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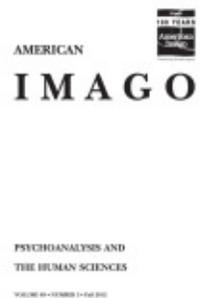
Unity and Synthesis in the Ego Ideal: Reading Freud's
Concept through Kant's Philosophy

Francey Russell

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Unity and Synthesis in the Ego Ideal: Reading Freud's Concept through Kant's Philosophy

Although men are not normally aware of it, they must believe that they are something more than they are, in order to be capable of being what they are; they need to feel this something more above and around them . . .

—Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*

I

Throughout the transformations of his theories of mind, Freud consistently regarded the ego as the seat of mental organization and synthesis. In contrast to the chaotic id, the ego is a “coherent organization of mental processes” (Freud, 1923, p. 17), working reactively, on the one hand, by excluding unconscious impulses, and actively, on the other, by structuring and binding mental content and libidinal energy. Additionally, the ego's organizational activity is directed not only towards the psyche itself, but also towards the environment or external world, facilitating judgments about and representations of that world.

In “On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1914), Freud suggests for the first time that the ego *qua* synthetic and synthesizing structure “cannot exist in the individual from the start; *the ego has to be developed*” (p. 77, emphasis added). That is, while Freud continues to regard the ego as the source of order and unity of mental contents, in 1914 he suggests that such order is not present at the beginning of life but must subsequently be developed. Thus, Freud attempts to provide a genetic account

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of psychic order, a developmental story of how the ego comes to be the organizational locus of mental life.

What is unique to "On Narcissism" is this suggestion that such organization is not simply given but is the ego's proper accomplishment; or rather the ego *is* that accomplishment. Insofar as it is developed, as Freud suggests, psychic order is something pursued, and therefore something potentially lost or perverted. "On Narcissism" represents Freud's attempt to provide the grounds and conditions for the ego *qua* coherent organization, which is to say, the conditions for the basic unity and organization of human experience. More specifically, insofar as the ego is organized by means of the inclusion of certain mental contents and the exclusion of others, and insofar as this organization is not fixed once and for all but processual or dynamic, it seems that the ego operates in light of something like an ideal or standard of order in accordance with which its organizational discriminations are made.

Freud introduces two novel concepts in order to explicate the genesis of mental order and unity: primary narcissism and the ego ideal, that out of which the ego develops and that towards which the ego strives. While the latter will become more or less identified with the super ego and moral conscience in Freud's later work, I suggest here that the ego ideal should instead be understood as the essential concept for accounting for the ego's defining feature, namely, the tendency toward organization and internal unity, and that the voice of the super-ego is but a sub-feature of that organizational tendency. Put otherwise, the capacity for moral discrimination and evaluation is one expression of the more general cognitive capacity for discrimination, evaluation, and organization broadly speaking.

It is my claim that the ego ideal provides the ego its needed pattern or goal of unity and synthesis, that in light of which psychic order is pursued. I will further argue that the ego ideal—the projection of the satisfactions of primary narcissism as a goal—is that which initiates and enables the ego's progressive growth and increasing complexity: in the words of Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985), the ego ideal makes possible psychic investment in *development* as such (p. 30). The ego ideal thus provides the model in accordance with which the ego organizes

and orders, and further, it functions as the always-outstanding end of total order and completeness, ensuring that the ego's order is not stagnant but dynamic and developing.

A broader implication of this reading of the ego ideal is that an ordered experience of self and world cannot be secured by ego and world alone; rather, the ego requires some encompassing guiding principle or ideal in light of which its incremental engagements with the world come to hang together as an organized whole. With this in mind, I will suggest that understanding the ego ideal as the cognitive function responsible for the cohesiveness of human experience has a particular philosophical significance. That is, this Freudian story offers a potential response to a problem in the history of philosophy, namely the Kantian problem of the systematic unity of experience.

II

Kant's revolutionary philosophical contribution was to suggest that the world is not simply given to a passive recipient, but is rather formed and conditioned by certain active cognitive capacities; that is, the mind conditions how anything can appear, how anything can count as significant or real. In this sense Kant's is a properly self-conscious or self-reflective philosophy, concerned not with the world itself, but with reflecting on what the mind brings to its meaningful encounters with that world.

In the Analytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant enumerates the forms of intuition (space and time) and the categories of the understanding as the conditions of possibility for human experience and knowledge of the world. These elements are formally constitutive of any particular experience or knowledge of an object; in this way, human knowledge results from the world's meeting the mind's formal demands or standards of objectivity. Yet, while space, time, and the categories condition any particular experience, Kant is not yet able to explain how the collection of specific experiences or the bits of knowledge yield an ordered whole rather than a contingent aggregate. That is, in the Analytic Kant does not yet account for the general

epistemic or experiential coherence and unity thanks to which any particular object or experience is salient or meaningful. If the mind contributes so fundamentally to the intelligibility of each particular experience, what kind of contribution does it make such that our world and experience can cohere in an overarching and ordered whole?

According to Kant, while the faculty of the understanding is limited to conceptualizing only what is given in intuition, the faculty of *reason* is characterized by a “natural” and “inevitable” tendency to transgress the limits of intuition in search of what Kant calls *the unconditioned*: the totality of knowledge and experience of which any given particular is an integrated part (A298/B354; references to the *Critique* are to the standard A and B pagination of the first and second editions respectively). Reason is “driven on by an inward need” (B21) to understand that which, by Kant’s definition, cannot possibly be known. Thus, even within the finite boundaries assigned to it by Kant’s system, the human mind is endowed with a *driven need* to exceed those boundaries, a faculty of excess that strives to achieve an impossible goal.

While Kant insists that all attempts to know that which is beyond the conditions of space and time are senseless, he suggests that reason’s restless endeavor (Bxv) to find the unconditioned can be put to good and proper use (A643/B671). This involves taking the idea of reason—the unconditioned—not as a given object but as a “task” or a “problem” (A508/B536), as an unreachable “goal” (A510/B538) set for the understanding. That is, reason sets the understanding with a necessarily impossible goal—to proceed through the series of conditions to the unconditioned (A308/B364)—and in this way demands a kind of organizational work from the understanding, in full acknowledgment that this work will never be completed, the goal of absolute systematicity or totality will never be reached; in this way, the projected goal is not sought in experience but functions instead to organize and motivate human experience. Whereas the concepts are properly “constitutive” of objects in the world, the ideal of systematicity is “regulative,” which is to say it functions as a (no less essential) recommendation or guide, rather than a strict conceptual rule. By projecting the

goal of systematicity for the understanding, reason provides human knowledge with an overarching if impossible goal in light of which all of its incremental achievements are assessed.

