

İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayın No: 4502
I S S N 1303-5746



İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
İLAHİYAT FAKÜLTESİ
DERGİSİ

REVIEW OF THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY OF ISTANBUL UNIVERSITY

Hakemli Dergi

SAYI: 9
YIL: 2004

İSTANBUL - 2004

FORGIVE BUT NOT FORGET

Okt. Mehmet ATALAY*

ÖZET

İnsan tekinin psikolojik sağlığına faydalı olmak üzere akli zemine dayalı bir strateji geliştirmek amacıyla, *kendi* kavramı, yanısıra da bireyci ve toplumsal kültür farkları kadar sorumluluk, dolayısıyla da özgür irade kavramları temelinde bir yapı inşa etmek gerekir. Freud'un psikolojisinin aksine, Erikson'un Buhran Psikolojisi diye adlandırılan öğretisi, sözkonusu yapı için iyi bir zemin sağlar. Bu bağlamda, Thomas Szasz tarafından gündeme getirilen 'affet fakat unutma' formülasyonu, özellikle psikolojik travmalara karşı azami ölçüde etkin bir mücadele yöntemi olarak temayüz eder.

FORGIVE BUT NOT FORGET

SUMMARY

In order to develop a rational coping strategy for the psychological well-being of individuals, one should seek a structure on the grounds of the concept of self, differences between individualist and collectivist cultures, definitely not leaving out the concept of responsibility and thus free will. To this purpose, unlike the psychology of Freud, that of Erikson called upon as the psychology of crisis can provide one with a good basis. On the same account, 'forgive but not forget,' as a formulation brought about by Thomas Szasz, is a keen and most efficient coping strategy especially in the case of psychological traumas.

* * *

* Lecturer in the Faculty of Theology at Istanbul University.

In any given culture, in order to be able to successfully develop some insights consistently useful for psychological well-being of individuals, it is crucially important to examine and focus on the concept of self. In other words, insights to be developed for psychological well-being must be in accordance with how the concept of self is viewed by individuals of a given culture. Further, it gains delicate and crucial importance to try to espouse a kind of continuum between the conception of self and practical insights aimed at psychological well-being of individuals, when it comes to psychological traumas or, in a broader sense, severe psychological problems stemming from past experiences.

Much to say that, especially in the case of social interactions, almost every form of individual behavior can be easily associated with the concept of self. For example, as shown in one study,¹ people with low self-esteem tend to describe themselves as altruistic and enhance their self worth especially by associating with a partner whom they describe more positively than themselves and therefore are significantly vulnerable to relationship damages.

It does not take, it seems, much effort to come to understand that 'self' is the most valuable 'gift' given to human beings. Moreover, the concept of self can be used as a key concept to classify and thus better understand different psychological orientations. Consequently, it can be argued that two major orientations of psychology, psycho-dynamic and behavioral explanations, and even the physiological one, are not fully consistent with the idea of self as seen by individuals in 'western culture.' The usage of the concept of self became highly popular when it was backed up by humanistic psychology, in which conscious choices and enhanced levels of personal fulfillment were considered crucially important for 'self-actualization.' More specifically, "the emphasis on the conscious control of behavior and the importance of one's view of the world for making decisions surfaced in the 1960s and early 1970s as a reaction against psycho-dynamic, learning, and physiological

¹ A. Schuetz & D. M. Tice, "Associative and competitive indirect self enhancement in close relationships moderated by trait self-esteem," in *European Journal of Social Psychology* (1997), 27, 257-273.

explanations for behavior in which human beings are seen as simply the products of unconscious drives, conditioning, and physiological pawns of controllable forces."² In short, based on the above-mentioned excerpt, it becomes apparent that, in general, different psychological orientations other than the humanistic one are not fully consistent with the widely and 'traditionally' valid sense of self, which does not spare any logical space in mind for the lack of the notion of responsibility.³

However, in terms of the classification of individualist and collectivist ideas of self, all orientations eventually do favor an individualist notion of self. In other words, in the case of humanistic psychology self is fully independent, individualist, competent and thus 'responsible.' For example, some scholars such as Jeffrey Rubin, trying to develop some kind of integration between self-centered and non-self-centered approaches (i.e. individualist and collectivist approaches) toward self, pick up psychoanalysis as an intensely non self-centered and one of the most dominant approaches in western culture. According to Rubin, "The very way psychoanalytic and Buddhist conceptions of self can be reconciled is to realize that both a sense of self and a sense of no self are necessary for experiencing optimal psychological health and leading a full life."⁴ In other words, Rubin seeks out some kind of balance between sense of self (individualist) and a sense of no-self (collectivist) by focusing on psychoanalysis and Buddhism, as prominent orientations of the two major orientations of self (i.e., individualist and collectivist) which leads to the obvious fact that psycho-dynamic orientation does not favor the notion of individualist self.

