

Toward a Pragmatist Acknowledgment of the Freudian Unconscious

Para um Reconhecimento Pragmático do Inconsciente Freudiano

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Abstract: This author argues here that Peirce's approach to the unconscious is closer to Freud's psychoanalytic orientation than James's "functional" psychology. The cultural as well as theoretical context in which the question of the unconscious was addressed by these three thinkers is sketched. Moreover, Peirce's critique of James's psychology, as put forth in his review of *The Principles of Psychology*, is examined. Indeed, this critical notice is an important part of the theoretical context. Finally, the philosophical upshot of these historical and exegetical considerations is highlighted at the conclusion of this essay. This upshot concerns how Peirce understood the nature of mind.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis. Psychology. Unconscious. Mind. Consciousness. Reason. Agency. Habit. Freud. James. Peirce. "America".

Resumo: O autor argumenta, aqui, que a abordagem peirciana do inconsciente está mais próxima da orientação psicanalítica freudiana do que da psicologia "funcional" de James. O contexto cultural, como também teórico, no qual a questão do inconsciente foi abordada por esses três pensadores, é delineado. Ademais, a crítica de Peirce à psicologia de James, como apresentada em sua resenha do *The Principles of Psychology*, é analisada. De fato, essa nota crítica é parte importante do contexto teórico. Finalmente, o resultado filosófico dessas considerações históricas e exegeticas é ressaltado nas conclusões deste ensaio. Esse resultado diz respeito ao entendimento de Peirce da natureza da mente.

Palavras-chave: Psicanálise. Psicologia. Inconsciente. Mente. Consciência. Razão. Mediação. Hábito. Freud. James. Peirce. "América".

Introduction

C. S. Peirce sharply distinguished mind from consciousness and, moreover, carefully delineated the senses of consciousness (see, e.g., Peirce CP 7.539-552, CP 8.270-305; also HOUSER, 1983; COLAPIETRO, 1989). In the course of doing so, he articulated a position far closer to Sigmund Freud than to William James. He advocated (to use Freud's terminology) not only the unconscious in the *descriptive* sense but also the unconscious in the *dynamic* sense (see GARDNER, 1991). This is nowhere more evident than in his observation:

Men many times fancy that they act from reason when, in point of fact, the reasons they attribute to themselves are nothing but excuses which unconscious instinct invents to satisfy the teasing 'whys' of the *ego*. The extent of this self-delusion is such as to render philosophical rationalism a farce. (CP 1.631)

Peirce is not precluding the possibility of acting rationally, only underscoring the difficulty of doing so. He is voicing skepticism about *philosophical* rationalism, not one about human reasonableness. For him, "rational" means essentially self-criticizing, self-controlling, and self-controlled, and therefore open to incessant questioning" (CP 7.77). Would it be reasonable, however, to exclude the character of our motives from such questioning, especially when we candidly consider our *experience* not only of ignorance (see, e.g., CP 7.345) but also of self-delusion?

However sharply Peirce distinguished mind from consciousness, he did not absolutely separate them. "We naturally make all our distinctions," not only this one, "too absolute" (CP 7.438).¹ Dualistic or "anti-synechistic thinkers wind themselves up in a factitious snarl by falsifying the phenomena in representing consciousness to be ... a skin, a separate tissue, overlying an unconscious region of the occult nature, mind, soul, or physiological basis" (CP 5.440). In contrast, the synechist (i.e., the Peircean who is committed to continuity) avoids such snarls by maintaining "the difference is only relative and the demarcation not precise" (ibid.).² The explicit supposition here is that human agents are not transparent to themselves; rather "we have an occult nature of which and of its contents we can only judge by the conduct that it determines and by the phenomena of that conduct" (CP 5.440).³ In other words, self-awareness is only *apparently* immediate; like all other modes of cognition, it is irreducibly inferential. A "man's real being extends beyond present consciousness, and such extension I call his mind, or soul, or occult being. You know that I do not pretend precisely to define my meaning" (MS 290, variant page 20).⁴ Self-consciousness (our awareness of our selves as finite, fallible, and distinct beings) is not intuitive, our awareness of our inner, mental states being bound up with outer, physical events and objects.

The most intimate and emphatic of our mental states are not simply given. They are recognized as such states as the result of a social tutelage in somatic literacy. Our awareness of our own states is mediated by our relationship to others. Moreover, these states themselves serve as signs (that is, they mediate between our conscious agency and the more or less occult states of that agency).

¹ Whatever the primary processes or their analogues in Peirce's account turn out to be, they must be continuous with the secondary processes. From my perspective, this means that they must be, at bottom, modes of inference, however rudimentary or unwarranted. From a Freudian viewpoint, this would almost certainly go too far in the direction of taming the unconscious (i.e., bringing it too fully within the domain of rationality), where the orthodox Freudian account falls prey, from a Peircean perspective, to an unwarranted and indeed self-defeating dualism.

² This is one of countless places where Peirce's doctrine of vagueness is pertinent.

³ This is part of Peirce's thoroughgoing opposition to the Cartesian conception of mind.

⁴ On at least one occasion, Peirce defines "one's soul" as "that part of our nature which takes general determinations of conduct" (MS 283, p. 76).

