. And because "nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution" (Dobzansky 1973, 125), Darwinism should be one of the privileged scientific sources for philosophical anthropology. Simpson may have overstated his case when he wrote: "The question 'What is man?' is probably the most profound that can be asked by man. It has always been central to any system of philosophy or of theology. The point I want to make now is that all attempts to answer that question before 1859 are worthless and that we will be better off if we ignore them completely" (Simpson 1966, 152). But I do think that any philosophical anthropology that ignores Darwinism is seriously flawed.

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