



YOGA AND FREUD

A Comparative Study in Psychology

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Abstract

Both Freud and Patañjali analyze the mind. Freud analyzes the mind as having three constituent parts, namely, the *Id*, the *Ego* and the *Super-ego*. The *Id*, according to Freud, is the unconscious instinctual urge seeking to fulfill the desires of the senses. It is untamed and unaccepted by society. It's a bundle of instinctual drives which seeks instant satisfaction of sensual drives. The *ego* is a function that seeks to satisfy both the drives of *id* and the social norms. In a way it's a training to adjust the base, unconscious drives of the *id* with the acceptable society. The *super-ego* is the instructor; the instructor comes in the form of parents and later the teachers, peers, ideal persons take over that place. This can be called as conscience that is formed by the instructors or models to live by in the society. In summary the analysis of Freud stops with examining the mind as to how it adjusts with the society without depriving the base drives of the *id*. The *ego* is the mediator between the *id* and the *super-ego*. That way it's an adjustment to live peacefully in society.

Patañjali analyzes the mind as a series of activities. The activities are of five types: right knowledge, wrong knowledge, imagination, sleep and memory. These are termed as 'modifications' meaning that the activities are in constant change. If one identifies with these activities that one would be in anguish; if one goes beyond the activities by merely looking upon them as the activities of the mind, that one would be in the state of non-anguish. Patañjali concludes that the mind is a lower state of reality and that which observes the mind is a superior reality. That superior reality he calls as the Self. Once a person realizes that s/he is not the changing mind but an observer of the mind that person realizes the nature of Self. That realization of the Self is liberation from all the anguish of the world.

Though both Freud and Patañjali analyze the mind, they differ greatly. Whereas Freud stops with the analysis of the mind, Patañjali goes beyond the mind, searches deeply for an agent that analyzes the mind. That agent is the consciousness which is conscious of the lower reality, the mind. As long as a person identifies herself/himself with the lower reality, i.e., the changing mind, one is in anguish and in bondage. When a person sees the separation between the conscious agent (Self) and the mind, that one is freed from the bondage and attains the liberation.

I. Clarifying the Terms of Freud

Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) used the terms (in German) "*das es*," "*Das Ich*," and "*das Uber*" for describing the psychoanalysis (Laplanche, Jean, 1973). Their meaning in English is "the It," the I," and "the Over-I" respectively. These terms are Latinized by Freud's translator James Strachey as "*id*," "*ego*," and "*super-ego*." Among these the first term "the It" is borrowed from a German physician Groddeck, Georg (1923), translated into English (1928). The original terms seem to be self-explanatory the Latinized terms. The term '*ego*' is taken from Latin which means 'I' in the nominative of the first person singular. Bruno Bettelheim criticized the Latinization of the terms which complicate the otherwise self-explanatory original terms, "...the English

translations impeded students' efforts to gain a true understanding of Freud” (quoted in Symington, p. 10). The Latin rendered terms need effort to understand the original sense in which Freud has written.

According to the structural model of the psyche the id, ego and super-ego are distinct, interacting agents. These are the agents that describe the activities and interactions of the mental life of a person. Accordingly, the id is a set of untamed instinctual desires and the super-ego plays moralizing role; the ego is a bridging principle that plays a role of harmonizing between the id and ego in practical life. (Strachey, 1999). Freud gives an analogy to explain the relation of the three: the ego is like a man on horseback; the horse is the instinctual desire (the id); and the super-ego is the reins that control the strength of the horse. The functions of the mind as id, ego and super-ego are explained below.

I.1. The ‘Id’

Three statements are made as the way of explaining the ‘Id’ by Cherry:

First, Id the source of all psychic energy that is the primary component of personality. Second, it’s the only component that is present from the birth. Third, it’s entirely unconscious and includes instinctive and primitive behaviors (Cherry, Kendra. 2018). It’s the source of impulses and acts as the pleasure principle avoiding the pain. Freud himself describes it as the dark and inaccessible part of our personality and very little of it is known by the ‘dreamwork’. It is of a negative character and described only as a contrast to the ‘Ego.’ It is described in analogies as chaos, a boiling kettle etc. It is filled with energy of instincts; but these instinctive powers are not organized. It strives to satisfy the instinctual needs to the observance of the pleasure principle. (Freud, 1933, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 105-6).

