

FORMULATIONS ON THE
TWO PRINCIPLES OF
MENTAL FUNCTIONING
(1911)

EDITOR'S NOTE

FORMULIERUNGEN ÜBER DIE ZWEI PRINZIPIEN DES PSYCHISCHEN GESCHEHENS

(a) GERMAN EDITIONS:

- 1911 *Jb. psychoan. psychopath. Forsch.*, 3 (1), 1-8.
1913 *S.K.S.N.*, 3, 271-9.
1924 *G.S.*, 5, 409-17.
1931 *Theoretische Schriften*, 5-14.
1943 *G.W.*, 8, 230-8.

(b) ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

'Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental
Functioning'

- 1925 *C.P.*, 4, 13-21. (Tr. M. N. Searl.)

The present translation, with a modified title, is based on the one published in 1925, but has been largely re-written.

We learn from Dr. Ernest Jones that Freud began planning this paper in June, 1910, and was working at it simultaneously with the Schreber case history (1911c). His progress at it was slow, but on October 26 he spoke on the subject before the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society, but found the audience unresponsive, and was himself dissatisfied with his presentation. It was not until December that he actually began writing the paper. It was finished at the end of January, 1911, but was not published till late in the spring, when it appeared in the same issue of the *Jahrbuch* as the Schreber case.

With this well-known paper, which is one of the classics of psycho-analysis, and with the almost contemporary third section of the Schreber case history, Freud, for the first time after an interval of more than ten years, took up once again a discussion of the general theoretical hypotheses which were implied by his clinical findings. His first extensive attempt at such a discussion

had been in quasi-neurological terminology in his 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' of 1895, which, however, was not published in his lifetime (Freud, 1950*a*). Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900*a*) was an exposition of a very similar set of hypotheses, but this time in purely psychological terms. Much of the material in the present paper (and especially in its earlier part) is derived directly from these two sources. The work gives the impression of being in the nature of a stock-taking. It is as though Freud were bringing up for his own inspection, as it were, the fundamental hypotheses of an earlier period, and preparing them to serve as a basis for the major theoretical discussions which lay ahead in the immediate future—the paper on narcissism, for instance, and the great series of metapsychological papers.

The present exposition of his views is exceedingly condensed and is not easy to assimilate even to-day. Although we know now that Freud was saying very little in it that had not long been present in his mind, at the time of its publication it must have struck its readers as bewilderingly full of novelities. The paragraphs marked (1), for instance, on p. 219 ff., would be obscure indeed to those who could have no acquaintance either with the 'Project' or with the metapsychological papers and who would have to derive what light they could from a number of almost equally condensed and quite unsystematized passages in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It is scarcely surprising that Freud's first audience was unresponsive.

The main theme of the work is the distinction between the regulating principles (the pleasure principle and the reality principle) which respectively dominate the primary and secondary mental processes. The thesis had in fact already been stated in Section I of Part I of the 'Project' and elaborated in Sections 15 and 16 of Part I and in the later portions of Section I of Part III. It was again discussed in Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*Standard Ed.*, 5, 565-7 and 598 ff.). But the fullest treatment was reserved for the paper on the meta-psychology of dreams (1917*d* [1915]), written some three years after this one. A more detailed account of the development of Freud's views on the subject of our mental attitude towards reality will be found in the Editor's Note to that paper (*Standard Ed.*, 14, 219 ff.).

Towards the end of the work a number of other related

topics are opened up, the further development of which (like that of the main theme) is left over for later investigation. The whole paper was, in fact (as Freud himself remarks), of a preparatory and exploratory nature, but it is not on that account of any less interest.

The greater part of this paper, in the 1925 version, was included in Rickman's *General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud* (1937, 45-53).

have become accustomed to taking as our starting-point the unconscious mental processes, with the peculiarities of which we have become acquainted through analysis. We consider these to be the older, primary processes, the residues of a phase of development in which they were the only kind of mental process. The governing purpose obeyed by these primary processes is easy to recognize; it is described as the pleasure-unpleasure [*List-Unlust*] principle, or more shortly the pleasure principle.¹ These processes strive towards gaining pleasure; psychical activity draws back from any event which might arouse unpleasure. (Here we have repression.) Our dreams at night and our waking tendency to tear ourselves away from distressing impressions are remnants of the dominance of this principle and proofs of its power.

I shall be returning to lines of thought which I have developed elsewhere² when I suggest that the state of psychical rest was originally disturbed by the peremptory demands of internal needs. When this happened, whatever was thought of (wished for) was simply presented in a hallucinatory manner, just as it still happens to-day with our dream-thoughts every night.³ It was only the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment experienced, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. Instead of it, the psychical apparatus had to decide to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavour to make a real alteration in them. A new principle of mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable.⁴ This setting-up of the *reality principle* proved to be a momentous step.

