

Psychohistory News

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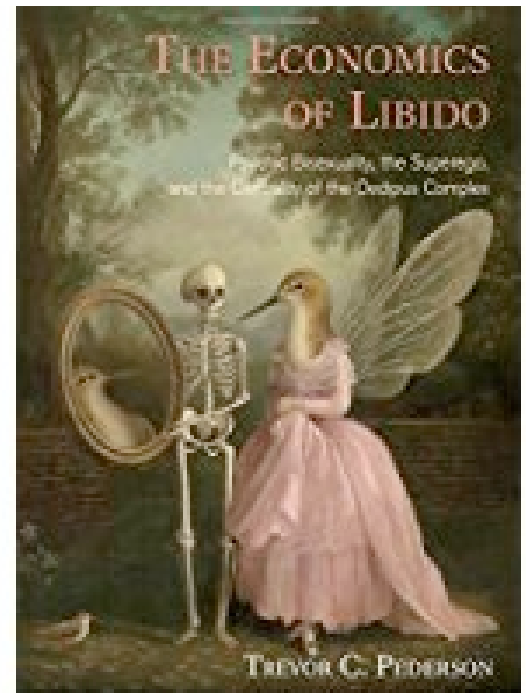
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PSYCHOHISTORIAN INTERVIEW

Trevor Pederson on *The Economics of Libido*

Our topic here is a work published by Karnac that received a 2016 Gradiva Award for best book by The National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis. Trevor Pederson's The Economics of Libido: Psychic Bisexuality, the Superego, and the Centrality of the Oedipus Complex also received high praise from Michael Eigen, Jon Mills, and Adele Tutter, among others. Trevor is a doctoral candidate and

continued on page three



Changing The World

Attachment Theory and Early Shared Reading Experiences: A Psychohistorical Perspective

by Andrea Greer



At a student panel during the 2016 International Psychohistorical Association Conference, I presented a paper demonstrating the multiple benefits of a caretaker engaging in shared reading experiences with a child. I discussed why creating more reading programs for impoverished and oppressed women and

minorities will not only build attachment between caretaker and child when they read together, but also empower women and minorities, better educate children, and fight poverty and oppression world-wide. The paper and presentation supported the following theories.

continued on page two

REMEMBERING GEORGE W. BROWN

by Paul Elovitz, page eight

ATTACHMENT AND READING

continued from page one

First, illiteracy is one of the largest blocks to success in the modern world. The way to keep people oppressed is to deny them access to information. Throughout history, since written language was invented, those who could read and write had power, and education was reserved for those in power. It is only recently that public education was created and that reading and writing programs are available for those of low social status, but unequal access to education still persists.

Second, those who can read can learn independently. When one can read, one has access to a wealth of information, creating the ability to think in different ways, build skills and find role models for empowerment. Reading teaches one to have a voice. Writing creates an alternative channel of communication for those who do not speak aloud. In countries where women and minorities are subordinate to others, these populations are also less literate and have less education than their male and white counterparts. An important way to empower oppressed communities is to introduce reading and literacy programs.



Third, caretakers who read can spend quality time with children, engaging in caring, productive experiences that mold a child's view of the world. Ask any parent who reads to their child and most will say how exciting and relaxing they find the experience. Parents who read greatly enjoy sharing their favorite characters and reminiscing about when they read the same story as a child. Mothers who cannot read miss out on this very special experience and therefore lose this venue to build healthy attachment bonds.

Fourth, caretakers who read can help their child with homework and be an active part of her or his education. Teachers frequently say that a certain child is bright and has potential, but he or she doesn't finish homework because nobody is at home to create a supportive, academic environment. When caretakers can read and write, they can ensure that school assignments are done with care. The child does better in school and acquires confidence and self-esteem, in addition to being able to participate more fully in class discussions and projects.

Fifth, caretakers who read have a better chance of getting solid employment to care financially for their family. When caretakers come out of abusive situations, often the greatest hurdle is the struggle to support themselves and their children financially. Those who are illiterate have a more difficult time filling out employment applications and finding a job. Those who can read and write are more attractive to the job market.

Sixth, in many countries and communities worldwide, schools are not available, especially for women and minorities. If we build reading programs for mothers, they can homeschool children in communities where there is no formal school.

