

*GROUPS EXISTS - AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE
ARGUMENTS OF BION - AS A "THING" IN REALITY A
TANGIBLE MATERIAL EXISTENT NOT AS A FICTION:*

**ACCORDING TO FREUD THE ID, EGO AND SUPER-
EGO ARE NOT FICTIONS BUT EXIST IN REALITY
AS ONTOLOGICAL ENTITIES -THEY ARE PART OF
THE BRAIN. :FREUD IS A MATERIALIST AND
REALIST**

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INDEX

THE GROUP IS A “THING” IT EXISTS AS AN ENTITY IN REALITY. P. 4

THE ID, EGO SUPER-EGO, EXIST AS MATERIAL PARTS OF THE BRAIN P. 15

THE GROUP IS A “THING” IT EXISTS AS AN ENTITY IN REALITY.

This essay will argue that, irrespective of what Bion thought, the consequences of Bion's arguments leads to the fact that a group is a 'thing'. This will be done by showing that in terms of what Bion thought a 'thing' to be, a group is a 'thing' for three reasons 1) because it can be perceived, 2) it has an objectively definable boundary 3) and is steadfast. It will be shown that the reasons a group is a 'thing' is because it has an essence and a group mentality. I will show a number of things in regard to Bion's account of groups. A group is an objective reality it exists in reality. A group exists because people exist. The group has a number of boundaries: psychic, spatial and temporal.. The essence of a group is defined by Bion to be an aggregate of people with the same state of regression. The psychic boundary of the group is the same state of regression which each members have in common with each other. The spatial and temporal boundary of the group is that which encloses all members as defined by the essence of the group and the group mentality to which all members are a part. If all members of a group could be identified by some shared attribute i.e. for purposes of identification they are all dyed the same color, then the group would become visible and its boundary seen. This boundary can be as large as the spatial and temporal range of each member over a large area, or it can telescope down, or focus into a small spatial area. In other words the boundary of the group can be a hall where the members

telescope into, or it can balloon out to enclose the random geographical distribution of the individual members. In this way a football team/group can be focused in a steam room, or extend to the boundary which encloses a member in Sydney and member in London, or a member in any other geographical place. So long as the psychic boundary, the group mentality and same state of regression, exists the group objectively exists in the minds of each member as well as in the spatial and temporal boundary which encloses all individual members; which can in theory become visible by marking each member of the group in such away that they can be perceptually identified..

In answering the essay question, the first question to be answered is ‘what is a thing’? If we look up ‘thing’ in a dictionary we find that a ‘thing’ is characterized in many, sometimes, conflicting ways. So it is important to know, not so much what Winnicot meant by ‘thing’, but what Bion meant by ‘thing’. Ashbach and Schermer claim that Bion did not regard a group as a ‘thing’.¹ According to Ashbach and Schermer what a ‘thing’ meant for Bion was something that can be perceived, has an objectively definable boundary and is steadfast.² Bion, they claim, denied that a group was a ‘thing’ because it was not steadfast, had no objectively definable boundary and could not be perceived. Irrespective of what Bion thought his arguments lead to the fact that a group is a ‘thing’ because a group can be perceived, is steadfast and has objectively definable boundaries.

¹ C Ashbach & V L Schermer, *Object Relations, Self and the Group*, Routledge, 1987, p.19.

² *ibid.*, p.19.

