

The Military Influence Upon Freud's Dynamic Psychiatry

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A previously disregarded but consequential influence upon the conceptual model of dynamic psychiatry as evolved by Freud is that of military science. Thus many fundamental terms bear obvious military connotations, including conflict, defense, repression, alliances, and resistance. Freud repeatedly exploited the rich metaphorical possibilities of the military analogy as he depicted psychology in terms of conflicts of forces, emphasizing the onslaught of instinctual impulses and the defensive operations of the ego to ward them off.

ONE OF THE almost forgotten, but in my view significant, influences upon the conceptual model of dynamic psychiatry as evolved by Sigmund Freud is that of military science. Yet the study of this interesting prototype has been virtually entirely neglected in favor of the more prominent physical, neurological, and philosophical sources, as embodied in the contributions of such men as Helmholtz, Herbert, Fechner, Meynert, and Nietzsche. This omission is most surprising when we pause to consider that some of the fundamental terms and expressions of dynamic psychiatry bear obvious military connotations. These include psychic conflict, defense, resistance, arrays of psychological forces, alliances, and even compromise formation.

Perhaps it was Freud's later pacifistic orientation, as expressed in such works as "Why War?" written with Albert Einstein in 1932, that caused this military influence to appear unlikely or unworthy of scholarly attention. Here Freud went so far as to assert: "We pacifists have a *constitutional* in-

tolerance of war, an idiosyncrasy magnified, as it were, to the highest degree"(1) (*italics* Freud's).

However, Freud was well aware of the existence of reaction formations in this respect and the complexity of origin of such feelings. Thus in another anti-war work, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," Freud wrote in 1915: "Those who as children have been the most pronounced egoists may well become the most helpful and self-sacrificing members of the community; most of our sentimentalists, friends of humanity and protectors of animals have been evolved from little sadists and animal tormentors"(2, p. 282). Obviously, the presence of a pacifistic outlook in later years does not at all preclude an earlier militarism, as the biographical information concerning Freud that I shall discuss confirms.

For examples of this failure to assess the influence of military science upon Freud's system of dynamic psychiatry, we can turn to James Strachey, Siegfried Bernfeld, and Ernest Jones. Strachey(3) confined his attention to physical and philosophical antecedents, even though some of these hypotheses (as defense and repression) are more readily understood in a military rather than physical context. However, there is no mention whatsoever of this consideration. Similarly, Bernfeld(4) found no significant link between Freud's military background and his later scientific contributions.

Ernest Jones describes Freud's military experiences in some detail in his biography. In spite of this, on no occasion does he interrelate them in a positive manner with Freud's later psychological achievements. On the contrary, Jones concludes that after Freud's intense childhood military curiosity and far-ranging ambitions: "His dreams of becoming a great general himself, how-

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ever, gradually faded, and any remaining military interest must have received a *final quietus* from the boring experience of spending a year in the army when he was twenty-three and in the midst of absorbing scientific research" (5, vol. 1, p. 23) (italics mine).

It is my contention that this "final quietus" did not actually take place. Instead I shall attempt to show how Freud incorporated his military knowledge into the framework of the dynamic psychological system that he created. Again and again he utilized military concepts and analogies in his writings as he depicted psychology in terms of conflicts of forces and various defensive operations against the onslaught of instinctual impulses. Thus the "transference becomes the battlefield on which all the mutually struggling forces should meet one another" (6, p. 454). Or Little Hans' phobia is referred to as a "battle which burst out" and "Victory lay with the forces of repression" in his case (7). The therapist is conceived of as an "ally from outside" to the patient's weakened ego, and "We form a pact with each other. . . . This pact constitutes the analytic situation" (8, p. 173).

In this manner the military metaphor enriched and elucidated Freudian dynamic psychiatry, making it easily understood through its close connection with human experience. Beyond this, it is distinctly possible, though unprovable, that the military conceptual model in fact preceded the more complex physical and philosophical points of origin in Freud's own mind. For example, the concept of "defense" as in "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense," was one of the earliest and most consequential elements in Freud's psychological system (9). In any case, it is my thesis that military science served as one of the important cornerstones for the structure of dynamic psychiatry. In this article an attempt will be made to explore this military influence in the hope of gaining a clearer understanding of the nature and origin of fundamental dynamic principles of psychiatry.

