

SCHOPENHAUER — A LINK BETWEEN THE BUDDHA AND FREUD ?

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“We have unwittingly steered our course into the harbour of Schopenhauer’s philosophy”. *Sigmund Freud.*

“Schopenhauer was influenced by Buddhism and by the Upanishads”. *Carl Jung.*

While working on a comparative study of the theory of motivation in Freud and the Buddha, the intriguing figure of Schopenhauer left an uncanny impression in our minds.¹ Schopenhauer remarks that there is “close agreement” between his doctrine and Buddhism.² Freud says that Schopenhauer’s concept of the unconscious “Will” is the equivalent of his theory of instincts, and thus considers the philosopher as a forerunner of psycho-analytic theory.³ While it is possible to accept the claim that Indian thought influenced the philosopher Schopenhauer, the direct influence of Schopenhauer on Freud is a more intricate issue, especially, when Freud remarks that he read Schopenhauer very late in his life. But the resemblance of some of his ideas to the thought of Schopenhauer certainly did embarrass Freud and he makes a number of attempts to clarify this issue.

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¹ M. W. P. de Silva, “An Analysis of Some Psychological Concepts in Early Buddhism and Freud,” (University of Hawaii: 1956). Unpublished M. A. Thesis, p. 5. Also see, M. W. P. de Silva, “A study of Motivational Theory in Early Buddhism With Special Reference to the Psychology of Freud,” (University of Hawaii: 1967). Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation.

² Arthur Schopenhauer, *World As Will and Idea*, 3 vols., trans, R. B. Haldane, and John Kemp, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1909)—Hereafter cited as *W. W. I.*, Vol. 2, p. 371.

Bhikkhu Ñānajiṅṅako has examined the similarities between the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Buddhism and demonstrates quite clearly the influence of Buddhism on Schopenhauer; See Bhikkhu Ñānajiṅṅako, *Schopenhauer and Buddhism*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1970).

³ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 Vols., translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey—Hereafter cited as *S. E.*, (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-), Vol. 14, pp. 143-44.

The closeness of the thought of Schopenhauer to some aspects of Buddhism and the Freudian echoes of Schopenhauer seem to suggest to us the possibility of a deeper basis for the resemblance in motivational theory between Freud and the Buddha. It is the aim of this paper to suggest possible lines of inquiry and invite discussion rather than give a conclusive analysis of the problem.

I

The Nature of Instincts: Buddhism, Schopenhauer and Freud.

In the field of scientific psychology, Freud was the first to accept the supremacy of emotions over the intellect or of affection over cognition.¹ This is something that Freud shared with Schopenhauer. According to Freud, these affective processes are nourished by deep-seated instincts and the nature of these instincts is not clearly known by the individual. This again is an idea common to Freud and Schopenhauer.² In fact, the comparative study of concepts of Schopenhauer, Freud and the Buddha that is attempted in this paper will be basically limited to the theory of instincts.³

| Buddhism | Schopenhauer | Freud |
|--|---|--|
| Tañhā | Will to live | The Id |
| { Kāma-tañhā Bhava-tañhā Vibhava-tañhā | { Sexuality Self-preservation Suicide | { Libido Ego Instinct Death Instinct |

Freud

Regarding the nature of instincts according to Freud, there were two stages in the development of the Freudian theory. First, Freud posited two basic instincts - the sexual instinct (libido) and the ego instinct. As the word hunger is used in ordinary language to represent the aims of self-preservation, so the word libido is used by Freud to indicate the presence of sexual longing in man. "The popular view distinguishes between hunger and love, as being the representatives of the instincts which aim respectively at the preservation of the individual and at the reproduction of the species. We accept this very evident distinction, so that in psycho-analysis

¹ See, Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer*, (N. York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1961), p. 54.

² Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 176.

³ The Chart summarizes the basic points of resemblance only with reference to the nature of instincts. As this paper is basically focussed on this problem, other possible subjects for comparative examination (e. g. the nature of religion) will not be discussed here.

too we make a distinction between the self-preservative or ego-instincts on the one hand and the sexual instincts on the other. The force by which the sexual instinct is represented in the mind we call 'libido'-sexual desire—and we regard it as something analogous to hunger, the will to power, and so on, where the ego-instincts are concerned."¹ Freud, however, used the term sexuality in a broad sense: it has many manifestations besides the simple connection with the genitals. Freud extended its meaning in two directions—on the one hand, to cover all bodily pleasures and on the other hand, to cover psychological aspects like the feelings of affection and tenderness.

