

# THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

Apr '13

*Philosophy is Everybody's Business*

Nº 715



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## MEDICINE AND MORALS

In 1936, Mortimer Adler delivered a series of lectures at the Institute for Psychoanalysis in Chicago. These lectures, plus 120 pages of copious notes, were subsequently published in a book entitled, *What Man Has Made of Man: A Study of the Consequences of Platonism and Positivism in Psychology*.

I am pleased to report that this important work has been republished under the title, *Platonism and Positivism in Psychology* by Rutgers University. The book carries a new introduction by Dr. James R. Weiss, President of the North Carolina Psychoanalytic Association, Professor of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychosomatic Medicine at the University of North Carolina. Here is an excerpt of what he says:

Since its inception as a natural science, psychologists have had disagreements as to psychology's proper subject matter, and today, they seem to be no closer to a resolution. Dr. Adler zeroes in on the heart of the problem maintaining that psychology is a specific social science and also a branch of philosophical knowledge.

While these two fields are related to each other, there must be a distinction in order to prevent and supplant the damaging "philosophizing" that psychologists employ to portray their research findings. Dr. Adler also analyzes the contribution of psychoanalysis by setting it apart from Freud's meta-psychology by pointing out that it is a deficient representation of classical philosophical views. In order to assess our times and amend psychology's deviations, we must consider what man has made of man.

Dr. Adler also shows that the nexus of psychology in our modern culture to errors in modern philosophy results in how man views his own nature and has a tacit effect on the determination of our moral, political, and economic doctrines. This work offers a powerful analysis for philosophers, psychologists, psychoanalysts, and sociologists.

Quoting from Dr. Adler's preface, the central issue of this book is "[that] the relation of science and philosophy, is the stumbling block of modern times," and from the epilogue, "The view which one takes of human nature determines how one lives as a man, alone and with others. The modern view of man, produced by the divorce of psychology from philosophy and its wedding to science, brings man to a lower state than he fell to from grace."

***You can now get a searchable pdf copy of the original book *What Man Has Made Of Man* for a \$10 donation.***

*Max Weismann*

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What follows is an excerpt from those lectures:

PSYCHOANALYSIS AS PRACTICAL PSYCHOLOGY:  
MEDICINE AND MORALS

1. I wish to consider psychoanalysis as practical for two reasons: first, to make the point that the genetics has no practical significance, whereas the topography and dynamics are significant in psychoanalytic therapy and morals; and second, to show the correlation between Freudian and Aristotelian ethics, a correlation which could occur only through their sharing the same analysis of man's nature. To the extent that the Freudian analysis is inadequate, the ethics will be so also.

2. The end of ordinary medical therapy is the health of the body, considered with respect to the functioning of its various organs. The end of psychoanalytic therapy is health in a more general sense, i.e., the health of the whole man, of body and soul together. Health in this sense is what Aristotle means by happiness: an activity of man in accordance with the perfection of all parts of his nature. The end of the psychoanalyst as a practitioner is the same as the end of the moralist as a teacher. Both are practical psychologists. They use psychological knowledge for the sake of making men happy, so far as one man can help another to become happy. [1]

3. In general we can make a translation between Aristotelian and Freudian ethics. I shall briefly indicate it as follows:

a. The moral virtues—the socialized id, i.e., the id as it is governed by the ego and super-ego. [2] (Here there is an important difference. The moral virtues are the passions and social actions moderated by reason in the light of knowledge. The id is socialized by the ego and super ego merely in the direction of conformity to the prevailing conventions or customs of the tribe.)

b. The intellectual virtues—insight or self-understanding. (Here also there is a difference. The Freudian does not understand the intellectual virtues because his psychological analysis is inadequate with respect to the intellect and the cognitive process. He does not know what it means to say that the good of the intellect is the truth. He does not fully admit, [3] because of his genetic superstitions, that the ego (reason) is the measure of goodness in the id, as reality in turn is the measure of goodness in the ego.)

c. The aim of psychoanalysis: to cure mental disorder, that is, to reduce the conflict in the psyche between ego and id; not to destroy the id, but by relieving repression to make a man understand himself, and through understanding his desires to adjust them to reality,

which is another way of saying, to make a man reasonable; to sublimate the libido so far as this is conformable to a proper satisfaction of the vegetative needs.

d. The aim of morality: to reduce the conflict between reason and the passions; not to destroy the passions, but to make them participate in reason through submitting to prudent government; to subordinate the sensitive appetite to the intellectual appetite; so to order all the goods desired by man that he is able to achieve all of them in a proper measure and in a proper subordination of lesser to greater goods.

e. Both the psychoanalyst and the moralist recognize the same basic difficulty in human life: the conflict or disorder in the soul due to the imperfect rule of the passions by reason, either because of the weakness of reason or because of the strength of the passions. The difference between them is with respect to what they do about this difficulty. The moralist appeals directly to reason; he hopes by giving the reason the knowledge it needs, to strengthen it; but he knows that this is not enough, that the virtues are habits, and that the virtues cannot be simply taught as geometry is. The sound moralist knows that his analysis of what a good man is does not enable him to make men good. Aristotle said that it was almost impossible to teach ethics to young men because of their subjection to the passions. The psychoanalyst seems to recognize this difficulty, and so approaches the problem, not from the side of reason but from the side of the passions. He tries to relieve the pressure of the passions; he tries to help reason without using it directly. And he knows, when he is honest, that he cannot succeed any more than the moralist in making men good; and ultimately for the same reason. His knowledge is not sufficient. He does not know how.

f. Yet the moralist succeeds better than the psychoanalyst to the extent that the psychoanalyst proceeds as if the goodness of a man did not depend essentially upon the cultivation of his reason.