Ashbach and Schermer note a phenomenological account of a group can lead to the fact that a group exists but not that the group has an essence.³ They then ask “[d]oes a group or community also have an essence, a fundamental integrating principle?”⁴ It is this essence or fundamental integrating principle which marks a group off from a non-group. Freud regarded the “... the essence of a group lies in the libidinal ties existing in it ...”⁵ So how does Bion see a group as distinct from a non-group? Bion says that what makes an aggregate of people a group, as distinct from just being an aggregate [non-group], is a group is a number of people who are in the same state of regression. As he states “... ‘group’ (using that word to mean an aggregation of individuals all in the same state of regression.)...”⁶ So here we see that a group objectively exists because the people with the same state of regression exist. The group is a ‘thing’ with an essence its thingness is its members. In this regard if one locates the members with the same state of regression then one has located the group As Bion notes “... if an observer judges a group to be in existence the individuals composing it must have experienced this regression.”⁷

By giving the group an essence Bion thus creates a sense of stability, or steadfastness in the group. So long as the aggregate of people have the same state of regression then this aggregate/group has a stability, or steadfastness through time. If the state of regression changes for all members in the group then the group would dissolve, or disintegrate. But so long as the state of regression of all members remains unaltered then the

³ibid., p.154.

⁴ ibid., pp.154-155.

⁵S Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego”, in *Civilization, Society and Religion, Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and other Works*, Penguin Books, 1985, p.125.

⁶ W R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups*, Brunner Routledge, 2000, p.142.

⁷ ibid., p.142.

aggregate/group is steadfast. This steadfastness, or stability of the group can also be seen in the way Bion characterizes the group mentality.

Bion objects to the notion that group psychology comes into play only when a group collects in a particular place.⁸ Bion claims that no individual is outside a group and lacks the active manifestations of group psychology.⁹ According to Bion the explanation of certain group phenomena has to be sort in the matrix of the group and not in the individuals who make up the group. As he states “[t]he explanation of certain phenomena must be sought in the matrix of the group and not in the individuals that go to make up the group.”¹⁰ Bion is adamant that, because of group phenomena being explained by the matrix of the group, the group is more than the sum of the individuals comprising the group. As he notes “[t]here is no more need to be confused by the impression that a group is more than the sum of its members ...”¹¹ Or again “[t]he group, therefore, is more than the aggregate of the individuals, because an individual in a group is more than an individual in isolation.”¹² It should be noted that Bion, in at least one place, contradicts this claim when he says he agrees with Freud in rejecting the notion that a group is more than the sum of its members. As he states:

“...that a group is more than the sum of its members. My experience convinces me that Freud was right to reject such a concept ... The apparent difference between group psychology and individual psychology

⁸ *ibid.*, p.131.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.131.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.133.

is an illusion produced by the fact that the group brings into prominence phenomena that appear alien to an observer unaccustomed to using the group.”¹³

Now Bion notes that there is a seeming paradox in postulating that the group is more than the sum of the members. In order to avoid this paradox Bion claims that human beings are by nature a group animal. He states that “[a]cceptance of the idea that the human being is a group animal would solve the difficulties that are felt to exist in the seeming paradox that a group is more than the sum of its members.”¹⁴ Freud objected to the notion of a herd instinct because he felt that brought in an instinct which was over and above the individuals in a group.¹⁵ Bion rejects Freud’s argument, because according to Bion there is no new instinct brought into play in a group because the instinct is always in play. Bion states:

“He [Freud] objects that it is difficult to attribute to the factor number a significance so great as to make it capable of by itself of moving it over mental life a new instinct that is otherwise not brought into play. In my view no new instinct is brought into play – it is always in play.”¹⁶

¹² *ibid.*, p.90.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.169.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.132.

¹⁵ S, Freud, ‘Group Psychology’, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in *Civilization, Society and Religion, Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and other Works*, Penguin Books, 1985, p.96

According to Bion there are characteristics in the individual that cannot be explained unless the individual is regarded as a herd animal.¹⁷ This herd animal has according to Bion a group mentality. This group mentality can be at variance with the individuals thoughts and behavior and as a consequence the group mentality can affect him disagreeably if he is out of sink with the groups basic assumptions. Bion characterizes group mentality as:

“Group mentality is the unanimous expression of the will of the group, contributed to by the individual in ways of which he is unaware, influences him disagreeably when ever he thinks or behaves in a manner at variance with the basic assumptions. It is thus the machinery of intercommunication that is designed to ensure that group life is in accordance with basic assumptions.”¹⁸

The groups basic assumptions are the basis of the group’s emotional life.¹⁹ Basic assumptions in a group are active before a group congregates into place and are active after the group disperses.²⁰ “The basic assumption group does not disperse or meet, and

¹⁶ W, R , Bion, op.cit , p.131.