A simple example of (at least) several aspects of this important point is suggested by yet another of Peirce's unpublished manuscripts. "Pleasure and Pain do not, *in themselves*, carry any sound Reason for acting one way[,] influential as they are in the purely Brutal mode, but are only *rational* motives as being veridical signs of real needs" (MS 649, p. 39). Hunger pangs, a distinctive species of conscious pain (at least when such pangs reach a degree of intensity), are not in themselves veridical signs of a real physiological need (though they might be of some other real human need or longing). In countless circumstances, nonetheless, they can be interpreted as such signs; but in some situations, the desire being expressed through the desire for food is not indicative of a need for nourishment, at least of the form being sought when hunger is uncritically taken to be a veridical sign of a physiological need. "Our Pleasure-Pain feelings, which are among the most mutable adjuncts of our minds, serve us as Signs of our Wants and Satisfactions; and provided they are employed critically and with caution, as all Signs should be employed, they serve us well. But to confound them with those Satisfactions and Dissatisfactions of which they are such beneficial Signs" is a mistake (MS 649, p. 37). On numerous occasions, then, the import of our pleasures and pains, as *signs* of our needs and even desires, requires interpretation, though this can (somewhat paradoxically) be intelligently accomplished with little or no reflection.⁵

Peirce arrived at his understanding of mind, including the unconscious facets of mental activity, in broadly the same manner as did Freud himself (GARDNER 1991). As agents, we are often at a loss to explain our actions to ourselves or to anyone else. As self-interpreting animals, we are thrown into painful confusion about the *experiential* meaning of our conscious exertions (cf. GARDNER, 1991). Limiting ourselves to consciousness is condemning ourselves to unintelligibility (WOLLHEIM, 1971). The failure to understand ourselves is not a charge leveled by an external interpreter or critic, but one *felt* as the result of impasses, repetitions, and confusions that our own suffering forces us to recognize. Of course, the possibility of *refusing* to recognize any of this is integral to the story being told here about mind. In particular, the motives that we attribute to ourselves render our actions and indeed agency less intelligible than a fuller account in which unacknowledged motives play a pivotal role. There is more to mind than consciousness, more to our actions than the conscious wishes, desires, and other motives from which they seem to flow. Self-understanding requires overcoming certain patterns of self-misunderstanding. A thoroughgoing fallibilism cannot stop short of an ongoing critique of our most assured pronouncements regarding virtually every aspect of our finite selves, least of all our motives. Indeed, here more than anywhere else it is imperative to recall Peirce's fondness for the lines from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*:

⁵ To deliberate at length whether one's hunger pangs veridically signify a physiological need for nourishment, after having gone without food all day, would hardly be reasonable; unreflectively to take the hunger pangs as reliably indicating a pressing need would be reasonable. In general, acting reasonably does not always take the form of acting deliberately.

... proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence.⁶ (EP 1, 55)

A radical implication of Peircean fallibilism, ignored if not resisted by many avowed Peirceans, is that we (far more often than we imagine) do not know what we are doing. What Peirce explicitly asserts about talking might be extended to acting (indeed, saying is one mode of doing): “It would, certainly, in one sense be extravagant to say that we can never tell what we are talking about; yet, in another sense, it is quite true” (CP 3.419). What is true of talk, as one species of conduct, is true of all other species: we are not in control of what of are about.

The implication of Peirce's use of the line from Emerson's poem “The Sphinx” (“Of thine eye I am eye-beam”), a line he was fond of quoting, is that the meaning of our own identities, inseparable from our strivings, imaginings, and passions, transcends our comprehension. Our being outstrips our consciousness, our self-ignorance far exceeds our self-knowledge.

As it is being posed in my inquiry into Peirce, the *question* of the unconscious primarily concerns the adequacy of a theoretical account, only secondarily (if that) the efficacy of a therapeutic approach. The efficacy of psychoanalytic treatment is one thing, the adequacy of psychoanalytic theory quite another. In insisting upon this, I fully realize that Freud himself supposed that clinical observations provided evidential support for his theoretical elaborations and, in turn, his theoretical accounts proved their power (or simply their adequacy) partly by their (alleged) therapeutic efficacy. On this occasion, however, my concern is to make a case for a particular understanding of mind, broadly identifiable as Freudian, *not* a case for a particular treatment of neurosis, properly designated as psychoanalytic.⁷

The opposition to positing the unconscious has come from a number of quarters, not least of all from the person who is arguably the greatest psychologist thus far in the history of North America. Indeed, James's critique of the unconscious is, even today, taken seriously, being subjected to careful reconstruction and equally painstaking criticism by such scholars as Gerald Myers (1990) and Donald Levy (1996). This is true even though his critique is aimed at an account other than that of Freud's.

Appreciating the details of this would be helpful for illuminating Peirce's actual relationship to James and his possible affinity with Freud. Central to the story of pragmatism is, upon my reading at least, James's disavowal and Peirce's espousal of the unconscious. My task in this paper involves nothing less than appreciating some of the most salient details of this complex story, though some of these details will be given only very sketchily. The historical context in which this complex story unfolded is especially important.

⁶ Peirce almost always leaves out the second line (“Drest in a little brief authority”) of this quotation.

⁷ In a limited way, I would defend the possible efficacy of psychoanalytic treatment for some persons. This paper is simply not the place in which I will do so.