In the second stage, Freud postulates two contrasting drives—the Eros and the death instinct (referred to by some as Thanatos).² While the Eros combines the sexual and the ego instincts, the death instinct conceptualizes Freud's claim that in man there is an innate destructiveness or a proneness to aggression, basically directed against the self (as in suicide) or deflected outwards (when inflicting injury on others, killing and destruction of objects).³

The base on which this theory of instincts rests is the notion of the Unconscious. Freud describes three layers of the mind—the Conscious, pre-conscious and the Unconscious. The conscious level consists of the processes which come within the normal awareness of a person, at a given time. The Pre-conscious consists of memories that could be recalled with little effort. The Unconscious contains ideas, memories and images which are not accessible to the conscious mind under ordinary conditions. Thus special techniques have to be used to break through the mechanism of repression. Freud considered the Unconscious as the area of repressed memories. Later, he realized that the Unconscious was not only the area of repressed memories, but was the receptacle of deep instinctual desires, which try to find expression in socially acceptable ways. He accepted that even a part of the ego was unconscious. Freud described this obscure and inaccessible part of the personality as the id. The little that has been learnt about it is based on the study of dreams and the formation of neurotic symptoms. We can come nearer to the id with the aid of analogies and call it a "chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations".⁴ The id consists

¹ S. E. Vol. 17, p. 137.

² Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, 3 vols. (N. York: Basic Books, 1963), Vol. 3, p. 273.

³ Ibid.

⁴ S. E. Vol. 22, p. 73.

of a mass of impulses irrational and primitive, and is thus referred to as "the reservoir of instincts". Again with the help of the metaphor of the iceberg, Freud has indicated his view of the mind—the visible conscious portion is extremely minute, compared with the more extensive submerged depth of consciousness.

The Freudian concept of a truly dynamic Unconscious as depicted by the concept of the id, certainly puts him in line with the thought of Schopenhauer. It is this aspect of Freudian thought which attracted the attention of Heinz Hartmann: "The concept of truly dynamic unconscious processes has a quite different ancestry; it is, in German philosophy, found in the works of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and in certain romantic philosophers before them. But about this ancestry comparatively little is known, or rather little is known about the degree to which, the ways in which, this thinking might have left an imprint on Freud's work."¹

Buddhism

The resemblance between the roots of motivation according to Freud and Buddhism has been dealt in greater detail elsewhere.² Thus, here, we need only summarize the basic points relevant to the subject under discussion.

In the Early Buddhist psychology, the springs of human action are traced to six roots, which fall into two classes, moral and immoral. Of these, the immoral roots are greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) while the moral roots are their opposites, charity, compassionate love and wisdom. Greed has two manifestations, viz. in the form of *Kāma-taṇhā* (craving for sensuous gratification) and *bhava-taṇhā* (craving for self-preservation). Hatred manifests itself in varied types of aggression and ultimately issues forth as *vibhava-taṇhā* (craving for annihilation). Delusion is the primary root of evil that prevents man from seeing the true nature of things.

The concept of *kāma-taṇhā* is similar to the Freudian concept of libido, *bhava-taṇhā* is similar to the Freudian notion of ego instincts and *vibhava-taṇhā* may be compared with the death instinct.

¹ Heinz Hartmann, *Essays On Ego Psychology*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 274.

² M. W. P. de Silva, "An Analysis of Some Psychological Concepts in Early Buddhism and Freud," (University of Hawaii: 1966). Unpublished M.A. Thesis.

Kāma as sense desire generally refers to the enjoyment of the five senses. But in a more specific and in a more narrow sense, kāma refers to sexual enjoyment as for instance in the precept concerning evil conduct with regard to sexual behaviour (kāmesu micchācāra). In fact, the word "methuna" is used to refer to sexual enjoyment in a specific way, the words 'methunasmin chanda', for instance refer to desires in sexual gratification. But the term kāma is used in a very broad manner and sexual pleasure may be one aspect of it. Thus the term kāma-ṭaṅhā comes very close to Freud's pleasure principle. The Buddha quite explicitly says that it is men's nature to seek what is pleasurable and avoid that which is painful.