¹⁷ ibid, . p.133.

¹⁸ ibid., p.65.

¹⁹ ibid., p.172.

²⁰ ibid., p.172.

reference to time have no meaning in the basic assumption group.”²¹ According to Bion McDougall distinguished between organized groups [what Bion calls a work group] and unorganized groups. Bion claims that these are not two different aggregates of individuals, but instead two different categories of mental activity.²² Bion notes that both these mental activities co-exist in the same group of individuals. The work group mental activity manifests when the group congregates, the basic assumption group mental activity always manifest regardless if the group congregates or is dispersed.²³ Now this is the important point in regard to the groups steadfastness or stability. The group has a group mentality based upon the basic assumptions. These basic assumptions are active no matter if the group is congregated or dispersed. Thus so long as the group is, no matter where the individuals members are, influenced by the group mentality and basic assumptions the group is stable or steadfast as a group. Bion even states this himself when he argues that the continuity [stability/steadfastness] of the group over time can only be observed if the two mental activities, of work group and assumption group, are recognized to be operating in a group at the same time.²⁴

So we see here, in contradistinction to Ashbach and Schermer’s claim that Bion did not regard a group as steadfast, we see that Bion’s arguments lead to the fact that a group is steadfast. This steadfastness comes about for at least two reasons. First the essence of the group and secondly the group mentality and basic assumptions. These three

²¹ *ibid.*, p.172.

²² *ibid.*, p.172.

²³ *ibid.*, p.172.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.172.

characteristics of essence, group mentality and basic assumptions bring about certain group phenomena. It is this group phenomena which leads to the notion that a group is both visible and has objectively definable boundaries.

Now in regard to the notion that a Bion group has no visibility, Bion's arguments in fact lead to the fact that a group is visible under certain circumstances. Bion notes "... if an observer judges a group to be in existence the individuals composing it must have experienced this regression."²⁵. In this quote we note Bion uses the word 'observe' thus the group must be a visible 'thing'. Secondly Bion uses the word 'existence', so the group must exist. The group's visibility comes about by Bion's claims in regard to group phenomena.

Bion is adamant that group phenomena is not dependent upon the group members congregating into a telescoped or focused area. Bion argues that he attaches no importance to the coming together of the group members;. since no individual [isolated] is outside a group. As Bion states:

"I attach no intrinsic importance to the coming together of the group ... This congregation of the group at a particular place at a particular time is obviously important (for reasons of observation and demonstration) ... but it has no significance whatsoever in the production of the group phenomena ... The point that I would like to make is that no individual

however isolated in time and space, can be regarded as outside a group or lacking active manifestations of group psychology ...”²⁶

According to Bion a recluse living in isolation is still a member of a group.²⁷ Which follows that many recluses living in isolation over a wide spatial area could all belong to the same group. Though they are dispersed they are all in the same state of regression. In this regard group phenomena can still manifest; since, as Bion stated above, group phenomena can manifest because it is not dependent upon the congregation of the members. Consequently if each individual recluse belonging to the group can be marked alike then they can be observed perceptually and the spatial boundary can be seen; just as the boundary of the group could be seen if they were congregated in a hall i.e. the hall is the boundary then. If they are spread though out a football crowd at a football ground then their, and thus the groups, location is the football ground. This perceptual characterization of a group contradicts Napolitani idea that “... the group is not an object of our sensorial perception ...”²⁸ Also if Ashbach and Schermer are correct when they claim that for Bion “... a group is a conception rather than a location ...”²⁹ then, Bion was not really aware of the consequences to which his arguments lead. Similarly the theoretical visibility and thingness of a Bion group contradicts Ashbach and Schermer’s claim that a group is not a ‘thing’ and is non-visible.³⁰ Thus we see that a group can

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.142.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.132.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.132.