Freud's Military Background

To begin with, let us review the relevant material concerning Freud's military background. In a revealing section of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud relates how his

father failed to assert himself in the face of anti-Semitic taunting. After learning of this example of cowardice when he was between ten and twelve years of age, Freud describes how he turned in his fantasies from his father to the Carthaginian general Hannibal, who had the courage to stand up to the Romans. Freud continues:

One of the first books that I got hold of when I had learnt to read was Thiers' history of the Consulate and Empire. I can still remember sticking labels on the flat backs of my wooden soldiers with the name of Napoleon's marshals written on them. And at that time my declared favorite was already Masséna (or to give the name its Jewish form, Manasseh). (No doubt this preference was also partly to be explained by the fact that my birthday fell on the same day as his, exactly a hundred years later.) Napoleon himself lines up with Hannibal owing to their having crossed the Alps. It may even be that the development of this martial ideal is traceable still further back into my childhood: to the times when, at the age of three, I was in a close relation, sometimes friendly but sometimes warlike, with a boy a year older than myself, and to the wishes which the relation must have stirred up in the weaker of us (10).

In this manner Freud viewed his pronounced early military orientation as a reaction to his father's timidity in confronting anti-Semitic incidents and, going further back, to sibling rivalry. Moreover, Freud identified himself at an early age with a series of celebrated military heroes, as if thereby to surpass his father through his imagined bravery. The Central European history and tradition of militarism permeated the culture of the nineteenth century and this undoubtedly also affected the nature of Freud's dynamic psychiatry along with the above psychological factors that he himself cited. It should be added that Freud's special interest in Napoleon must have persisted until the end of his life. In a letter to Thomas Mann dated November 1936, Freud explored in detail the possibility that the biblical Joseph (the subject of Mann's tetralogy, *Joseph and His Brothers*) served as a source

¹Louis Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), a French statesman and historian, wrote *History of the Consulate and the Empire of France* between 1840 and 1855 (Encyclopedia Britannica). In its English translation it is a thick, finely printed, five-volume work. I have also examined a 12-volume edition published in Philadelphia by the J. B. Lippincott Company in 1893.

of psychological identification for Napoleon (5, vol. 3, p. 462).

I have examined the Thiers' work referred to by Freud(11). It must have been a remarkable feat for Freud to have read such a massive composition at so early an age. Thiers' history contains some of the same military imagery that Freud was to utilize in his later psychological writings. That is, Thiers describes struggles, resistances, defensive maneuvers, military alliances and pacts, and temporary compromises of warring parties through the efforts of outside mediators. Of course no definite link between Freud and Thiers can be proved in the absence of further information from Freud; nevertheless, this writer was particularly impressed by the common similarity of emphasis upon history (or therapy) as involving continual conflict, defense, and resistance, an orientation which Freud would not have gained from his scientific antecedents.

When Freud was 14 the Franco-Prussian War broke out. Ernest Jones, on the basis of information he obtained from Freud's sister, described how this war aroused Freud's interest to such an extent that he kept a large map on his writing desk and followed the progress of combatants in detail by means of small flags(5, vol. 1, p. 23). Also, Freud would explain to his sisters the significance of the movements of the conflicting parties. Jones referred to this as an "unmistakable military phase" in Freud's life. Afterwards, Freud's outward military enthusiasm subsided, but as I shall show, this militarism eventually was shifted over and embodied within his dynamic psychological system.

Freud's Military Career

Freud's own military career, as would be expected, failed to measure up to his earlier lofty ideals. It began while he was a medical student in 1879 and extended to 1887 when he was intensely occupied with neurological research. Unfortunately by that time military service turned out to be an unwanted interference with his burgeoning professional career, not to mention its conflict with his courtship and young married

life occurring at the same time. During his first year of military duty Freud was on alert status at home and in local hospitals; this he found very boring. He was also required to attend scheduled military meetings, an obligation he often neglected. Because of this, Freud was reprimanded and forced to spend his 24th birthday under arrest; characteristically, Freud coped with his boredom in a creative manner—he used the time to translate essays of John Stuart Mill into German, work that Jones described as "brilliant and rapid"(5, vol. 1, p. 55).

After his first year in the service Freud was placed on inactive reserve status until 1886. At that time, as a result of uprisings in Eastern Europe, he was required to spend a month on army maneuvers as a senior army surgeon(5, vol. 1, p. 193). Freud's duties included giving lectures on field hygiene to the servicemen and participating in marches with them. He also performed work of a more distasteful nature, vividly described in a letter of September 1, 1886, to his friend and future collaborator, Joseph Breuer: "I am lying here on a short leash in this filthy hole—can't think of any other way of describing it—painting flagpoles black and yellow"(12).