With this regulative idea of systematic unity, Kant is indicating that the human intellect, while finite and conditioned, must operate in light of the more comprehensive idea of the whole or unconditioned. While Kant expressly submits that subject and object, thought and world, are co-constitutive and mutually conditioning, he seems now to be suggesting that their relationship depends upon some overarching third term, a unity or order within which subject and object can be coordinated, related and differentiated. The comprehensive ideas of reason, or ideals of comprehensiveness, supplement the understanding with two necessary and related features that it would not have alone.

First, by projecting an ideal of completeness and systematicity as a task or goal, reason makes possible *development* or *progress* in knowledge and experience. Because reason can conceive the unconditioned, whereas the understanding can only comprehend what is given in experience (A311/B367), the former is able to set an ideal goal in the mode of (pure) possibility that the latter would be unable to formulate on its own. In this way, while the understanding can acquire only an aggregate of knowledge, reason can demand an ongoing organization in the acquisition of knowledge with the aim of constructing a system. As Kant frequently insists, reason is only concerned with the higher order task of bringing the understanding into thoroughgoing consistency with itself (A323/B380). Thus reason demands an ideal of complete coherence and systematization of knowledge such that the understanding can develop, not merely mechanically or additively, but in accordance with some specific aim. In this way, the work of the understanding is given an overarching purpose in light of which its products make sense at all.

Second, reason imbues the activity of the understanding with *sense* or *value*. By projecting an ideal towards which the understanding must work, reason provides a purpose and thereby a value to that very work. Pieces of knowledge have value—or even more basically *make sense*—only insofar as they

occupy a place in a larger domain of thought, a domain which is never itself encountered but is projected as the intelligible milieu in which thoughts have traction. As is clear by the very notion of the *ideal*, with the faculty of reason Kant introduces the idea of a standard of perfection or value against which we can judge the products of the understanding. The projection of an ideal allows for the qualitative assessment of the organization of the understanding and demands that the latter work to approximate the perfect systematicity of the ideal.

Thus towards the end of the first *Critique*, Kant appears to be suggesting that the transcendental conditions outlined in the *Analytic* are not sufficient for human experience, that an epistemic relationship to the world cannot be secured by concepts and intuition alone, but that something beyond the understanding, even “contrary to common sense” (A302/B358), is required. At the risk of compromising the integrity of his system, Kant advances, though does not fully endorse, the idea that the dynamic, cumulative systematicity characteristic of human experience is a condition for and irreducible to the functioning of the understanding, necessary for coherent thought and yet beyond the straightforwardly thinkable.

Abstracting from both Kantian and psychoanalytic terminology, we can understand the question animating both projects as the following: What feature of mind contributes to the coherence and unity—the “systematicity”—of human experience? What elevates experience from a disorganized or meaningless aggregate to an ordered and meaningful whole?

Now it is certainly true that Kant's project was a transcendental investigation into the formal or structural conditions for objective knowledge, and he was expressly *not* concerned with human psychology, let alone with the idiosyncrasies of individual psychic structures that constitute the object of psychoanalysis. Yet my concern here is not to argue that Kant makes significant contributions to psychology, but rather that Freud can be understood as making an important contribution to philosophy.

I argue, then, that Freud offers a developmental account of psychic order and unity, and thereby provides a tenable response to the philosophical problem of the systematic unity of experience, originally raised by Kant. Whereas Kant was

compelled by his transcendental method to insist that the unity and systematicity of experience could not be derived from experience but had to be operative *a priori*, with his developmental account of the ego, Freud perceived that psychic order and unity is an early achievement, an account which, moreover, allows for the possibility that such order might *not* be established or might be lost. In his metapsychological writings Freud, like Kant, is concerned with the conditions of possibility for human experience, but he pursues the un-Kantian insight that these conditions are not fixed or given; rather they are the never-guaranteed products of development. Following Kant's observation that *any* conception of experience must involve a conception of unity, and so any experience must call upon or presuppose such unity, Freud proposes that this unity is *both* requisite and precarious, necessary and a contingent accomplishment of development. With the ego ideal Freud is attempting to account for the necessity of psychic unity as a condition for experience, a formal condition that is, paradoxically, itself conditioned. It is this paradox of psychic unity—how it is that the unity of experience does not exist from the start but has to be developed *within experience*—that Freud both indicates and attempts to resolve.

III

Before attending to the concept of the ego ideal as articulated in "On Narcissism," it will be helpful to first provide an overview of Freud's conceptualization of the ego with respect to order and unity to demonstrate the extent to which Freud regarded the ego as, paradoxically, both the source and the result of psychic organization. As will become clear, the kinds of mental conflict that psychoanalysis was designed to resolve could only occur in an organized and organizing psychic apparatus, one based on the inclusion and ordering of certain elements, and the rejection or repression of others.

As early as the first case studies in 1893, Freud envisaged the ego as the organizational function of the mind, the maintenance of which motivated the exclusion of certain unacceptable ideas

from consciousness. While the affect associated with the idea could become attached to another representative—for example, in the form of hysterical symptoms—the original thought or wish is rejected, the ideational content having been judged incompatible with the ego as a whole. Only much later would Freud offer anything close to a developmental ego psychology, and at this point, the ego is simply taken as a given. Yet crucial to his first theories of repression and psychic conflict is the concept of a conscious ego organized by certain commitments and committed to a certain organization. As Freud (1893) writes: “the basis for repression itself can only be ... the incompatibility between the single idea that is to be repressed and the dominant mass of ideas constituting the ego” (p. 116). Repression is an expression of the ego’s commitment to internal coherence by excluding those ideational elements that would come into contradiction with its “dominant mass of ideas.”

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (1900) attributes the work of the censoring ‘secondary revision’ of dream content to the ego; he writes, “there is no doubt, then, that it is our normal thinking that is the psychical agency which approaches the content of dreams with a demand that it must be intelligible” (p. 499). “Normal thinking,” or the ego, rejects not only unpalatable or disturbing thoughts, but also those thoughts that appear unintelligible from the ego’s perspective. Any mental content that cannot meet the “demand” of intelligibility will be repressed, forgotten, or re-worked such that it makes sense, that is, has a place within the organized whole of the ego. Yet, while it is clear that “normal thinking” issues the demand of intelligibility, what remains mysterious is what the specific nature of that demand amounts to. That is, Freud has not yet accounted for how anything like normal thinking comes to be developed, nor has he yet provided a standard with reference to which ideas could be judged as compatible or incompatible, intelligible or nonsensical.