²⁸ D Napolitani, quoted in C Ashbach & V L Schermer, *Object Relations, the Self and the Group*, Routledge, 1987, p.19.

²⁹ C Ashbach & V L Schermer, *Object Relations, the Self and the Group*, Routledge, 1987., p.19.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.19.

become visible and its objective boundary is that which encompasses all the members of the group no matter how dispersed they are. This means that a group dispersed through a football crowd at a football ground can be visible if they all have the same identifying mark. Also the objective boundary of the group is the football ground.

Thus we see that the consequences of Bion's arguments, in regard to groups, leads to the fact that a group is a 'thing' – as understood by Bion. We saw that a group is a 'thing' because it is steadfast visible and defined by an object boundary. It is steadfast because it has an essence and a group mentality which give the group a continuity through time and space. The group is visible and with a definable boundary because the group phenomena , generated by the group essence and group mind, ties all the members together into unity which theoretically can be identified, through some marker and which objectively defines the boundary of the group.

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THE ID, EGO SUPER-EGO, EXIST AS MATERIAL PARTS OF THE BRAIN

This essay will argue that Freud's views regarding the ego, id and super-ego were that of a realist. In other words Freud at the time of outlining these terms believed that they were ontological existent i.e. they did exist. There are some who would seem to characterize Freud, perhaps like Rycroft, as a pragmatist/instrumentalist. This essay will argue that this characterization of Freud miss understands that Freud considered himself to be doing as well as just what scientific hypotheses are meant to be. In this essay it will be shown that Freud regarded what he was doing in psychoanalysis was science. Freud it will be shown adopted the scientific method, as understood by him and as a consequence, though he regarded his views of the ego, id and super-ego as being hypotheses these hypotheses were meant to characterize real existent things - much like physics hypotheses about sub-atomic particles. Even though an hypotheses is regarded by science as a provisional thing open to modification or abandonment nevertheless they are meant to as a rule be assumption about real existent things. It will be shown that Freud adopted this view of hypotheses and consequently the provisional nature of the ego, id and super-ego. Nevertheless even though they are

provisional entities these entities at the time of formulation were regarded by Freud as existing even though with time their characteristics could be modified or them abandoned as new facts became known. I will demonstrate Freud's realism by outlining 1) his characterizations of the ego, id and super-ego then 2) his views in regard to the scientific method and his views in regard to the ontological nature of his metapsychology.

In *The Ego and the Id* Freud characterized the mental apparatus as being made of three interrelating structural parts: the Id, the Ego and the Super-Ego. The structural model as A. Bateman and J. Holmes note is "... firmly imbedded within the instinct theory."³¹ The model sets out to explain how an individual's personality structure in light of external reality adapts itself to the demands of instinctual wishes and repression's. This structural model places more emphasis upon external reality than does the topographical model. As a consequence as A. Bateman & J. Holmes note "the key issue clinically is not just whether the patient is conscious or unconscious of some aspect of himself, but whether what part of his mind holds sway: is the patient behaving and thinking according to primary processes [Id]; under the

³¹ A. Bateman, J. Holmes, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, 1995, p.35.

dictates of conscience [Super-Ego]; or adaptively [reality testing Ego/consciousness].”³² The structural model was concerned with the vicissitudes of the instinctual drives, like the topographical but it placed more emphasis on the structures that delay and alter drive expression.³³