Kāma has two aspects: kāma as object (vatthu kāma) and kama as desire (kilesa-kāma). This distinction is found in the Mahā-Niddesa, but it is related to a distinction already made in the older suttas, pañca kāmāgāna and kāma rāga. Kilesa kāma may be called subjective sensuality while vatthu-kāma may be called objective sensuality.¹ Pañca kāmāgāna refers to the five types of pleasure objects obtained by the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. Kāma-rāga refers to the desires and passions of a sensual nature. The term "pañcakāma gunika-rāga" refers to the fact that in beings there is a deep-seated proclivity for the enjoyment of the five senses.

In the final analysis, it is not the existences of sense-organs or the impact of sense-impressions that is emphasized, but the persistence of desire and lust. The eye is not the bond of objects, nor are the objects, the bond of eye, but desire and lust that arise owing to these two. Freud too makes a distinction between erotic instincts and object and considers the instincts as more important.

According to the Buddha, unless there is the persistence of clinging (upādāna), excitation of the sense-organs is not sufficient to rouse the individual to activity. Clinging emerges with craving as a condition. But clinging as such works on a far deeper current and once a person clings to pleasure giving objects, some latent tendencies (anusayas) have already been excited and stimulated. Fixation on pleasure giving objects always feed on the undercurrents of anusayas. In fact, all three aspects of craving mentioned above, are related to the anusayas. The anusaya of sensuous craving

¹ Nyanatiloka Thero, *Buddhist Dictionary*, (Colombo: Frewin and Co; Ltd, 1956), p.68.

(kāmarāga) is the basis for the craving for sensuous gratification and the anusaya of anger (patigha) provides a base for the craving for annihilation. The lurking tendency to cling to existence is the bhava-rāga anusaya and it is related to the craving for self-preservation.

Both Freud and Schopenhauer recognize the dominating role of sexuality but Schopenhauer felt that the love of life was a more basic drive.

Bhava-taṇhā

Bhava-taṇhā arises with a false conception of personality, based on the dogma of personal immortality (sassata-diṭṭhi). This is the belief in an ego entity existing independently of those physical and mental processes that constitute life. This entity is assumed to exist as a permanent, ever existing thing, continuing after death. This wrong view is referred to as diṭṭhi. However, the ego is not merely an intellectual construction. It is fed by deeper affective processes like the desire for self-preservation, self-display etc.

The roots of this ego-illusion are very deep. It rests on a primitive and archaic ego-illusion, which has been functioning through countless births. It lies in the personality in the form of a dormant proclivity, described in the suttas as bhava-rāga anusaya and bhava āsava.

Another manifestation of the ego is self-conceit (māna). Self-conceit takes three forms. It takes the form of a superiority (seyya māna), equality with another (sadsa māna) or inferiority to another (hīna māna). If a person has attained fame and glory, he could suffer from an inflated sense of vanity. On the other hand, one who is beset with defeat and disappointment will suffer from a depraved ego. This analysis of ego injury and ego elation have their parallels in Freud. The Freudian concept of Secondary narcissism and the Adlerian concept of inferiority complex may be compared with the Buddhist concept of māna. In general, it could be said that both Freud and Buddhism make a clear distinction between the desire for sense gratification and the desire for self-preservation.

Regarding the origin of the ego, Freud makes an interesting comment that the ego is first and foremost a "body - ego". This is similar to the Buddhist analysis of the origin of personality

beliefs (*atta ditṭhi*) in relation to corporeality. It is said that the majority who are not skilled in the doctrine regard body as the self. Freud also says that the ego as an organization of mental life is derived from the primal structure of the id. This is somewhat like the relationship of the ego illusion to *bhava-āsava*. Thus the similarity between the ego instincts in Freud and *bhava-taṇhā* in Buddhism appear to have a deeper basis.

Vibhava-taṇhā

The word "vibhava" as used in Pāli literature, has two meanings: 1. Power, wealth, prosperity. 2. Non-existence, cessation of life and annihilation. There seem to be two meanings of *vibhava-taṇhā* which may be connected with these two meanings of the word *vibhava*.

1 The love of the present life or craving for success and power in the present life based on the belief that there is no future state. The ego will be annihilated at death, so make the best of the present life.

2 The desire for self-annihilation accompanying the belief that there is a self-entity that is annihilated at death. This springs not from a desire for success in the present life, but from loathing, disgust of the body and aggression. This leads to suicide and self-inflicted tortures to do away with the body. While the earlier expression of *vibhava-taṇhā* is to some extent related to sensuality the latter form basically issues from the root hate (*dosa*).

