

# **PERTSEV VS SLOTERDIJK NATUR-THEISM, OR THE PHILOSOPHY OF NEUROSIS: THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PREREQUISITES FOR THE EMERGENCE OF S. FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYSIS\***

**Konstantin A. SOROKIN**

Postgraduate student, Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia konstantin.sorokin1@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0004-1914-313X

\*Translated by Danil Yurievitch LANSKIKH, postgraduate student of the Department of Fundamental and Applied Linguistics and Textual Science, Department of Philology, Ural Institute for Humanities, Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the present study is to examine ideas related to psychoanalysis by means of comparing and collating two works: "Natur-Theism as the crypto-philosophy of Sigmund Freud" by A. V. Pertsev and "Proposals for the historical philosophy of neurosis" by P. Sloterdijk. The research method is based on juxtaposition of facts from the life of S. Freud with philosophical and historical interlinkages and philosophical knowledge. The first section of the paper deals with comparing psychoanalysis with the phenomenon of exorcism, the second section covers German idealism, and the third section focuses on the religion of Judaism. The study constitutes an analysis of S. Freud's methodology with special attention to the comparison of these phenomena using the prefix "post" with regard to perception of psychoanalysis.

**Keywords:** Pertsev, Sloterdijk, Freud, Psychoanalysis, Neurosis

*The article is dedicated to the seventieth anniversary of Professor,  
PhD in Philosophy, A. V. Pertsev*

## Introduction

When dealing with classical Viennese psychoanalysis within the context of history of ideas, there is an obvious presence of a triple religious-philosophical influence, characterized by P. Sloterdijk as post-exorcism, post-idealism and post-Judaism. Within the given context, the prefix "post-" always indicates a revisionist approach to a particular mode of thought, while nouns reflect the intellectual and historical tendencies belonging to the highest level of psychological competence. In turn, A. V. Pertsev refers to psychoanalysis as Natur-Theism, or the Pantheistic philosophy of Viennese therapeutic nihilism, a curative philosophy and ideology of a considerable social movement. Making a correct diagnosis was the primary purpose of this movement, whereas the rest was left to be cared for by nature. All three trends possess a mediumistic character. We can observe how, over the centuries, profound knowledge of mysteries of both external and internal relations of the human soul has been preserved in psychoanalysis-related traditions, such as exorcism, idealism and Judaism.

### Psychoanalysis as post-exorcism

Exorcism is by and large Christian shamanism culture-wise, still practiced by Catholic and Orthodox churches. According to Christian tradition, entities known as demons can indwell a person, and the condition thereof is known as "demonic possession". "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Luke 11: 24–26), which should be understood as follows: if the spiritual space of a "house", that is, a soul, is not filled by the presence of the Holy Spirit through prayerful contemplation and spiritual communion, there is a probability of it being taken over by opposite, negative spiritual powers.

When exorcism was performed, healing and recovery were perceived as ritual processes like cleansing of a sanctuary. The soul was seen not as a stage or a production space (which is typical for the modern era), but rather as a sanctuary, in which no idol belonged but the image of God the Man; His image, for its part, was meant to represent the unattainable God. It is important to notice that in such a concept recovery was never regarded as mere elimination of a disorder. Banishment of malicious spirits was always accompanied by an ascendant bright principle which, becoming the guardian of a soul purged of stain, transformed into its new inspiration. P. Sloterdijk notes: "According to the theory of exorcistic catharsis, the healing process implies alteration of the soul's owner, and in doing so, the malicious denizen is replaced by a positive and benevolent spirit. It does not imply the emergence of a twisted personal interest for this individual soul" (Sloterdijk 2017: 138). As compared with pastoral magic, psychoanalysis, like post-exorcism, has only preserved a single common motive – reincarnation. Despite the rejection of metaphysical doctrines, this motive continues to hold psychological significance, proposing to replace disruptive possession with affections of a life of decency.