In conclusion, when thinking about improving education worldwide, one should consider educating children, but just as important, one should consider educating caretakers. When one educates caretakers, it is like building a literacy army to join the ranks to teach others. This dynamic makes a community more independent, fosters attachment and builds a community of readers within. To be sure, this intervention is not a substitute for the institutional and policy reforms needed to create productive livelihoods and sustainable prosperity for all. But, ideally in concert with such reforms, it can be a game changer for hundreds of millions of people.

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ECONOMICS OF LIBIDO

continued from page one

psychoanalyst in Casper, Wyoming and active on the Clio's Psyche list serve. He is also working on a book on psychoanalysis and film that is under contract to Routledge. What follows is the interview that Psychohistory News conducted with Trevor about The Economics of Libido.

Interviewer Ken Fuchsman (KF): The notion of the superego has not been written about extensively. What made you choose to focus on it?

Trevor Pederson (TP): When I went to the secondary literature, there seemed to be an arbitrary distinction between the ideal ego and ego ideal that Lacanians, but also some non-Lacanians, had introduced. There were also some ego psychologists who differentiated the superego from the ego ideal as separate systems. However, none of what I saw stuck closely to Freud's text. I thought it was worthwhile to quote and explicate Freud at length in order to show all the different ways he had conceived of it.

At its core, the superego for Freud is a phenomenological fact and synonymous with self-consciousness. I can view my own self as guilty, as shameful, but also as weak, ugly, boring, presumptuous, (etc.). The superego is used to explain how we take ourselves as objects to be measured against conscience, ideals of perfection or love, as well as how we measure ourselves in

relation to both internal and external standards. Regarding the latter, the superego also connects us to the social body. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud explains that we put authority and love objects in our ego ideals.

KF: Similarly, why do you think the Oedipus complex is so important, and why do you think it is universal?

TP: You have to understand that Freud holds that a child's personality is formed by the end of the phallic-oedipus complex. Models of love and authority are established by the parents and every later relationship we have will fit into these earlier models. Part of the concept of narcissism is about how a person can regress from, or never form, the more complicated relations of childhood development. The mute autistic child, for example, never goes on to form these relations, and the psychotic individual who used to engage in these relations regresses back to an early stage in which he no longer seeks work, love, or friendship.

The phallic-oedipus complex represents the most differentiated relationship to love and authority in which a person cares about his or her reputation or image. He cares about being thought of as a successful, competent, and "good" person in the community. He also cares about making his family or parental-substitutes (advisors, bosses, etc.) proud, or at least does not want to embarrass them. We use the idea of 'pedigree' not just with our biological parents, but with those we learn from or study under. With many of the criminal populations I work with,

they can tell you about the time that they stopped caring about their grades in school or what their parents thought or others might have thought about them. They have problems respecting authority and always have codependent (i.e. sado-masochistic) relationships. Some of the egoistic types get involved in organized crime, want to gain money and power, and live in brutal worlds. Some altruistic types no longer want to go after their own success but focus on helping children, “fixing” their romantic partners, or assisting so-called friends. After they have been walked over or taken for granted too many times, they fall prey to self-pity and lose themselves in drugs and depression.

In “The Economic Problem of Masochism” Freud (1924) writes that in “the oedipus complex... [the parent’s] personal significance for the superego recedes into the background’ and ‘the imagos they leave behind... link [to] the influences of teachers and authorities...” (pp. 167–168). Freud (1919a) also refers to this outcome of the oedipus complex in other places: “the father persists in the shape of a teacher or some other person in authority... a substitute taken from the class of fathers” (Freud, 1924b, p. 196, 190; 1910, p. 133). If you understand that any relation of a neophyte to an elder with more authority and skill is a repetition of a childhood model of authority, then you can understand why the phallic-oedipus complex must be universal. There are no cultures in which this “difference between the generations” doesn’t exist.



Oedipal conflicts are found in all cultures.

In order to highlight Freud’s linking of the Oedipus complex to this relation to authority, and to allow for the fact that not everyone is ambivalent with authority, I link the castration complex to the

triangular conflicts. The Oedipus complex, in so far as it is a complex, disturbs the non-ambivalent tie to love and authority, so that one moves to the castration complex. In other words, not every grad student is defiant and competitive, or submissive and fawning over their professors. To enter into such relations is an example of the castration complex, and shows a loss of the non-ambivalent relation to them.