Historical Background

In 1909, a European theorist devoted to articulating a revolutionary account of the human mind traveled to the United States for his first and only time. Indeed, he was, like so many European intellectuals, then and now, contemptuous of the country that usurped for itself the name of America. Despite this, he felt gratitude for the recognition that he received on this occasion, so unlike the criticisms, dismissals, and neglect with which his European contemporaries responded to his work.

During Freud's trip to the United States in 1909, he encountered, very briefly, a North American thinker who had already made a significant contribution to psychology and, acutely mindful of his own mortality, was strenuously engaged in consolidating the main conclusions of his philosophy. While the impetus he gave to functional psychology would soon become nullified – at least temporarily dissipated – by the hegemonic ascendancy of behavioral psychology, his pragmatist philosophy would not so quickly or completely be eclipsed by other philosophical developments. The thinker from whom James derived his pragmatism was, however, one who was as critical of Jamesian psychology as Jamesian pragmatism. The foci of his criticisms are worth recalling here, not least of all for the light they shed on mind and consciousness, on the one side, and pragmatism and psychoanalysis, on the other.

James published the *Principles* in 1890, Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899-1900, and the two met, briefly, at Clark University in Worcester, MA, in 1909 (see ROSENZWEIG, 1992). Shortly after the publication of the *Principles*, two critical notices of this monumental work appeared in consecutive issues of *The Nation* (2 July 1891 and 9 July 1891). Among the unpublished papers of this reviewer, we find an intriguing notebook on the *Principles*. It is largely a series of questions prompted by claims found in James's text.⁸

A word about Freud's attitude toward "America" is not out of place here. He once proclaimed: "Yes, America is gigantic, but it is a gigantic mistake" (quoted in GAY, 2006, p. 563). "I have always said that America is useful for nothing else but to provide money" (quoted in GAY, 2006, p. 563). "... and what is the American without prosperity?" (Id., p. 565). Of one of his nephews (Edward Bernays), who enjoyed great success in the field of public relations, Freud wrote: he was "an honest boy when I knew him. I know not far he has become americanized" (GAY, 2006, p. 578). He warned a friend (Pfister): "If you get involved with America, you will surely be swindled. In business matters they are way ahead of us" (GAY, 2006, p. 564). "Freud was delighted to learn that Otto Rank had "found the only rational kind of conduct appropriate for a stay among the savages: to sell your life as dearly as possible" (GAY, 2006, p. 563). "Nowhere is one so overwhelmed by the senselessness of human doings as there [in the US], where even the pleasurable gratification of natural animal needs is no longer recognized as a life's goal. It is crazy anal *Aderle!*" (GAY, 2006, p. 568). Peter Gay offers an illuminating gloss on this (at least) doubly casuistic comment: In characterizing this culture by a technical psychoanalytic term (anality), Freud is portraying "Americans one and all as victims of an anal-sadistic retentiveness hostile to pleasure but conducive at the same

⁸ Part of this notebook has been published in volume 7 of the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (7.72-90).

time to the most aggressive conduct in business and politics” (GAY, 2006, p. 568). Who can deny that Freud’s contempt for America, *so interpreted*, is in some measure warranted? But, in fairness, who cannot question the possibility of summing up an entire people or culture in such wholesale dismissals and harsh judgments?

In response to Jones’s suggestion to edit a source book of Freud’s psychoanalytic writings for American readers, Freud sharply responded: “Fundamentally, the whole thing is, being authentically American, quite repellent to me. One can rely on it: if such a source book were available, no American would ever go to the original source. Perhaps he would not do so without it, but take his information from the muddiest of popular sources” (GAY, 2006, p. 566).

Freud’s impressions of James were far more favorable than those of the country who his older colleague so uniquely represented. In an autobiographical sketch, he recollected: “Another event of this time [1909] which made a lasting impression on me was a meeting with William James the philosopher. I shall never forget one little scene that occurred as we were on a walk together. He [James] stopped suddenly, handed me a bag he was carrying and asked me to walk on, saying that he would catch up [with] me as soon as he had got through an attack of angina pectoris which was just coming on. He died of that disease a year later; and I have always wished that I might be as fearless as he was in the face of approaching death” (57-58).

James’s impressions of Freud’s character are also worth recalling: In a letter shortly after meeting Freud, James wrote:

Speaking of ‘functional’ psychology [the approach associated with his own name], Clark University, of which [G.] Stanley Hall is president, had a little international congress [how delicately – and deliciously – slighting is this expression] the other day in honor of the twentieth year of its existence. I went there for one day in order to see what Freud was like, and met also Jung of Zürich, who [...] made a very pleasant impression. I hope that Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to their utmost limits, so that we may learn what they are [presumably both these ideas and their limits]. They can’t fail to throw light on human nature; but I confess that he made on me personally the impression of a man obsessed with fixed ideas. I can make nothing in my own case [i.e., on the basis of my own experience (see, however, ROSENZWEIG, 1992)] with his dream theories, and obviously ‘symbolism’ is a most dangerous method. A newspaper report of the congress said that Freud had condemned the American religious therapy (which has such extensive results) as very ‘dangerous’ because so ‘unscientific.’ Bah! (PERRY, 1935, II, 122-23)

In another letter, one to Mary W. Calkins who had been in attendance at the conference, James wrote:

My day at Clark University was very enjoyable, not only in meeting you, but in seeing new faces; especially Tichtener’s, whom I had never yet met, and who made on me a very pleasant impression. I strongly suspect Freud, with his dream-theory, of being a regular *balluciné*. But I hope that he and his disciples push it to its limits, as undoubtedly it covers some facts, and will add to our understanding of ‘functional’ psychology, which is the real psychology. (PERRY, 1935, II, 123; cf. DEWEY, MW 14)

Freud's reception in the US was, in his own judgment, deeply gratifying and personally encouraging: Despite his antipathy toward "America," Freud notes in his autobiography (published in 1925): At the time of his first and only visit to the US, "I was only fifty-three, I felt young and healthy, and my short visit [approximately six weeks] to the new world encouraged my self-respect in every way. In Europe I felt as though I were despised; but over there I found myself received by the foremost men as an equal. As I stepped on the platform to deliver my *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* it seemed like the realization of some incredible daydream: psychoanalysis was no longer the product of a delusion, it had become a valuable part of reality. It has not lost ground in America since our visit; it is extremely popular among the lay public and is recognized by a number of official psychiatrists as an important element in medical training. Unfortunately, however, it has suffered a great deal from being watered down [cf. GAY, 2006, p. 564-68]. Moreover, many abuses which have no relation to it find a cover under its name [as, no doubt, other abuses find a cover under the name of pragmatism], and there are few opportunities for thorough training in technique or theory" (GAY, 2006, p. 58).

Janet Malcolm's assessment of Freud's *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* is, in my judgment, accurate. Freud delivered these lectures without notes (he rehearsed them in the morning on walks with Sándor Ferenczi, who traveled with Freud and Jung to the United States) and composed them only after his return to Vienna. Even so, Malcolm suggests: "These lectures remain the most considered and lucid account in and out of Freud's writings of the birth of psychoanalysis; nowhere is the complicated story more effortlessly told" (1982, p. 11).

I would be amiss if I did not mention the pivotal role of James Jackson Putnam in reception of psychoanalysis in the US. In *An Autobiographical Study*, Freud recalled:

We also met James J. Putnam there [in the US], the Harvard neurologist, who in spite of his age was an enthusiastic supporter of psychoanalysis and threw the whole weight of a personality that was universally respected into the defence of the cultural value of analysis and the purity of its aims. He was an estimable man, in whom, as a reaction against a predisposition to obsessional neurosis, an ethical bias predominated; and the only thing in him that we could regret was his inclination to attach psychoanalysis to a particular philosophical system and to make it the servant of moral aims. (p. 57)

In this sketch of his life, Freud mentions Putnam *before* James (though *after* Hall, who in Freud's estimation displayed "a touch of the king-maker"). In *Putnam Camp*, George Prochnik, J. J. Putnam's great-grandson, depicts (according to a notice in *New Yorker* (November 13, 2006, p. 91) "Freud outside his element – trying to play his first game of tetherball, struggling amid campers who hike, sing, and play dress-up games at dinner!")

James's words of farewell to Freud and his company (as recounted by Ernest Jones): Upon his departure home from Worcester, James is reported by Jones to have put his arm around the shoulder of Freud's companion and announced: "The future of psychology belongs to your work" (JONES, 1981, II, p. 57; quoted in GAY, 2006, p. 211)

The testimony of one of James's most famous students, Walter Lippmann, is also worthy of recollection here. In 1912, two years after James's death, Lippmann was engaged in studying "Freudian psychology" with "a great deal of enthusiasm," imagining he felt about it "as men might have felt about *The Origin of Species!*" (GAY, 2006, p.

458). Lippmann reread James after having discovered Freud, an experience that left him “with a curious sense that the world must have been very young in the 1880s,” the decade in which James was writing the *Principles*. “... serious young men took Freud seriously, as indeed he deserved to be taken. Exploitation of Freud into a tiresome fad came later and generally from people who had not studied him and had only heard about him.”

Psychological Foreground

Having identified the historical background, I now turn to the psychological foreground. In particular, I would like at this juncture to call your attention to Peirce’s critique of James’s psychology and also to striking parallels between a Peircean and a Freudian outline for a program of research. Due to the constraints of space, however, I will discuss in detail only this critique, while touching very lightly upon these parallels. But, given the fact that the sketch of Peirce’s program is found in an unpublished manuscript, I will quote at length its central claims. For our purposes, his critique of James is of greater importance.

1. Peirce’s Critique of James’s Psychology

In the context of offering a critique of what he identifies as “the mind-stuff theory” (Chapter VI), James in his *Principles* tries to destroy, root and branch, the widespread tendency to recognize mental activity other than conscious processes. Hence, James’s critique of the unconscious is put forth as part of his critique of another theory and, indeed, seems to be subordinate to this larger goal. Even so, many of his admirers and followers find his critique of the unconscious, apart from that of the mind-stuff theory, to be worthy of consideration in its own right.⁹ The mind-stuff theory holds that “our mental states are composite in structure, made up of smaller states conjoined” (p. 148; emphasis omitted). The mental atomism bequeathed by the associationalist school to the psychology of James’s day¹⁰ supposes that the recognizable states of everyday consciousness are *reducible* compounds (or combinations) of more rudimentary states and, ultimately, of irreducibly simple ones (hence, the term mental *atoms*). According to James, however, “there are no unperceived units of mind-stuff preceding and composing the full consciousness [exemplified in hearing a melody or discerning an object]. The latter [the full consciousness manifest in the identifiable states of our conscious life] is itself an immediate psychic fact and bears an immediate relation to the neural state which is its unconditional accompaniment” (JAMES, 1981, p. 159). It is not only an immediate but also an *irreducible* psychic fact. To state the matter somewhat misleadingly,

⁹ In order to be properly interpreted, reference to the context (i.e., to the discussion of the mind-stuff theory) is taken to be indispensable, but in order to be logically assessed James’s critique of the unconscious is taken in effect to stand on its own. To some extent, I will follow this approach.