In 1910, Freud notes that “the incompatibility of [a] wish . . . with the patient’s ego was the motive for the repression; the subject’s ethical and other standards were the repressing forces . . . which [were] thus revealed as one of the devices serving to protect the mental personality” (p. 24). Here Freud suggests for the first time that psychic order is established through the

ego's submission of mental content to ethical and other *standards* in light of which they are deemed either compatible or incompatible with the "mental personality." In a way that will become explicit only with the concept of the ego ideal, Freud is here suggesting that the ego is an organizational structure that functions according to certain standards, or ideals, and that the maintenance and meeting of such standards influence the formation of the mental personality.

From this brief glance at Freud's early work, it is clear that he took the ego to be an organized and organizational function of mental life whose operations and structure are modeled in accordance with ethical and other standards of compatibility or holistic coherence; in the case that an idea or wish arose that was incompatible with these standards, such an idea or wish would be repressed in order to protect the integrity of the mental personality. Importantly, it is not the particular content of the idea or its quota of affect that must be defended against but rather the "situation of incompatibility" (Freud, 1893–1895, p. 146) that arises between a particular idea and the organized mass of ideas constituting the ego.

Throughout other developments in his conceptions of the structure of mind, this emphasis on intra-psychic incompatibility as the motive for repression remains central to his understanding of mental coherence. For instance, in his 1915 paper on repression, Freud notes that an instinct is repressed when the attainment of its aim—satisfaction or discharge—would produce displeasure. But, Freud asks, if satisfying an instinct is inherently pleasurable, then under what circumstances would this be experienced as unpleasurable? To this problem he writes:

We then learn that the satisfaction of an instinct which is under repression would be quite possible, and further, that in every instance such a satisfaction would be pleasurable in itself; but it would be *irreconcilable with other claims and intentions*. It would, *therefore*, cause pleasure in one place and unpleasure in another. It has consequently become a condition for repression that the motive force of unpleasure shall have acquired more strength than the pleasure obtained from satisfaction. (p. 147, emphasis added)

That is, what would or ought to give rise to an experience of pleasure—satisfying a drive—in fact generates the unpleasure of irreconcilability; precisely *qua* irreconcilable with the other “claims and intentions” of the mental personality, the satisfaction of a repressed instinct is unpleasurable. The feeling of unpleasure is thus the “motive force” for repression and thereby functions as a representative of intra-psychic irreconcilability. Again, repression here represents an effort to achieve consistency amongst the dominant mass of ideas (and claims and intentions) constituting the ego, which is to say that certain experiences are endowed with a value (pleasure/unpleasure) that must remain consistent with the overarching ego organization or system. Indeed, only a psyche that held itself to such a “standard” of internal compatibility and organization amongst its “claims and intentions” would be motivated to exclude (psychic) elements seen as threatening to the possibility of meeting such a standard—or to the standard itself.

According to Freud's early accounts, the ego functions primarily defensively, with its own unity a reactive product of the exclusions of and resistances to the activity of the unconscious. As Hans Loewald (1951) has pointed out: “Freud's first conception of the ego was that it represents the repressive, defensive agency within the psychic apparatus. Only later did he stress the [active] synthetic function of the ego” (p. 10). The earlier, dynamic approach to psychic structure distinguished unconscious and consciousness according to a logic of defense, where the unconscious is a repressed unconscious and consciousness a defensive or repressing consciousness. While Freud does not abandon the language of repression, the new structural approach introduced in “The Ego and the Id” emphasizes the functioning and organization specific to the mind's various agencies or loci. As Loewald (1971) writes “the terms [‘ego’ and ‘id’] make it more feasible to visualize the coexistence of mental processes of different *organizational levels*, without the implication, suggested by the negative term ‘unconscious,’ of mutual exclusion or of the active removal of consciousness (repression)” (p. 95, emphasis added). What this means is that Freud can re-conceive the psyche as manifoldly functioning, rather than as the interplay between mutually

hostile systems of defense (consciousness) and offense (the unconscious). Moreover, since repression and defense can potentially characterize a number of mental activities, Freud's structural or functional account makes possible an elaboration of the activities, organization, and features that are properly unique to the ego.

According to the structural topography, the unconscious id is that part of the mind constituted by unbound primary processes and operating in accordance with the pleasure principle; by contrast, the ego, governed by its own standard of order, works to bind these processes and operates primarily in accordance with the reality principle. The ego is oriented towards and influenced by the external environment, and is capable of binding and organizing libidinal energies in order to form thoughts, judgments, and truth-apt intentional attitudes with regards to the real world (Freud, 1923). While the structure of the ego remains in part an effect of repression and defense against the id, this is no longer taken to be its primary or sole function. Indeed, in the later works, Freud suggests that organization and unity are not mere by-products of defense but are the definitive features of the ego's unique functioning.

In 1926, Freud writes: "the ego is an organization characterized by a very remarkable *trend* towards unification, towards synthesis. This characteristic is lacking in the id" (p. 197, emphasis added). And again in 1933 [1932]: "what distinguishes the ego from the id quite especially is a *tendency* to synthesis in its contents, to a combination and unification in its mental processes which are totally lacking in the id" (p. 76, emphasis added). While Freud does here describe the ego in contradistinction to the id, it is crucial to note that the organization of the former is not based exclusively on the repression of the latter. Rather, the ego "tends" towards organization and unification, and it is this immanent and unique activity or function that distinguishes it from the id. Whereas in the earlier writings, Freud presents this organizing tendency as if the ego were 'facing' the disorganized id and repressively responding to it, here he suggests that the ego is 'facing' in a different direction, towards a goal (a "standard") of unification and synthesis. This suggests not only that the ego is equipped with

its own tendencies and aims, but also that mental organization is not simply present or given but must be *enacted*, pursued as an ideal not yet achieved. As Freud (1913 [1912–13]) writes in *Totem and Taboo*, just one year before “On Narcissism:” “there is an intellectual function in us which demands unity, connection and intelligibility from any material, whether of perception or thought, that comes within its grasp” (p. 95).