Citing A. Lorenzer (1922–2002) and studying in detail the history of "medical-administrative violence", already in connection with activities of Jean Martin Charcot (1825–1893), one of the teachers of S. Freud (1856–1939), he lists four sources of "the flourishing of medicinal authority":

- the right to administer patients inherited from the state regulation of destitution (i.e., public charity system);
- the magical figure of a healer who determines everything and upon whom everything important depends;
- the suppressive superiority of a scientist, the only figure capable of comprehending the laws of disease and healing;
- the hypnotist's irresistible and violent interference in the patient's behaviour" (Lorenzer 1996: 94).

All this indicates the substitution of Christian practice of exorcism with quite a scientific-research approach associated with neurotic disorders in humans. S. Freud never resorted to hypnosis due to his lack of hypnotist skills; everything else that has been stated about a doctor as a figure of authority is applicable not only to J. M. Charcot's therapy, but to psychoanalysis, as well. Likewise, these concepts can be extended to describe

the opposite party – a powerless and completely subjugated patient. A psychoanalyst dealing with a patient in the XX century becomes the one who earlier exorcised demons from the soul of a sinner or an ailing man. Demons have turned into complexes. A. V. Pertsev points out: “However, such autonomous struggle for recovery demanded guidance and mentorship no longer coming from a person of clergy, but from a physician”.

Psychoanalysis was a good solution for the situation, making it possible for medicine to reclaim something that had seemingly been irrevocably handed over to religion and put at its mercy under the influence of Kantianism and positivism – the right to hear the patient’s confession on par with the right of spiritual guidance over them, implemented during a personal dialog with the patient as a unique personality.

Unlike these philosophical teachings, psychoanalysis did not separate science from religion or split spheres of influence with it, thereby indirectly confirming its sole discretion of mental impact on the patient, but rather started actively recapturing this very discretion. It was this that enabled psychoanalysis to become scientific confession and scientific sermon, as well as scientific absolution” (Pertsev 2020: 21).

### **Psychoanalysis as post-idealism**

A. V. Pertsev writes on the possibility of Freudian psychoanalysis to be perceived “...first, as a science of principles and causes of the psyche and, secondly, as a philosophical discipline. Indeed, it is an unusual philosophy, judging by the categories it operates. These categories largely represent concepts used in modern medicine, physiology and psychology” (Pertsev 2020: 31). However, any expert in the field of human behavior would probably notice that a meaning that is excessively broad is ascribed to Freudian concepts. On the other hand, a historian of philosophy would not take long to see that these concepts replace traditional metaphysical categories while retaining the essence of the same problems. When studying the second field which happens to be the source of the psychoanalytic system – the philosophy of German idealism, especially its Fichtean and Schellingian forms, we can see the concept of the animated spirit and the spiritualized soul reach peak level of abstraction. Within the context of idealistic logic we can say that the area of the soul or the spirit is formed exclusively through the interaction of the mental and the spiritual.

For instance, J. G. Fichte (1762–1814) argues that the manifestation of consciousness fundamentally contains the absolute “I”, manifested in the unconscious as the will or the need for action. “From this necessity of action proceeds the consciousness of the actual world and not the reverse way; the consciousness of the actual world is derived from the necessity of action. We do not act because we know, but we know because we are called upon to act; the practical reason is the root of all reason” (Fichte 1905: 82). Unconscious ideal activity represents the fusion of process and its product in the form of the absolute “I”. The absolute “I” in the process of development moves from the unconscious state of the subject “I” to the conscious state as an object in the “not-I”. J. G. Fichte writes: “The I is unconditionally opposed to a certain “Not-I” ... Insofar the Not-I is to posit itself, the I must also be posited..., both the I and the not-I are products of primary actions of the I; consciousness itself is such a product of the primary actions of the I; and consciousness itself is such a product of the primary action of the I - the I posited by itself” (Fichte 1916: 75, 84, 86). We can say that the absolute “I” is subdivided into empirical quantities well-suited for analysis.