At this point, it would be enormously rewarding to focus on Freud's idea that sexual drives must be set 'free' to reach a better form of civilization, in terms of grasping the very essence of the argument we have been trying to lay down in this article. However, before we go on, it is necessary to illustrate what we have referred to as the traditional sense

² David S. Holmes, *Abnormal Psychology* (New York: Longman, 1997) p. 48.

³ It might be argued that the reason why Aristotle is considered dominant in Western Philosophy and culture is because in the philosophy of Aristotle, unlike that of Plato, there is a full amount of responsibility associated with individuals.

⁴ J. B. Rubin, *Psychotherapy and Buddhism* (New York: Plenum, 1996) p. 75.

of self regarding the western culture. One of the greatest illustrations of this 'sense' is explored and introduced by Carl G. Jung, the founder of Analytic Psychology who sharply distinguished between 'self' and 'ego.' According to Jung, "Our decision appears to be an act of obedience and the result of divine attention." In other words, the impulses that people have can be considered as 'the will of God' in the sense that they are not arbitrary wishes and wills; however, they are fully responsible eventually for their acts. To make the point more clear, he adds: "I should like the term 'God' in the phrase 'the will of God' to be understood...in the sense intended by Diotema, when she said: 'Eros, dear Socrates, is a mighty demon.' The Greek words daimon and daimonion express a determining power which comes up upon man from outside, like providence or fate, though the ethical decision is left to man."⁵ Consequently, in Jung's account, the self is enormously valued with an integrative (i.e., theological) attachment. On the other hand, unlike psycho-dynamic conception, for example, responsibility is associated with the self without sparing any space for the otherwise.

Actually, it can be contended that Freud, assisted by newly developed integrative explanations about the origin of human beings in an era when Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, based his argument, in a sense, on the whole concept of responsibility.

In *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, one of his early works, he tries to explain how repressed sexual desires can be expressed in a socially acceptable form.⁶ More clearly, Freud, in making his point, is seemingly reluctant to choose between the question 'did Leonardo do a great artistic job because of his repressed sexual desires?' and 'did he not finish his great artistic work because of his repressed sexual desires?' Consequently, it can be said that Freud, especially in his early works where his major argument regarding repressed sexual desires did not get its final form, does favor and espouse the idea of 'sublimation,' "a form of displacement in which an unacceptable,

⁵ C. G. Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, (Princeton: University Press, 1991) p. 27.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, trans. Alan Tyson, (New York: Norton, 1989) p. 30.

unsatisfied impulse is expressed in a socially acceptable form,"⁷ for psychological well-being of individuals. In other words, Freud's main argument, in its early form, is seemingly dependent on a kind of psychology of conflict or crisis.

However, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, one of his later works, Freud contends that, in order to reach a better form of civilization, sexual drives (sexual life) which are the underlying factors of all human behavior and under the pressure of civilization, need to be set free, since they, if not fully satisfied, may show up in the form of aggressiveness (e.g., atrocity). More specifically, his main argument, in its later form, is aimed at resolving psychological conflicts, which are of no free will and thus do not fully relate to the very essence of individual 'responsibility,' by merely "allowing complete freedom of sexual life and thus abolishing the family, the germ-cell of civilization"⁸ because of their threats against civilization itself.

