



Freud

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Jonathan Lear clearly introduces and assesses all of Freud's thought, focusing on those areas of philosophy on which Freud is acknowledged to have had a lasting impact. These include the philosophy of mind, free will and determinism, rationality, the nature of the self and subjectivity, and ethics and religion. He also considers some of the deeper issues and problems Freud engaged with, brilliantly illustrating their philosophical significance: human sexuality, the unconscious, dreams, and the theory of transference.

Freud is one of the most important introductions and contributions to understanding this great thinker to have been published for many years, and will be essential reading for anyone in the humanities, social sciences and beyond with an interest in Freud or philosophy.

Freud Details

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From Reader Review Freud for online ebook

David says

This is really just an excellent and well-written introduction to Freud's theories.

Frankie Della Torre says

Jonathan Lear, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago, has here written an extremely helpful introduction to the thought of Freud that comes at this giant's work from the angle of the ancient philosophical search for wise living. That was a mouth-full so let me put it simply: Lear is a philosopher who reads Freud for the purpose of living a more healthy life. The fundamental task taken up by Socrates - the quest to "know thyself" - is the most basic intention and goal of this book - it is, as Lear calls it, the "fundamental question." But knowing thyself cannot be accomplished (not that its possible in any comprehensive sense) without first understanding how our human behavior and desires work. This latter (and prerequisite) task is psychoanalysis.

At bottom, psychoanalysis is a practical tool intended to help the analysand bring to consciousness certain unconscious drives, feelings, and wishes that are presenting themselves in his or her neurotic behaviors (anxiety, depression, anger, etc.) - all of which are causing the lived experience of the individual to "go wrong." A lot of our problems in life are explainable by various latent, undeveloped, and unaddressed fears, traumas, habits, etc. from childhood upbringing that we've internalized and thus keep coming back again and again. We not only don't know what's going on in the unconscious, but we also repress such drives and feelings, distracting ourselves from the deep feelings - and such is a self-induced tactic whose goal is to turn away from reality. All of this is a self-induced cycle of unhappiness and actually get in the way of our human flourishing.

My favorite chapter was the last one in which Lear critiques Freud's criticisms of religion. Lear is clearly a religious thinker who thinks that psychoanalysis is compatible with Christian belief.

C says

Nearly five stars, but there's whole important areas of Freud's thought that are never mentioned (e.g., castration complex), and many sections where Lear opens with: "Freud's view on this subject is somewhat dated and incorrect, so I'm going to give my own view". The problem is, even if Freud's view is incorrect on some such subject, it would be prudent to tell the reader what Freud thought, instead of skipping over his ideas in favor of Lear's, since we readers did after all buy a book on Freud, not on Lear. For instance, we are treated to Lear's theory on the unconscious, and the process of repetition, and Freud's theories are nearly completely ignored.

Still, a good book.

Paul Johnston says

This is a very readable and interesting introduction to Freud (and to psychoanalysis). It looks at Freud from a philosophical point of view and makes many interesting links particularly to Socrates and Plato. I did occasionally feel that it was seeking to be popular in a negative sense and the author certainly has the confidence to present clear views and make clear judgements, some of which did strike me as being a bit quick or superficial. However, there are many interesting perspective and a good balance between sympathy and agreement with Freud and the attempt to stand back a bit and assess his work. Three stars is perhaps a bit harsh, but as an ex-philosopher my expectations of philosophers are a bit high. I also think that seeing Freud's work through Plato's eyes is rather more worthwhile and interesting than adding Davidsonian insights to psychoanalytic perspectives (but that is probably mainly a reflection on me rather than on this book!).

Tommy says

In this excellent philosophical introduction to Freud, Lear explores the many ways in which a reading of Freud reframes the age-old question of "how shall I live?".

Leonard Houx says

An anglo/analytic approach to Freud. Some interesting critiques. Five excellent chapters and one ok-ish. For some reason, Lear feels that Freud's critiques of religion are unjustified (um, ok?).

Contains great lists of recommended reading at the end of each chapter. Also, of interest: he describes the goal of psychotherapy as 'free speech'--similar to Lacan.