The thinking task of idealism, namely, the so-called absolute reflection, lies in the intuitive comprehension of oneself as a local symptom of God’s presence, – one should understand “comprehension” here seriously as acting in a cognitive theodrama; thinking in the highest sense means what is comprehended – comprehension, what is seen – vision; the participles “comprehended” and “seen” should be replaced with stronger forms “comprehended through” and “seen through” in order to point out the medial nature of comprehension and vision as events. It is not I who sees and comprehends but rather the force of vision and comprehension emanating from the Absolute and acting through me” (Sloterdijk 2017: 140). German idealism stems from the concept of metaphysical mediumism which, from Plato to G. Hegel (1770–1831), asserts that all individual souls are under One God’s authority. Within the scope of monotheism, all personalities are seen as masks of God’s character. The absolute spirit, be it God or life, manifests itself as the principle of absolute indivisibility; it is the prime force of unconditional intensity and pathos which exists (primarily or exclusively) through others.

The abundance of aftereffects of the monotheistic psychotheological thinking pattern has a major impact on the postidealistic concept of the soul. This model gives rise to two milestone concepts to have significantly changed the psychological thinking in the XIX and XX centuries. First, the idea of the unconscious as a recondite shadow of the conscious life of the soul rekindles interest in the depths of the psyche. Secondly, the

concept of subjectivity represents the dual nature of subjective experience – the Ego and the Self. P. Sloterdijk claims: “The latter is easily explained in the context of the previous statement: if we are to accept that the Ego is a function of the absolute spirit, then the soul and individual spirit emerge exclusively under its influence. Since subjectivity in the idealist understanding is a double subjectivity, we can explore the role of the Ego in the context of its capability of manifesting itself through itself. Viewed in this way, idealism can be seen as a sort of philosophical psychoanalysis that explores egoism as resistance to the core essence of itself. This resistance can be interpreted as a warped and unconscious manifestation of a lost divine property, as a symptom of a history of alienation” (Sloterdijk 2017: 141). Recent studies by A. Gehlen (1904–1976), O. Marquard (1928–2015), T. Macho and other researchers suggest that psychoanalysis can be viewed as a depotentiated or “degenerative” form of German idealism (Gehlen 1952: 338–353; Marquard 1986; Thomas 1992).

As noted by A. V. Pertsev, with reference to V. M. Leibin: “Many famous Western philosophers have devoted entire books to the study of Freudian philosophy. He himself, as V. M. Leibin has perfectly demonstrated, was knowledgeable in works by many philosophers, mentioning them in his works. It is just the text and bibliography of the third, revised edition of “The Interpretation of Dreams” that list the names of Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Hegel, Kant, Fichte, Schubert, Scherner, Schleiermacher, Volkelt, Herbart, Fechner, Schopenhauer, E. von Hartmann, Lipps, Wundt and Bradley. His works also mention Nietzsche, Diogenes, Epicurus, Spinoza, Diderot, Rousseau, Gassendi, Maine de Biran and Spencer” (Leibin 1990: 13–26). However, as V. M. Leibin states in his monograph “Freud, psychoanalysis and modern Western philosophy”, “...this very insistence on denying philosophy is precisely what appears alarming” (Ibid.: 24). Presumably, consciously or unconsciously, it was associated with Freud's desire to demonstrate scientific validity of his theory of psychoanalysis. He sought to show that his theory was part of medicine and natural history, not philosophy or anthropology. Moreover, he insisted on the importance of the fact that his theory was absolutely unique, being the result of exceptional creative genius.

A. V. Pertsev describes psychoanalysis in the form of a modern theatrical performance. “One can compare an operation performed with a modernist staging of a classical theatrical play when, say, a Shakespearean tragedy is played by actors clad in modern clothes like jeans or sweaters. The director explains their new developments by claiming that copying authentic costumes and setting would make audience think that what is happening on the stage is only relevant for an age long past, only having museum significance with no connection to modern-day life whatsoever. The director's idea is that a contemporary would more easily perceive a Hamlet wearing a sweater on the stage without getting distracted by the Danish prince's fanciful medieval garments which appear completely alien to him. In this way, the viewer immediately understands that the play puts on the agenda problems relevant and significant for the modern world” (Pertsev 2020: 32).

What has been emphasized above does not belittle Sigmund Freud as the founding father of psychoanalysis and does not imply accusing him of plagiarism (something he may have probably feared himself). It is important to note that most significant scientific ideas never emerge out of nowhere. Vice versa, truly great ideas always reflect a new breakthrough in understanding, but such breakthroughs are not possible without relying on accumulated knowledge in the respective field. However, it is most surprising that Sigmund Freud persistently distanced himself from his predecessors, which only testifies his high ambition and pursuit of the role of a prophet whose ideas are perceived on par with divine revelation, which will be discussed in more detail in the section to follow.