According to him, there are two main factors that civilization depends on: the compulsion to work (Ananke or Necessity) and the power of love (Eros or Love). Moreover, the development of civilization is essentially based on some kind of balance between these two essential elements. "But in the course of development the relation of love to civilization loses its unambiguity. On the one hand love comes into opposition to the interests of civilization; on the other, civilization threatens love with substantial restrictions"⁹ and thus the balance is destroyed on behalf of necessity. Further, though civilization tries to limit the 'scope of love' and uses it just as a 'tool,' because of the fact that "fear of a revolt by the suppressed elements drives it to stricken precautionary measures,"¹⁰ it does not seem that civilization succeeded very much. That is, 'ill-will' is a reality and has impact on each one of us. Freud also takes into account 'communists' regarding the origin of aggressiveness. According to him, the idea of the communists that

⁷ S Feshbach, B. Weiner & A. Bohart, *Personality* (Lexington: Health, 1996) p. 85.

⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey, (New York: Norton, 1961) p. 61.

⁹ Ibid p.50.

¹⁰ Ibid p.51.

poverty is the original cause of aggressiveness is wrong, since aggressiveness "reigned almost without limit in primitive times, when property was still scanty, and it already shows itself in the nursery almost before property has given up its primal, anal form..."¹¹ Consequently, the origin of aggressiveness, according to Freud, is prerogative in the field of sexual relationships and thus it must be removed by allowing 'complete' freedom of sexual life.

So far, as is seen from our account on Freud, he breaks away from 'psychology of conflict.' Though, in doing so, he depends on the idea of individual responsibility, which is familiar to the essence of 'traditional' sense of self, as a standpoint, he offers an extreme, unfamiliar form of resolution: complete sexual freedom, not to mention abolition of family. It can be argued that what Freud did not see, in the case of complete sexual freedom, is the fact that the balance between the impulse of work and love would be destroyed on behalf of love. Further, keeping the balance alive and sustainable, perhaps with a nature of escalation, should be the very concern regarding the advancement of human civilization. As Eric Hoffer states: "The saying of Heraclitus that it would not be better for mankind if they were given their desires' is true of nations as well as individuals."¹²

Although Freud breaks away from the idea of usefulness of conflict or crisis, it can be contended that psychoanalytic theory in general, if not taken into account some of Freud's later works such as *Civilization and Its Discontents*, can be regarded as a psychology of crisis as it clearly shows up in the works of Eric Erikson, the best known of all the psychoanalytic writers who 'modified' and expanded it.

When reading the writings of Erikson, interestingly, one becomes really familiar with the concept of crisis. Moreover, the concept of crisis in Erikson's works has not necessarily a negative content. In other words, "by crisis, Erikson does not mean overwhelming stress, but rather a turning point in the life of the individual, when a new problem must be

¹¹ Ibid 60.

¹² Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951) p. 162.

confronted and mastered.”¹³ Likewise, Erikson, considering his eight psychosocial stages, instead of pursuing the very idea that a failure does result in another one in the next stage, says the following: “A new life task presents a crisis whose outcome can be a successful graduation, or alternatively, an impairment of the life cycle which will aggravate future crises.”¹⁴ More specifically, he does not see success, i.e., exposure to the positive aspects of a psychosocial stage rather than the negative ones, as necessary for a healthy personality as long as it contributes to future crises. Consequently, it can be said that according to Erikson, ‘failure’ in a stage is somewhat advantageous as it contributes to future crises. In addition, Erikson, for example, in his highly acclaimed book titled *Young Man Luther*, based on the psychosocial stages applied to Martin Luther’s life, leads the reader to originate strong sympathy toward the concept of crisis. That is, according to him, it is crisis that made Martin Luther.

In the light of the information given above, we are prone to come to the idea that displacement or sublimation, as a form of displacement, appears to be one of the best coping strategies in dealing with psychological problems stemming from past experiences and even in the case of psychological traumas. By displacement, first introduced by psychoanalytical theory as a defense mechanism, we specifically mean drive displacement¹⁵ including sublimation as a form of displacement. More clearly, in our account, displacement is to be inclined to espouse and to get led into psychologically healthy and socially acceptable ways as a result of psychological crisis or, in a broader sense, problems that stem from past experiences including severe traumas of any kind from early childhood years. At this point, it should be noted that “There is no universally accepted list of defense mechanisms.”¹⁶ Moreover, “There is a difference of opinion among psychoanalysts about what should be termed a defense mechanism.”¹⁷ As a result, displacement as described in our account may not be considered as a defense mechanism, since most

¹³ N. S. DiCaprio, *Personality Theories* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1974) p. 60.

¹⁴ Erik K. Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York: Norton, 1958) p. 254.