Julian Meynell says

This is a philosophical introduction to Freud's views. It's interesting in many ways and Lear is not afraid to critique Freud, but at times the work turns more into an exposition of Lear than a popular philosophical introduction should be. Also, at times he is not harsh enough with Freud. Freud had almost no philosophical background and like all people who start doing philosophy with no real background in it, he makes dreadful first year undergraduate type mistakes. Lear is too patient with this and it's clear that Freud's views on religion and morality are so simple minded as to be virtually worthless from a philosophical perspective.

Where Freud is at his most interesting from a philosophical perspective is where he is developing psychological views based on psychology that are philosophically relevant. The wall between psychology and philosophy is barely there if at all and this is where a philosophical introduction is most useful. Fortunately, that covers most of the book.

An additional criticism that I have is that if we take a long clear hard-headed look at Freud, then we have to conclude that he was both a genius and a fucked up dude. Furthermore, he was much more captured by the morays of his time than he ever expected. Lear is bad at understanding this which is essential to

understanding Freud. To take the most obvious example of this, Lear discusses at length the case example of Dora primarily in the chapter on Transference. Like Freud, he misses the fact that Dora is essentially being pimped out by her father in order to bang another man's wife. Lear engages in subtle victim blaming here as does Freud. Dora seems the only wholly reasonable one here to me.

Lear is both a psychoanalyst and a philosopher and this is the strength and weakness of the book. He is still locked in some of the myths of psychotherapy, such as the therapist can be a neutral objective partner in the therapeutic relationship. IN my opinion, if we think philosophically we see that things are more complicated than that. Also he is clearly a Freudian psychotherapist and his closeness to Freud often blinds him to both the real flaws of Freud and his real achievements. BOth of which are numerous. On the other hand, he reflexively locates Freud where he should be located as a practitioner first and a theorizer second.

Still having said this the book is very good and rich in ideas. My three star rating is harsh and its almost a four star, but I rate harshly and I would only give at most three or four secondary sources in philosophy a five star rating, its the primary sources that get that kind of thing.

Mark says

A very readable story about Freud's work and its importance for philosophy.

Michael A. says

Lucid and accessible philosophical introduction to Freud that is critical yet sympathetic (my favorite kind of introductions!) Argues, contra Donald Davidson, that the unconscious ought not to be thought of as a "second mind". I am rather new to Freud but I found Lear's argument rather compelling, I do think the mind ought to be thought of holistically that may be divided (preconscious, unconscious, subconscious, conscious...) but it is still "one"... I guess a kind of cognitive monism? I don't know. His chapter on dream analysis was very compelling but I felt he could have articulated condensation and displacement a bit better (I needed outside reading material to better comprehend it - the fault in lack of understanding could be my own!) but either way it fairly radically shifted the way I look at dreams. The concept of transference seems tricky (he even admits it is not very well understood in psychoanalysis itself!) but I thought Lear did a good job articulating this concept at an introductory level (though it was still quite complicated and I'm not sure I quite get the full gist of it!). The pleasure/reality principle stuff is neat and Lear's critique of the death drive was interesting, but I didn't quite understand it to be honest haha. Lear's articulating of the id/ego/superego and its genealogical formation and the Oedipus complex were really good, I was enthralled with it: gave me a lot to think about! I think Freud's theory of morality and religion are quite interesting (and like most of his theories fairly weird) but I do think Lear pretty much demolished it with his critique (Lear admits its the weakest part of Freud's theory and from what I know I tend to agree, though it is still an interesting thing to read about...Freud essentially constructs his own myth to explain mythologies). Overall, very good introduction to Freud and I feel like it is accessible to most people, the chapter on Transference was by far the hardest one to grasp, but this is a perfect introduction for someone with a little bit of experience of reading academic texts (like, say, a freshman undergrad). Maybe not the absolute best "baby's first Freud" book but I can't imagine one being better while also still being as academically rigorous yet compelling.

Noor Alam says

This book was a nice follow up to the Mishra book, "An End to Suffering." I was in the mood to be more self-reflective, and what better way to do it than to read something about Freud? Lear basically uses Freud's talk therapy sessions as the raw material for his book, at times incorporating Freud's interpretation of what was happening, but at other times showing where Freud went wrong. In whole, Lear seems to be arguing against the idea of our identities being that of distinct, contradictory selves, and moves more to the idea of the identity as an evolving process, the benefits of talk therapy being the quest of being to articulate our inchoate emotions, and make sense of the world.