In Freud’s structural model the Id corresponds to the Ucs.³⁴ Now though the Ucs does not coincide with the repressed nevertheless all that is repressed is Ucs.³⁵ Consciousness is the surface of the mental apparatus.³⁶ It regarded as being the sense organ of the ego.³⁷ All perceptions from with out –external reality- and within are from consciousness [Cs].³⁸ Freud notes that only a perception that was once conscious can become conscious.³⁹ The Super-Ego is the psychic representative of the parental authority figures of childhood which have been distorted in some way.⁴⁰ The Super-Ego is a differentiation within the Ego.⁴¹ It crystallizes out of the ego as the person develops, as the ego crystallizes out of the id.⁴² Freud faced with the clinical phenomena of guilt brought on in some cases by morals etc formulated the

³² *ibid.*, p. 36

³³ J. Sandler et al, *Freud’s Models of the Mind*, International University Press, 1997, p. 166.

³⁴ S. Freud, “The Ego and the Id”, in *On Metapsychology*, Penguin, 1984, p.362.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.35.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.357

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp.364-365.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.357.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.358.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 367-379.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.367.

notion of the Super-Ego to account for this guilt or conscience.⁴³ This psychic representative thus is responsible for a persons unconscious guilt.⁴⁴ The Super-Ego is a persons conscience as well as the ideal derived through society and the parents.⁴⁵ The Ego is a structure that is under the influences of the Id and Super-Ego and consciousness. It is an entity that developed to cope with the demands of the pleasure seeking Id the restrictions of the external reality consciousness [its reality testing role] and the demands of the conscience of the Super-Ego.⁴⁶ The Ego faced with these conflicting demands uses its mechanisms of defense to send unwanted content into the Id as repressed content⁴⁷ as well as uses its problem-solving and synthetic capacity to deal with all these demands. The Ego “represents ... reason and common sense, in contrast to the id which contains the passions.”⁴⁸ The Ego is not sharply separated from the Id as part of it is itself Ucs. As Freud states“ a part of the ego, too and Heaven knows how important a part- may be Ucs, undoubtedly is Ucs. And this Ucs belonging to the ego is not latent

⁴² *ibid.*, pp.367-379.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp.365-366.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.374.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp.367-379.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp.367-379.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.362-363.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.364.

like the Pcs; for if it were it could not be activated without becoming conscious.”⁴⁹

The ego uses the mechanisms of defense to repress and modify unacceptable unconscious wishes. The censorship is now no longer a barrier between different psychic parts of the mind it is in fact part of the ego itself. In this regard it can be seen that part of the ego is to protect consciousness from unpleasant content by evaluating and filtering unacceptable content.⁵⁰ It can do this by noticing anxiety the consciousness generates when unacceptable content is coming through.⁵¹

Based upon Freud’s clinical experience he constructed a theoretical superstructure which he called a Metapsychology.⁵² This Metapsychology involved such things as the ego, id and super-ego of which Freud stated “[t]he super-ego, the ego and the id – these, then, are the three realms, regions, provinces, into which we divide an individual’s mental apparatus ...

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.356.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp.399-401.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.399.

⁵² J, Strachey, Sigmund Freud: ‘A sketch of his life’, in *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1991, p.21.

“⁵³ Now the question, is in regard the Metapsychology of the ego, id, super-ego, to ‘is Freud a realist or pragmatist/instrumentalist’? In other words does Freud believe that his entities exist or are they only heuristics tools to aid explanation without any ontological existence. Rycroft claims that Freud regarded his psychic apparatus as a fiction⁵⁴ – “they formulate mental phenomena *as if they* were phenomena.”⁵⁵ In this regard a fiction does not ontologically exist it is just heuristic. Thus from Rycroft’s characterization Freud is an instrumentalist not a realist. Some of Freud’s expositions would seem to support this claim of Rycrofts. ; but when we understand just what Freud thought about the scientific method and scientific hypotheses we shall see that this is a misrepresentation of Freud’s ideas due to a misunderstanding of what Freud thought he was doing.