(1) In the first place, the new demands made a succession of

¹ [This seems to be the first appearance of the actual term 'pleasure principle'. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* it is always named the 'unpleasure principle' (e.g. *Standard Ed.*, 5, 600).]

² In the General Section of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. [i.e. in Chapter VII. See in particular *Standard Ed.*, 5, 565-7 and 598 ff. But what follows is for the most part also foreshadowed in the 'Project' of 1895. Cf., for instance, the end of Section 11 and Section 15 of Part I.]

³ The state of sleep is able to re-establish the likeness of mental life as it was before the recognition of reality, because a prerequisite of sleep is a deliberate rejection of reality (the wish to sleep).

⁴ I will try to amplify the above schematic account with some further

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We have long observed that every neurosis has as its result, and probably therefore as its purpose, a forcing of the patient out of real life, an alienating of him from reality.¹ Nor could a fact such as this escape the observation of Pierre Janet; he spoke of a loss of '*la fonction du réel*' ['the function of reality'] as being a special characteristic of neurotics, but without discovering the connection of this disturbance with the fundamental determinants of neurosis.² By introducing the process of repression into the genesis of the neuroses we have been able to gain some insight into this connection. Neurotics turn away from reality because they find it unbearable—either the whole or parts of it. The most extreme type of this turning away from reality is shown by certain cases of hallucinatory psychosis which seek to deny the particular event that occasioned the outbreak of their insanity (Griesinger).³ But in fact every neurotic does the same with some fragment of reality.⁴ And we are now confronted with the task of investigating the development of the relation of neurotics and of mankind in general to reality, and in this way of bringing the psychological significance of the real external world into the structure of our theories.

In the psychology which is founded on psycho-analysis we

¹ [The idea, with the phrase 'flight into psychosis', is already to be found in Section III of Freud's first paper on 'The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence' (1894c). The actual phrase 'flight into illness' occurs in Section B of his paper on hysterical attacks (1909a).]

² Janet, 1909.

³ [W. Griesinger (1817-1868) was a well-known Berlin psychiatrist of an earlier generation, much admired by Freud's teacher, Meynert. The passage alluded to in the text is no doubt the one mentioned by Freud three times in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, 4, 91, 134 and 230 n., and again in Chapter VI of the book on jokes (1905c). In this passage Griesinger (1845, 89) drew attention to the wish-fulfilling character of both psychoses and dreams.]

⁴ Otto Rank (1910) has recently drawn attention to a remarkably clear prevision of this causation shown in Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* [Part II (Supplements), Chapter 32].

adaptations necessary in the psychical apparatus, which, owing to our insufficient or uncertain knowledge, we can only retail very cursorily.

The increased significance of external reality heightened the importance, too, of the sense-organs that are directed towards that external world, and of the *consciousness* attached to them. Consciousness now learned to comprehend sensory qualities in addition to the qualities of pleasure and unpleasure which hitherto had alone been of interest to it. A special function was instituted which had periodically to search the external world, in order that its data might be familiar already if an urgent internal need should arise—the function of *attention*.¹ Its activity meets the sense-impressions half way, instead of awaiting their appearance. At the same time, probably, a system of *notation* was introduced, whose task it was to lay down the results of this

details. It will rightly be objected that an organization which was a slave to the pleasure principle and neglected the reality of the external world could not maintain itself alive for the shortest time, so that it could not have come into existence at all. The employment of a fiction like this is, however, justified when one considers that the infant—provided one includes with it the care it receives from its mother—does almost realize a psychical system of this kind. It probably hallucinates the fulfilment of its internal needs; it betrays its unpleasure, when there is an increase of stimulus and an absence of satisfaction, by the motor discharge of screaming and beating about with its arms and legs, and it then experiences the satisfaction it has hallucinated. Later, as an older child, it learns to employ these manifestations of discharge intentionally as methods of expressing its feelings. Since the later care of children is modelled on the care of infants, the dominance of the pleasure principle can really come to an end only when a child has achieved complete psychical detachment from its parents.—A neat example of a psychical system shut off from the stimuli of the external world, and able to satisfy even its nutritional requirements autistically (to use Bleuler's term [1912]), is afforded by a bird's egg with its food supply enclosed in its shell; for it, the care provided by its mother is limited to the provision of warmth.—I shall not regard it as a correction, but as an amplification of the schematic picture under discussion, if it is insisted that a system living according to the pleasure principle must have devices to enable it to withdraw from the stimuli of reality. Such devices are merely the correlative of 'repression', which treats internal unpleasurable stimuli as if they were external—that is to say, pushes them into the external world.

¹ [Some remarks on Freud's views about attention will be found in an Editor's footnote to the metapsychological paper on 'The Unconscious' (*Standard Ed.*, 14, 192).]

periodical activity of consciousness—a part of what we call *memory*.

