

Phallacies and Other Lies

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Freudian Fraud: The Malignant Effect of Freud's Theory on American Thought and Culture, by E. Fuller Torrey (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), xvi, 362 pages.

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Who would have thought 100 years ago that a smallish and insignificant Moravian doctor who believed that human sexual impulses repose in the end of our noses would become the most influential thinker of the modern era? So monomaniacal about sex did he make us that it is now impossible to look at a tree and see a tree, or drive a car with an Edsel-like grill with a clear conscience.

Open any encyclopedia and under the entry for “Freud, Sigmund” one will find what amounts to hagiography. Open many recent biographies and one will discover nothing short of a quacksalver. Are these new biographies simply part of the deconstructionist trend to tear down everything? Perhaps. But consider that the leaders of psychology have had Freud's letters locked away in the Library of Congress until the end of 22nd Century! Is it possible that they know something we don't?

No, but it's very possible that those letters reveal Freud for the crackpot that he was. Yes, yes, I know. Those same encyclopedias repeat his major accomplishments: use of hypnosis for neurotic patients; dream interpretation and analysis; psychic determinism; defense mechanisms; the unconscious; and, lastly regression. Of course writing a review that exposes our famous quack risks the reviewer venomous Freudianesque slanders: a bit anal retentive, aren't we? and so forth. But the risk is gladly taken if this icon of liberal flotsam and jetsam can be flushed clean from our system.

It did not take Freud long to make a name for himself: an infamous one. One of his most celebrated and early patients was Horace Frink. Frink was infatuated with the banking heiress Angelika Bijurs. One is puzzled whether Frink's infatuation was for her, or if it was simply a lust for her money. Anyway, he sought Freud's advice and got it in spades. Freud had no misgivings about her money: he wanted all of it. Frink, according to Freud, was a latent homosexual. In order to prevent him from becoming an overt one (lucky for Freud, Act-Up! hadn't been invented yet—but his very philosophy made the group

possible later), Frink had to marry Bijurs. One little fly in this ointment was a this small thing called divorce which Freud argued they both must do, and then marry each other.

There may not be a better example of a more catastrophic bit of advice ever given by a charlatan unless it's that one about the tailors and the Emperor's new clothes. Anyway, Freud's colossally bad advice proved fatal to the divorced spouses. Both were heartsick and both soon died. The new marriage proved equally bad for Bijurs and Frink. Bijurs later divorced Frink and thereafter Frink repeatedly attempted suicide. Meanwhile, Freud went on to stardom. All in all not a bad day at the office.

But this is only one of our quack's more celebrated blunders. Freud's work began badly and ended horribly. For Americans, it proved our sexual undoing. And no wonder. Consider Freud's major source: Wilhelm Fliess.

Fliess was a Berlin ear, nose and throat doctor who believed that our sexual dysfunction was caused by masturbation, coitus interruptus and condoms. Employing these in the sexual life damaged the nervous system which in turn dislocated certain “genital spots” in the body. Fliess located the most important of these spots in the... nose. Yes, that's right. Treatment consisted of cocaine and cauterization of the nasal passages. And you thought Freud's nose was merely genetic.

Recent publication of Freud's letters to Fliess reveal how completely Freud was taken with this bizarre notion. Freud sent patients to Fliess for “treatments”. Fliess and Freud were convinced that these genital spots in the nose passed their bad blood on to other organs. So, a stomach ache was not caused by eating the wrong foods or an irritable ulcer, but because the patient was using a condom or masturbating, disrupting the genital spot. These bad vibes, so to speak, were then passed on to the nose, and from there to the stomach—or heart, liver, eyes or wherever.

In 1895, Emma Eckstein went to see Freud for “stomach ailments and menstrual problems”. Freud's diagnosis reads like something out of a Mad Magazine parody: masturbation mediated through the “nasal reflex” and passed on to her stomach and uterus. Freud summoned Fliess to Vienna to operate on Eckstein's nose. The Laurel and Hardy of Headology proved unbeatable when it came to malpractice. Ms. Eckstein began hemorrhaging copious amounts of blood from the nose.