Since the Id begins at the birth, it precedes the Ego. The difference between them is that the Id is in search of pleasure and the ego balances the impulse with reality. It is mostly unknown to us since it is not under the control of consciousness. It can be described as the pure impulse of the bodily senses. It forms the first psychical expression. (Freud, 1940, *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*).

The new born child’s psyche is totally ‘id-ridden’, meaning, it is a collection of instinctive drives and impulses. It is for the instant satisfaction of the senses. It is actually powered by the needs of the organism, the body. It does not know moral judgment as good and evil. It is described as ‘the great reservoir of libido’ (Freud, *The Ego and the Id, On Metapsychology* (Penguin Freud Library 11) p. 369). Libido has been explained as the instinctive drive to create the life instincts which are crucial to survival.

Freud, in his advanced years, articulates id as negative instinct, i.e., ‘death instinct.’ The task this instinct is to lead organic life back to the inanimate state (Freud, *On Metapsychology* p. 380). According to Freud, the death instinct seems to express itself as instinct of destruction not of the self but directed against the external world and other organisms through aggression. In conclusion the id includes all instinctual impulses, survival as well as the destructive.

I.2. The ‘Ego’

‘Ego’ is the Latin word for ‘I’. It is one of the three constitutional elements of the mind (id, ego and superego). The above passage describes *Id* as a bundle of desires, instincts etc. that wants to be satisfied immediately. Ego delays the urge created by id and waits for proper time and place etc. for fulfilling the desires of the id. It is described as the mediator between id, i.e. instinctual desires and superego, moral constraints.

Freud explains ego as the ‘organized’ part of the mind that mediates between id and superego, and the realities of the world. It is, in a way, ‘civilized person’ that acts according to the norms of society. Ego operates according to the reality principle; accordingly, it delays or redirects instinctual gratification to suit social norms and circumstances. “The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions” (Freud, S. 1923. *The Ego and the Id*).

There is a relationship between id and reality through ego. Ego is an attempt to mediate between these two. The passions, instinctual urges are unconscious commands; the ego, with its preconscious rationalizations, conceals the id’s conflicts with reality (Sigmund Freud, 1933, p. 110). It was already seen that ego ‘delays’ the urges of

the id; and example can be that the urge of grabbing other's pen is gratified by purchasing one. Grabbing is the unconscious urge of the id and purchasing is the preconscious rationalism of ego.

Whereas the id is unorganized bundle of instincts, the ego is organized part of the personality structure. It includes the functions of defense, perception and intellectual cognition. Ego, though completely conscious, certain conscious awareness resides in it. Freud used the word ego to mean a sense of 'self.' Later, re-interpreted it to mean a set of psychic functions like judgment, reality testing etc. The function of the ego is to separate what is real; helping one to organize one's thoughts and have sense of those thoughts and the world around. (Ruth, Snowden, 2006, pp.105-107). Id and ego are in tension like in a tug of war; the id is the pull of the passions without reason, and the ego is rational part in order to satisfy these passion (Freud, *The Ego and the Id, On Metapsychology*, pp. 363-4). The tug of war becomes even worse because the ego serves three severe masters, the external world, the super-ego and the id (Freud, 1933). From this the task of ego is clear, i.e., to find balance between id, the strong sensual drive, and the reality in the external world; it satisfies the id and the super-ego. The safety of a person depends on the operation the ego; it balances the drives of the id, giving expressions to it in a limited manner so as not to harm the person. The moral guilt, anxiety, and inferiority arise because of remorse from the super-ego since the ego tries to satisfy the primitive drives of the id.

Freud identifies a defence mechanism to resolve the conflicts that arise because of the id and reality confrontation. The defence mechanism includes denial, displacement, fantasy, repression etc. Because of ego's connection with both id and super-ego it is half conscious, a quarter preconscious and another quarter unconscious.

I.3. Super-ego

The cultural rules taught mainly by parents are internalized and super-ego is this internalization (Schocter, Daniel. 2009, p. 481). According to Freud it can be called as 'conscience' of a person (Freud, *On Metapsychology*, pp. 89-90). Though the super-ego is internalization of the parents in the first place, the others like educators, ideal people, religious teachers etc. take the place of parents. This way, the super-ego is constructed on the model of not parents but of its parents' super-ego. This becomes a vehicle of tradition making moral judgments that are handed down from generation to generation (Freud, 1933, pp. 95-96).