(1) Freud's criticism of hypnosis as therapy was that it only cured the symptoms of hysteria and did not cure the disease. It removed the symptoms by a trick without attacking their causes.

(2) My criticism of psychoanalysis as therapy is similar. It only relieves or alters one of the conditions of the moral problem. By an extraordinary trick,—much more ingenious and extraordinary than hypnosis,—it influences the passions which are involved in the

disorder of the soul. But this is negative. So is the cure of repression. The problem is fully solved only if the individual acquires sound moral principles and then is able to form habits and direct his life according to these principles by the rule of reason.

(3) To the extent, then, that the psychoanalyst is not competent as a moralist,—to the extent that his philosophy is incomplete or erroneous,—he cannot achieve the end he sets himself: to make men happy. At best, he can give them a little help by a kind of purgation of the passions through understanding them objectively. (In other words, psychoanalysis works in the same way that art, particularly the drama, does. It makes a man a spectator of his own passions by a process of identification, transference, etc.)

(4) What a good friend who is a wise man and a competent moralist can do in some cases, the psychoanalyst who is a wise man and a competent moralist can do in other cases. The difference in the cases is the difference between the normal and the neurotic, a difference in the degree to which the passions are disordered and reason is weak.

g. Unfortunately, the psychoanalyst is seldom a wise man and a competent moralist, because he is seldom if ever a philosopher. The Freudian conception of a good man as a complete adult is inadequate because all that this ideal involves is normal biological functioning, primarily on the vegetative and social level. The crucial error in his moral insight arises from his crucial error in psychology: his failure to understand the nature of intellect and will. (As a result of his analysis of the super-ego the Freudian thinks that morality is nothing more than conformity to the prevailing mores. He does not recognize that moral principles are based upon speculative truths, that they hold for all men, that they are not relative and changing.)

## CONCLUSIONS

1. I have tried to show positively that psychoanalysis has a place in the European tradition, both among the sciences and in relation to philosophy. It is due to the great genius of Freud in rediscovering man as the subject-matter of psychology that the vitality, and significance of the ancient tradition has been at last infused into psychology as a scientific enterprise.

2. But psychoanalysts do not understand their place in this tradi-

tion, and as a result they do not understand their own doctrine. This may account for their failure to make an intelligible presentation of it to those who are not psychoanalysts and who employ critical standards to judge what is presented.

a. Psychoanalysts fail to understand what part of their contribution is scientific, and what part of their doctrine is philosophical.

b. They do not understand the relation between the theoretical and the practical aspects of their undertaking.

c. These failures of understanding may account for the failure so far of any psychoanalyst to make a clear, systematic statement of psychoanalysis in terms of its basic concepts, its principles, its evidences, its facts. [4]


3. To what are these failures of understanding due? To lack of philosophical training, on the one hand; and to the influence of the 19th century,—its bad philosophy, its prejudices and superstitions,—on the other. The only cure that I know of for the influence of the 19th century is education in the European tradition which was almost completely obscured in that century.

4. But education is not enough. To suppose that it is to make the error of assuming that men, psychoanalysts among them, are completely rational and are capable of being moved by the truth. Prejudices are like passions. May I borrow the technique of the psychoanalyst for a moment, and analyze his prejudices in the hope that he may get the insight that will work as a cure.

a. If you were to psychoanalyze me,—and you will probably start as soon as I leave the room,—you would say that I have the prejudices and the passions of an anal-erotic. I am trying to be completely submissive to objective truth and order. I am masochistic toward reason.

b. If I were to psychoanalyze psychoanalysts, I would say that as a group they have the prejudices and passions of the narcissist. They are trying to be original; they are trying to swallow everything in psychoanalysis. To be original in this way, they must ignore their sources in the European tradition, and they must be sadistic toward order and reason. In other words, psychoanalysts commit the sin of pride. They are unwilling to recognize their place in the great intellectual tradition of western Europe, and to

make what contribution they can to its science and wisdom, however slight that may be.

c. I have added this little psychoanalytical ending for the sake of warning you that you cannot dismiss what I have said in these lectures by psychoanalyzing me. That defense can be used against you as readily as against me. Psychoanalysis is irrelevant to the merits of any intellectual position, the truths of science and philosophy, resting on evidence and demonstration, are not challenged by the ad hominem of calling their proponents narcissists or analerotics. A man becomes an authority by speaking the truth; the truth does not rest on the authority of its human source and is thus unaffected by states of personality. 

## NOTES

1. The essential difference in aim between the moralist and the psychotherapist is that the former is primarily concerned with positive training, the latter with the elimination of defects. Their difference is analogous to that between preventive medicine and surgery.
2. This translation could be carried out in great detail by comparing the Freudian account of the genesis of neurosis with the Thomistic account of unhappiness in terms of sin and vice, especially the relation of capital to superficial sins which corresponds to the relation between complex and symptom in the Freudian analysis.
3. Yet, on the question of truth, Freud is opposed to skepticism and relativism, as on the question of the contribution of the intellect, he is opposed to materialism. Vd. New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, New York, 1933: pp. 240 ff.
4. Vd. the not quite successful attempt made for psychoanalysis by W. Healy, A. F. Bronner and A. M. Bowers, The Structure and Meaning of Psychoanalysis, New York, 1930.

*[We welcome your comments, questions, or suggestions.](#)*

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## THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

Is published weekly for its members by the

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE GREAT IDEAS

Founded in 1990 by Mortimer J. Adler & Max Weismann

Max Weismann, Publisher and Editor

Ken Dzuga, Senior Fellow and Archivist

A not-for-profit (501)(c)(3) educational organization.  
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