Logically both positions are possible. It is possible for a care free pleasure lover to hold on to the position that death is the end of life. It is also possible for a man full of worry and anxieties to wish for the end of life even by committing suicide. The later position is a more complex and interesting situation. Even Freud for instance says, that, so immense is the ego's self-love that we cannot conceive how the ego can consent to its own destruction. It took sometime, for him, to accept that there is a basic aggressive aspect in the personality of man that makes the concept of a death wish meaningful. Schopenhauer, while accepting the warlike and the aggressive aspect of man seems to consider suicide as merely another subtle expression of the will to live.

There is a crucial passage in the Majjhima Nikāya that gives a definite sense to the second meaning of the word vibhava.¹ Here, the terms- uccheda, vināsa and vibhava are used as synonyms and thus vibhava clearly means destruction. Though the individual attempts to get rid of the "essential being" by destroying it, he paradoxically displays a tremendous pre-occupation with the self. There is a display of undue anxiety and fear regarding one's own body (sakkāyabhaya) and the loathing of one's body (sakkāyaparijegucchā). Thus one keeps running and circling around one's body. This is compared to a dog running and circling round a post to which it is tied. Thus those who take to suicide as an escape from intolerable conflicts are too subject to an ego illusion, namely the annihilationist view.

According to the Buddhist theory, the thirst for annihilation expresses itself in the annihilation of the painful objects as well as one's own body. The Freudian theory is the inverse of this- the death instinct is originally directed against the self, as a death seeking urge and only secondarily deflected against the outer world. Though there is an important difference in this respect, both Freud and Buddhism recognize hatred as a dominant source of human motivation. In a later phase of Freudian theory we get the concept of Eros. Eros which combines the sexual instinct and the ego instinct is similar to the Buddhist concept of rāga. Rāga has two manifestations- kāma-rāga (sensual passion) and bhava-rāga (the lust for life). Some aspects of the death instinct may yet be compared with the concept of vibhava taṇhā. However, in his later theory, the dual instincts of Eros and the death instinct go beyond the limited confines of their psychological and clinical dimensions and assume as Jones says "something of a transcendental significance". They are represented as the forces of unification and separation. This metaphysical flavour is hard to find in the Buddhist theory.

The concept of unconscious motivation in Buddhism has been examined in detail, elsewhere² Here, it should suffice to mention the relevant concepts in Buddhist psychology that help us to

¹ M. 232-233

² M. W. P. de Silve, "A Study of Motivational Theory in Early Buddhism With Special Reference to the Psychology of Freud," (University of Hawaii: 1967). Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation.

grasp the nature of unconscious motivation. Many scholars attempt to explain unconscious motivation in terms of concepts like the bhavaṅga and ālayavijñāna. But these concepts really do not belong to the nikāyas of early Buddhism.

The concept of anusayas (latent tendencies), asampajāna mano-sankhārā (dispositions of the mind of which we are not aware), viññānasota (the stream of consciousness) and āsava (influxes) help us to understand the basis of unconscious motives.

We have already referred to the fact that the three aspects of craving have a deeper source in the under-currents of the anusayas. The concept of sankhārā refer to certain conative tendencies having both a conscious and an unconscious aspect. The āsava concept is close to the Freudian notion of the id.

Schopenhauer

Regarding the nature of man, Schopenhauer says that, "Willing and striving is its whole being, which may be very well compared to an unquenchable thirst."¹ The Buddhist concept of taṇhā could also be rendered as an unquenchable thirst. According to Schopenhauer, "... the basis of all willing is need, deficiency, and thus pain. Consequently, the nature of brutes and man is subject to pain originally and through its very being. If, on the other hand, it lacks objects of desire, because it is at once deprived of them by a too easy satisfaction, a terrible void and ennui comes over it."² Thus man is tossed to and fro between the states of pain and satiety.³

This resemblance between Schopenhauer and Buddhism regarding the nature of willing has its echo in Freud. According to Philip Reiff's interpretation of the Freudian concept of instinct, "Instinct is to him just that element which makes any response inadequate. The failure of response can be traced not merely to societal rigidities,.. but further back - to the ambivalent structure of instinct itself, which continually prepares the ground for conflicts."⁴ Reiff says, "Far from being a residual idea left over from

¹ *W. W. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 402.

² *Ibid.*

³ Thomas Mann, *Schopenhauer*, (London Living Thoughts Library, 1939), p. 10.