¹⁰ James is explicit about this historical link, noting that “the mind-stuff theory is nothing but the last and subtlest offshoot” of “the Lockean school of associated ideas” (JAMES, 1981, p. 178).

the primitive data of our mental lives are not simple but complex ideas; however, the complexity of these ideas is immediately given, not unconsciously compounded out of mental atoms. That is, this complexity is not derivative, but primary: our experience tends to be inherently and irreducibly complex. The data in question are vague wholes admitting of inexhaustible analysis. We ought not to take the results of reflective analysis (e.g., separable qualia) to be the *constituents* of our primitive experience. In other words, our primitive experience is ordinarily quite far from being primitive. We typically begin not with disorganized impressions, but rather with always already recognizable patterns or, at least, focal objects of a troubling indeterminacy. Perceptible and otherwise felt objects and events, not sensory impressions or data, constitute the most primitive constituents of our mental lives. The supposition that such objects and events are compounds derived from simpler ideas, not themselves felt (not themselves registered at the level of consciousness), is, for James, phenomenologically unwarranted.

In order for the mind-stuff theory to work, there must be both impressions of which we are unconscious (e.g., Leibniz's *petite perceptions*) and processes by which these impressions are compounded, of which we are also unaware. Hence, James takes it upon himself in this context to mount a critique of the conscious. In outward form, this critique wears a judicious guise: despite his contempt for scholasticism, James presents it in the form of a disputed question, "as in scholastic books."¹¹ In rhetorical tone, however, it is anything but judicious. At the outset, he announces: "The distinction [...] between the unconscious and the conscious being of a mental state. [...] is the sovereign means for believing what one likes in psychology, and of turning what might become a science into a tumbling ground for whimsies" (JAMES, 1981, p.166; emphases omitted). Along the way, he interjects at one point, "Comment on this seems hardly called for. It is [...] pure mythology" (JAMES, 1981, p. 171), and at another, "These reasonings are one tissue of confusion" (p. 175). What might give some students of pragmatism pause, however, is that James makes several of these remarks in reference to arguments put forth by Eduard von Hartmann, the very thinker whom Peirce credited with *proving* "conclusively" the reality of the unconscious (see, e.g., CP 7.366). It is, accordingly, worthwhile to attend more sympathetically than James does in this chapter to the considerations in favor of the unconscious.

If we turn to the second of Peirce's reviews of James's *Principles* (CP 7.62-71), we discover that he is in effect defending a position dismissed by James in one of the later chapter (Chapter XIX, "The Perception of 'Things'"). Here James takes up the question, "Is perception unconscious inference?" In turn, Peirce focuses on James's handling of this question as representative of the manner in which the author of *Principles* treats the central issues pertaining to the emerging science of empirical psychology. In the earlier review, Peirce noted: "With an extraordinarily racy and forcible style, Prof. James is continually wresting words and phrases of exact import to unauthorised and unsuitable uses. He indulges himself with idiosyncracies of diction and tricks of language such as

¹¹ C. S. Peirce's "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man" is more fully and indeed authentically cast in the form of a scholastic *disputatio*. See, e.g., PRENDERGAST, T. (1974).

usually spring up in households of great talent” (CP 7.57). There he also claimed, “the one thing upon which Prof. James seems to pin his faith is the general incomprehensibility of things,” shortly thereafter adding:

He inclines toward Cartesian dualism, which is of the true strain of the incomprehensibles and modern materialism’s own mother. There is no form of idealism with which he will condescend to argue. Even evolutionism [...] seems to be held for suspect. It is his *métier* to subject to severe investigation any doctrine whatever which smells of intelligibility. (CP 7.58)

In the second critical notice, Peirce declares: James’s *Principles* “most of the topics in psychology in an extremely unequal way, but always interesting and always entertaining” (CP 7.62). He elects in this notice “to give a fair specimen of the author’s critical method (for the work is essentially a criticism and exposition of critical principles)” (ibid.). For this purpose, Peirce selects “a short section entitled ‘Is Perception Unconscious Inference?’” Whereas James responds to his own question by asserting, “To call perception unconscious reasoning is [...] either a useless metaphor, or a positively misleading confusion between two different things” (p. 756; emphasis omitted), Peirce insists there is nothing uselessly metaphorical or positively misleading about identify perception as an instance, albeit an unconscious one, of inference.

But this brings us back to the unconscious, as treated in Chapter VI (“The Mind-Stuff Theory”). For our purposes, I will focus on but one of the ten arguments canvassed by James, in fact, the tenth argument (p. 172-73) and James’s “Objection” to it (p. 173-76), since this brings into play the considerations most relevant to the case for the unconscious in its distinctively Freudian sense. In fact, I want to concentrate on only a fragment of this argument:

There is a great class of experiences in our mental life which may be described as discoveries that a subjective condition which we have been having is really something different from what we had supposed. We suddenly find ourselves bored by a thing which we were enjoying well enough; or in love with a person whom we imagined we only liked. Or else we deliberately analyze our motives, and find that at bottom they contain jealousies and cupidities which we little suspect [if suspected at all] to be there. Our feelings toward people are perfect wells of motivation, unconscious of itself, which introspection brings to light. (p. 172)

It is especially of such considerations, put forth in defense of the unconscious, that James dismisses as “one tissue of confusion” (p. 173). But are they truly this?