KF: How is the ego ideal connected to and different from the superego?

TP: Again, Freud is explicit that the superego is what allows for self-consciousness and, therefore, for any form of self-judgment or measurement of the ego. The superego houses ‘thou shalt nots’ and ‘thou shalt’ and one can judge oneself as weak, bad, inferior, etc. for not living up to a thou shalt and one can judge oneself as guilty, shameful, despicable, etc. for transgressing a thou shalt not. There are many interpreters who have tried to make the ego ideal into something different than the superego, but in the *The New Introductory Lectures* Freud explicitly includes it in his concept of the superego. I think that part of the difference they want to capture between the two is shown in the differentiation I make between the Oedipus complex and the subsequent father complex in Freud’s work. Contrary to what many say, Freud holds that many people haven’t formed a real guilt conscience and the Oedipus complex is linked to what he calls ‘social anxiety’ and wanting to be seen as moral or good by others (not measuring and judging oneself as guilty). With the guilt conscience a person judges himself for having the intentions to do bad or wrong things, and if he acts on them, he feels an internal pressure to “come clean” about what he’s done.

KF: How do you see individuation intersecting with the Oedipus complex and the prohibitions of the superego?

TP: I see individuation intersecting with the Oedipus complex in two ways. First, one still has to have transference towards authority in society or one loses motivation for growth. If you have had too many ego injuries and retracted this transference, then you

might feel like you are perfect already or feel depressed and dead, and the person becomes pre-occupied with self-medicating and coping in various ways— not growing. Additionally, some ego injuries don't lead to regression away from these transferences, but show up in primitive psychopathology that affects the ability to learn, memory, or other things that will stop or slow down individuation.

As I discuss in the book, I see individuation as more directly related to psychic bisexuality. Here is an example from the mental health field of the active and passive poles of this personality typology. At the active pole, I have met authors in the field who say very banal things or hide behind jargon and don't show much depth in their writing and understanding of others. They are competitive, write for prestige, and may have a high IQ, but don't show very much EQ. At the passive pole are many intuitive and perceptive psychotherapists who have really helped patients but don't know theory very well or who don't care to read or write books. They are not as driven to have their name out in the field, are focused more on helping others, and have a high EQ, but may have a low IQ. Individuation for both types requires development of both the EQ and IQ, which are motivated in part by altruism and egoism respectively. The tension between having both poles functioning in one's personality pushes for higher syntheses and individuation.

KF: Please discuss the four libidinal positions and why they are central to this project.

TP: The four libidinal positions are subject egoism and object egoism and subject altruism and object altruism. The egoist pole centers around power, glory and competitiveness and the altruist pole around belonging, harmony, and submissiveness. Egoists follow two varieties of narcissism: subject egoists feel they are the best looking, have the best taste in things, or live the most beautiful life, while object egoists arrogantly feel like they are the toughest, smartest, most skilled, etc. Subject altruists are concerned about the belonging of others and will focus on their needs, make them feel included or welcome, or "masochistically" sacrifice their own desires or needs. Object altruists are

"masochistically" concerned with their own belonging, fitting in, getting others to like them, or not being "weird" or "boring."

Of course I need to add some caveats here. A person is ideally a mixture of more than one type and it's only in pathology that we see people approaching the world in one rigid way. Additionally, the redundancy in active-egoism and passive-altruism is checked by observing that there are active-altruists and passive-egoists. This means that someone who was altruistic, for example, can feel walked all over or humiliated in some way, and begin acting in a more egoistic manner. However, such people still have a hard time standing up for themselves and will often withdraw so that they don't get used again or manifest a superficial anger to keep others at a distance. Even though they aren't acting altruistically, their egoism can't be mistaken for the active variety because they don't become highly competitive or seek leading positions, for example. Lastly, the term "masochism" follows a formula that sees the feminine as the castrated masculine (i.e. she must enjoy her egoism through a proxy, she enjoys the pain of being submissive) and so I prefer the term echoism as the complement to narcissism.

KF: You came to this psychoanalytic project from philosophy, and there is much philosophy in the book. Describe how Nietzsche, Descartes, Kant, and Wittgenstein are pertinent to this psychoanalytic project.

TP: Nietzsche called himself the first psychologist and he has many observations on people's behavior that are impressive and enlightening.