⁴ Philip Reiff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (N. York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1961), p. 32

his biological training, as the neo-Freudians have maintained, Freud's theory of instinct is the basis for his insight into the painful snare of contradiction in which nature and culture, individual and society, are forever fixed."¹

Having examined the nature of will in general, it is now necessary to examine its more specific manifestations. First, it must be mentioned that for Schopenhauer "egoism" (*principium individuationis*) is the basic mode in which the will manifests itself.² Schopenhauer examining the source of egoism says that "...every one desires everything for himself to possess, or at least to control, everything, and whatever opposes it would like to destroy."³ This practical aspect of egoism is related to what he describes as "theoretical egoism." There is only one point from which the world can be seen and this is the position that a person occupies physically.⁴ The individual is the supporter of the knowing subject and the knowing subject is the supporter of the world.⁵ The will is objectified or is given expression through this basic mode of egoism. "... every individual, though vanishing altogether and diminished to nothing in the boundless world, yet makes itself the centre of the world, has regard for its own existence and well-being before everything else; indeed from the natural standpoint, is ready to sacrifice everything else for this-is ready to annihilate the world in order to maintain its own self, this drop in the ocean, a little longer. This disposition is *egoism*, which is essential to everything in nature."⁶

The instinct of self-preservation is of course the most natural expression of the will. But Schopenhauer says that the sexual instinct is equally dominant and that, "next to the love of life, it shows itself the strongest and most powerful of motives."⁷ He also refers to sexuality as the "focus of the will."⁸ Schopenhauer's description of the role of the sexual impulse seems to anticipate some of the Freudian reflections on the subject. "...it is really the invisible central point of all action and conduct, and peeps out every where

¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

² Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 266.

³ *W. W. I.*, Vol. I, p. 427.

⁴ Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 264.

⁵ *W. W. I.*, Vol. I, p. 428.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *W. W. I.*, Vol. 3, p. 339.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

in spite of all veils thrown over it. It is the cause of war and the end of peace, the basis of what is serious, and the aim of the jest, the inexhaustible source, of wit, the key to all allusions, and the meaning of all mysterious hints..."¹ To Schopenhauer, Sexuality "appears as a malevolent demon that strives to pervert, confuse, and overthrow everything."² In general, Schopenhauer gives a metaphysical picture of the universe and man; it is an expression of the will as manifested in the love of life and the impulse of sexuality. "The parts of the body must, therefore, completely correspond to the principal desires through which the will manifests itself; they must be the visible expression of these desires. Teeth, throat, and bowels are objectified hunger, the organs of generation are objectified sexual desire; the grasping hand, the hurrying feet correspond to the more indirect desires of the will which they express."³

Regarding aggression, Schopenhauer discusses it mostly as the product of the conflict of individuals. The terrible side of this aggression caused by the conflict of individuals is seen in the lives of great tyrants and miscreants and in world-desolating wars. Its absurd side appears in self-conceit and vanity. The warlike nature of man so ably described by Hobbes is best seen when men are released from the bonds of law and order. This is only surpassed in actual wickedness, "which seeks, quite disinterestedly, the hurt and suffering of others, without any advantage to itself."⁴ What Schopenhauer describes as wickedness is somewhat similar to the sadistic element in man described by Freud; some derive a kind of gratification by inflicting pain on others.

Regarding suicide, Schopenhauer says that it is merely another expression of the assertion of the will rather than a denial of it. "The suicide wills life, and is only dissatisfied with the conditions under which it has presented itself to him."⁵ Also, suicide is a vain and foolish act, as the will to live is not changed by it. The will to live remains unaffected by suicide, "as the rainbow endures however fast the drops which support it for the moment may change."⁶ Schopenhauer concludes by saying that the "will

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

² *Ibid.* p. 339.