Perfection is the aim of the super-ego (Meyers, David G. (2007). "Module 44 The Psychoanalytic Perspective"). It is commonly called as 'conscience' forming the organized part of the personality structure. It is mainly unconscious but there is also conscious part in it which includes the individual's ego ideals, spiritual goals, and the psychic agency. It criticises and prohibits the drives, fantasies, feelings and actions. "The Super-ego can be thought of as a type of conscience that punishes misbehavior with feelings of guilt. For example, for having extra-marital affairs" (Reber, Arthur. (1985). *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*). One can take it as the inner critic from the above sense of conscience. The difference between id and super-ego are clear: whereas the id wants immediate gratification of the instincts, senses, the super-ego wants to go along with the socially accepted norms. Thus the super-ego controls our sense of right and wrong and guilt and helps one to fit to the society according to the accepted norms and behaviour. Since the id and the super-ego are opposed to each other the ego sometimes has a hard time to reconcile between them. Freud related super-ego with the father figure and Oedipus complex and if the male child clings to the mother it is afraid of castration by the father (Freud. *The Ego and the Id*). It is different for women because women are considered already castrated; because of this their judgements are influenced by the feelings of hostility and affection (Freud. *On Sexuality*),

I.4. The Summary of Freud's Mind Analysis

Earlier Freud divides the mind into three topographical models as conscious, preconscious and unconscious. The terms are self-explanatory: conscious means the things/events that one is aware of, preconscious on the way to become conscious and unconscious, the events that one is not aware of (Carlson, Neil R. (2010). *Psychology, the science of behaviour: The psychodynamic approach*. Toronto: Pearson Canada, p. 453). The new interpretation of these three is slightly different: "the three qualities of consciousness and the three provinces of the mental apparatus do not fall together into three peaceful couples...we had no right to expect any such smooth arrangement" (Sigmund Freud (1933). pp. 104-5).

With above detailed explanation of the mind being divided into three, namely, *id*, *ego* and *super-ego*, one can conclude that Freud is analyzing the ‘mind’ alone. He does not go beyond the mind which is the main concern of the *Yoga System of Philosophy (Yoga-darśana)*. It would be immediately clear to the reader as s/he reads through the Yoga psychology in the next section.

II. Yoga Psychology: Beyond the Mind

The first six *sūtras* (aphorisms) of *Yoga-darśana* explain the nature of the mind, which is unconscious, and how there is something beyond this unconscious mind that observes it. Once the seer identifies himself/herself with the consciousness s/he is established in the nature of that consciousness. A short explanation is attempted to the first six *sūtras* of Patañjali’s *Yoga-sūtras*.

II.1. *Atha yogānuśāsanam* – and now the discipline called Yoga (*Yoga-sūtras* 1.1).

The word *atha* (then, and now, after) signifies the disillusionment of all desires because of non-fulfilment, i.e., the sensual desires are never satisfied. Satisfaction is the fulfilment of the desire and since there is no satisfaction one realizes the futility of the desire. ‘And then’ (*atha*) the discipline called Yoga is needed. *Anuśāsanam* means the discipline. The mind is filled with ‘crowd’ of desires. To wade them off and to get ‘centred’ one needs discipline. That centring, making the empirical self (crowd of desires) with the ultimate self (the conscious soul) is called *Yoga* (from the root *yuj* – to unite). It is uniting oneself from the ‘outer’ (empirical) to the ‘inner’ (ultimate, spiritual) self.

II.2. *Yogaḥ-cittavṛtti nirodhaḥ* - Yoga is the cessation of the mental modifications (1.2).

Mental modifications are explained in details because mind, in itself, is not a substance but it exists as various functions of the mind. Buddhism calls it as ‘conglomeration of thoughts.’ The ‘functions’ are called *vṛttayaḥ* translated as ‘modifications.’ Mind exists in the action called thoughts. Like ‘walking’ is an activity, but it is not substance. If one stops walking there is no substance called walking anymore. The same way mind is an activity called thinking. If there is no thinking, there is no mind. No thinking means one needs to separate oneself from the activity of the mind, i.e., thinking. This is called ‘cessation’ of the mind.

II.3. *Tadādraṣṭuḥ svarūpe ’vasthānam* – the one who sees thus (without mental modifications) is established in the nature (nature of the self) (1.3).

One is established in oneself by witnessing the mental activity. The logicity of the ‘self’ which is conscious is that the mental activity can be ‘seen’/witnessed by something other than mind. It is so because the mind cannot see itself. If the mind can be observed that means that there is something higher than the mind which observes it. This observing one is conscious and it is called self. The real nature of the self is consciousness. That’s why the aphorism says that the one who sees the unconscious mind as separate from the conscious self is established in its own nature (*svaṛūpe ’vasthānam*). The conclusion is that such person realizes the nature of the self (as consciousness).

