

REFLECTIONS ON  
ERNEST JONES' BIOGRAPHY OF FREUD<sup>1</sup>

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It would have been impossible for Freud to have found a better Boswell to write his life than Ernest Jones. Here is an author who served his friend with unstinted devotion, morally and materially, intellectually and financially, for half a lifetime! A friend who did not hesitate to risk his own life by flying straight into the hands of the Nazis in Vienna in 1938, in order to rescue his old and dying master.

Ernest Jones' heroic directness succeeded for he brought Freud safely back to England, not only with his whole family, but with many of his chief supporting analysts; nor was he satisfied with this terrific struggle, for after establishing Freud and his wife in a beautiful, well cared for home, Jones found posts for Freud's supporters, at a most difficult time, just before the outbreak of the 1939 War, against unbelievable restrictions, and professional opposition.

FREUD'S CONTRIBUTION

It is difficult to criticize such a man for presenting his friend in a one-sided manner. What other manner could Jones have used when his whole existence was concentrated on the single figure of Freud, and his own highly successful career based on that iron-rigid cage known as psychoanalysis? Factually this is a faultless history of Freud, but the significance of its facts sometimes seems to have escaped the author and his master, although the main features of both the man and his work stand out as unmistakably as the Druid slabs of Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain.

Yet we may well ask ourselves, as many have asked themselves of these great stones—Where did they come from? What were they used for? And what do Freud's many and diverse theories actually contribute towards the uncertain future of mankind?

What will posterity have to say? What do the social anthropologists now already say, of Freud's discoveries? Will posterity dismiss Freud himself, as Colin Wilson, a young modern thinker, has lately dismissed him, as "a thin materialistic ghost of the Victorian age?" Or may the uncertain future hold Freud to have been the most dyn-

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest Jones. *The life and work of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Basic Books, 1953-1957. 3 vols.

amic mind of the twentieth century, and therefore directly responsible for some of its greatest catastrophes?

There is no question that Freud had a wonderful writer's outfit; a flashing wit springs from his pages, and again and again the delighted reader is stirred by the persuasive and lucid ease of his matchless style. Freud was no great speaker; his thought life required isolation. Nor was he a man who could enter easily into personal contacts; but he was very certainly a great writer. For eighty-two years, sixteen-and-a-half writing under the harrow of physical agony, this questing, inexhaustible, creative mind of Freud worked on, undemoralized by suffering, undefeated by the two world wars, both of which fell heaviest upon the city in which, although he hated it, Freud elected to live a lifetime. It is therefore hard to write critically unbiased by the awe and pity roused by reading this last heroic epoch of his life. Yet his personal self-control and courage must not dazzle us when we try to seize the permanent values of Freud's speculative philosophy. It may well be that what Adler called Freud's "sexual myth" will slip into a far less exclusive place, his always improbable theory of infantile eroticism may be entirely blotted out, the freeing of the libido may be considered of less importance than what it is freed for. The Oedipus complex, already tottering on its throne, may easily be replaced by the factual experience that children of either sex naturally first choose the mother as the center of their lives, while often turning to the father instead, should they feel too seriously dethroned by the birth of another child. Adler's "masculine protest" may take priority in importance over Freud's "castration complex," since the masculine protest applies more universally to both sexes, and can be seen to rise from a sense of inferiority not limited to any one organ, but common to all children while feeling their helplessness in a grown-up world. An inferiority sense often explains what a sex theory merely complicates.

Nor perhaps need we seek to confine ourselves to the blank wall of a death wish in a world that is fast learning to educate its inhabitants towards social interest by the break-up of ego-centricity.

The time context of Freud must never be forgotten. The mould of his mind was formed in a materialistic age, in which all scientists alike accepted negation of anything to which they could not apply causal thinking. Adler, fourteen years younger than Freud, escaped this walled-in limitation. He had no absolutes to maintain; and he was by nature unsacerdotal. He taught his followers to speak of Individual Psychology as the "lesser error." Nor did he attempt to systemize

his psychology, since he set no limits to the vastness of thought, or to the power of man to change himself by personal choice. Adler believed, against the sharp repudiation of Freud, in the teleological approach, and in the pursuit of a goal—never wholly obtainable, but always to be traveled towards, based on *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.

