

CONFLICTING INSTINCTS IN FREUD'S *BEYOND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE*

Preeti Puri

Lecturer in English
Lovely Professional University
&
Research Scholar,
Himachal Pradesh University,
Shimla

Abstract

Freud the 'Copernicus' of psychology, has a crowning impact on how we think. His theories proposed a new insight into childhood, family relations, civilization and religion. A modest attempt is being made in this article to present Freud as a theorizer, who was attracted to dualistic explanations. He assumed there are two sets of instincts which guide all human activities. The instincts of self preservation or Eros connected to 'ego', and sexual instincts connected to 'libido'.

Keywords:- Consciousness, Ego, Id, Instinct, Libido, Pleasure.

Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure principle* is illuminating, stimulating, but at the same time speculative. The dauntlessness of his thinking reaches its zenith in this essay. In this thought provoking essay, he formulated a 'meta- psychological' approach to decode the mental process. He included economic factor (the dualism of pleasure- displeasure mechanism), in addition to topographical and dynamic factors.

He broached pleasure principle is the dominant mental drive. The mental events become active due to unpleasurable tension, and work towards lowering of that tension, which ultimately leads in the avoidance of unpleasure. An increase in the quantity of excitation leads to unpleasure, and diminution of the same leads to pleasure in a given period of time. Freud felt that one cannot remain indifferent to G. T. Fechner's view about pleasure and unpleasure and quoted, Fechner's hypothesis that "every psycho- physical movement crossing the threshold of consciousness is attended by pleasure, in proportion as, beyond a certain limit, it approximates to complete stability, and is attended by unpleasure in proportion as, beyond a certain limit, it deviates from complete stability" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* : 4).

However universal experience stands contradictory to the statement 'pleasure principle is the dominant mental drive.' For instance, reality principle replaces the pleasure principle, when ego paves an indirect road to attain pleasure either by postponing satisfaction or by building a temporary toleration for unpleasure. Thus the task of the psychic apparatus is thus no longer direct detension but compromise.

Even Freud made a candid confession, that unpleasant traumatic experiences pose a threat to the mastery of pleasure principle. It is a cliché belief that traumatic neurosis is the result of 'mechanical concussions' like railway disasters and war, but Freud put forth a novel hypothesis for traumatic neurosis. Human beings, like other organisms, have to preserve a state

of equilibrium. The nervous system in human beings facilitates to maintain the same, either by abolishing stimuli, or by reducing stimuli. Freud's 'meta- psychology' is based on the assumption that consciousness lies in the cerebral cortex. It receives excitations from the external world, and the feelings of pleasure and unpleasure from the mental apparatus. The outermost layer of the cortical layer to a certain degree becomes inorganic, and thwarts the energies of the external world to enter into the next underlying layer with their entire intensity. In the case of trauma, the excitations received from the external world are so powerful that they break through the protective shield.

At this juncture mind sets an anticathexis on a grand scale. Freud, the convinced dualist, has put forth two types of cathexis a) freely flowing cathexis pressing on toward discharge b) quiescent cathexis. The additional inflow of energy is converted into inactive cathexis i.e it is bound psychically. Fright arises when one is not prepared for anxiety. It includes hypercathexis of the systems which are the first to receive the stimulus. Due to the low cathexis of the system, the binding function fails which results of the breach in the protective shield.

Catherine Malabou opined, 'If there is something beyond the pleasure principle, it can only be a certain category or concept of time. The moment of time that Freud is looking for beyond the pleasure principle appears to be the very first, the earliest, the most original moment. This moment precedes the emergence of life, or of what Freud calls the living substance. Consequently, it precedes also the emergence of death . . . The very first moment is not the beginning but comes just before the beginning of life and death. It is the last stage of matter before it becomes animate. The very first moment is the last moment of inorganic matter' (78-85).