Descartes is there for his unquestioning assumption of volition or the rational will that is opposed to the body and passions. I use him as a foil for Freud's Copernican revolution. In this revolution we can make sense of mental pathology if we see humans not as rational agents, but as driven to relate to others. We are social animals first and reason is secondary. For example, as a clinician I work with many addicts who self-sabotage and constantly make "irrational" choices in which they could lose their jobs, children,

or freedom (end up in jail). Most treatments focus on the Cartesian split of either telling the person that addiction is a choice and that they are being selfish or weak by choosing to drink, or that they are controlled by their bodies (DNA, brain chemistry) and are victims of a disease. In the psychoanalytic model, the relevant issues in addiction are how some feel like they can't trust anyone and so they express their love through a safe, inanimate thing that they can control. Some can literally say that they "love" their drug of choice. Others can discuss their need for "chaos" and the rush to do something that might see them become seriously punished (i.e. returning to prison, being kicked out by their parents); they don't want the punishment itself, but the rush that they might get from it. Others are in repetitions in which a worried parent or partner agonizes over whether the addict will ever come home again, or if they are dead. Others are able to believe that they are the most beautiful or desirable, or that they are "kings" when they are high and use drugs in order to return to those states...

Kant is there as another foil. His project to rehabilitate the Cartesian subject is clever and has some ideas that are valuable, but the error of modern philosophy before Nietzsche, Marx, and Hegel is that it doesn't seek to understand pathology but some ideal, universal human being.

Wittgenstein, or more precisely, the late Wittgenstein is the philosopher who best exposes the errors of metaphysicians such as Kant and Descartes. He shows how their projects to use mathematics or knowledge to ground the solipsistic or atomistic rational chooser don't hold any water.

KF: You discuss both active-egoistic and passive-altruistic attitudes. Would you explain how Freud sees these as both connected to and distinguished from masculinity and femininity. What led you to connect passivity to altruism, and why did you use the term altruism, which is only mentioned once in Freud's works?

TP: Freud recognizes that there is a sociological input that today we would call gender, which is different from the active and passive of psychic bisexuality. He writes:

the opposition between two currents, which runs through all sexual life, is already developed: they cannot yet, however, be described as 'masculine' and 'feminine', but only as 'active' and 'passive.'

(*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 198)

He observes, for instance, that in a very deep castration complex a man may refuse to allow any man to have any authority over him, but that he may allow himself to be very dependent upon a woman. Additionally, we all know that a boy can be shamed by others telling him he is like a girl, a "little bitch," (etc.). However, at the same time, he points out that there is "feminine masochism," which can be related to sexed fantasies in which a man may feel like he has been castrated, even when he still has a penis. These fantasies, in turn, are linked to certain behaviors and inhibitions in one's personality.

In my clinical experience, I've encountered women who rail against gender roles and feel like they are discounted in some way just for being a woman. While it is no doubt true on some occasions, I've also watched them read way too much into some of the comments of others in a therapy group. I've also had male patients with "womb envy," who resent that it's not acceptable to be "house-husbands" or stay at home and do their art or take care of the kids, while the woman works. Conversely, I've worked with successful women who never bring up gender inequality and house-husbands who don't feel judged by others. Additionally, I've worked with many dominant men (subject egoists) who live off women and won't work because of their castration complex pride (i.e. problems with authority) and paranoia. The men with womb envy are different and it's usually from their characterologically lower drive to compete with others that they want to stay at home (as opposed to the hyper-competitiveness of the subject egoist's castration complex).

As I mentioned above, there is some sense in Freud's work that 'woman' is just a man who is lacking something or inferior. I wanted to examine the passive pole in a way that appreciated it as its own thing. Freud's contrast of egoism and altruism in *The Introductory Lectures* seemed like the proper neutral language to talk about different motivational structures without the stigma of sex. Many analysts

merely note the potential for the idealization of the self or the idealization of the other as the main polarities in the personality, but this doesn't go far enough, in my opinion. The specific repetitions are what are important for psychoanalysis to develop as a science.

I thought I'd also mention that Freud doesn't use egoism and altruism just once. You are right, he doesn't use it very often, but he also mentions it in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (p. 140), for example, and not just in *The Introductory Lectures*.

KF: How do you see what you are writing about here as within the Freudian tradition, and are there ways you are using Freud to go beyond him and the other analysts you cite?