The place of repression, which excluded from cathexis as productive of unpleasure some of the emerging ideas, was taken by an *impartial passing of judgement*,¹ which had to decide whether a given idea was true or false—that is, whether it was in agreement with reality or not—the decision being determined by making a comparison with the memory-traces of reality.

A new function was now allotted to motor discharge, which, under the dominance of the pleasure principle, had served as a means of unburdening the mental apparatus of accretions of stimuli, and which had carried out this task by sending innervations into the interior of the body (leading to expressive movements and the play of features and to manifestations of affect). Motor discharge was now employed in the appropriate alteration of reality; it was converted into *action*.²

Restraint upon motor discharge (upon action), which then became necessary, was provided by means of the process of *thinking*, which was developed from the presentation of ideas. Thinking was endowed with characteristics which made it possible for the mental apparatus to tolerate an increased tension of stimulus while the process of discharge was postponed. It is essentially an experimental kind of acting, accompanied by displacement of relatively small quantities of cathexis together with less expenditure (discharge) of them.³ For this purpose the conversion of freely displaceable cathexes into 'bound' cathexes was necessary, and this was brought about by means of raising the level of the whole cathectic process. It is probable that thinking was originally unconscious, in so far as it went beyond mere ideational presentations and was directed to the relations between impressions of objects, and that it did not acquire further qualities, perceptible to consciousness, until it became connected with verbal residues.⁴

¹ [This notion, often repeated by Freud, appears as early as in the first edition of his book on jokes (1905c, towards the end of Chapter VI) and is examined more deeply in his late paper on 'Negation' (1925h).]

² [Cf. 'Project', Part I, Section 11.]

³ [Cf. 'Project', Part I, Section 18, and *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Standard Ed.*, 5, 599–600.]

⁴ [Cf. 'Project', Part III, Section 1, and *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Standard Ed.*, 5, 574 and 617. This is developed further in Section VII of 'The Unconscious' (1915e).]

(2) A general tendency of our mental apparatus, which can be traced back to the economic principle of saving expenditure [of energy], seems to find expression in the tenacity with which we hold on to the sources of pleasure at our disposal, and in the difficulty with which we renounce them. With the introduction of the reality principle one species of thought-activity was split off; it was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone.¹ This activity is *phantasying*, which begins already in children's play, and later, continued as *day-dreaming*, abandons dependence on real objects.

(3) The supersession of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, with all the psychical consequences involved, which is here schematically condensed into a single sentence, is not in fact accomplished all at once; nor does it take place simultaneously all along the line. For while this development is going on in the ego-instincts, the sexual instincts become detached from them in a very significant way. The sexual instincts behave auto-erotically at first; they obtain their satisfaction in the subject's own body and therefore do not find themselves in the situation of frustration which was what necessitated the institution of the reality principle; and when, later on, the process of finding an object begins, it is soon interrupted by the long period of latency, which delays sexual development until puberty. These two factors—auto-erotism and the latency period—have as their result that the sexual instinct is held up in its psychical development and remains far longer under the dominance of the pleasure principle, from which in many people it is never able to withdraw.

In consequence of these conditions, a closer connection arises, on the one hand, between the sexual instinct and phantasy and, on the other hand, between the ego-instincts and the activities of consciousness. Both in healthy and in neurotic people this connection strikes us as very intimate, although the considera-

¹ In the same way, a nation whose wealth rests on the exploitation of the produce of its soil will yet set aside certain areas for reservation in their original state and for protection from the changes brought about by civilization. (E.g. Yellowstone Park.) [Cf. the discussions of phantasies in 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' (1908e) and in 'Hysterical Phantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality' (1908a). The term '*Realitätsprüfung*' seems to make its first appearance in this sentence.]

tions of genetic psychology which have just been put forward lead us to recognize it as a *secondary* one. The continuance of auto-erotism is what makes it possible to retain for so long the easier momentary and imaginary satisfaction in relation to the sexual object in place of real satisfaction, which calls for effort and postponement. In the realm of phantasy, repression remains all-powerful; it brings about the inhibition of ideas *in statu nascendi* before they can be noticed by consciousness, if their cathexis is likely to occasion a release of unpleasure. This is the weak spot in our psychical organization; and it can be employed to bring back under the dominance of the pleasure principle thought-processes which had already become rational. An essential part of the psychical disposition to neurosis thus lies in the delay in educating the sexual instincts to pay regard to reality and, as a corollary, in the conditions which make this delay possible.

