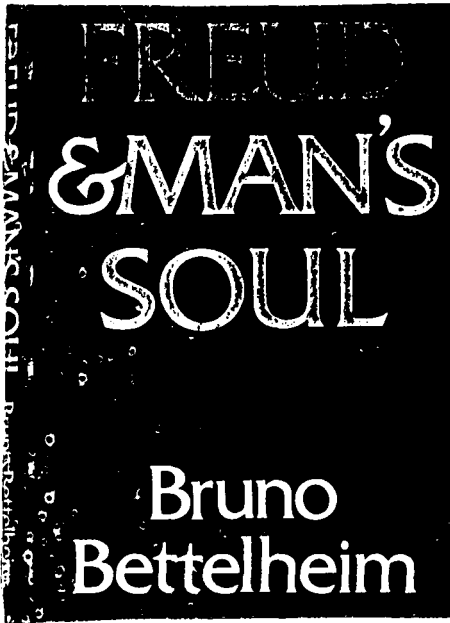


WAS FREUD HUMANISTIC AFTER ALL?

Another look at Bettelheim's *Freud and Man's Soul*

by David Kalisch

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Although this work of Bettelheim's is quite short, its impact is immense. Any attempt to re-evaluate and relocate Freud's work in relation to humanistic psychotherapy has to take account of it.

Freud has been perceived as stodgy, unapproachable, mechanistic, dogmatic, patriarchal, scientific, and soulless. It now appears that he was only patriarchal. Bad enough perhaps but in the light of Bettelheim's book, the rest of the charges are groundless.

It seems that the trouble was caused by Freud's main English translator, James Strachey, who insisted on presenting Freud's passionate and personal German

prose - German prose of the very first order, we are assured - dressed up in medical- sounding Latinised terms that turn out to be of Strachey's own invention, and that often bear little resemblance to what Freud actually said or meant.

If you stop the Humanistic Psychology student in the street and ask him or her what Freud is all about - words like 'ego', 'id' and 'superego', are likely to come tumbling out. But it turns out the 'ego', 'id', 'superego' and most of the other Latin jargon that we associate with Freud was Strachey's whim. Freud's orig-

inal was 'das Ich', 'das Es' and the 'über-Ich'. The true English translation would be 'the I', 'the it' and 'the above I!' (In French these are usually translated 'le Moi', 'le Soi', and 'le Surmoi'). But look how misleading the Strachey translation can be - even as sensitive a reader of Freud as James Hillman is misled by the Latin into seeing in Freud's famous aphorism, "where 'id' was there ego shall be", a colonisation of the soul, which, revealingly, Hillman goes on to speak of in terms of a 'pax Romana'. The more appropriate translation of 'where it was there I shall be' leads, I think, to a very different sense of the purpose of psychoanalysis and one not so far removed from the intentions of Humanistic Psychotherapy.

But the problem of mistranslation revealed by Bettelheim goes much further than this. The *Standard Edition* systematically refused to take on board that Freud used the German word for 'soul' - 'Seele' - and not the German words for 'mind' and 'mental'. And that he used 'Seele' (soul) and 'seelish' (of the soul) purposefully and with a full awareness of the resonance of these words with his German speaking readership. Wherever Freud writes 'soul', Strachey translated it to 'mind': 'seelish' or 'of the soul' became 'mental' or 'psychic'.

In 1905 Freud wrote:

"psyche' is a Greek word and its German translation is 'soul'. Psychological treatment means 'the treatment of the soul' ... Psychological treatment wishes to signify treatment originating in the soul".

In the *Standard Edition* this becomes:

"'psyche' is a Greek word which may be translated 'mind'! Thus, 'psychical treatment' means 'mental treatment, etc.'"

At the end of his life Freud wrote that his life's work had been dedicated to understanding the world of man's soul, of which the I is only one aspect.

Bettelheim writes:

"There really was no reason - apart from a wish to interpret psychoanalysis as a medical speciality - for this corruption of Freud's references to the soul".