³ *W. W. I*, Vol. I, p. 141.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

⁶ *Ibid.*

to live appears just as much in suicide (Siva) as in the satisfaction of self-preservation (Vishnu) and in the sensual pleasure of procreation (Brahma)".¹

Schopenhauer also has a notion of an obscure depth of the mind which unknowingly influences the consciousness.² The distinctly conscious thoughts are merely the surface while the indistinct and obscure thoughts, feelings intermingled with disposition of the will belong to the depth.³ "Consciousness is the mere surface of our mind, of which, as of the earth, we do not know the inside, but only the crust."⁴ Gardiner remarks that this statement resembles Freud's celebrated analogy of the mind as an iceberg. "In any event, analogies certainly exist between the ways in which Schopenhauer frequently characterizes the will—e.g. as 'blind incessant impulse', 'endless striving' and as 'indestructible'—and many of the terms Freud was wont to employ when talking about the nature of the unconscious".⁵

II

Having outlined the nature of instincts according to Freud Buddhism and Schopenhauer, we now raise the question of mutual influence. Regarding the relationship of Freud and Buddhism, we have already summed up the points of similarity; there is no problem of influence to examine, excepting the possible link through Schopenhauer. We also do not hope to examine the influence of Buddhism on Schopenhauer. In fact, Bhikkhu Nānojīvako has done an excellent job in examining this question and of bringing out some significant parallels between Schopenhauer and Buddhism.⁶ Our main problem in the second part of this paper is to determine the relationship between Freud and Schopenhauer against the background of Buddhist influence on Schopenhauer.

Freud On Schopenhauer

What does Freud himself say regarding his relationship to the thought of Schopenhauer? In a number of references to

¹ Ibid.

² *W. W. I.*, Vol. 2, p. 328.

³ Ibid., p. 327.

⁴ Ibid., 328.

⁵ Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 176-177.

⁶ Bhikkhu Nānojīvako, *Schopenhauer and Buddhism*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1970).

Schopenhauer's philosophy, Freud mentions the similarities between his theories and some of the basic ideas of Schopenhauer. But yet he does not accept the contention that Schopenhauer influenced his psycho-analytic theories; on the contrary Freud says that he read Schopenhauer very late in his life.¹ Even if Freud read Schopenhauer very late in his life it is possible that the thought of Schopenhauer was a part of the intellectual climate of the time. This hypothesis is supported by L. L. Whyte in his, *Unconscious Before Freud*: "He may have been unconsciously influenced in his general attitude by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky-even if he personally read little of these writers in his early years, they were being widely read in Vienna in the last two decades of the century."²

There are many references to Schopenhauer in Freud's works, out of which we have selected a few. The theory of repression, the nature of unconscious processes, sexuality and the death instinct are the main topics where Freud finds certain parallels between himself and Schopenhauer.

"The theory of repression quite certainly came to me independently of any other source; I know of no outside impression which might have suggested it to me, and for a long time I imagined it to be entirely original, until Otto Rank (1911 a) showed us a passage in Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Idea*... What he says there about the struggle against accepting a distressing piece of reality coincides with my concept of repression so completely that once again I owe the chance of making a discovery to my not being well-read."³ Freud concludes by saying that he is prepared, "to forgo all claims to priority in the many instance in which laborious psychoanalytic investigation can merely confirm the truths which the philosopher recognized by intuition."⁴ Here, Freud claims that the concept of repression was suggested by the clinical data that he examined and that it was not due to his reading of Schopenhauer. In this context it appears that we have to accept Freud at his word. It is reasonable to claim that the concept of

¹ S. E. Vol. 29, pp. 59-60. Freud says that Nietzsche is another philosopher whose ideas had some resemblance to his psychology; precisely for this reason, Freud claims that he refrained from reading Nietzsche.

² L. L. Whyte, *The Unconscious Before Freud*, (N. York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1962), p. 157.

³ S. E. Vol. 14, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

“repression” was suggested by the clinical material he examined. Freud’s claim to a new discovery lies in transforming the cathartic procedure into a complete system of psycho-analysis, and the new factors that were added to the cathartic procedure were—the theory of repression and resistance, infantile sexuality and dream interpretation.

While giving Freud due credit for these specific contributions, it seems that regarding the more general concepts like the Unconscious, indirect influence of Schopenhauer on Freud is possible. This claim can be supported by some of Freud’s own statements.

In a paper entitled, *A Difficulty In Psycho-analysis* (1917), Freud says that the pride of man suffered three blows; The first is the cosmological, where Copernicus pointed out that the earth was not the center of the universe, the second is the biological, where Darwin blew up the myth of a radical difference between man and animals and the third is the psychological, where Freud pointed out that man is not the master of his own mind. Referring to his own contribution, Freud cites two significant factors—“that the life of our sexual instincts cannot be wholly tamed, and that mental processes are in themselves unconscious and only reach the ego and come under its control through incomplete and untrustworthy perceptions.”¹ He says that these two ideas together represent the third blow to man’s pride. And he concedes to Schopenhauer the anticipation of these two profound ideas.