### **Psychoanalysis as post-Judaism**

P. Sloterdijk considers the relationship between Judaism and the method of psychoanalysis the third source of the psychoanalytic movement in a narrower sense. This refers particularly to the Book of Exodus, in which Moses provides no quite specific description of wandering in the desert, much akin to a psychoanalyst providing but implicit promises in their practice. These promises, too, contain an element of boundary transgression, as therapists, by virtue of their profession, follow S. Freud in approaching their clients very closely on the moral stage - often without realizing it clearly. P. Sloterdijk notes: “Despite all its Hellenizing and Aegyptianizing aspects, Viennese psychoanalysis is to be ultimately deciphered as a psychology of exodus. It transposes a people's founding myth – the myth of the Jews' exodus from Egypt – into every single analytic therapy by interpreting clients' previous lives as neurotic–Egyptian and by depicting future life as a case of heading in a big way toward a libidinal Canaan” (Sloterdijk 2017: 142).

There is no guarantee for the attainability of the Promised Land apart from an obscure pledge brokered in earlier times between God and Moses. Psychoanalysis is an individualized practice of exodus. With each of its clients, it repeats a schema that marks the history of the Jewish people even to the present day. Every patient indeed reproduces, more or less discreetly, a private exodus from Egypt under the guidance of psychotherapists who as a rule do not admit that they stand, legally, in the Mosaic line of succession. Every patient is Israel on the forty-year march through the ego-forming desert – a desert that, as a space of suffering, is at the same time a zone of purification and hope. Of this desert it is said that it is better to traverse it in agony than to remain in the comfortable psychic death of Egypt". In modern social environment, a psychoanalyst reaches out to different influences, but unlike a representative of the Enlightenment, who was not always successful at peddling their ideas to the high and the mighty, a psychoanalyst does have authority. Those patients who doubt the efficacy of their treatment may perceive the process thereof as endless wandering, similar to the children of Israel who murmured at the duration of their wandering. Arising doubts about the competence of therapists may also reflect a mistrust of leadership, analogous to Israeli doubts about Moses' competence after many years of vagrancy. This well-known murmur symbolizes the beginning of resistance in the history of ideas. It is interesting to note that Sigmund Freud's behavior towards dissenting colleagues reflects the dynamic of Moses' relationship with his followers. As A. V. Pertsev notes, "The power over the patient must know no limits for psychoanalytic treatment to be successful. Yet S. Freud had no intent to rule only over patients. If one is to use the expression by F. Nietzsche (1844–1900), he intended to subjugate all psychoanalysts of the world as laborers of psychoanalysis, to create around himself the headquarters of this new army of labour and become its sole commander-in-chief" (Pertsev 2020: 28). To have power is, above all, to have boundless influence not only over patients, but one's followers, too. E. Fromm (1900–1980) wrote: "Freudian psychology is permeated through and through with this orientation to "have", and therefore his greatest fear is always that of losing something he "has" (Fromm 2011: 21). A. V. Pertsev provides examples of the titles of articles published by S. Freud, which are mentioned in biographies "Emergence from isolation" (1901–1906), "The beginning of international recognition" (1906–1909); "The International Psycho-analytical Association"; "Opposition" and "Dissentions" (1911–1914); "The Committee"; "the War Years" (1914–1919); "Reunion", "Disunion", "Progress and misfortune" (Pertsev 2020: 29). Fromm wrote: "Anyone reading these headings would hardly doubt that the book deals with the history of a political or a religious movement, its growth and its schisms; that this is the history of a therapy, or a psychological theory, would be a most unexpected surprise. Yet, this spirit of a world-conquering movement already existed in the early years of psychoanalysis" (Fromm 2011: 87). Erich Fromm illustrates a high degree of propensity towards conflict, which accompanied S. Freud's struggle for preserving his authority in the psychoanalytic society. He also refers to Freud's inclemency and implacable attitude toward renegades and those who sought to share the helm with him.