From Freud’s account of what science is and does it can be seen that Freud regarded the ego, id and super-ego as being ontological existent entities. Freud regarded what he was doing in psychology as science. Science, according to Freud, “ ... endeavors is to arrive at a correspondence with reality – that is to say, with what exists outside us and independently of us

⁵³ S, Freud, ‘Dissection of the personality’, in *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1991, p.104.

⁵⁴ C,Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Pyschoanalysis*, 2 ed, Penguin, 1995, p.142.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.17.

... correspondence with the real external world we call 'truth'.⁵⁶ Thus we see here that Freud regarded science as discovering real existent entities, entities that are external and independent of us. Now these entities were regarded as being provisional hypotheses. Freud states of this Metapsychology that any part of it can be altered or changed without loss or regret once it proves inadequate. As he states "such ideas as these are part of the speculative superstructure of psychoanalysis any portion of which can be abandoned or changed without loss or regret the moment its inadequacy has been proved."⁵⁷ Similarly Freud notes that the mental apparatus "... is an hypothesis like many others in the sciences ... open to revision ... The value of an 'fiction' of this kind ... depends on how much one can achieve with its help."⁵⁸ Here Freud is associating 'fiction' with hypotheses. Now Freud regarded an hypothesis. As something science constructs to understand the observational facts which can be modified or altered as the observations entail in order to get a better understanding of the facts in question. As Freud notes in science "[b]y observation ... we come upon something new ... we put forward conjectures, we construct hypothesis, which we withdraw if they are not confirmed ... we renounce early

⁵⁶ S, Freud, 'A Weltanschauung', in *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1991, p.206-207.

⁵⁷ S, Freud, 'An Autobiographical Study' in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican books, 1986, p.216.

convictions so as not to be led by them into overlooking unexpected factors and in the end ...we get an insight into the whole of mental events ...”⁵⁹

Now Freud regarded such things as matter, force and gravitation in physic as being hypotheses or working concepts as he states “ [p]hysics itself, indeed, would never have made any advance if it had to wait until its concepts of matter, force, gravitation and so on had reached the desirable degree of clarity and precision.”⁶⁰ Now just as Freud would regard some concepts of science i.e. physic as being hypotheses he nevertheless would not deny that in some way they did exist. This is the same with his hypotheses of the ego, super-ego and id. For Freud these hypotheses at the time of formulation referred to existent ontological things.

Freud is a realist. He believed at the time he postulated such things as ego, id and super-ego that they were perpetually existing entities. The ego, id super-ego did exist. even though his hypothesis about them could in time be modified, or displaced by new facts, they nevertheless, at the time he put them forward , did exist.

⁵⁸ S, Freud, ‘The Question of Lay Analysis’, in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican books, 1986, p.294.

⁵⁹ S, Freud, ‘A Weltanschauung’ in *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1991, p.210.

Freud abandon the topographical model, for his structural model, nevertheless when he constructed it he believed that what he was describing in fact did exist. Now even though Freud stated that "... our hypothesis set out to be no more than graphical illustrations"⁶¹ he nevertheless believed that there is something for which the metaphor is a metaphor of. This something did exist it existed in the brain itself. In talking about sexuality, in 1914, Freud notes that psychical forces can be used to replace, or stand for what are really chemical substances, or existents he states "... we are taking this probability into account in replacing the special chemical substances by special psychical forces."⁶²In other words Freud is saying the psychical forces exist ontologically because the chemicals they represent exist ontologically. In 1914. Freud postulates the an agency that was to become the super-ego in such a way that he states that it might ontologically exist As he states "[I]t would not surprise us if we were to find a special psychical agency ... [one that] constantly watches the ego and measures it by that ideal. If such and agency exists we cannot possibly come to upon it as a

⁶⁰ S, Freud, 'An Autobiographical Study' in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican books, 1986, p.242.

⁶¹ S, Freud, 'The Unconscious' in *On Metapsychology*, Penguin, 1991, p.177.