“It was not psycho-analysis, however, let us hasten to add, which first took this step. There are famous philosophers who may be cited as forerunners – above all the great thinker Schopenhauer, whose unconscious ‘Will’ is equivalent to the mental instincts of psycho-analysis. It was this same thinker, moreover, who in *words of unforgettable impressiveness* admonished mankind of the importance, still so greatly under-estimated by it, of its sexual craving.”² He concludes by saying that there is, however, a difference; while the philosopher asserts this on an abstract basis, he demonstrates the same through his techniques to every individual personally.

In his *Autobiographical Study* (1925), however, he says that the assertion regarding the dominance of emotions, importance of

¹ *S. E.* Vol. 17, pp. 143–144.

² *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

sexuality and the mechanism of repression – are not to be traced to his acquaintance with Schopenhauer's philosophy.¹

The only concept that we have not mentioned so far is the death instinct. This is a concept that finds definite expression, in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* published in 1920. By the year 1925, in his *Autobiographical study*, he made the statement that he read Schopenhauer very late in his life. In his *A Difficulty in Psychoanalysis*, 1917 Freud has already referred to "words of unforgettable impressiveness" of Schopenhauer, implying that he had read Schopenhauer. Thus it is certain that by the time he published his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he had closely read Schopenhauer. This is strengthened by the fact that he makes a specific reference to Schopenhauer's work, in this book.² If so, did Schopenhauer influence Freud's concept of the death instinct? Freud of course says, "we have unwittingly steered our course into the harbour of Schopenhauer's philosophy. For him death is the 'true result and to that extent the purpose of life', while the sexual instinct is the embodiment of the will to live."³ As early as 1913, Freud refers in his *Totem and Taboo*, to Schopenhauer's preoccupation with the problem of death. The concept of death instinct is considered one of the most speculative aspects of Freud. It is at this point that Freud makes the reference to the "Nirvana Principle"⁴, inviting Reiff's comment that there is "Something Oriental in the Freudian Ethic."⁵

As Freud refers to the "nirvana principle" as an aspect of the death instinct, the concept of death instinct needs careful analysis. The concept of nirvāna has a key place in Schopenhauer; it is also the ultimate ideal of the Buddhist. Ernest Jones points out that Freud was influenced by Fechner who in turn was influenced by Buddhism. Regarding the nirvana principle Jones says, "Dorer has plausibly suggested that it, derives from the quietistic teaching of Buddhism which is known to have greatly influenced Fechner."⁶

¹ S.E. Vol. 20, p. 59.

² S.E. Vol. 18, p. 50; also cf. p. 101.

³ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

⁴ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵ Philip Reiff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*, (N. York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1961), p. 376.

⁶ Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, (N. York: Basic Books, 1963), Vol. 3, p. 270.

Thus in the case of the nirvana principle, Freud had some contact with Buddhism, via an indirect route—Fechner and Schopenhauer. Yet nirvāna is not an expression of the death instinct according to the Buddhist. Freud says that the “*pleasure principle* represents the demands of the libido” and “The *Nirvana principle* expresses the trend of the death instinct.”¹ It is Vibhava taṇhā rather than nirvāna that can be compared with the death instinct of Freud.

However, as Flugel has shown, there are six strands of meaning that come under the Freudian concept of the death instinct.² (1) The universal tendency of living things to suffer dissolution and die. (2) The tendency to achieve and maintain equilibrium in the inorganic and organic world. (3) The tendency to reduce or abolish tension. (4) The repetition compulsion and the restoration of earlier states. (5) Source of aggression. Aims at annihilation of self, re-directed outwards as hostility to others. (6) Death instinct as contrasted with life instinct; former integrating and uniting and the latter separating and disintegrating.

Of these, (5) can be compared with Vibhava taṇhā. The difference is that the death instinct is originally directed against the self, whereas the Buddhist consider that aggression is usually directed outwards, and only later directed against oneself. However, both systems consider hatred and aggression as a primary base of motivation. It is in fact in his later works like the *Civilization and its Discontents*, that Freud turned his attention to the outward expression of the death instinct—aggressiveness and destructiveness.³ Schopenhauer also lays emphasis on the conflict between individuals, and the warlike nature of men set free from the bonds of law.