II.4. *Vṛtti sārūpyamitaratrā* – in not witnessing the mind, one is identified with the mind (mental modifications) (1.4).

The term ‘*itaratrā*’ signifies those who do not witness the mental modification. They become one with the mind. These are the people who have not realized the self but act according to the mental modification. Such people can be termed as ‘sensual’ because they act according to the sensual impulses. Those who identify themselves with the mind’s activities appear sick because they have not realized the conscious self. These are called ‘*vṛtti-sārūpyam*’ (the one identified themselves with the modifications). Based on this explanation, people can be divided into two categories, those who realize that they are separate from the mental activities and those who do not. *Yoga-sūtras* continues with the mental modifications.

II.5. *Vṛttayḥ pañcatayyaḥ kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ* - mental modifications are five kinds and they are (the cause of) anguish and non-anguish (1.5).

It looks strange to say that the mental modifications are the cause of anguish and non-anguish! It is anguish if one gets identified oneself with the mental modifications. That is when a person cannot see the mind as separate from oneself. That's the expression 'he lost himself' or 'over-powered by the emotions' etc. make meaning. Here the person gets identified with the mind and acts upon it. Such a person is in anguish.

On the other hand, if a person sees mind as separate from oneself, such person can make the mind as an instrument. That one merely becomes witness to the mental activities and does not act upon them. Such person is in the state of non-anguish. The one who realizes that s/he is not the mind and the mind is not a permanent substance but a passing activity is separated from the mental activity. This separation from the mental activity is the state of non-anguish.

Patanjali carefully avoids the positive term 'joy,' 'happiness,' 'felicity' etc. because of a reason. The reason is that when a person listens to such terms s/he gets attached to those positive terms, i.e., 'joy' etc. The attachment leads one to forget about the goal of realizing the conscious self. That's why he puts neuter term, non-anguish.

II.6. *Pramāṇa viparyaya vikalpa nidrā smṛtayaḥ* - (the mental modifications are of five kinds) right knowledge, misconception, fictitious perception, sleep and memory (1.6).

Patanjali classifies the mind as the five modifications. These are fluctuations or movements (passing activity) of the mind. Through these five modifications the mind operates and experiences the empirical reality. A short explanation of these five modifications is attempted below:

- 1) *Pramāṇa* – right knowledge: it is given as the source of valid knowledge in the Classical Indian Philosophical Systems. Three sources (*pramāṇas*) are widely accepted and they are, perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*) and testimony (*śabda*).
- 2) *Viparyaya* – wrong knowledge: it is mistaken identity; seeing something else than what is. For example seeing a shining shell one may mistake it as silver or the famous rope-snake example.
- 3) *Vikalpa* – imagination: mere words without indicating an actual object like sky-flower, son of a barren woman, married bachelor etc.
- 4) *Nidrā* – sleep: it is a mental state that is characterised by the absence of empirical content; but still the mind experiences objects making it a modification.
- 5) *Smṛti* – memory: it is the retention of past experiences in the consciousness.

A seer sees them as mere activities of the mind separating himself from the activity. He learns to observe and make them as instruments by regulating the modifications with the power of the consciousness. Thus, gaining mastery over these modifications one attains the stillness of the mind. Through this stillness one can enter into *samādhi* to be united with the self (self-realization). The others who cannot see the modifications as separate from the conscious self, become identified with the modifications and land up in anguish.

Concluding Remarks

Though both Freud and Patanjali analyse the mind, they differ greatly. Whereas Freud stops with the analysis of the mind, Patanjali goes beyond the mind. Separates the mind as unconscious activity and comes to the conscious self which can be aware of the activities of the mind. Freud does not go beyond the physical mind but Patanjali searches the 'conscious agent' that is aware the mind.

There is a concept of 'liberation' in Patanjali's thought: as long as a person identifies herself/himself with the lower reality, i.e., the changing mind, one is in anguish and in bondage. But when a person sees the separation between the conscious agent (self) and the mind, that one is freed from the bondage and attains the liberation.

Freud's analysis leads to psychological therapy which makes 'adjustment' with the real world. Thus, making the base drives acceptable to the society's norms.

Patañjali's vision is fullness of 'health' by going beyond the mind. It is achieved by realization of the 'consciousness' that which witnesses the mind's activity. It's 'adjusting' with the existence itself.

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