In addition, Freud objected to the system of rank and regimentation in the army. In this same letter, he observed: "An officer is a miserable creature; he envies his equals, he bullies his subordinates, and is afraid of the higher-ups; the higher up he is himself, the more he is afraid." Quite remarkably, this must have lingered in his mind many years. In a discussion concerning psychological displacement in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, written 52 years later, Freud appears to have utilized this earlier experience when he stated in a footnote: "An analogy may be seen in the behavior of a non-commissioned officer who accepts a reprimand from his superior in silence but vents his anger on the first innocent private he comes across"(8, p. 168). In spite of his dissatisfaction with military life, Freud was promoted to *Regimentsarzt* (Captain) during these maneuvers from his earlier rank of *Oberarzt* (First Lieutenant).

It was as a result of World War I that Freud finally adopted his pacifistic position referred to earlier in this discussion. Inter-

estingly enough, Freud's initial reaction to the outbreak of this war was not horror but rather one of enthusiasm for the Austrian side. Thus in a letter to Karl Abraham on July 26, 1914, at the start of World War I, Freud wrote that it was the "first time for thirty years I feel myself to be an Austrian," and he referred to the "liberating effect of courageous action" in the early encounters of the war(13). Jones termed this response one of "youthful enthusiasm, apparently a re-awakening of the military ardors of his boyhood"(5, vol. 1, p. 171). One can speculate further whether this first unguarded reaction was not more truly reflective of his inner militaristic feelings than his later misgivings, as is often the case in such changes of heart.

Freud's renewed enthusiasm soon subsided as he became aware of the harsh realities of the war, both as it affected his family and country and as it interfered with his professional work. The fact that two of his sons faced hazardous duty, one of them becoming a prisoner of war, and that a nephew, the son of his favorite sister, was later killed, undoubtedly contributed to his disenchantment with World War I and war in general(5, vol. 2, p. 191). In "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death, The Disillusionment of the War," Freud described the cruelties, injustices, and mutual intolerances engendered by the conflict, and how the individual caught up in it becomes a "cog in the gigantic machine of war"(2). By 1932, in "Why War?" Freud took the position of an avowed pacifist. However, later on he was alert to the dangers of Hitlerism and eventually, after much hesitation, was forced to leave his country because of Nazi terror in 1938(5, vol. 3, p. 218).

It should be emphasized that Freud continued to utilize military concepts and analogies in his writings in spite of his disillusionment with war. In fact, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* probably contains a greater concentration of such expressions than is found in any other work, indicating that the military metaphor by then had become a permanent part of the fabric of his dynamic psychological system.

The Military Influence

We are now in a position to examine in

greater detail the nature of the military influence upon dynamic psychiatry. Freud expressed the essence of his dynamic approach in *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, delivered at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., in 1909. In the second lecture he contrasted his dynamic orientation with Pierre Janet's organic-constitutional psychological viewpoint:

We do not derive the psychical splitting from an innate incapacity for synthesis on the part of the mental apparatus; we explain it *dynamically*, from the conflict of opposing mental forces and recognize it as the outcome of an *active struggling on the part of the two psychical groupings against each other*(14) (italics mine).

Thus the fundamental distinction of his psychological system was seen to be of a military nature; it involved an active conflict or struggle between opposing mental forces reminiscent of a battlefield. Incidentally, Freud rarely used the word "dynamic," but here it is quite clear that it is used synonymously with a concept most easily understood from a military point of view.

Freud recognized a similar difference between himself and Josef Breuer in his monograph "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement." In this work Freud termed Breuer's approach to hysteria, which was based on "hypnoid states of consciousness," as "physiological" in contrast with his own psychological orientation: "I had taken the matter less scientifically; everywhere I seemed to discern motives and tendencies analogous to those of everyday life, and I looked upon psychical splitting itself as an effect of a process of repelling which at that time I called 'defense', and later 'repression'"(15, p. 11). He added: "The theory of repression is the cornerstone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests. It is the most essential part of it"(15, p. 16). In other words, Freud emphasized an active process of "repelling" or defense, with obvious martial overtones, as basic to his dynamic psychology. Moreover, it can be seen that Freud was convinced that his conflict and defense orientation was a crucial factor separating him from his contemporaries, who confined themselves to the scientific modes of thought of their day.