(4) Just as the pleasure-ego can do nothing but *wish*, work for a yield of pleasure, and avoid unpleasure, so the reality-ego need do nothing but strive for what is *useful* and guard itself against damage.¹ Actually the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time. But the endopsychic impression made by this substitution has been so powerful that it is reflected in a special religious myth. The doctrine of reward in the after-life for the—voluntary or enforced—renunciation of earthly pleasures is nothing other than a mythical projection of this revolution in the mind. Following consistently along these lines, *religions* have been able to effect absolute renunciation of pleasure in this life by means of the promise of compensation in a future existence; but they have not by this means achieved a conquest of the pleasure principle. It is *science* which comes nearest to succeeding in that conquest;

¹ The superiority of the reality-ego over the pleasure-ego has been aptly expressed by Bernard Shaw in these words: 'To be able to choose the line of greatest advantage instead of yielding in the direction of least resistance.' (*Man and Superman*.) [A remark made by Don Juan towards the end of the Mozartean interlude in Act III.—A much more elaborate account of the relations between the 'pleasure-ego' and the 'reality-ego' is given in 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (1915c), *Standard Ed.*, 14, 134-6.]

science too, however, offers intellectual pleasure during its work and promises practical gain in the end.

(5) *Education* can be described without more ado as an incitement to the conquest of the pleasure principle, and to its replacement by the reality principle; it seeks, that is, to lend its help to the developmental process which affects the ego. To this end it makes use of an offer of love as a reward from the educators; and it therefore fails if a spoiled child thinks that it possesses that love in any case and cannot lose it whatever happens.

(6) *Art* brings about a reconciliation between the two principles in a peculiar way. An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of phantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality. Thus in a certain fashion he actually becomes the hero, the king, the creator, or the favourite he desired to be, without following the long roundabout path of making real alterations in the external world. But he can only achieve this because other men feel the same dissatisfaction as he does with the renunciation demanded by reality, and because that dissatisfaction, which results from the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself a part of reality.¹

(7) While the ego goes through its transformation from a *pleasure-ego* into a *reality-ego*, the sexual instincts undergo the changes that lead them from their original auto-erotism through various intermediate phases to object-love in the service of procreation. If we are right in thinking that each step in these two courses of development may become the site of a disposition to later neurotic illness, it is plausible to suppose that the form taken by the subsequent illness (the *choice of neurosis*) will depend on the particular phase of the development of the ego and of the libido in which the dispositional inhibition of de-

¹ Cf. the similar position taken by Otto Rank (1907). [See also 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' (1908e), as well as the closing paragraph of Lecture XXIII of the *Introductory Lectures* (1916-17).]

velopment has occurred. Thus unexpected significance attaches to the chronological features of the two developments (which have not yet been studied), and to possible variations in their synchronization.¹

(8) The strangest characteristic of unconscious (repressed) processes, to which no investigator can become accustomed without the exercise of great self-discipline, is due to their entire disregard of reality-testing; they equate reality of thought with external actuality, and wishes with their fulfilment—with the event—just as happens automatically under the dominance of the ancient pleasure principle. Hence also the difficulty of distinguishing unconscious phantasies from memories which have become unconscious.² But one must never allow oneself to be misled into applying the standards of reality to repressed psychical structures, and on that account, perhaps, into undervaluing the importance of phantasies in the formation of symptoms on the ground that they are not actualities, or into tracing a neurotic sense of guilt back to some other source because there is no evidence that any actual crime has been committed. One is bound to employ the currency that is in use in the country one is exploring—in our case a neurotic currency. Suppose, for instance, that one is trying to solve a dream such as this. A man who had once nursed his father through a long and painful mortal illness, told me that in the months following his father's death he had repeatedly dreamt that *his father was alive once more and that he was talking to him in his usual way. But he felt it exceedingly painful that his father had really died, only without knowing it.* The only way of understanding this apparently nonsensical dream is by adding 'as the dreamer wished' or 'in consequence of his wish' after the words 'that his father had really died', and by further adding 'that he [the dreamer] wished it' to the last words. The dream-thought then runs: it was a painful memory for him that he had been obliged to wish for his father's death (as a release) while he was still alive, and how terrible it would have been if his father had had any suspicion of it! What we have here is thus the familiar case of self-reproaches after the loss of someone loved, and in this instance the self-reproach

¹ [This theme is developed in 'The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis' (1913f), p. 324 ff. below.]

² [This difficulty is discussed at length in the later part of Lecture XXIII of the *Introductory Lectures*.]

went back to the infantile significance of death-wishes against the father.¹

The deficiencies of this short paper, which is preparatory rather than expository, will perhaps be excused only in small part if I plead that they are unavoidable. In these few remarks on the psychical consequences of adaptation to the reality principle I have been obliged to adumbrate views which I should have preferred for the present to withhold and whose justification will certainly require no small effort. But I hope it will not escape the notice of the benevolent reader how in these pages too the dominance of the reality principle is beginning.

¹ [This dream was added to the 1911 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, 5, 430-1, soon after the publication of the present paper.]

TYPES OF ONSET OF NEUROSIS (1912)