The undertaking named "Exodus" was too important in the time of Moses (and in the XX century, too) for Sigmund Freud to leave it for the mercy of his followers and strangers alike, even if they were bright people. A. V. Pertsev was very accurate when he noticed, quoting E. Fromm, Freud's authoritarian attitude: "...The break with Jung, more dangerous politically and more harmful to Freud personally than any of the other dissensions, led to a new tightening of the movement by the foundation of a secret international committee of seven (including Freud) that was to watch and influence the course of the movement... Ferenczi remarked to Jones "that the ideal plan would be for a number of men who had been thoroughly analyzed by Freud personally to be stationed in different centers or countries. There seemed to be no prospect of this, however, so I [Jones – E. F.] proposed that in the meantime we form a small group of trustworthy analysts as a sort of Old Guard around Freud... Freud himself was enthusiastic about the idea and answered Jones's letter immediately: "What took hold of my imagination immediately is your idea of a secret council composed of the best and most trustworthy among our men to take care of the further development of psychoanalysis and defend the cause against personalities when I am no more... First of all: This committee would have to be strictly secret in its existence and in its actions" (Fromm 2011: 21). In this passage, two contradictions directly collide, primarily related to the universality of the project called psychoanalysis, which in itself implies openness while, on the other hand, keeping this method secret. P. Sloterdijk notes: "The double nature of modern Judaism is unmistakably reflected in psychoanalysis. On the one hand, its people are, more than ever, a persecuted and chosen people; on the other hand, it wants nothing more to do with its special role and would like to leap out of its theological script, as a completely normal nation state. The psychoanalytic movement is both – consistently, one would almost say: on the one hand, a completely normal therapeutic professional organization, just like the Deutsche

Psychoanalytische Gesellschaft e. V. [German Psychoanalytic Society, registered association], with a secular self-image and a lay therapeutic mission; on the other hand, an exodus community with Mosaic rules of succession and a latent pathos of chosenness" (Sloterdijk 2017: 143). It is necessary to note the similar view of A.V. Pertsev on this phenomenon. He compares the position of S. Freud with that one of the Bolsheviks, which wonders about the role of the individual in history altogether and the role of the leader in the psychoanalytic movement in particular. "A doctor among philosophers and a philosopher among doctors, neither of them for specialists, but at the same time both a doctor and a philosopher in the eyes of the general reading public – such was the guise chosen by S. Freud. A guise that allowed him to lay claim to the role of a modern Moses for all mankind" (Pertsev 2020: 31).

Exodus as a pattern of analytic departure is based on the idea of a radical difference between the true and false life. The falsity is manifested in obsessional ideas of compromised Egyptian deities and their various daemons, while the verity lies in the sigh of relief under the authority of the One breathing God whose name cannot be named. The intoxicating deadly comfort of Egypt is considered false, while the sobering, invigorating effort of movement through the interior desert is recognized as true. P. Sloterdijk notes: "A psychotherapy conceived of on a more or less veiled analogy with the monotheistic ethics of holy disillusionment will not hurt its clients' integrity too much when it explicitly acknowledges the greatness and rigor that characterize the anthropology of a religion of exodus. On the contrary, it gets too close to its clients when it has no idea what it's doing when it initiates them into the discipleship of Freudian ideas of healing, which for their part are already encrypted. It gets to be an unconscious boundary transgression when therapists blunder with their clients into Mosaic space, which they neither recognize for what it is nor seek. Psychoanalysis can become an unconscious form of seduction when it emboldens its clients to take elitist pride in their newly won vitality, without reckoning that psychoanalysis in the great Viennese style brings de facto a cryptic form of chosenness into the world" (Sloterdijk 2017: 144). One can notice that those who have walked the path through the desert of the "great analysis" join the ranks of the Chosen People, the former neurotics who are now on an erotic-psychological mission among those who have not yet undergone treatment.