#### FREUD, THE MAN

“Why should I love my neighbour?” Freud demanded. Nor can we be surprised that a man who asked this question kept a list of the men he hated; and required in addition to a belief in “defensive mechanisms” a “bodyguard” of seven skilled and devoted psychoanalysts wedded to him with golden rings, in order to help him keep watch over the inviolability of his discoveries. Breuer, Fliess, Adler, Stekel, Jung, Ranke and Firenze broke the bars of the Freudian cage; and were permanently discarded. Even the faithful Jones found it hard work to hold on to a few little innocent ewe lambs of his own.

Freud was a man of austere and impeccable self-control. He was loved by his family, and prized by his followers, but he was not widely loved; and he avoided social contacts. Nor had he a desire to be loved except as he was obeyed and followed. Through all three of the Jones volumes we are conscious of Freud's above-below attitude so strikingly exemplified by the symbol of the couch on which his patients must lie while he remained invisibly behind and above them. “Depth psychology” was always, and is still held to be beyond the power of any mind untrained in didactic psychology to understand. Not for Freud or for any of his followers is Adler's belief that “a truth must be true for all men, and for all time, and therefore can be understood by all.”

Freud's attitude towards laboratory work is very illuminating. He was afraid to set himself free from it, and in his training period always finding it a fretting curb and restraint. So when at last he could make himself independent of its findings, he expressed great relief in this new freedom. He nearly lost his growing reputation in Vienna over his exploitation of cocaine as a harmless and useful pain killer. Having made the important discovery of its actual use in eye surgery without tests or checks other than those his fertile brain provided for itself from his case material, he endangered both his friends and his patients.

Freud became, what he was always in essence, a great speculative philosopher. After his several and prolonged early struggles, fame and

fortune alike smiled upon him. His marriage was ideal. He had good and devoted children. He had ample means, and world-wide recognition. He was surrounded, and worked for at a distance by his faithful bodyguard, and a ring of obedient patients. Yet no good fortune or happy human relationship shook his determined pessimism.

#### ADLER, THE CONTRAST

What a contrast to his chief opponent Adler! Adler had never been spoiled or over-prized. He never had ample means, or influential friends. He made his own way without help. He was a man who thrived on risk and independence. Against the organized hatred of the psychoanalytical group Adler won his way step by step through his development of Individual Psychology; until he was accepted in Vienna as a genius in child education; and as the foremost practicing psychiatrist in the world. Adler left Vienna which he loved next to his own family, directly the freedom of his educational work was threatened by the rise of the Nazis, and re-settled in the U. S. A. Learning the English language at sixty, he gave his first lecture in this strange tongue three weeks after he landed for his first visit. It might be said of Freud as it was said of the most despondent of English philosophers, Hobbes: "Axiom—fear; method—logic; conclusion—despotism." And of Adler: "Axiom—courage; method—exploration; conclusion—freedom."

It is perhaps natural that Ernest Jones should underestimate the part played by Adler in the early years of psychoanalysis in Vienna, where Adler was its leading speaker and protagonist; but it is childish to overlook altogether the international weight and value of Adler's further career as the founder of Individual Psychology. Nor does Ernest Jones do his old friend a service when he quotes in his last volume what Freud wrote to Arnold Zweig on the death of Adler. Zweig, who knew and greatly admired both men, wrote that he was deeply moved and touched to hear of the sudden death of Adler at Aberdeen. Freud—unbelievably if one were not told it by so faithful a biographer—replied: "I don't understand your sympathy for Adler. For a Jew boy out of a Viennese suburb a death in Aberdeen is an unheard-of career in itself. The world really rewarded him richly for his service in having contradicted psychoanalysis."

Yet for many years, perhaps for all these years it must never be forgotten how much each of these great men contributed to each other. What could the science of psychology have been for Adler or any other

modern psychologist without Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, the first real light thrown into the "not yet understood" realm of man's mind? What better test than Freud's "free association" can be used to expose the involuntary stepping stones of thought just—but only just—beneath the surface of speech? For many years they worked together unmasking the buried life of man.

Freud and Adler shared the same love of truth, the same deep sense of responsibility for the releasing of man's powers, the same unshakeable will power, the same penetrating sardonic humor. They were the best guessers of that "glory, jest, and riddle of the world"—mankind. They were subtle in the same way, and often generous in the same way; and neither, while going their separate ways, seems ever to have got the other out of his mind. Freud was the founder of the new system of psychoanalysis; but it was Adler who broke open the system and, freeing "the player behind the instrument," led the spirit of man forward towards the goal of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.