⁶² S, Freud, 'On Narcissism an Introduction', in *On Metapsychology*, Penguin, 1991. P. 71.

discovery – we can only recognize it ...”⁶³ Freud in 1915 noted that the mental apparatus of the topographical model did refer to physical parts of the brain. In regard to the topography of the mental apparatus Freud states “It is a difficult one as it goes beyond pure psychology and touches on the relations of the mental apparatus to anatomy. We know that in the very roughest sense such relations exist.”⁶⁴ In 1933 Freud again notes that the psychic phenomena existed because they had biological i.e. physical accompaniments As he states “[a]ctually what we are talking now is biological psychology, we are studying the psychical accompaniments of biological processes. It was as representing this aspect of the subject that the ‘ego-instincts’ and the ‘sexual instincts’ were introduced into psychoanalysis.”⁶⁵ Again Freud claims that psychoanalysis is rooted in biology “... after we have completed our psychoanalytic work we will have to find some point of contact with biology...”⁶⁶ Similarly psychoanalysis “... explains the supposedly somatic concomitants phenomena as being what is truly psychical ...”⁶⁷ These claims of Freud clearly show that the mental apparatus of the ego, id and super-ego did exist because they have

⁶³Ibid., . P. 89.

⁶⁴ S, Freud, ‘The Unconscious’ in *On Metapsychology*, Penguin, 1991, p.176

⁶⁵ S, Freud, ‘Anxiety and Instinctual life’, in *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1991, p.128.

⁶⁶ S, Freud, ‘The Claims of Psychoanalysis to Scientific Interest’ in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican books, 1986, 42.

biological, or physical accompaniments in the brain Freud says this clearly when he states “ ... we must recollect that all our provisional ideas in psychology will presumably some day be based on an organic substructure ...”⁶⁸ Here we see that Freud regarded his hypotheses of the mental apparatus as one day being found to be part of the organic make up of the brain. In other words as existing since the physical brain exists. Thus even though the ego, id and super-ego are provisional hypotheses at the time of their use they were considered to be existent ontological things. That Freud regarded the ego as being an ontologically real thing is no more clearly seen than in regard to the fact that according to Freud the ego both produces and feels anxiety. Freud states “ [w]ith this thesis that the ego is the sole seat of anxiety – that the ego alone can produce and feel anxiety.”⁶⁹ The feeling of anxiety is a real phenomena not a fiction- if the ego feels a real emotion then it must be real as well not a fiction as Rycroft claims.

Now it must be admitted that Freud in his writing seems to offer a pragmatist/instrumentalist account of the ego, id and super-ego that

⁶⁷ S, Freud, ‘An Outline of Psychoanalysis’, in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican books, 1986, p.389.

⁶⁸ S, Freud, ‘On Narcissism an Introduction’, in *On Metapsychology*, Penguin, 1991.

contradicts the above realist account of Freud. This pragmatism was expressed Breuer in 1893-95, in his joint work with Freud. Breuer noted that the spatial relations of psychology are only metaphor and have not reality to the brain as they are only mythical entities. As he states “ Our mythology is complete .. we constantly bear in mind that all such spatial relations are metaphorical and don’t allow ourselves to be misled into supposing that these relations are literally present in the brain we may nevertheless speak of a consciousness and subconsciousness. But only on this condition.”⁷⁰ Freud seems to adopt this characterization of Breuer in some of his characterizations of the mental apparatus, and could account for Rycroft claiming that Freud regarded his mental apparatus as a fiction i.e. did not ontologically exist.

Freud in 1905 states “... the terminology of the still unknown topography of the mental apparatus (which is not to be taken anatomically).”⁷¹ Again in 1915 Freud noted that “[o]ur psychical topography has *for the present* nothing to do with anatomy; it has reference not to anatomical localities but

⁶⁹ S, Freud, ‘Anxiety and Instinctual life’, in *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1991, p.117.

⁷⁰ J, Breuer, & S, Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, Penguin, 1991, p.307.