Just as Moses, in his old age, did not cross the border of the Promised land together with his people, so did Sigmund Freud, in his eighties, say the following: "After forty-one years of medical activity, my self-knowledge tells me that I have never really been a doctor in the proper sense. I became a doctor through being compelled to deviate from my original purpose; and the triumph of my life lies in my having, after a long and roundabout journey, found my way back to my earliest path" (Freud 1948: 290). It therefore follows: forty-year long journeys are not always successful for their organizers. Another interesting fact is that S. Freud's work was the book "Moses and Monotheism", in which he argues, citing research done by James Henry Breasted, that the name Moses is of Egyptian origin: "It is important to notice that his name, Moses, was Egyptian. It is simply the Egyptian word 'mose' meaning 'child' and is an abridgement of a fuller form of such names as 'Amen -mose', meaning 'Amon-a-child', or 'Ptah-mose', meaning c Ptah-a-child, these forms themselves being, likewise, abbreviations for the complete form 'Amon-(has-given)-a-child', or 'Ptah-(has-given)-a-child'" (Freud 1939: 4), he was also Egyptian and a disciple of Akhenaten. One can assume that with this last paper S. Freud performed a psychoanalysis session on himself. As stressed by P. Y. Lyukimson, Sigmund Freud was deeply impressed by his father's story: "Suffice it to recall the indelible impression and the horrifying disappointment left in the soul of Sigmund Freud by the story his father once told him: he cowered before an anti-Semite who knocked his hat off him in the street. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine a Jewish boy living in a non-Jewish, or even anti-Semitic environment and dreaming of having non-Jewish parents and his Jewishness being a mistake" (Lyukimson 2014: 293). In "The Interpretation of Dreams" Freud carried out a session of psychoanalysis with himself. One dream he wrote about in his book without altering deals with an episode of a child feeling anger and scorn towards his father, considering him a loser. The child claims that his life will see much more success than that of his miserable father. In another episode, Freud describes the incident with his father's hat, which only highlights his pursuit of power, resistance and even world domination as a response to contempt for his father. In "The Interpretation of Dreams" Freud describes the hat as "symbolizing male genitals" (Freud 2018: 158).

Ancient Egypt was present in Sigmund Freud's life since his very childhood, first as a copy of the Philippon Bible purchased by his father in 1848, then as figurines on the writing desk. One shouldn't also forget Freud's famous retelling of one of his childhood dreams, wherein he saw his mother being carried in arms and placed on her bed by two men with avian heads" (Ibid.: 34). Freud saw himself as a Moses of heritage hard to

tell, but in his letter to Jung he wrote: “*If I am Moses, then you are Joshua and will take possession of the Promised Land of psychiatry, which I shall only be able to glimpse from afar*” (Lyukimson 2014: 284).

Summing up the section, we can note what the phenomenon called psychoanalysis is in the XXI century. It has not become strictly scholarly knowledge but rather part of ordinary life where it is customary to use the term “Freudian slip” without understanding much of what has been said. Using it, numerous people dubbed psychotherapists earn their living. P. Sloterdijk provides the following description to this phenomenon: “Besides, the “exodus” of modern therapy has become so abstract that nothing is left of sacred history but the formula: an amorphous clientele is accompanied by an amorphous leadership in an amorphous target zone, where it is supposed to enjoy the fruits of an amorphous chosenness – this added value of a health earned on its own” (Sloterdijk 2017: 145).

### Conclusion

Psychoanalysis is a discipline causing controversy, and the efficacy of its use as a method of treatment is disputed to this day. Albeit preserving its significance in the field of psychiatry, psychoanalysis nonetheless has a post- connotation. Based on Freudian teachings, new psychoanalytic concepts are created which are widely used outside the therapeutic context, including psychoanalytic literary and film criticism, analysis of fairy tales, such philosophical movements as Freudo-Marxism, as well as other cultural phenomena. As P. Y. Lyukimson writes, “Freud is undoubtedly alive in psychoanalysis: hundreds of thousands of people in different countries continue to use the services of psychoanalysts of various fields and believe that it is helpful to them. Most curious is the fact that even those who admit that modern psychoanalysis is going through crisis are often looking for ways out of it by appealing to S. Freud’s authority and trying to impart a new understanding of his works” (Lyukimson 2014: 465). Undoubtedly, Freudianism has had significant influence on the fields of psychology and philosophy and diverged into multiple branches of humanities knowledge.

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