Here Freud could not have stated more clearly that unity, connection, and intelligibility—all unique features of the ego—are goals or ideals that the ego strives to realize or institute. However, note that here Freud suggests that the ego does not strive for order solely of its own accord; rather, there is an unnamed and distinct “intellectual function in us” which demands that the ego’s contents (perception and thought) be so ordered. Even before the introduction of the ego ideal, then, Freud seems to be proposing a third “organizational level,” to use Loewald’s phrase, beyond the id and the ego; this third level would represent that “intellectual function” whose role is to demand the ego work towards unity, connection, and intelligibility. Moreover, this third level is indicative of the kind of self-consciousness that makes possible a reflective evaluation of the relative order or disorder of mental contents.

By introducing this unique intellectual function, Freud’s approach at this point in fact keeps pace with Kant’s. According to Kant, reason does not create concepts but orders them and gives them unity (A643/B6710); reason provides reflective, overarching organization to first-order concepts, and as such, “reason is in fact concerned with nothing but itself” (A680/B708). Indeed Kant uses the metaphor of a mirror to elaborate the unique capacities of reason (A645/B673), and while he means for it to indicate that, like a mirror revealing what lies behind our backs, reason provides us with knowledge that we would not otherwise have, it seems significant that like a mirror, reason allows us to be concerned with and reflect upon ourselves. So Kant and Freud both suggest that the order and unity of human knowledge and experience is a result of a higher-order reflection on the activities of the understanding or the ego. Yet, again, while Kant can only insist on the extra-worldly faculty and functioning of reason, Freud will come to provide a compelling developmental account of how the hu-

man mind comes to exhibit this essential reflective capacity.

Before laying out the development of the ego ideal, it will be helpful to attend to Freud's 1913 writings on narcissism and its relation to systems of thought and systematicity in thought.

IV

In *Totem and Taboo* (1913 [1912-13]), Freud presents the concept of narcissism in two distinct though related senses. On the one hand, narcissism represents an early stage of psychic development; on the other hand, Freud suggests that the structure of narcissism is essential for the formation of "systems of thought," or systematic thinking in general. The concept is first introduced in the context of a discussion of animism, which Freud suggests is most fundamentally oriented by its belief in the "omnipotence of thoughts:" "primitive man transposed the structural conditions of his own mind into the external world, [exhibiting] an intention to impose the laws governing mental life upon real things" (p. 91). In quite Kantian language, Freud asserts that this form of thought "mistakes an ideal connection for a real one" (p. 83); specifically, animism believes that the forms of merely subjective or ideational association and organization—similarity and contiguity—actually obtain amongst things.

In a parallel fashion, transcendental error, for Kant, involves employing the concepts of the understanding *as if* they described things in themselves—to which human cognition has no access—rather than mere appearances (A289/B345). So common to both transcendental error and animism is a mistaken belief in the substantial reality of merely ideal objects and relations. Further, common to the projects of both transcendental idealism and psychoanalysis is a critical reflection on the conditions and limits of human knowledge, and an abandonment of the presumptuous and erroneous (metaphysical or neurotic) projection of subjective features of thought onto things in themselves.

However, as we shall see, Freud begins to recognize that the projection of systematicity onto the external world is not necessarily or in all cases pathological, but is in fact a condition

for coherent and consistent thought as such. Likewise, in the Appendix to the Dialectic—as though it were an afterthought—Kant begins to suggest that recourse to reason's ideal of systematicity does not *ipso facto* constitute a transcendental error; rather, when employed merely regulatively, as a non-dogmatic guide or pattern, this idea functions as a crucial condition for knowledge and experience. That is, human cognition must project the idea of unity and order into the world (A651/B679) if experience of the world is to have the requisite character of unity and order.

What we see evidenced by both thinkers here is a fundamental ambivalence about the extent of the influence of “ideal” structures on our experience of the “real” world, about the extent to which the notions of ideal and real could in fact be meaningfully distinguished. While Kant's “Copernican turn” precisely insisted that reality must conform to our concepts of it, that the only objects of which we can legitimately speak are those that assume the forms dictated by the human mind, he did not endorse the idea that human reason could likewise constitute or determine the systematic unity of reality (A648/B676). Likewise, while the psychoanalytic enterprise avows the constitutive or formative influence of mental structures on the experience of reality, Freud is explicitly critical of totalizing or systematizing tendencies in human thinking, linking them most often to forms of neurosis or “primitivism,” to delusion or wishful thinking. While Kant and Freud both avowed the formative and constitutive function of the human mind on its experience of the world, both at the same time sought to mitigate the prospect of a humanly constructed order projected or superimposed onto the world. I will return to a discussion of the philosophical implication of Kant's worry about superimposition at the end of this paper.

Turning now to Freud, we see in *Totem and Taboo* an acknowledgment that while the demand for systematicity can become pathological or defensive, the ego's successful functioning hinges on responding to the demand for order and unity in some form. Freud suggests that the animistic phase in the evolution of human consciousness roughly corresponds to a phase in the individual's early mental life: between the phase

of auto-erotism, wherein the disorganized drives cathect various parts of the subject's own body, and object relations, when the drives are pointedly directed towards the external world, Freud inserts an intermediate stage that he calls "narcissism." Here, "the hitherto isolated sexual instincts have already come together into a single whole and have also found an object. But this object is not an external one, extraneous to the subject, but it is his own ego, which has been constituted at about this same time" (1913 [1912–13], pp. 88–89).

Narcissism is thus first presented as a phase of psychic development and libidinal organization wherein all relations and "objects" are (experienced as) internal. The external world does not yet exist as such or have any authority for the infant at this phase, either as a source of satisfaction or in terms of mental representation; rather narcissism is characterized by the illusion of self-sufficiency and completeness. Importantly, narcissism *qua* unification of drives also signals the first instance of psychic unity and order: this first form of drive synchronization both cathects and corresponds to the first form of mental unity—the ego—which is constituted "at about this same time." That is, the first form of libidinal cohesiveness or organization corresponds to the first psychic organization. Freud's language is cagey at this point, but he is moving towards a view of psychic life that holds that narcissistic or internal organization prefigures the kind of mature psychic organization that can take account of externality or objects. While Freud is clear that, like animism, the narcissistic structure is a stage of psychic development that must in some sense be overcome, he is equally unequivocal that narcissism is "never wholly abandoned" (*ibid.*, p. 89), that something about this self-organizing mental dynamic not only grounds but persists throughout all advanced forms of mentation.