⁷¹ S, Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Pelican Book, 1976, p.219.

to regions in the mental apparatus, wherever they may be situated in the body ... ⁷² In 1933 Freud similarly stated "... the apparatus of the mind as being built up of a number of agencies or systems whose relations to one another are expressed in spatial terms without any actual connect with the anatomy of the brain (I have described this as the topographical method of approach)" ⁷³

In 1933 Freud comes the closet, to my mind, to answering the question as to whether the ego, id and super-ego are just concepts or existent ontological things. His answer is very vague, and since most of Freud's writing are clear and concise, it is mystery why –perhaps translation. Nevertheless his answer does not seem to make the issue clear at all. As he states

“ I am now prepared to hear you ask me scornfully whether our ego psychology comes down to nothing more than taking commonly used abstractions literally and in a crude sense, and transforming them from concepts to things – by which not much would be gained. To this I would reply that in ego-psychology it will be difficult to escape what is universally

⁷² S, Freud, 'The Unconscious' in *On Metapsychology*, Penguin, 1991, p.177.

known; it will be rather a question of new ways of looking at things and new ways of arranging them than of new discoveries.”⁷⁴

These apparent contradictions of Freud in the light of his views about science its methods and aims must be an aberration. The pragmatist/instrumental claims of Freud are out of place with what Freud saw himself doing namely science. If we are to give any consistency to Freud's claims this pragmatist/instrument aspect can only be seen as being an anomaly. It is only when we place Freud's realist claims alongside his concept of science that his views become both consistent and coherent and his pragmatism an aberration – which does need to be explained. We can see the consistency of Freud's realism when we consider in what degree he agrees and disagrees with Breuer's claims about mythology.

Freud in fact agrees with Breuer in calling his theories a mythology. But this agreement is deceptive. Freud in fact claims that the theories of physics are mythology as well. As Freud notes “[i]t may perhaps seem to you as

⁷³ S, Freud, ‘An Autobiographical Study’ in *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican books, 1986, p.216.

⁷⁴ S, Freud, ‘Dissection of the personality’, in *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1991, p.91.

though our theories are a kind of mythology ... But does not every science come in the end to a kind of mythology like this? Cannot the same be said to-day of your physics.”⁷⁵ Now as we argued above Freud would have regarded the mythical entities of physics such as force etc as existing. What Freud regarded mythical entities as being was not their non-existence but their indefiniteness. As Freud notes in regard to the instincts “[t]he theory of the instincts is to say our mythology. Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness.”⁷⁶ In this regard the ego, id and super-ego can be regarded as being mythical entities not because they don’t exist but because their complete elaboration, like the entities of physics, remains indefinite.

Thus we see that Freud’s ideas of the method and aims science make him a realist. This realism has the consequence that the ego, id and super-ego where regarded at the time of their use to be real ontological existent entities . The existed in the hard wiring of the brain as physical parts of the brains anatomy. There appear to be places in Freud’s writing which give credence to Rycroft’s claim that the ego, id and super-ego where just fictions heuristic

⁷⁵ S, Freud, ‘Why War’, in *Civilization Society and Religion, Group Psychology Civilization and it Discontents and other works*, Penguin, 1985, p. 158

⁷⁶ S, Freud, ‘Anxiety and Instinctual life’, in *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1991, p.127

devices without any ontological or physical aspects i.e. they were not part of the anatomy of the brain. It is argued that these claims of Freud are aberrations or anomalies in his work for if we are to give consistency and coherence to Freud's ideas then we must see his total work in terms of how he viewed science, the very thing he thought he was doing. This view of science held by Freud was that of a realist not a pragmatist/instrumentalist. Breuer claimed that the entities of psychology were fictions or myths, agreeing with Rycroft. Freud also claimed that the entities of psychoanalysis were myths, but he did not mean they were fictions but instead only indefinite like the real existent entities of physics.

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