He does not treat in detail the case of motivation that he so vividly depicts. In a sense, he does not treat it *at all*, but offers rather general considerations by which its specific flaws are supposedly exposed. This is, however, hardly adequate.

James does treat more fully the instance of coming to identify by name one’s state as that of being in love. He rather incredibly insists:

I am simply giving a name to a state which previously *I have not named*, but which was fully conscious; which had no residual mode of being except in the manner in which it was conscious; and which, though it was a feeling towards

the same person for whom I now have a much more inflamed feeling, and though it continuously led into the latter, is yet in no sense identical with the latter, and least of all in an 'unconscious' way. (175)¹²

Is love by any other name as conscious of itself?

The conclusion to which James is led – or the one to which he *tenaciously* clings – is this: There are no unconscious mental states or processes. “There is only one ‘phase’ in which an idea can be, and that is a fully conscious condition. If it is not in that condition, then it is not at all. Something else is, in its place” (p. 174).

It is certainly ironic that James himself has provided us, in an earlier chapter (Chapter VIII, “The Relations of Minds to Other Things”), with a critical resource for a genuine acknowledgment of the Freudian unconscious. There is, James notes, discernible in our conscious life a remarkable tendency, something more than “a mere failure to notice” what is occurring. Not infrequently, we can discern “an active counting out and active exclusion of certain objects” (p. 209). Such a tendency has its analogue in our social life: “It is as when one ‘cuts’ an acquaintance, ‘ignores’ a claim, or ‘refuses to be influenced’ by a consideration” (Ibid.). Whereas James explains this in reference to multiple personalities, a primary one and at least one secondary personality, effectively cut off from one another, Freud explains this in terms of the more or less disjointed region of a “single” mind. The mind as such is to some extent divided against itself and from itself, a thesis congenial to Peirce no less than Freud, but one uncongenial to James except in the extreme case of split personalities. “What the true definition of Pragmatism may be, I find it very hard to say; but in my nature it is a sort of instinctive attraction for living facts” (CP 5. 64; also in EP 2, 158).

The mind is a nexus of habits, most of which are unconscious in the purely descriptive sense, some of which are unconscious in the dynamic sense. The precarious emergence of the human mind in any recognizable form depends upon “uncertain tendencies” and unstable states of psychic equilibrium (CP 7.383). The unconscious in the dynamic sense is most evident in those forceful but unsuspected habits by which we for a variety of motives actively – indeed aggressively – exclude from consciousness certain objects. Many of these *facilitate* our fluid engagement with complex circumstances. Some of these habits in effect operate as strategies by which we evade what is in one way or another painful, shameful, or in some other respect not anything to which we are drawn to notice. And some of these strategies themselves operate to our detriment: they thwart our conscious purposes and our ascribed motives. To fail to acknowledge such habits and strategies is not only cowardly but also unpragmatic.

¹² Donald Levy perceptively notes that, with the addition of the feeling becoming more inflamed, James alters the examples and needlessly complicates the illustration at the same time as unfairly simplifying his task.

2. Two Programmatic Outlines for a Scientific Psychology

The youthful Freud and the mature Peirce outlined a remarkably similar approach to launching a physiological approach to mental processes. But Freud appears to have abandoned quite early this project, whereas Peirce seems to have abandoned his characteristic opposition to any reductivist form of mechanistic explanation when he in a late manuscript sketches the defining traits of “a reaction-machine.” In one text, Peirce asks his reader to assume that “all of man’s actions are those of a machine, as is indubitably, at least approximately, the case” (MS 649, 19). He goes so far as to call the human organism the “human machine.” Even in one of his most speculative and (to use a dangerously misleading word) idealistic writings, Peirce is unhesitant in insisting: “The cloudiness of psychological notions may be corrected by connecting them with physiological conceptions” (CP 6.22; cf. 6. 246ff, 280, also CP 1.385ff.). The later manuscript to which I will refer is one that might be read as a place where he tries to provide such a corrective. In any event, this convergence between Peirce and Freud is significant for both ascertaining their respective espousals of the unconscious and, more generally, their distinctive approaches to the exploration of mental phenomena. Here I can do little more than gather some of the most salient features of their programmatic sketches, as an invitation to other inquirers.

Freud. Beginning in the spring of 1895, Freud worked intensely on his *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, a project he never completed and also one he tried in his later years to have destroyed. The outline of the program of research found in the manuscript that escaped destruction is both inherently fascinating and hermeneutically suggestive: it is, in its own right, an intriguing text and, in reference to Freud’s later positions, an anticipatory one. The editors of the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* do so far as to suggest: “the *Project*, despite being ostensibly a neurological document, contains within itself the nucleus of a great part of Freud’s later psychological theories. [...] The *Project*, or rather its invisible ghost, haunts the whole series of Freud’s theoretical writings to the very end” (SE I, p. 290). Freud himself characterized the intention of this project to establish psychology as “a natural science, that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles [or quanta], thus making those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction” (GAY [ed.], p. 87). Several recent expositors, most notably Oliver Sachs and Clark Glymour, have cogently argued that the program of research outlined in this *Project* is in fundamental accord with the basic tenets of cutting edge developments in cognitive science.