An additional consideration bears discussion at this juncture. "Dynamics" can be defined as "that branch of physics or mechanics which deals with force as producing or affecting motion or, more comprehensively, with the action of force on bodies in motion or at rest" (*The American College Dictionary*). As is well known, Freud was influenced by the German scientific tradition and derived much of his own psychological vocabulary from it, e.g., "cathexis of energy." One might include "dynamics" in the same category rather than in the military connotation I am emphasizing.

However the above and subsequent examples will indicate clearly that Freud's concept of dynamic psychiatry had a dimension considerably beyond that of dynamics in physics, which concerns the collision of bodies and the forces produced. Instead, Freud's approach involved an active conflict and the defensive measures undertaken during the course of that struggle. This of course brings his type of dynamic formulation much closer to the military metaphor under discussion.

Military Metaphors in Medicine

It is true that clinical medicine also utilizes the concept of defensive struggles of the body against the invasion and spread of germs. Freud's medical background undoubtedly made him well acquainted with this fact, and this may indeed have been a rather important consideration. Certainly elsewhere in his writings he did use medical terminology for expressive purposes, e.g., his lengthy comparison of the psychoanalyst with the surgeon in "Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis" (16).

Nonetheless, medicine had originally borrowed these terms and concepts from the military and the source of derivation remained obvious to such a literate individual as Freud, who was also skilled in several languages. Moreover, on the basis of numerous examples in his writings, some of which are included in this discussion, there is little question that the origin of his language in these instances is exclusively military.

One such example is found in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* and is used in modified forms elsewhere. This passage illustrates,

it should be added, how Freud readily combined his military orientation with his later structural hypothesis. Thus Freud observed in a discussion of the ego and its relations with the internal and external environments:

The ego is fighting on two fronts: it has to defend its existence against an external world which threatens it with annihilation as well as against an internal world that makes excessive demands. It adopts the same methods of defense against both, but its defense against the internal enemy is particularly inadequate (8, p. 200).

We can note how the ego is represented as an army or warrior in active combat against an enemy on two separate battlefronts in this military metaphor. As is often the case, Freud, the creative writer, makes excellent use of the rhetorical technique of personification in this vivid depiction of the defensive operations of the ego.

Certain Freudian military analogies stand out as purple passages from his writing and undoubtedly contributed to his literary reputation, for which he received the Goethe prize in 1930 (5, vol. 3, p. 148). To this reader they serve to place Freud in a long line of brilliant writers from Virgil onward who had this metaphorical skill. A good example of this is found in a discussion of psychological regression and fixation in the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*:

Consider that if a people which is in movement has left strong detachments behind at the stopping-places on its migration, it is likely that the more advanced parties will be inclined to retreat to these stopping-places if they have been defeated or have come up against a superior enemy. But they will also be in the greater danger of being defeated the more of their number they have left behind on their migration (6, p. 341).

Thus Freud described the weakening effect of psychological regression and fixation upon the ego in terms of an analogy involving straggling troops or forces left behind a battle line.

Another example of this nature was used by Freud to explain the process of dream-work, which he termed an "unconscious working-over of preconscious thought processes." Freud illustrated this as follows in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*:

To take an analogy from history: invading conquerors govern a conquered country, not according to the judicial system which they find in force there, but according to their own. It is, however, an unmistakable fact that the outcome of the dream-work is a compromise. The ego-organization [during sleep] is not yet paralysed, and its influence is to be seen in the distortion imposed on the unconscious material and in what are often very ineffective attempts at giving the total result a form not too unacceptable to the ego (*secondary revision*). In our analogy this would be an expression of the continued resistance of the defeated people (8, p. 167).

Here we find the relationship of the preconscious and unconscious parts of the ego during sleep compared with that of an invader and his conquered people. Again one can speculate whether what Freud is presenting is not an echo of his reading experience in military history more than 60 years earlier.

Numerous other passages from Freud's writings can be introduced to elucidate the conflict and defense, military orientation I am emphasizing; the more one searches, the more he will find. The following are a few additional examples, some of which are used in several places.

Freud depicts the ego as a tired mediator of combatants in an ongoing battle in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*: "The over-acute conflict between id and superego which has dominated the illness from the very beginning may assume such extensive proportions that the ego, unable to carry out its office of mediator, can undertake nothing which is not drawn into the sphere of the conflict" (17).

