

Book Reviews

A HISTORY OF AGGRESSION IN FREUD: Paul E. Stepansky. New York: International Universities Press, 1982.

Stepansky's history traces what seems to be *all* of Freud's thinking about aggression and its role in the neuroses. He begins with Freud's earliest clinical investigations of hysteria (Chapter 2), followed by a presentation of the contrasting, qualitative shift in Freud's thinking signaled by the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Chapter 3). Next, Stepansky highlights the emergence of a new strand of Freudian aggression (not generally acknowledged) discovered in the dream analysis and applied in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (Chapter 4). Then he shows the reasons for the growing disagreement between Freud and Adler regarding the primary or secondary nature of aggression and the importance of the drives, and draws attention to a situation in which these theoretical issues were confounded with extra-scientific institutional matters. Finally, the impact of war on Freud's character and thought and the development of dual drive theory are elaborated (Chapter 6). In this way Stepansky's formal theoretical understanding and historical perspective demarcate the various stages in the evolution of Freud's thought. In addition, the book contains two important chapters (1 and 7) in which metapsychological terms such as entropy, Eros, and Thanatos are criticized, with the backing of a substantial review of the literature.

Aggression explicitly appears as a concept when Freud attempts to understand why some people become hysteric and others obsessive. Clinical data and a developmental analysis indicated that hysteria is related to a genital physical sexual experience *imposed* on a child, in which the child remained *passive*. The result was sex, unpleasure, and shock, and in later life, hysteria. Passivity—identified with being female, accounted for the fact that

most hysterics were women. On the other hand, male children who are *actively* aggressively sexual find it pleasurable and feel guilt only in retrospect. Disguised self-attack then takes the form of obsessive ruminations. Subsequently, Freud's clinical data showed that the male obsessives had all reported a passive seduction by an older woman, which had preceded their active, aggressive (lustful) sexual experience in which they had been doing to another what had been done to them. Thus, both the hysterics and the obsessives had the same early passive seduction. What accounted for the choice of neurosis? Was it that males, though experiencing an imposed passive role, identified with the aggressive, active seducer, thereby developing the obsessive symptom? Or, moving away from an explanation based only on passive and active forms of aggression, was the developmental timing of the seduction important? Would a preverbal seduction lead to somatic conversion (hysteria), a seduction between the ages 4-8 to a translation into words (obsession), and one between 10-14 to disbelief and projection (paranoia)? The developmental hypothesis held that these childhood experiences were not traumatic in and of themselves. Rather, they were impressions of experiences which were repressed and dormant until adolescence, at which time they were reawakened, reinterpreted and once again repressed. It was at this point that pathology resulted. Freud never solved this problem.

The abandonment of the seduction theory was heralded by the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The postulate that mental life involved universal fantasies, and the hope that the dream would serve as a "normal" analog to pathological processes, shifted Freud's "evidential medium" from the developmental timing of real events to the dream pattern. First, Freud showed analogies between neurotic symptom formation and the dreamwork, such as condensation, compromise, and the co-existence of contradiction. Borrowing further from his understanding of hysteria, he concluded that if an unconscious wish from infancy, in a state of repression, were transferred to a normal train of thought, the mechanisms of the dreamwork would be brought into play. Thus, the study of hysteria with its discovery of the importance of the actuating wish clarified Freud's understanding of the dream. Next, he applied his understanding of dreams, the idea of the elemental necessity of wish fulfillment, to the problem of symptoms. The dream pattern became the key to understanding hysteria.

Stepansky points out, however, that the theory of hysteria had been able to do more than simply pinpoint the developmental origins of the wish. The theory had ascribed to the wishes a particular nature. Quite specifically, they were sexual wishes from infancy which had undergone repression and were activated in later life. Freud was unwilling and actively refused to commit himself to this final clinical analogy, apparently to leave the door open to non-sexual forms of aggression. As Stepansky puts it, Freud's desire to "leave it an open question" was overdetermined. It is only in the section on the "Material and Sources of Dreams" that Freud cites clinical evidence for the explicit and significant role of aggression.