Once near death, Ms. Eckstein's condition did not improve and a surgeon was called in. He removed a half meter of gauze from her nasal cavity that Fliess has inadvertently left behind. Her nasal passage had been so severely chiseled away on the left side that her face began to cave in, leaving her once normal looking visage misshapened and unpleasantly disfigured. Freud initially believed all of this to be the fault of the surgery. But he later corrected this to hemorrhages that “were hysterical in nature, the result of sexual longing”. And thus was born the intellectual moon-calf that Freud called an idea.

Undaunted by this incredible blunder, Freud went back to Fliess and had his own nose operated on. He praised Fliess for holding “in your hands the reins of sexuality, which governs all mankind: you can do anything and prevent anything”. From these exchanges, Freud developed much of his theory on infantile sexuality. These borrowings, however, merely began Freud's pillaging of ideas that he later passed off as his own.

In fact, Freud's well-known dream theories were well ingrained in the European consciousness prior to 1880. When Freud was a young man, the madman Nietzsche was palavering about the unconscious. And most readers have detected the legacy of the id that Freud “borrowed” from Nietzsche. In the case of his dream interpretations, Karl Scherner's *Life of the Dream*, available to Freud, was complete with sexual symbolism elaborated in detail. So, there you have it: a philosophy born out of the imbecility of genital nasal spots, the ravings of a madman, and the figments of a sleeping imagination. If Freud can be counted as having done anything with this material, it must be said that he claimed it as his own.

It is important to look upon these mass relocations of information in Freud, not as so much rechauffe, but as so many close plagiarisms. James Joyce rarely had an original idea. But the ideas of others he was somehow able to remake until the idea no longer resembled what the owner offered. In Freud's case, however, we find mass borrowings with few alterations. Moreover, we find Freud wishing for the presentation to be considered new, original.

But many a great thinker has been found to have been unoriginal. There is hardly sin in that. What is more troubling is the legacy Freud left behind. Before moving to that legacy, however, it is important to note that Freud was driven by three essential ingredients: fame, the occult and cocaine. From his earliest days, Freud fell famished for fame. To his fiancée, he wrote,

I have almost finished carrying out an intention which a number of as yet unborn and unfortunate people will resent....[T]hey are my biographers. I have destroyed all my notes of the past fourteen years, as well as letters, scientific excerpts, and the manuscripts of my papers.

Of course Freud was not dreaming of those of us who would rue the day he ever walked the earth. Rather he spoke of his coming celebrity. Moreover, he remarked to his medical schoolmates that he would one day be great and be enshrined in the hall at the University of Vienna, where the busts of its famous graduates were displayed.

Freud also did more than dabble in the occult, telling friends if he had it to do over, he would have spent more time in psychic researches. His 1921 paper on telepathy was withheld by friends who foresaw the damage such a work would have done his budding reputation. But more even than the fame and the occult was his addiction to cocaine. Dozens of entries in his diaries are veritable paeans to what he calls the “miracle” drug. He also views it as an aphrodisiac, and warns his fiancée that she will succumb to “a big

wild man with cocaine in his body”. His diaries reveal his penchant for relieving his nasal distress, migraines, depression and desire with “cocainization”. Indeed, on June 12, 1895 he entered, “I need a lot of cocaine”.

It is against this dopey backdrop that Freud's harebrained ideas began infiltrating (or infecting) the realpolitik of America. The biggest impact was, of course, felt in the area of “liberated” sexual awareness. Freudianism moved us from a Puritan prudery to a moral manumission; from what was described as sexually uptight and repressed Americans, to what came to be billed as open, loving and caring ones. Of course what could only be suspected then, we now know to be true today. To get from prudery to freedom, we had to endure prurience, and a generation hopelessly lost to sexual impropriety. Freud's philosophy cannot be charged with these all ills exclusively, but his work set the stage for what later followed.

Freud did not succeed overnight. He faced some fierce barriers. No less a figure than H. L. Mencken fought against him. Only Mencken, with his inimitable style, could wound so strongly:

To Freudian writers the entire language is made up of two groups of symbolic words, half meaning the male, the other the female genitalia. If any words happened to be left over they stand for incest, rape, anus, or faecal associations, or the fornicative, generally speaking.

Two such helpers were Sarah Benedict and Margaret Mead. Benedict and Mead were both radicals and the axe they had to grind they sought to grind through their academic writings. Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* concluded with a protracted discussion homosexuality. Benedict felt that homosexuals were given short shrift and she decided to take on the reigning moral orthodoxy, seeking to somehow modify it. It was a huge risk for her because cultural currents were such that a discussion of this nature could send one over the waterfall of public dissent swiftly.