Or Freud refers to the resistance in terms of entrenched enemy soldiers fairly often. One typical example of this is found in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable": "No stronger impression arises from the resistance during the work of analysis than of there being a force which is defending itself by every possible means against recovery and which is absolutely resolved to hold on to illness and suffering" (18, p. 242).

The secondary gain of a neurotic illness is represented as a weapon used by one party of a conflict in the *Introductory Lectures*: "Her illness now becomes a weapon in her battle with her dominating husband—a

weapon which she can use for her defense and misuse for her revenge" (6, p. 383).

Heterosexuality and homosexuality are personified as warriors locked in combat in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable": "Whereas in the first class of people the two trends have got on together without clashing, in the second and more numerous class they are in a state of irreconcilable conflict. A man's heterosexuality will not put up with any homosexuality and *vice versa*" (18, p. 244).

Even the outcome of the process of sublimation is presented in a military analogy, as in *The Ego and the Id*: "The struggle which once raged in the deepest strata of the mind and was not brought to an end by rapid sublimation and identification is now continued in a higher region, like the Battle of the Huns in Kaulbach's painting" (19). That is, dead warriors continuing their conflict in the sky above the battlefield is akin to the shifting of an Oedipus complex to a "reaction-formation of the ego ideal" in Freud's terminology.

In view of all these examples the question may be raised: was the military metaphor a rhetorical device as opposed to an essential element of Freud's dynamic psychological system? My answer would be that it is true that Freud made extensive and illuminating use of military analogies partly for expressive purposes as we have shown. However even where Freud tended to abjure metaphorical language, as in his metapsychological papers, his basic psychology was still built upon the same conflict and defense military prototype as elsewhere. This was basic to his psychological thinking. In other words, central to Freudian psychology were conflicts of psychic forces and various defensive maneuvers against the eruption of instinctual impulses, regardless of the nature of his language in a particular place, which of course depended upon the audience Freud was seeking to reach.

One final consideration should be expressed. That is, by tracing the military influence upon the conceptual model of dynamic psychiatry as I have, no intent is involved to underestimate the significance of other factors stemming from Freud's many-faceted background. In this connection the present writer has recently assessed

the often neglected or misunderstood role of Freud's Judaism upon his psychoanalytic methodology (20). It is clear that Freud was influenced by a variety of antecedents, scientific and nonscientific, and in my view a one-sided emphasis in either direction is misleading. Therefore, it was the goal of this study to bring into the realm of investigation the heretofore disregarded, but important, position of military science in the formation of fundamental principles of dynamic psychiatry, and thus gain a clearer understanding of their nature and origin.

Summary

We have seen how the roots of Freud's military outlook extended deep into his early childhood. With his usual diligence and understanding Freud studied the military histories and events of his formative years and identified himself in his fantasies with a series of military heroes.

Although later developments in his life caused Freud to outwardly abandon his earlier military interests, the manner of thinking and imagery of these beginning years did not disappear as has been believed until now. Instead, I have shown how Freud shifted over and incorporated into his dynamic psychological system the military knowledge he acquired as a youth.

In this presentation I have attempted to trace the link between Freud's childhood martial ardor and his later psychological achievements. The early origin of this military influence upon his work is reflected by the primacy given to the concept of defense from 1894 onward. It is my conclusion that Freud's military background left a permanent impression upon his mode of thought that was to influence the nature and structure of our present day dynamic psychiatry.

That is, psychology was conceived of in terms of conflicts of forces, emphasizing the onslaught of instinctual impulses and the defensive operations of the ego to ward them off. In addition to this, we have seen how Freud utilized the rich metaphorical possibilities of the military analogy on numerous occasions to illustrate his dynamic psychological thinking. Undoubtedly this literary quality and the simplicity and theoretical elegance of the military con-

ception contributed to the acceptance of Freud's dynamic psychiatry in the "market-place" of psychological ideas.

The essence of this unique "toy soldiers" approach to psychology was perhaps best summarized by Freud in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*:

The ego is weakened by the internal conflict and we (the therapist) must go to its help. The position is like that in a civil war which has to be decided by the assistance of an ally from outside. The analytic physician and the patient's weakened ego, basing themselves on the real external world, have to band themselves together into a party against the enemies, the instinctual demands of the id and the conscientious demands of the super-ego. We form a pact with each other. . . . This pact constitutes the analytic situation (8, p. 173).

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Greatness of name in the father oft times overwhelms the son; they stand too near one another. The shadow kills the growth: so much, that we see the grandchild come more and oftener to be heir of the first.

— BEN JONSON