The enigmatic mastery of the pleasure principle can be dismantled by 'the time of materiality' and in Freud's terminology 'the compulsion to repeat' which is 'prior to the time of pleasure'. Freud posited, there is an 'organic compulsion to repeat' due to conservative instincts, i.e. 'an instinct is a compulsion inherent in organic life to restore an earlier stage of things, which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* : 60). Freud named it as the death instinct and William V. Silverberg stated that death instinct is 'analogues to the so-called "law of maximum entropy" in physics' (530-532). Freud believed "the goal of all life is death", inanimate existed before what is living, and everything dies for internal reasons, and becomes inorganic once again. The attributes of life were at first evoked in inanimate matter, and thus the first instinct came into being i.e. the instinct to return to the inanimate state.

The 'compulsion to repeat' creates ego displeasure, as it brings in the forefront the repressed instinctual impulses, and at times past experience which in no case provides pleasure or satisfaction to the repressed instinctual impulses. For instance, dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses bring the patient 'back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* : 13). The same holds true for the dreams that bring back to memory the psychical traumas of childhood. For instance, when the wishes of infantile sexual life cannot cope up with reality, it leaves a permanent scar in the form of inferiority complex in an individual. Such painful experiences are recalled by the neurotics under the compulsion to repeat.

It was easy for a living substance to die, but taciturnly external influences altered the original course of life. These external influences framed a roundabout way for the living substance to reach its ultimate goal 'death'. Freud termed them as sexual or life instincts. Thus an individual's life is structured by the dual rhythm of life drives and death drives. The ego

instincts proceed towards ‘Thanatos’ or death drive which brings self- destruction, repetition, aggression and compulsion , while sexual instincts embark towards ‘Eros’ or life drive which produces creativity, harmony, sexual connection, reproduction and self- preservation.

The sexual instincts that are active in each cell take other cells as their object. They strive to neutralize the death instincts in those cells to preserve their life. Other cells do same for them, while others sacrifice themselves for the accomplishment of this libidinal function. Thus germ cells never die. They are immortal as compared to soma because under well disposed conditions some of the germ cells separate themselves from the organism as whole. The sexual instincts are highly conservative as they are not influenced by the external factors and preserve live comparatively for a long period.

Freud broached there is always an opposition between life and death instincts. One group of instincts, he writes in chapter 5, “rushes forward” inorganic matter toward life (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* : 41). The other group seeks “to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has . . . abandoned” (36). They seek to return to inanimate matter (38). This “earlier state of things” “must then be an old state of things, an initial form which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return . . . If we are to take as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons- becomes inorganic once again- then we shall be compelled to say that ‘the aim of all life is death’ and, looking backwards, that ‘inanimate things existed before living ones’” (38).

Freud posited that both orders of instinct came into being simultaneously with the beginning of the individual. William V. Silverberg expressed this time as ‘the moment of the union of the spermatoozn with the ovum, therefore the conflict itself is as ancient as either as group of instincts’ (530- 532). A child attains maturity when he attains either complete or partial reconciliation of these two conflicting group of instincts. Thus maturity is the ability and willingness to renounce on in favour of the other as the occasion demands. The moment one fails to practice this art, he is viz- a viz with fright which Freud described as traumatic neuroses.

William V. Silverberg stated an adult ‘cannot become mature because (1) he fears meeting the situations where mature renunciation will be called for and hence tends to avoid such situations (he is wedded to death instincts and denies that which might force him to renounce them – the sex instincts); (2) b) he develops anxiety as a defense against such a possible shock, anxiety acting as a preparative which will lessen the force of the shock’ (530-532).

At the culmination of the paper one can easily figure out that Freud’s theory of drives is marked by dualism. He divided the conflict of life in two opposing forces or two antagonistic terms i.e. death drive and life drive wherein ‘one group of instincts rushes forward, to reach the final goal of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* : 68). In conclusion, I would like to insist that what goes beyond the pleasure principle is neither life nor death, but their very similarity.

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