Having suggested that narcissism is the mental and libidinal correlate of animism, Freud asserts that the latter reveals an "intention to impose the laws governing mental life upon real things" (p. 91) and that the formalization of this intention represents "man's first theoretical achievement" (p. 93); which is to say that man's first theoretical achievement or "system of thought" (p. 94) is expressive of the basic structure of narcis-

sism. This is the second sense of narcissism that Freud discusses, its relation to the production and maintenance of systems of thought. In this way, he links the possibility of theoretical achievement as such to the structure of narcissism, suggesting both that narcissism is a condition for theoretical construction and that the latter is in some sense an articulation or formalization of the former.

Abstracting from animism *qua* specific theoretical achievement or system, Freud goes on to elaborate more generally on the role of “the system” or systematicity in mental life. In particular, he discusses the secondary revision to which dreams are subjected whose “purpose is evidently to get rid of the disconnectedness and unintelligibility produced by the dream-work and replace it by a new ‘meaning’” (p. 95). He writes:

The secondary revision of the product of the dream-work is an admirable example of the nature and pretensions of a system. There is an intellectual function in us which demands unity, connection and intelligibility from any material, whether of perception or thought, that comes within its grasp; and if, as a result of special circumstances, it is unable to establish a true connection, it does not hesitate to fabricate a false one ... a rearrangement of the psychical material [is] made with a fresh aim in view; and the rearrangement may often have to be a drastic one if the outcome is to be made to appear intelligible from the point of view of the system. (p. 95)

As we saw, Freud attributes the work of secondary revision to the ego, which attempts to establish coherence in that which appears to defy order and to make meaningful all “material” which would otherwise have no place, i.e., no connection with other material, no part in the structured whole. Here in 1913 Freud suggests that the “intellectual function” that works to render dream contents intelligible also demands unity, connection, and intelligibility from *any* material that the mind encounters. Indeed, he further suggests that, in response to this demand, all psychic material is arranged with a systematic aim in view, and that such material will be arranged according

to “false” connections if a “true” connection cannot be established. Such re-arrangement with an eye to “unity, connection and intelligibility” is made, not from the point of view of the ego, but “from the point of view of the system,” suggesting that the ego must assume a different perspective—the perspective of the system—in order to arrange the material. At this point, it seems that the tendency to mistake an ideal connection for a real one is not unique to animism or primitive belief systems but is operative in and necessary for (systematic) thinking in general.

It is certainly true that, even in the passage above, Freud can be (and often is) read as criticizing this tendency in thinking as defensive, neurotic, precisely unable to take adequate account of reality. Yet Freud is insistent that narcissism is never wholly abandoned, and I want to suggest that it is its maintenance in advanced, object-oriented stages of thinking that provides the latter with adequate coherence and consistency, imbuing the ego’s experience of the object-world with the requisite unity and cohesiveness. We might say that narcissism persists in mature psychic functioning precisely *as* the drive to synthesis and unity, as the desire for the systematic. While this drive can become pathological, manifesting in the kind of paranoia that finds meaning and connections where there are none, its appropriate enactment, its “good and proper use,” we could say with Kant, makes possible the kind of overarching order and interconnectedness that imbues experience with structure and significance.

While Freud had long recognized the ego’s demand for intelligibility, what is new in 1913 is his concept of narcissism as the source of and pattern for this (demand for) psychic unity. As Samuel Weber (2000) writes:

the animistic attempt to comprehend the external world in terms of unity and totality [paradigmatic of systematic thinking in general] corresponds to the newly formed unity within the psyche: the narcissistic ego. The single point of view and the all-embracing comprehension it permits thus reflect the composite unity of the ego. (p. 46)

With *Totem and Taboo*, then, Freud further elaborates his theory of mental unity and systematicity by way of the concept of narcissism. As a phase of psychic development, narcissism precedes and sets up more mature psychic functioning, and as a form of mental organization, narcissism functions to secure psychic cohesion, and persists in and informs the pursuit of unity and systematicity. What Freud has yet to account for is precisely how the ego transitions from the form of self-sufficient and closed unity predicated on the identity of subject and object (narcissism), to the kind of unity that takes account of difference, a unity in which the external world has a place (object relations, mature psychic functioning): that is, how is the structure of narcissism both maintained and overcome?

V

At the opening of "On Narcissism," Freud postulates an "original libidinal cathexis of the ego ... which fundamentally persists and is related to the object-cathexes much as the body of an amoeba is related to the pseudopodia which it puts out" (1914, p. 75). Reiterating his thoughts from 1913, Freud suggests that the narcissistic investment of the ego, the subject's taking itself as a first or proto-object, is the original libidinal organization, a reflexive relation that is never completely given up in favor of an intentional relation. That is, the subject does not, as it were, 'lose itself' to the object; rather, it sustains a relationship between two terms: itself and the other. Nevertheless, an intentional or object-directed relation *is* established in normal psychic functioning, and part of what Freud is accounting for in "On Narcissism" is how the ego manages to maintain a balance between reflexive investment in self and intentional investment in the other, such that a closed narcissistic unity based on exclusion can develop into a dynamic organization or unity that can account for difference and externality, that is, reality.

Freud poses two related questions in the first sections of his paper, questions to which the concepts of narcissism and the ego ideal are meant to respond. First, in justifying why

he would introduce the notion of a primary narcissistic stage between autoerotism and object-relations, Freud notes that “a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed” (p. 77). The ego as unity and as unifying function cannot be simply assumed, as Freud had done in his earlier work; on the contrary, Freud now recognizes that he must account for how that structure is first established and how it is continually maintained. The first question, is thus, how does the unity and unifying activity of the ego come about?

Secondly, in arguing for an original narcissism in everyone, Freud finds himself asking “what makes it necessary at all for our mental life to pass beyond the limits of narcissism and to attach the libido to objects” (p. 85); that is, why is it that we come to invest in objects at all, how does the ego come to relate meaningfully to an other? If, as Freud insists throughout his writings, “we can never give anything up [but] only exchange one thing for another” (Freud, 1908 [1907], p. 145), how do we give up the satisfactions of primary narcissism and develop towards mature, externally-oriented psychic functioning? Taking these questions together, Freud is asking how the unified ego comes into being *such that* this unity can account for objects, for reality.