Peirce. In MS 318, Peirce in effect outlines a project exhibiting remarkable affinities to Freud’s early effort to sketch the research program for a scientific psychology. He notes here:

The action of a sign generally takes place between two parties, the *utterer* and the *interpreter*. They need not be persons; for a chameleon, and many kinds of insect, and even plants[,] make their living by uttering signs, and lying [or misleading] signs, at that. Who is the utterer of the signs of the weather which are not remarkably veracious always? However, every sign certainly conveys something of the general nature of thought, if not from a mind, from some repository of ideas or significant forms, and if not to a person, yet to something capable of somehow [sic.] ‘catching on,’ as a section of society says; that is[,] of

receiving not merely a physical, nor even merely a psychological dose [or quantum] of energy, but a significant meaning"* (MS 318).¹³

Though not necessary, it is typical or "characteristic that signs specially [i.e., ordinarily] function between two minds, the one being the sign's *utterer* (not necessarily a vocal utterer, but putting forth the sign in any way), the other the sign's *interpreter*. Indeed, a *mind* may, with advantage, be roughly defined as *a sign-creatory in connection with a reaction-machine*" (MS 318). This is an intriguing suggestion, though one requiring a careful sifting and probing interrogation. Insofar as time allows, let us commence such a process. The word *creatory* seems to have been coined by analogy with a word used several sentences prior – *repository* (a sign conveys something, "if not from a mind, from some *repository* of ideas or significant forms" [emphasis added]). Just as *repository* designates a place or locus in which significant forms repose or sleep, *creatory* indicates a locus or matrix from which signs flow, in which they take shape. Whereas creator suggests a mindful or personal agency, this coinage does not.

As our next step, we need to consider Peirce's detailed explanation of what "reaction-machine" means here.

"The chief properties of a reaction-machine are," Peirce informs us, "as follows":

1st; A reaction-machine is very delicately susceptible, and in a vast variety of ways, to physical forces; but only provided these forces and their way of incidence are of very special kinds. The event of a force being at any time of such a kind and so incident as to affect the reaction-machine is called an *excitation*.

In addition to such delicate susceptibility, there is the actual reaction to the wide array of physical forces to which such susceptibility exposes the "human-machine." In Peirce's own words,

2nd; the effect upon a reaction-machine is a motion, called a *reaction*, of some one of a large variety of parts of the machine. There is little persistently regular connection between the quality of an excitation and [p. 19] that of the resulting reaction. But a more intense excitation will, other things being equal, produce a more energetic reaction. The general law of reaction which is greatly modified by other properties, is that, as long as the excitations continues, the reaction increases in intensity; but when the excitation ceases, the reaction ceases.

There is, in addition to these properties, the property of fatigue, that is, the tendency of the reaction-machine to decrease the intensity of its internal activity. Again, in Peirce's words:

¹³ CSP on his own inability to catch on to slang: "... I am naturally deficient in aptitude for language. When a new bit of slang comes into vogue, I am about the last person who discovers what it means, and when I come to do so, it is by requesting somebody to explain it to be" (MS 620, variant p. 7). Cf., however, CP 7.447: "You hear a new slang word: you never ask for a definition of it; and you never get one. You do not get even any simple example of its use; you only hear it in ironical twisted, humorous sentences whose meaning is turned inside out and tied in a hard knot; yet you know what the word means much better than any abstract definition could have informed you."

3rd; After almost any part or the whole of the reaction-machine has been uninterruptedly in action, for a lapse of time differing enormously for different parts, but always shorter the more intense has been the action, there comes on a temporary, though not usually very brief state, called *fatigue*, of that part, which is marked by two effects; first, by decreased and further decreasing activity; and, secondly, (especially in reactions and associations) by a tendency of the activity to be transformed to other parts, which may be neighboring but dissimilar, similar but distant, or otherwise related to the parts [p. 19] theretofore active. The consequence is that if an excitation continues, the reaction will become, for a while, more and more violent, changing its mode several times, until some reactional motion happens to cause the cessation of the motion. But this does not usually happen, because, in consequence of the fourth property of the reaction-machine, the excitation will be brought to an end more promptly.

Finally, there is the establishment of patterns of reaction, of habits of exertion.

4th; An excitation, E'; that is similar to a previous excitation, E, or to several previous excitations, has a particular tendency to be followed by reactions R', S', T', etc. that are similar to reactions R, S, T, etc. that have ensued upon such previous excitations; and this tendency is stronger the more similar the excitations, and the more frequently [p. 20] the similar reactions, have taken place. This statement is utterly indefinite in that it fails to specify the kinds of similarity intended. It is capable of logical proof that, in an unlimited universe of marks, any two individual objects are, in themselves, equally similar with any other two. But since human apprehension of similarity has been developed by tradition and heredity under the action of this very property of the human reaction-machine of nerve and muscle, it is natural to conjecture that when a person, family, clan, tribe, people, or race has developed any consistent natural apprehension of similarity, the human reaction-machine will possess this property with reference to that natural apprehension; and roughly, at least, this [p. 21] seems to be true. So far as it is true, it is a very useful truth. But great reserve should be exercised in admitting its exact truth. For the reaction machine is a purely physical apparatus, and similarities which govern its actions must be fundamentally similarities of dynamic structure, not similarities of feeling, as such [p. 22].