In the section on typical dreams, Freud discusses dreams involving the "death of persons of whom the dreamer is fond," most often parents and siblings. These dreams were interpreted by Freud as an expression of an active childhood wish that the person die. And, although the child's wish for someone to die is in the sense of "go away," it does denote an intense hostility which is quite genuine. By 1916, in the *Introductory Lectures*, Freud was willing to go beyond the Oedipal parents and the pure egoism of sibling rivalry. "All censored dream wishes . . . were manifestations of 'an unbridled and ruthless egoism.'" It was just this type of asocial egoism that Freud had never failed to come upon in the death wishes of his female patients.

Attention to the death wish brought about a new comprehension of hostility as distinct from sexuality. In addition, with the postulation of the Oedipal Complex as universal, the child's aggressive disposition was no longer thought to be prematurely aroused, but was now considered to be a phylogenetic inheritance. In clear contrast to his discussions of hysteria, Freud wrote: "It is not the father who seduces the child, but the child in 'wishing' to possess the mother, who desires the death of the father."

These two trends of aggression (zonal and non-sexual cruelty impulse) distinguish *Three Essays On the Theory Of Sexuality* from *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. The former develops the idea of sadism as a developmental admixture of erogenous (anal) sexual pleasure and aggression in the form of anal sadism (retention and expulsion of the feces). The latter elaborates the category of an adult type of hostility discovered in relation to the joke, and traceable to the cruelty impulse discovered in the death wish. The source of the impulse is the child's primordial egoistic disposition

combined with the instinct for mastery and the absence of pity (which only develops later).

Stepansky points out that although Freud had been experimenting with the idea of aggression as an instinct in its own right, he refused to give aggression the formal status of an instinct. He remained committed to aggression as a component of sexuality. This disavowal, says Stepansky, results from both intellectual commitments and cultural imperatives dictated by the emergence of an organized psychoanalytic movement. Freud hoped to explain all with the libido theory "from the simplest actual neurosis to the most severe alienation of personality." Secondly, psychoanalysis had come to be known by its conceptions of sexuality, conflict, and defense. The public had taken sides. Much was at stake in maintaining things as they were. So, although Freud further develops the conception of aggression in *Totem and Taboo*, his analysis of aggression in *Leonardo* and the Schreber case remains as a defensive reaction to libidinal wishes.

It is in Stepansky's chapter 5 ("A Little Fliess Returned: Adler and the Politics of Aggression") that his discussion of the aggressive instinct culminates. For Adler, aggression was an immediate reaction to the frustration or limitation of fundamental organ needs. It was a "superordinated dynamic force" which directed the action of the instincts toward satisfaction. There was no cruelty impulse; only the biological and subsequently psychic compensation to an environmentally conditioned struggle for satisfaction. By 1911, Adler moves on to attack the goddess Libido when he stated that only the organ inferior child becomes precociously libidinal and, further, that neurotic birth fantasies and castration anxieties reflect neither sexual wishes nor repressed fantasies. Sexuality is a defense for inadequacy and fear. Finally, Adler dissociates aggression from the drives, since he viewed satisfaction as related to cultural institutions and economic conditions.

Why does Freud keep attacking Adler for postulating an aggressive drive when according to Stepansky no such thing is being proposed? Stepansky thinks that Adler was misunderstood. Adler's views must have provided a critically different perspective on the clinical importance and theoretical nature of aggression. For example, in 1908 he had proposed that anxiety itself could arise from the suppression of aggression. Spotnitz (*Modern Psychoanalysis of the Schizophrenic Patient*, 1969) agrees: "had Adler systematically developed his views on aggression he might have made a

major contribution to the concept of Schizophrenia." Stepansky notes that Freud may not have understood the details of Adler's system. He surely is unsympathetic to Freud's 'joke' about Adler's paranoia: "As a paranoiac he is right about many things, though wrong about everything." It is tempting here to suggest to Stepansky that Freud included many of the elements in Adler's system that were right but didn't go along with the whole system, which was wrong. Freud does in fact complain to Jung in 1910 that Adler has tried "to force the wonderful diversity of psychology into a narrow bed of a single aggressive 'masculine' ego current."