TP: I think the Freudian model offers the most complex framework for understanding personality and consider myself to have gone beyond him and other analysts very little. Others have noted the different libidinal positions, I just happened to formalize them. Others have had the idea of the two poles of the personality intermixing and further differentiating (Klein who I cite and Blatt who formally likened it to a double helix). I quote Freud

a lot in this book because I believe many others have wrongly interpreted him.

I think that when I formally introduce the Electra complex, the Antigone complex, and the Bellerophon complex as the nuclear complexes along with Oedipus, in my next book, that I might feel like I'm going beyond other analysts. However, I will always consider myself Freudian and to only be adding details to a design that was largely sketched by him.

KF: Thank you, Trevor, for illuminating answers.

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REMEMBERING GEORGE BROWN

continued from page eight

doing, to say nothing of his willingness to come all the way from Alaska. We kept in touch through the years, during which he became a loyal member of the Psychohistory Forum and an occasional contributor to *Clio's Psyche* on the subject of community health and peace. When I said in passing that I would be going sight-seeing in Alaska, the Browns insisted that I stop to see them. They met my cruise ship at the dock to drive my wife and I in their Volkswagen Beetle down the street to the swinging doors of the Red Dog Saloon, where we were treated to a delicious reindeer burger, beer, and stimulating conversation.

In addition to George's altruistic human services and values, it was his zest for life which was most

engaging. He so clearly threw himself into everything he did, whether his commitment to his "soulmate" Carolyn, to caring for others, to running 75 marathons (and walking two more marathons after a hip replacement), devoting himself to a Juneau organization of parents and medical providers as part of his commitment to behavioral medicine, and mostly the acceptance of others. Dr. George Brown is survived by his wife, son, daughter, a granddaughter, and numerous people whose life he improved or inspired. George will be missed. □

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George Brown's Commitment to Children, Communities, Human Rights, and Peace

by Paul H. Elovitz

George W. Brown (1937-2016) is representative of an important group of individuals who were especially drawn to the IPA in the first 15 years of its existence. They saw it as an organization in which most members were passionate about children, communities, human betterment and rights, and peace. While these issues remain very much alive in the minds of so many IPA-ers today, there is not the same intensity that there was in this early period when the historian Bernard Flicker, our third president, concluded our annual meeting by calling on the membership to follow him to an anti-war demonstration in Central Park. (Personally, although I marched quite frequently against the Vietnam War, I refused to follow because I believed that as a professional organization we should not be directly involved in politics). George Brown lived these passions. Prior to his dying of a massive heart attack on December 14, 2016, he was in his own words, "a community pediatrician" who cared passionately about behavioral health, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, preventive medicine, public health in general, and peace.

George lived in Juneau, Alaska with his Texas-born wife—they met in the cadaver lab in medical school. They married before graduating and Carolyn (she always spells her name with a lowercase c) and George shared the same passions on their life journeys. Partly to avoid the Vietnam War medical draft, he became a commissioned officer and then a reservist in the U.S. Public Health Service (1965-2016) who worked in remote parts of his adoptive state of Alaska, in federal prisons from Arizona to Florida, and elsewhere in the country. Combating child abuse was a special interest. In addition, his altruism took him to work on tuberculosis among migrant workers in Haiti; to fight HIV/AIDS (2004-2006) by Lake Victoria to Africa without refrigeration, a proper laboratory, Western toilets,

and only intermittent electricity; to American Indians and disenfranchised Alaskan natives. Upon their return to the States, the Browns raised money to fund a proper laboratory in Kenya. For 13 years they lived in Vermont, where Carolyn had an academic position.



George W. Brown

Dr. Brown earned the prestigious Kempe Award from the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, the Ray Helfer Award for his work on child abuse and a variety of other recognitions for his outstanding service for human betterment. In East Africa, he founded and later directed the Alaska-Kenya Health Scholarship Program for Kenyan high school students who were preparing for health-care careers. George may have passed, but the program continues.

I first met George while we were drinking wine (or was it coffee?) at an IPA social event in the late 1970s or early 80s. (Despite the distance, he presented at a number of our conventions as recently as 2007 and read *The Journal of Psychohistory* and later *Clio's Psyche* from cover-to-cover, discussing the contents with his wife.) I was impressed by his passion for what we were

continued on page seven