Here the ms. breaks off (more accurately, here the pages treating this ms break off, since MS 318 breaks off in numerous places. Even so, this is an immensely rich and suggestive text, for both understanding Peirce's mature thought in itself and in relation to Freud and, indeed, other theorists. It seems especially relevant to underscore in this context.

Moreover, this text is in line with claims made by Peirce elsewhere, e.g., in the essay "Evolutionary Love" (1893).

Direct endeavor can achieve almost nothing. [...] the deeper workings of the spirit take place in their own slow way, without our contrivance. [...] Besides this inward process, there is the operation of the environment, which goes to break up habits destined to be broken up and so to render the mind lively. [...] Where there is motion, where history is a-making, *there* is the focus of mental activity [emphasis added]. [...] A portion of mind abundantly commissured to other portions *works almost mechanically* [emphasis added]. It sinks to the condition of a railroad junction. But a portion of mind *almost isolated* [emphasis added], a spiritual peninsula, or *cul-de-sac*, is like a railroad terminus. Now

mental commissures are habits. Where they abound, originality is not needed and is not found; but where they are in defect, spontaneity is set free. ("Evolutionary Love," EP 1, p. 361)

We might pose important questions regarding how the sign-creatory is connected to the reaction-machine, especially how to conceive the one in relationship to the other in such a way as to avoid an unwitting reinscription of Cartesian dualism (yet another variant of "the ghost in the machine"). But space does not permit us to do more than to note that Peirce's intriguing suggestion carries in its wake thorny questions. Peirce's conception of habit allows him to escape the snares of such dualism; but, even at this juncture, the details of just how this is so have not been fully worked out.

Just as this above text exhibits striking parallels with the Freudian account of mental activity outlined in *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, so Peirce's critique of James's psychology drives toward an unblinking acknowledgment of the Freudian unconscious (or, to avoid anachronism, what came in the years after Peirce's death to be known as the Freudian, or dynamic, unconscious). To use one of Peirce's own favorite words, however, what is the *upshot* of these considerations? What, if anything, of distinctively *philosophical* significance emerges from the intricate story I have been narrating regarding the three figures portrayed above?

The Philosophical Center

The point emerging from Peirce's critique of James's psychology concerns partly pragmatism, partly the philosophy of mind. If I am correct in drawing out the implications of this critique, then the defining purposes of pragmatism need to be re-envisioned and the disciplinary identity of psychology needs to be redefined. This is the philosophical center of the present inquiry. The purpose involves not only the suspension of purposefulness (musement) but also the subjection of our purposes to an ongoing, playful interrogation wherein the spontaneous tendencies of an irrepressible psyche are given free play. Our minds are not principally definable in terms of antecedently fixed purposes; they are rather better envisioned in reference to historically emergent goals. In Peirce's judgment, the authority and control of conscious exertion are, for both the framing and attainment of these goals, quite limited.

Direct endeavor," he stresses (as we have already noted), "can achieve almost nothing. [...] the deeper workings of the spirit take place in their own slow way, without our contrivance. [...] A portion of mind abundantly commissured to other portions *works almost mechanically* [emphasis added]. It sinks to the condition of a railroad junction. But a portion of mind *almost isolated* [emphasis added], a spiritual peninsula, or *cul-de-sac*, is like a railroad terminus. ("Evolutionary Love," EP 1, p. 361)

But, to recall once more Peirce's remarkable suggestion: "Indeed, a *mind* may, with advantage, be roughly defined as *a sign-creatory in connection with a reaction-machine*" (MS 318). A reaction-machine might be of such a constitution to be not only a sign-creatory but also the physiological basis for the indefinite development of an agency properly identified as a sign-creator (a personal agent who deliberately improvises and interprets ever more intricate – and intricately related – signs, especially symbols).

Conclusion

Peirce might prove to be a better *psychologist* than James, just as he has unquestionably proven himself to be the better philosopher. He might do so precisely because his account of mind incorporates within itself an acknowledgment of the unconscious. In his 1903 Lectures on Pragmatism, Peirce confessed (and I take such confessions to be constitutive of his *contrite* fallibilism): “What the true definition of Pragmatism may be, I find it very hard to say; but in my nature it is a sort of instinctive attraction for living facts” (CP 5. 64; also in EP 2, p. 158). The living facts regarding the human mind are, as much as anything else, those deeply rooted dispositions to evade and deny, repress and disavow, the disquieting and unsettling disclosures of our experiential encounters. What is more living about our minds than those subtle, often imperceptible tendencies by which we actively exclude something from awareness? There is nothing deeply mysterious or scientifically suspect about the unconscious, at least when the mind is conceived as a nexus of habits and, in turn, these habits are taken to include ones whose operations not only resist our ordinary awareness but also frequently frustrate our avowed purposes. What could be more pragmatic than pushing contrite fallibilism to an unblinking acknowledgment of the unruly dispositions making up such a significant portion of the unconscious mind? What could be less fallibilistic than remaining proudly assured of what we are most ignorant of, the darker regions of our own idiosyncratic psyches?

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