(1) can be compared with the Buddhist doctrine of annicca, Schopenhauer too refers to the endless change and dissolution in things. (3) may be compared to the concept of craving in Buddhism and Schopenhauer. (2) is similar to (3) while (3) refers to the physiological and psychological aspects of desire, (2) refers to a more general pattern in the universe, both in the organic and inorganic world. However, it may be confusing to equate this principle of equilibrium with the nirvāna of the Buddhist. The

¹ S.E. Vol. 19, p. 160.

² J. C Flugel, *Studies in Feeling and Desire*, (London: Duckworth & Co., 1955), pp. 96-97.

³ S.E. Vol 19, pp. 157-158, n. 2.

concept of equilibrium can conceptualize some aspects of nirvāna, a state free from tension and conflict. On the other hand, as an expression of the death instinct it can be very misleading. Nirvāna cannot be described as an inorganic state of rest or a state of pure quiescence. Nirvāna has been described in positive terms like the concepts of perfect health, knowledge, insight etc. It is the culmination of one's spiritual growth and not merely the annihilation of instincts. Schopenhauer emphasized the negative aspects like the denial of the will and thus perhaps indirectly contributed to strengthen the view that nirvāna is annihilation. The concept of repetition compulsion (4) has a parallel in the Buddhist concept of sankhāra, translated as karmic formation, conative dispositions etc. Schopenhauer's concept of will too contains the idea of repetition as an aspect of its meaning. Regarding (6) Schopenhauer expresses a similar idea: "generation and death are essentially correlatives, which reciprocally neutralize and annual each other."¹ An exact correlative of this idea is not found in Buddhism. In general, it could be said that the concept of death instinct with all its diverse strands of meaning, refers to some puzzling aspects of man's experience. And in this, Freud is attempting to state the nature of a dilemma than present a straightforward solution. Not only has he steered his course into the harbour of Schopenhauer's philosophy, but at this point his thinking appears to be nourished by a drop of alien blood (via the route of Fechner and Schopenhauer).

Apart from Freud, Jung is another psycho-analyst who refers to the philosophy of Schopenhauer in most of his works. He has made a study of both Schopenhauer and Buddhist thought and quite clearly says that Schopenhauer was influenced by Buddhism.² Though Jung differed from both Schopenhauer and Buddhism regarding certain facts, he certainly attempts to use Schopenhauer as a bridge between Buddhism and his version of psycho-analysis. An interesting example cited by him is the common etymological root of the Latin libido and Sanskrit lobha. In fact, lobha (greed) along with dosa (hatred) and moha (delusion) are the three roots of motivation according to the Buddha.

In spite of the somewhat obscure and speculative thinking that Jung often displays, he has struck an interesting line of thought

¹ *W. W. I.* Vol. I, p. 355.

² Carl Jung, *Collected Works*, ed. R. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, Trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. II, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 481.

by working his ideas through Schopenhauer, back to Indian thought. All this seem to suggest that behind "...the philosophic climate he (Freud) shared with figures like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche"¹, there are haunting shadows of Indian thought.

Tentative Conclusions

- (1) Freud did not knowingly make use of Schopenhauer's ideas as hypotheses for organizing his clinical data. This is specially true of some of his specific and limited concepts like repression, oedipus complex, infantile sexuality, transference etc.
- (2) But regarding the more general concepts like the Unconscious, libido and death instinct, the possibility of indirect influence cannot be denied. There were others who read Schopenhauer and his ideas belong to the intellectual climate of the time.
- (3) At some point in his life he did read Schopenhauer closely. In his paper, *A Difficulty in Psycho-analysis* (1917), he refers to Schopenhauer's "words of unforgettable impressiveness". In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud makes specific references to Schopenhauer's work.
- (4) Taking into account, both indirect influence and some kind of direct influence (after he read Schopenhauer), we could do no better than sum up in the words of R. S. Peters who says of Freud: "Schopenhauer peered wanly through some of his constructs".²
- (5) The close agreement between Buddhism and Schopenhauer is evident; some degree of influence of Buddhist and Upanishadic thought on Schopenhauer can be established.
- (6) Thus it appears that in the philosophy of Schopenhauer may be present, a link between Buddhism and Freud.

¹ Hellen Walker, Puner, *Freud*, (London: Grey Walls Press, 1949), p. 162. The word 'Freud' within parenthesis has been inserted by the author.

² R. S. Peters, ed. *Brett's History of Psychology*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962), p. 717.