¹⁵ See Holmes, *Abnormal Psychology*, p. 24.

¹⁶ Rubin, *Psychotherapy and Buddhism*, p. 137.

¹⁷ *Ibid* p. 137.

of the defense mechanisms, in essence, imply some kind of cognitive distortion.

In fact, it can also be argued that, especially in the case of severe problems such as traumas, 'it is not your problem,' as a landmark statement of cognitive approach of treatment, is not exempt from being associated with cognitive distortion. It may function as to provide quick and temporary relief, yet in the minds of most people exposed to traumas the question of 'why?' remains pounding. In other words, the above-mentioned statement, as representation of the very essence of cognitive treatment which we think would be the only equivalent to what we espouse of 'displacement' otherwise, does not prevent the individual from such thinking as that 'So why did it happen to me?...Am I a victim here?...Victim of what?...' These questions, without doubt, require 'integrative' answers such as philosophical or theological ones; nevertheless, there is no integrative answer to reasonably put an end to the question of 'why?'

However, fortunately, in the case of displacement of our account, one is not necessarily faced with these questions. On the contrary, by displacement treatment, people can make enough sense about their experiences, probably except for those exposed to psychological traumas in early childhood years when their 'free will' was weak and vague. In addition, displacement technique can also function as a motivation. For example, a person who was exposed to abuse of any kind in childhood years may devote him/herself to the problem of child abuse. In brief, displacement technique is the one that mostly aims at 'provoking' and leading to heroic acts, which brings about a tremendous amount of self-esteem.

Secondly, as a coping strategy, we are also prone to offer a formulation of insight consistent with the idea that conflict or crisis, especially those stemming from past experiences, is not necessarily a negative phenomenon; rather, it can turn into a positive factor with respect to further achievement.

The formulation to which we have referred above aimed at wisdom is the rule of 'forgive but do not forget.' Obviously, this rule is most valid

regarding the psychological 'disorders' coming from past experiences in which free will is involved. According to this rule, it can be stated that there are three kinds of people. First: Those who forgive and forget. These kinds of people cannot avoid repeating 'their mistakes' lying behind the emergence of 'disorders' because they cannot even remember what they did wrong.

Second: Those who do not forgive and do not forget. These kinds of people always tend to be aggressive since they do not forgive ('others') and thus probably focus only on external conditions that lie behind the crisis they were exposed to in accordance with the fact that "we tend to attribute success to our own personal effort and ability [internal stimuli or conditioning], while we are likely to attribute failure to the difficulty of the task or to bad luck [external stimuli or conditions]"¹⁸ In other words, the attitude of these people contributes to their psychological well-being only negatively since they are most likely to show fundamental attribution error, "the tendency for observers to underestimate situational influences and overestimate dispositional influences upon others' behavior."¹⁹ Third: Those who forgive but do not forget. These kinds of people represent the very essence of wisdom. By forgiving, they include themselves in the process of emergence of the 'disorders' and avoid fundamental attribution error. By not forgetting, they always keep themselves motivated to do something for the betterment of the conditions that led to their painful experience and avoid repeating it as well. In short, they get realistic and peaceful, as the eminent psychiatrist Thomas Szasz points out: "The stupid neither forgive nor forget; the naïve forgive and forget; the wise forgive but do not forget."²⁰

In conclusion, in order to develop insights most useful for psychological well-being of individuals of a given culture, one should definitely consider whether their culture is an individualist or a

¹⁸ Feshbach et al., *Personality*, p. 287.

¹⁹ D. G. Myers, *Social Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996) p. 80.

²⁰ Thomas Szasz, *The Second Sin* (New York: Doubly & Company, 1973) p. 51. For another creative take on this rule see İsmet Özel, *Faydasız Yazılar (Unuseful Writings)*, (İstanbul: Risale, 1986) p. 26-31.

collectivist one. 'Psychology of crisis,' as clearly introduced by Erik Erikson especially depending on Freud's early works, appears to be crucial importance for individualist cultures. Consequently, in accordance with the psychology of crisis, we offer displacement and sublimation, as a form of displacement, as to be centrally relevant to it and thus most useful for psychological well-being of individuals in an individualist culture. The fact that heroes for instance, throughout history, are the very products of 'crises' calls for making use out of them.