Later, Mead followed up with what has been described as a tour de force on modern sexual mores by arguing that men and women in Samoa were the most unrepressed sexually of any individuals on the planet. *Coming of Age in Samoa* seemed, in fact, to be a description of individuals from another planet, so different were their attitudes about wanton sex and homosexuality. It is now clear that Mead was duped by the Samoans and that her book is a treasure-trove of mismemes. Only an intellectual could be so easily taken in. Mead apparently did not know or did not care that previous histories of Samoans indicated their penchant for deliberately misguiding researchers. Could it be that Mead's and Benedict's scholarship was ideologically driven, given that they were lesbian lovers?

Walter Lippmann of *New Republic* fame continued the useful idiot line by arguing for Freudian interpretations and providing fawning articles about Freud and Freudians throughout his magazine's pages. Moreover, his work in the magazine coupled with his entree for Freud's ideas into the fashionable salon of Mabel Dodge's on 23 Fifth Avenue

made certain that middle America would be inundated with Freud and Freudians at virtually every level of intellectual life.

Even such lukewarm liberals (who heated up much later in life) as Dr. Spock—the baby doctor, not the Vulcan—assisted Freudians with his nonsense book about raising children. But Spock's work was Freudianism defanged, and millions, literally, of American parents sought to do what Dr. Spock told them to do. Not every bit of his advice had been inquinated by Freud's poisoned pen, but enough of it had been to make the bulk of his advice suspect from the outset.

Of course no one can forget the Kinsey fiction regarding sexual mores in the fifties and the damage it has done. Driven by Freudian philosophical underpinnings, Kinsey and his troupe sought to remake sexual mores by lying about what they really were. We now know that his research population could only be described as sexual deviants. While this might fit some portion of the under thirty population today, it did not begin to describe America at the time of the released report. Though researchers knew Kinsey's work was intellectually dishonest, the ends justified the means and a conspiracy of silence paved the way for the insanity of the sixties.

Finally, Karl Menninger assisted the Freudians with his battologies about prison reform. Menninger was convinced that those we had in prisons were simply mixed up. All we had to do was assist them in unmixing themselves and all would be well. “I suspect”, wrote Menninger, “that all the crimes committed by all the jailed criminals do not equal in total social damage that of all the crimes committed against them.” Where is Willie Horton when you need him to drive home a point!

These are only representative of the number who made it their lot in life to propagate Freud's views. Torrey touches on countless others such as, Hitchcock who sought to make going to the psychiatrist office look like fun, or the thousands of television shows that pushed for counselling at every street corner. Readers can easily add others. For example, there are those columns of the Landers girls that answer every problem with the solution of counselling. Torrey shows in painstaking detail that the revolution that Freud began, so permeated the fabric of society that not one thread of it can now be found without some tincture of his philosophy.

It's uncanny how successful Freud turned out to be, even though, as is the case with nearly every revolution, he was cast aside when the revolution was over. But his success cannot be denied. Freud's work is now *implicit* in virtually all we do, say or think. It is taken for granted that we are, to a greater or lesser degree, all Freudians. When I think of the two dozens or more acquaintances who have undergone counselling, I find Freud's triumph even more baffling. While admittedly anecdotal, these two dozens have, not one of them, been helped in any appreciable way. In fact, by their own admission, it was only after they ceased to go to counselling that they finally resolved their problems. This is not to say that no one can be helped by some form of counselling. But I for one would like to see some non-partisan statistics on the success rate. My guess is that it is almost as

successful as public education.

Torrey tells the story of Freud and his malignancy with panache and scholarship. The book is eminently readable, but it is also very troubling. With the genie out of the bottle and having granted so many bad wishes, how is it possible to put him back, or to undo his heinous legacy? When one thinks for a moment how much of this hodman's work has made its way into what is called Christian counselling, one realizes how monstrous the problem is, and how arduous the clean-up chore will prove to be.

Coleridge had it right without knowing it when he wrote of another:

He looked at his own Soul with a Telescope. What seemed all irregular he shewed to be beautiful Constellations; and he added to the Consciousness hidden worlds within worlds.

The only problem with this assessment in Freud's case has to do with the worlds he created. Each world was one more fallen one upon fallen one that he tried to pass off as whole.