As we have discussed, Freud uses the concept of primary narcissism to designate both a stage in psychic life and a particular libidinal configuration. As a developmental stage between auto-erotism and object-love, primary narcissism designates, as Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) write, “a first state of life ... an objectless’—or at any rate ‘undifferentiated’—state, implying no split between subject and external world” (p. 337). As an organization of libido, primary narcissism represents “an original libidinal cathexis of the ego,” manifesting in an experience of self-love, self-sufficiency, and self-satisfaction. Primary narcissism thus represents an idealized state of completion, a particular kind of “attitude towards the external world” that cannot account for the world’s very externality (Freud, 1914, p. 75). As Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) puts it, “when the infant took himself as his own ideal [in primary narcissism] there was no unsatisfaction, no desire, no loss, and this time remains with us as an example of perfect, unending contentment” (p. 5).

Now it is clear that in reality the infant is *not* miraculously self-sufficient but on the contrary, completely helpless and dependent on the object (parent); this simple fact means that any theory of primary narcissism must account for the contributions of the parents, especially the mother or primary caregiver. Notoriously, Freud never adequately theorized the role of the mother for pre-Oedipal development; his essay “Female Sexuality” in 1931 represents his most sustained speculation on the mother. Yet, we can read in his comments regarding the “attitude of affectionate parents towards their children” (Freud, 1914, p. 90)—indeed their own *narcissistic* attitude towards their children—a dim awareness of the role of early parenting in fostering the primary narcissistic state. Much psychoanalytic theory following Freud has been dedicated to supplementing Freud’s emphasis on the Oedipal drama by suggesting that prior to this, the infant-mother interactions are similarly crucial in informing psychic development. Klein, Winnicott, Loewald, Balint, Kristeva, and, as I will discuss below, Chasseguet-Smirgel each offer unique accounts of the specific role and contributions of the mother in the early formation of the psyche, and speculate on the status or consequences of this early experience of the not-yet-separated world.

Chasseguet-Smirgel’s work on the ego ideal emphasizes the ways in which the parent both facilitates and disrupts the infant’s fantasies of self-sufficiency. She suggests that the child’s radical helplessness and dependency, combined with its inability to recognize the parent as other or external, means that primary narcissism is best conceived as a state of symbiotic fusion (with the mother) (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985, p. 26). In such a state, the child is constantly attended to, its needs quickly met, and the infant experiences this state precisely as magical self-sufficiency, as fantasied perfection.

During this period, the parents must, on the one hand, bestow upon the child the kind of “narcissistic confirmation” (p. 31) to which Freud only flippantly refers, thereby fostering in the child a sense of value and cohesion, and a self-sufficiency such that later disappointments or frustrations can be tolerated. Emotional and physical care, ministrations to the child’s body, and affirmation of psyche, all contribute to the internal

cohesiveness and stability that will make possible coherent and stable engagements with the world. As Chasseguet-Smirgel's emphasis on parental care suggests, the success of the stage of primary narcissism is dependent upon the activity and influence of something beyond the ego, which is to say that the development of a relationship between ego and object depends upon something over and above those terms. Winnicott's crucial idea of the "holding environment" as productive of the child's sense of "structured integration" (1960, p. 590) is another way of articulating the same basic notion that psychic or experiential unity must be fostered and established by something other than ego.

On the one hand, then, the parents must establish the coherence of primary narcissism. On the other hand, it is the very frustration and interruption of this completeness that promotes development, growth, and the awareness of the not-I or object. In this way, the child comes to *recognize* its own dependence on the object, prompting it to form a more advanced and active relationship with it. As Chasseguet-Smirgel (1976) rightly emphasizes, immediate satisfactions and attentive care engender a kind of immersion in object, and contribute to the child's sense of world-stability, yet a proper *relationship* with the object depends upon a minimal sense of distance. Such frustrating or disruptive distance constitutes the essential perspective from which the object can appear *qua* object, the world *qua* objective world (p. 350).

Primary narcissism is a state of idealized unity that must be fostered, to give the child a sense of self, and finally interrupted, to give the child a sense of the other. As Chasseguet-Smirgel puts it: "each stage of his development must afford [the child] enough gratification so that he does not want to turn back, and enough frustration to urge him onwards so that he does not remain fixated" (p. 351).

The question, then, is how can this fusional and total satisfaction be given up? Or rather, given that we cannot give up any satisfactions, for what could such a cohesive satisfaction be exchanged? Moreover, if primary narcissism is essential for fostering a sense of internal cohesion, organization, and self-sufficiency—all of which are necessary if the child is to confi-

dently make developmental progress—how can it be overcome such that it is not traumatically destroyed but rather maintained in an advanced form?

The obvious first point, already indicated, is that the satisfactions of primary narcissism cannot be maintained without interruption, and so, of necessity, the infant must develop an awareness of and capacity to interact with the object-world. As Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984) puts it, “it is the experience of frustration that prompts the development of the ego” (p. 33). Yet Freud also suggests that the basic structure or function of primary narcissism—which, as Robert Stolorow (1975) emphasizes, is to maintain structural, psychic cohesiveness—cannot be simply abandoned but must be rearticulated at a higher organizational level, one that can include the world. Here, Freud introduces the ego ideal or ideal ego as the means by which the satisfactions of primary narcissism are given up while the basic sense of unity and cohesion is retained. As he writes:

[The] ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. The subject's narcissism makes its appearance displaced on to this new ideal ego, which, like the infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection that is of value. As always where the libido is concerned, man has here again shown himself incapable of giving up a satisfaction he had once enjoyed ... What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal. (1914, p. 94)

The developing ego maintains the satisfactions of primary narcissism precisely by projecting them “before him,” into the future, into an ideal that might at some point be realized. What is projected, stated in the barest terms, is precisely the possibility of self-satisfaction, the fantasy of completion without remainder, of there being nothing left outstanding: that is, of becoming one's own ideal. Speaking energetically, this would entail the cessation of desire, of lack, of tension; speaking in terms of objects, this would entail the abolition of external objects, of any outside at all. The ego ideal is the promise of

the possibility of complete, integrated, ideal unity, and it will be against such an ideal that the actual ego will measure itself (p. 93).