Freud's English translators took it upon themselves to sanitise the original's passionate and romantic rhythm and language in order to sell psychoanalysis as a science to an Anglo-American audience more open to the language of medical technology than to that of German Romantic philosophy in the tradition of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Why didn't Freud object? Bettelheim suggests that Freud's lack of interest in how he was being mistranslated is explained by his general animosity to things American ("America is gigantic", he said to Ernest Jones, "but it is a gigantic mistake"). Perhaps he thought of America as a soulless country and therefore deserving of a 'soulless' psychology. The great pity for the history of psychoanalysis is that Bettelheim himself turned down the chance to provide a new translation of Freud's writings. And if it hadn't been for the War which shifted the location of psychoanalysis from Europe to the USA, the mistranslation would

have had less of an impact.

Bettelheim notes how important to an understanding of Freud's work is an appreciation of his mastery of the craft of writing. Within the German speaking world, Freud was widely recognised as a supreme stylist (Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, Albert Einstein were among his many admirers). Although much of this inevitably shines through in English to the sensitive reader, a great deal of poetry, eloquence and allusiveness of the original is lost. Worst of all, to many Freud comes across as abstract and technical when his style and tone is supremely warm, ardent and personal. Freud sought for common familiar words to reach across and personally touch his audience, where the tendency of the translators was inevitably towards the impersonal and the abstract.

Bettelheim emphasises that Freud saw psychoanalysis and psychology in a humanist light - that is as a part of the humanities and not as a science in the positivistic sense. Freud opposed, though finally unsuccessfully, the attempt of the American Psychoanalysts to make psychoanalysis a medical speciality. He wrote that it was his task to preserve psychoanalysis, and by implication, the soul, from both the doctors and the priests.

Although there are many strands of positivistic, scientific thinking in Freud's work, the over-arching endeavour of Freud is to see the provinces of the soul in their depths rather than in their reduction. However, the bias of the English translators was everywhere to heighten the tendency towards the scientific, the technical, the impersonal and the certain. A few examples:

THE STANDARD EDITION

'The Interpretation of Dreams'

'mental apparatus'

'bungled actions'

'parapraxis'

'cathexis'

'scopophilia'

'defence'

'repression'

'free association'

'Civilisation and its Discontents'

'instinct'

'Instincts and their Vicissitudes'

'death instinct'

RECONSTRUCTIONS BASED ON BETTELHEIM

'a search for the deeper meaning of dreams'

'the structure of the soul'

'mishandlings'

'faulty achievement'

'investment' (as in investment of energy
in an object/person)

'lust in looking'

'parrying' or 'warding off'

'repulsion'

'what comes to mind'

'the uneasiness inherent in culture'

'drive' or 'impulse'

'drives and their changes'

'death impulse'

Freud not only did not use a technical language where everyday language would suffice, he actively opposed its use. He wrote in a warm, personal, intimate German that was masterly both in touching his readers' hearts and also in stimulating their imaginations through his use of metaphor, imagery and literary allusion. He wrote within the German tradition of 'Geisteswissenschaften' (lit: 'sciences of the spirit') which was ascribed the same respect and honour as the 'Naturwissenschaften' (natural sciences) despite the complete difference in their approach and methodology. Thus, Freud could quite legitimately call psychoanalysis a 'science of the life of the soul' without anyone in his German audience finding any contradiction or conflict in this. But to an Anglo-Saxon audience, science and soul belong in two quite distinct conceptual categories and traditions of thought. Strachey's solution was to eliminate all the references to soul, to objectify the subjective categories of experience out of which Freud wore his system and wherever possible to make Freud's work look or at least sound like science (where science equals natural science). Of course the long-term consequences, given the rapid post-War dissemination of American psychoanalysis and the demise of European psychoanalysis in the wake of Nazi persecution, has been to spread a positivistic version of Freud's work that he never intended: and ironically at the same time to lay his work open to charges of being unscientific from the behaviourists and logical positivist philosophers. The worst of both possible worlds!

Humanistic Psychology has participated in this deliberate misunderstanding of Freud's work. Through resupplying the cultural and linguistic context in which Freud worked and wrote, Bettelheim - and who could have been better placed to do it? - has rendered a singular service to us all in making it possible and more likely now that the words of the great founder of modern psychotherapy will ring through to us in a more humane way.

So was Freud humanistic after all? Human, certainly: a humanist, probably; but humanistic? If Humanistic Psychology expresses a view of humans as open, interactive, choice making and potentiating, then almost certainly not. But what of that? He was the great social poet of his time, who with his ardent and daring conquistador spirit, unmasked the irrational forces lying just below the surface of the cultivated European sensibility of his day and in that he was second to none.

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