

**Sigmund Freud**  
**1856 – 1939**



Sigmund Freud was born on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1856 in Freiberg, Moravia, which is now known as Pribor in the Czech Republic. Freud developed the techniques of “psycho-analysis” for treating psychological and emotional disorders. He graduated as a doctor of medicine from the Medical School of the University of Vienna in 1881. In the September of 1891, Freud moved to 19 Berggasse in Vienna where he lived and worked for the next 47 years.

Freud first used the term “psycho-analysis” in his 1896 paper, “The Aetiology of Hysteria”. Six years later in the October of 1902, a circle of physicians who followed Freud’s work began weekly discussions on his theory of “psycho-analysis”. As time went by, the group came up with more theories and more ideas to justify their claims. So in-depth did they become with their studies that they developed a group based on the studies themselves, called the “Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society” in 1908.

In 1910, the "International Psycho-Analytical Association" was formed in Nuremberg under it’s first President; a Swiss psychologist by the name of Carl Jung. “Psycho-analysis” soon gained acceptance all over the world as a scientific discipline and as a therapeutic approach.

On March 12, 1938 German troops marched into Austria and the Nazis assumed power. Freud's daughter Anna was arrested on March 22 by the Gestapo and held for a single day. On June 4<sup>th</sup> of the same year, Freud and certain members of his household, such as his wife, his youngest daughter Anna, his housekeeper Paula Fichtl and his medical caretaker Josefina Stross were granted emigration rights for London. Freud’s other children also managed to escape despite numerous international interventions. At around the same time, Freud’s brother lost all of his properties in Vienna. His four sisters were killed in Nazi concentration camps around Europe, and Freud himself moved into his new abode in London’s Hampstead.

Sigmund Freud died on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1939 of a cancer of the mouth that he had suffered from the last twenty years of his life. "The Sigmund Freud Museum" was opened in his former office at 19 Berggasse, Vienna in 1971.

One of Freud’s most famous theories was his theory regarding ‘the unconscious mind’. Freud's account of the unconscious, and the psychoanalytic therapy associated with it, is best illustrated by his famous model of the structure of the mind created in 1923. It has many similarities with the account of the mind put forward by Plato over 2000 years earlier.

The theory is called 'tripartite' because, again, like Plato, Freud distinguished three structural elements within the mind, which he called the 'id, ego, and super-ego'.

The 'id' is that part of the mind in which sexual drives are situated that require satisfaction. The 'super-ego' is the part that contains the 'conscience'. The 'ego' is the conscious created by the tensions and interactions between the 'id' and the 'super-ego', which has the task of merging their conflicts. It is because of this notion that the mind is thought to be a dynamic "energy system".

All streams of consciousness belong in the 'ego', the contents of the 'id' belong permanently to the unconscious mind, and the 'super-ego' is an unconscious 'screening mechanism' which attempts to limit the pleasure seeking drives of the 'id' by the employment of 'rules'. There is some debate as to how Freud intended this model to be perceived, but it is important to note that what is being offered by Freud is a theoretical model.

According to "An Outline of Psychoanalysis" by James Strachey, 1940, the 'id' is... "a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement. We suppose that it is somewhere in direct contact with somatic processes, and takes over from them instinctual needs and gives them mental expression, but we cannot say in what substratum this contact is made. These instincts fill it with energy, but it has no organisation and no unified will, only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs, in accordance with the pleasure-principle". This shows that his principle of the unconscious in accordance with the id, ego and super-ego is very relevant today.

In modern times, the human race is more and more concerned with pleasure seeking. When one activity or process becomes mundane and lacks its original thrill or excitement, the typical person would then find something better or more exciting to move onto – it is a natural progression. For example, if one roller coaster becomes boring and fails to offer the rider any more degree of stimulation, they will move onto another bigger, faster and more enthralling ride. This shows that Freud's theory on the unconscious is well founded and as far as we know, correct. As I commented on in previous paragraphs, there is a constant 'battle' going on between the two sections of the unconscious mind: the ego and the id. The super-ego acts as a sort of rationalisation process between the two - almost like a referee. It is this mixture of biological, instinctual processes that makes the unconscious mind something puzzling, yet fascinating and thus exciting to concur.

Despite these theories being formulated decades ago, it is obvious that they hold significant relevance today. The ego, said Freud, "represents reason and good sense". The super-ego is the last part of the personality to emerge and represents the internalisation of demands of society, parents and communities etc. It is the fulfilment of both these procedures that makes the unconscious mind what it is. It is for this reason that it is still relevant today: people are instinctually thrill seekers, and thrill seeking is what satisfies all parts of the mind – the ego, the id and the super-ego. Freud developed this concept years ago, yet it still applies unflinchingly to modern day psychology.

## **References:**

- > [Freud AS Psychology Booklet, History Unit One](#)
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