By combining an ego and a libido theory in his conceptions of primary narcissism and the projected ego ideal, Freud demonstrates that what is sought is not some abstract ideal of perfection but *satisfaction* most broadly speaking. We are properly gripped by our ideals of perfection and satisfaction, or we might say in Freud's idiom that these ideas are intensively cathected. Incredibly, Kant recognized this as well: he speaks of reason as "driven by an inward need" (B21) and as "an interest endeavor[ing] to obtain satisfaction" (A666/B694), at least implicitly acknowledging that the conditions for knowledge are not themselves wholly of the order of knowledge. Reason cannot be straightforwardly known and does not produce knowledge but is better conceived as a "disposition" or a "need" (B21), experienced phenomenologically as a "restlessness" (Bxv) or a "burden" (Avii). Facilitated by the notion of the unconscious, Freud can suggest that such a drive or tendency towards an ideal is the expression of unconscious forms of thought within higher order thinking. Which is to say that higher order thinking does not fully overcome but includes primary thought processes and through this inclusion facilitates more advanced forms of world engagement.

Loewald (1962) suggestively proposes that, as the promise or possibility of satisfaction, the ego ideal is a psychic structure endowed with a unique *temporal* function. The ego ideal is best conceived, not as a spatially differentiated "grade in the ego," as Freud will later phrase it (1923, p. 28), but as a psychic differentiation or organization arranged in accordance with some "temporal principle" (Loewald, 1962, p. 265). In projecting the cohesiveness and completion of primary narcissism into "something to be wished and reached for" (p. 266), the psyche is working out a sense of possibility, futurity, which is to say a sense of time. More precisely, Loewald suggests that this differentiation in the ego does not result in some abstract awareness of time, but in the cultivation of "psychic time as an activity" (p. 264), which is to say, the mental capacity to recall and anticipate, to bring the past and future to bear on the present. So in

addition to the kind of (spatially imagined) “perspective” from which an object can be properly experienced, as emphasized by Chasseguet-Smirgel, the projection of ego ideal makes possible the assumption of a specifically temporal vantage from which can be surveyed particular experiences in light of the projection of a temporal whole (past, present, and future).

By projecting the completeness of narcissism into the future in the form of a to-be-realized ideal, the fantasied perfection of primary narcissism is overcome—object relations are engaged and the possibility of sublimation established—yet insofar as this overcoming is accomplished by way of projection, this perfection is in an important sense retained and becomes that towards which the ego tends and strives. Crucially, while the ego ideal functions as a goal, it is in principle unrealizable, the projection of a fantasied completion that could in no way take place in experience. That it cannot be realized, that it must remain always still outstanding, is in fact the temporal function or arrangement that ensures the ego's continued and dynamic development.

Accordingly, guilt or even the simple awareness of a goal still outstanding are experiential manifestations of the distance between the ego and its ideal. And while sensations of guilt most often arise with regard to specifically moral deficiencies, this is but one form that the experience of falling short of one's ideal can take; that is, the ego can experience itself as deficient in more than simply moral terms. The ego ideal most broadly conceived functions not to issue demands of exclusively moral perfection. Rather, it demands and promises perfection, completion, unity—full stop.

Now while I am suggesting that the ego ideal *qua* projection of completion and unity is not identifiable with or reducible to the moral conscience that will come to be embodied in the super-ego, as soon as Freud introduces the ego ideal, he begins to speak of the demands of moral conscience and the claims of ethical or social standards; the ego ideal is undoubtedly a key feature of the voice of conscience. Nevertheless, while we usually feel or “recognize” (Freud, 1914, p. 95) the demands of the ego ideal *as* conscience, this is not its sole or most basic function; rather, conscience is only one expression of the

more general demand for completion issued by the “critically observing agency” (p. 96).

In fact, Freud is explicitly concerned to demonstrate that the commanding force of the ego ideal is active not only in the realm of moral conscience but in other aspects of mental life; that is, Freud by no means intends to conflate the ego ideal and conscience but is interested in articulating the *various* areas of psychic life in which the ego ideal has an effect. As he writes, “it will certainly be of importance to us if evidence of the activity of this critically observing agency—which becomes heightened into conscience *and philosophic introspection*—can be found in other fields as well” (p. 96, emphasis added). One such field in which the ego ideal plays a pivotal role is that of intellectual endeavors and systematic or theoretical speculation. As Freud suggests:

the activity of the mind which has taken over the function of conscience has also placed itself at the service of internal research, which furnishes philosophy with the material for its intellectual operations. This may have some bearing on the characteristic tendency of paranoiacs to construct *speculative systems*. (p. 96, emphasis added)

That is, while conscience is one of its functions, the ego ideal is also the psychic mechanism responsible for “philosophical introspection,” “intellectual operations,” and the (potentially neurotic or paranoid) construction of “speculative systems.” Recalling his 1913 association of the structure of narcissism with the ability or drive to construct systems of thought, Freud here suggests that what the ego ideal (*qua* projection of primary narcissism) demands is precisely cohesion, completion, order, unity, and that this demand is made in ethical *and* intellectual, practical *and* theoretical life.

Freud also suggests in 1914 that the secondary revision of dream content for which he had heretofore held the ego responsible should now be understood as an effect of the censoring work of the ego ideal (p. 97). We should recall here that Freud believed that both secondary revision and conscious thinking demand order and intelligibility from

their material (Freud, 1900, p. 499); as we saw, the tendency toward consistency and unity is not unique to either the dream censor or animism but pervades all of conscious life. Here in 1914 Freud suggests that the demands of conscience, the work of the dream censor, and the construction of speculative or philosophical systems are all expressions of one and the same power or agency, all responses to the ego ideal's demand for unification, for synthesis.

We can now confidently assert that the “intellectual function in us which demands unity, connection and intelligibility from any material” (Freud, 1913 [1912–13], p. 95) is the ego ideal *qua* projection of primary narcissism. The ego ideal, projected into the future, demands that the ego work to regain the perfection of primary narcissism, and the ego's censoring and ordering, its inclusions and exclusions represent its attempts to respond to those demands. Moreover, insofar as the ideal is essentially unreachable, it is by means of the projection of the ego ideal that anything like development, progress, or work is possible in the first place. As Freud (1914) writes:

The development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous attempt to recover that state. This departure is brought about by means of the displacement of libido on to an ego ideal imposed from without; and satisfaction is brought about from fulfilling this ideal. (p. 100)

The development of the ego consists in disruption of primary narcissism and the concomitant projection of the ego ideal. As Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) writes, “the ego ideal implies the idea of a *project* [...] a *hope* [...] together they suggest the idea of *development*, of *evolution*” (p. 29). While the super ego indeed assumes center stage—in Freud's own thought and perhaps in most psychic economies—by demanding moral consistency from the ego, this is but one form of a more general demand for intra-psychic compatibility and synthesis.