Subsequent to the series of vehement debates with Adler, we see a critical shift in Freud's concept of aggression. In "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" and then in "Mourning and Melancholia," love and hate are assigned a separate line of development and do not become polar opposites until the ego separates internal from external reality, incorporating pleasurable objects and repelling (hating) unpleasurable objects. This form of hatred bears no relationship to the sexual function nor to an egoistic cruelty impulse. It is rather the hatred of the healthy ego-repelling unpleasurable stimuli in order to maintain itself. Even in the grips of melancholia, healthy hatred of the internalized object helps free the ego for reintegration.

Stepansky asks why Freud shifted his analysis of aggression at this point. Several before him, the most authoritative being Bibring, had argued that the clinical data had become too diverse: it juxtaposed sexual perversions with non-erotic impulses of cruelty and harshness, as well as those involving control, assertion and domination. Stepansky notes that Freud had let the situation be ambiguous for thirteen years and that there was "no pressing theoretical reason to make this change." The cruelty impulse and the urge for mastery (subsumed under the sexual function) could have handled the clinical data and even the experience of the war. Stepansky argues that it was the realities of war that made it clear that "man was irreducibly aggressive." Yet Freud responded by creating hate as a healthy response to pain, and war as a perversion. That was Freud's compromise. Even at this point he remained emotionally unable to accept the idea of an aggressive instinct.

This is a theme that Stepansky reiterates. Freud's antipathy to the implications of an aggressive instinct (as well as to his own feelings of aggression) prevented him from constructing anything but a "healthy" hating ego, even in the context of war. Now in the postwar aftermath, burdened by economic misery and per-

sonal loss, Freud—still impelled to address man's aggression—continues to avoid concluding that there is an aggressive instinct. How? By developing the vitalistic (non-scientific) Death Instinct. Life is only a detour in its return to non-existence and *aggression is not primary but a derivative*. Pathological aggression (defused from Eros) subverts one's imminent path to death.

The interplay between Eros and Thanatos does, however, provide a framework to decipher cultural and clinical phenomena. War, traumatic dreams, and the negative therapeutic reaction can be studied freely. And although harsh aggression directed against the self can be pathological, proper amounts of guilt are necessary to modulate the threat to culture posed by man's inclination to aggression.

When one rereads Freud's texts cited by Stepansky, it is not easy to find his avoidance of aggression. In fact, Freud seems almost too much in tune with the dismally disappointing and fundamentally dangerous aspects of human character. Why does Stepansky get the feeling that Freud is avoiding an experience of the human condition when the evidence in his writings shows that not to be the case? Stepansky's comment that even after the experience of the war, Freud refused to make aggression primary but only a derivative of the Death Instinct, could be interpreted as Freud trying to point to something more fundamental than a particular manifestation of aggression, more fundamental than the biological primacy of life itself, trying to express the primacy of aggression in its irreducible connection to pre-existence.

One begins to get the feeling that Stepansky is more sympathetic to the young Freud who was theoretically committed to the importance of "real" events, and that his criticism is more fundamental; that is, that he is wary about any theory (in this case drive theory) which assigns characterological dispositions to the mental apparatus. He seems concerned that too complicated a relationship between mind and reality, further distanced by untestable scientific propositions, might blur the source of human misery and deflate moral responsibility.

This book is an objective, scholarly and systematic survey of Freud's thinking about aggression. It is necessary reading. My strong feeling, in agreement with Roy Schaefer's foreword, is that a detailed reading of Stepansky's book will leave one "with an enhanced comprehension of Freud, the theory of aggression and the enduring problems of metapsychology."

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