It is worth noting briefly that the demands of the ego ideal and the attempt to fulfill them can indeed take pathological form. As we've seen, Freud recognized paranoia as a neurotic

expression of the ego ideal and its demands for unity, connection and intelligibility, and he characterized animism and certain expressions of a rigid commitment to systematicity as forms of pathology and neurosis. More recently, Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) and Julia Kristeva (1987, 1989) have argued respectively that perversion and melancholia are pathological manifestations of the fantasy of self-sufficiency, perfection, total satisfaction. The pervert believes he already is his own ideal (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985), while the melancholic laments her personal inability to realize or merge with the always withdrawing ideal (Kristeva, 1989); in both cases, the possibility of unity or completeness becomes rigidified or reified, as though it *could in fact be realized*. In fact, this erroneous belief in the reality or substantiality of the ideal is the very error of which Kant accused his predecessors: for Kant, the pre-critical metaphysicians believed that the unconditioned could actually be found in experience, that it was straightforwardly available for human comprehension. Both the neurotic and the metaphysician are unable to accept that the unconditioned is not a thing or a realizable state, but an ideal whose function is to give value and direction to human experience.

Thus, a healthy ego ideal functions to motivate the individual to pursue goals or projects (that is, to sublimate) even while acknowledging that “achieving [any particular] aim . . . can never be truly and finally satisfying” (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985, p. 7). Insofar as the ego ideal maintains this kind of dynamism, insofar as the ego ideal provides a merely regulative and not rigidly constitutive ideal, as we might say with Kant, it offers the ego the kind of goal or standard of coherence in light of which the ego can effectively perform as the psychic apparatus’ organizational and integrative agency.

I suggested with respect to Kant that reason’s projection of an ideal supplements the understanding with two essential functions—progressive development and a system of value—which make possible unified and ordered experience and knowledge. The same can be said of Freud’s system; that is, the ego ideal essentially supplements the functioning of the ego, providing the latter with a developmental goal which functions to imbue any individual experience with sense or

value. Recall Freud's comment in his paper on repression that a certain potentially satisfying experience is repressed because it would be "irreconcilable with other claims and intentions" (1915, p. 147). We can see now that the ego *qua* reconciliatory or organizational function requires an ideal of coherence in light of which an experience can "count" as pleasurable or painful, valuable or insignificant, as a gain or a loss. In ways that I have not been able to discuss here, the specific shape or pattern of the ego ideal will depend upon the kind of care and attention administered by the parents; that is, parental care will be responsible for communicating what counts as satisfaction, fulfillment, achievement, love, and therefore what the ego seeks in its ideal will be informed by this kind of care.¹ That the ego strives to develop, to be more, that its experiences of gain and loss have weight or significance, that its life is endowed with a specific shape and meaning, all this is thanks to the possibility of completeness embodied in the ego ideal.

VI

By the end of the first *Critique*, the problem that continues to weigh on Kant is, as we've seen: what is the status of the mind's need or demand for systematic unity? Is the systematicity of experience merely subjective, or properly objective and "real"? (A648/B676) While Kant suggests that such unity is a projected ideal towards which the understanding strives, he remains agnostic as to how fundamental or how necessary—which is to say, how transcendental—this projection actually is. Insofar as he relegates reason's ideal of unified order to the status of the *merely regulative*, rather than the robustly constitutive, Kant will grant it only an "indeterminate validity" (A663/B691).

Part of Kant's hesitance with regard to the status of the demand for unity and systematicity in experience is a worry that such order amounts to nothing more than a subjective and precarious superimposition onto the world. Even in the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant attempts to respond to the still unresolved problems of the first *Critique*, and to specify and secure a pervasive order or systematicity for experience, he

remains fearful that experience *might not* cohere into a system, that experience might ultimately be nothing more than a “crude chaotic aggregate,” “a disturbing, boundless heterogeneity” (1987, p. 209). Within the terms of Kantian philosophy, then, there is both a recognition of the need for an overarching or ideal order in which any particular experience or judgment makes sense, and at the same time, a fear that this order might ultimately be undermined by potentially “chaotic” or “disturbing” experience, that the demand for systematicity might not be adequately met.

To conclude, I suggest that Freud was likewise gripped by these two concerns: on the one hand, the ego must be guided in its effort to organize experience and mental contents, and on the other, this effort might ultimately fail, amounting either to the pathological imposition of order, or to the collapse of order in the face of incompatible or disturbing experience. Yet whereas Kant seemed unable to tolerate these latter possibilities, believing as he did that the conditions of experience needed to be universal and unwavering, Freud’s great philosophic insight is precisely that incompatibility and disturbance are probable features of mental life, and that the conditions securing coherent experience can falter or fail. We might say that while Kant sought for a transcendental guarantee of order and systematicity, Freud accepted and worked within the impossibility of such a guarantee.

What Freud provides is a historical-developmental account of the conditions for psychic order, which is to say, paradoxically, that for Freud the conditions of possible experience are themselves conditioned. The projection of a good-enough ego ideal depends upon good-enough conditions holding wherein the developing mind’s sense of coherence and order is both supported and adequately disrupted, thereby facilitating consistent and dynamic ego development. This external or inter-personal facilitation of the ideal is repeated later in life, both within social and group dynamics (see Freud, 1921) and within the clinical setting; in this sense, the ideal of coherence or perfection is configured differently in different stages and settings, and part of the efficacy of the practice of psychoanalysis relies on the possibility of the transformation of that ideal, on the

practical adjustment of the mind's most general orientation to good and bad. Again, against Kant's demand for transcendental conditions for experience, Freud's developmental theory posits that the conditions for coherent experience are continually conditioned within experience.

It follows from this theoretical stance that when good-enough conditions fail to obtain, or when a disturbing experience arises which compromises psychic functioning and integrity, so too is undermined the coherence of human experience, its unity and order. In these cases, experience is not destroyed *überhaupt*, as Kant feared; rather we find here the kinds of psychic suffering and confusion that psychoanalysis was designed to treat. While I have not here adequately explored the philosophical significance of suffering and its capacity to compromise the conditions for experience, by aligning Freud's concerns with Kant's, I hope at least to have indicated that psychic suffering, the object and orienting concern of psychoanalysis, can reveal something profoundly philosophical about the conditions for mind and world, and the possible relationships between the two.

Note

1. I am here inspired also by Stanley Cavell's discussion of language acquisition in the chapter "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language" in *The Claim of Reason* (1999).

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