

IDEOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: THE EXCOMMUNICATION OF FERENCZI

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In the title of this paper I chose the term “excommunication” because its etymology of “exclusion from the community of the faithful” clearly gives the idea of the essence of this procedure, which is the expulsion from the group of reference. as a sanction for having broken the rules of the group. In the Catholic Church, a well-known example is the excommunication of the Emperor Frederick the Second on the part of Pope Gregory the Ninth. The Catholic Church did not only apply excommunication in matters of faith, but also in scientific matters, as in the equally well-known case of Galileo.

This is a means of social control universally applied. It is found in all ages and at all levels, from the ostracism in ancient Athens to the excommunication, in the proper sense, in the various churches, to the informal expulsion from a family. The effectiveness of this procedure is due to the fact that man is a social animal, and that to belong to a group of reference is an innate need. Among the pre-colonial Australian aborigenes, expulsion from the tribe could lead to death.

At the beginning of life, the equivalent of the need for belonging to a group is the need for a relationship, as distinct from the need for nourishment. In hospitalism, described by René Spitz, hospitalized babies, although regularly fed, would waste away, and sometimes die, due to the lack of a relationship.

In what follows I examine the excommunication of Sandor Ferenczi on the part of orthodox psychoanalysis. I then examine four other authors, Erich Fromm, Jeffrey Masson, Alice Miller and John Bowlby, following the thread of excommunication and of the various reactions to it.

Ferenczi

This paper is concerned in the first place with the punitive expulsion of Sandor Ferenczi on the part of his group of reference, Freudian psychoanalysis, for having broken a rule of that group, consisting in the denial of the reality of childhood sexual abuse.

This rule may be a particular case of a more general rule in medicine, consisting, at least in the past, in the denial of the reality of childhood traumata of any kind, physical as well as sexual, if inflicted by the parents. Gianni Guasto, the coordinator of a group of Ferenczian readings in Genoa, tells me that the radiologist Caffey described in 1946 a neonatal syndrome characterized by subdural hematoma accompanied by multiple fractures of the long bones, but did not dare to suggest that the cause was physical abuse on the part of the parents, as was indeed the case. Things have changed since then. In 1968, *The Battered Child*, by Helfer and Kempe, is full of radiographs of fractured skulls and broken bones.

Before denying the reality of child sexual abuse, Freud had upheld it. He had a first experience of child abuse in 1885-86, during the stay in Paris in which he attended Charcot's lectures. On that occasion he also visited the Morgue, where he witnessed the autopsy of children raped and killed. In 1895-96, his patients reported sexual abuse in childhood. Freud presented these results in a paper on *The Aetiology of Hysteria*, given in April 1896 at the Society for Psychiatry and Neurology in Vienna. The paper was met by a stony silence. Subsequently, as he revealed in a letter to his friend Fliess of September 21, 1897, Freud changed his mind. He decided that he had been wrong in believing his patients, and that the recollections of the alleged abuse were actually fantasies. In its subsequent development psychoanalysis was based on the theoretical premise of infantile sexual impulses expressed in fantasy and was carried out in a position of neutrality on the part of the analyst.

In the last years of his life Ferenczi, Freud's favourite pupil, developed a series of concepts at variance with the orthodox psychoanalytic ideology: in normal development, the importance of parental love; in psychopathology, the reality of physical and sexual traumata, to which the infantile psyche reacts with dissociation; finally, in therapy, the intense involvement of the therapist, which included experiments in "mutual analysis".

In September 1932 Ferenczi presented a paper at the 12th International Psycho-Analytic Congress in Wiesbaden with the title *Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child*, in which he talked once more of the sexual seduction of children. This was met by the strongest disapproval, just as Freud's 1896 paper. When before the Congress Ferenczi went to Vienna to meet Freud, who was too ill to attend, Freud asked him not to publish the paper. This disapproval left Ferenczi isolated and probably contributed to his premature death, which took place soon after, in May 1933. His colleagues considered him paranoid and did not publish the English translation of the paper. The publication only took place in 1949, on the initiative of Michael Balint, Ferenczi's pupil.

To sum up, Ferenczi was alone in confronting orthodoxy. He confronted it with courage and consistency, but he suffered greatly from the excommunication, which entailed the loss of the personal relationship with Freud, which meant a lot to him, and of the membership in his group of reference, where he had been very influential and highly regarded.

Fromm

Erich Fromm rose twice in defence of Ferenczi. The first time in 1935, soon after Ferenczi's death, in a paper titled *The Social Determinants of Psychoanalytic Theory*. In this paper, Fromm views the disapproval of dissident followers such as Ferenczi as indirect evidence of Freud's basic identification with social norms.

Fromm defended Ferenczi again after the publication in 1953 of Jones' biography of Freud. He was indignant at the allegation that Ferenczi had become insane at the end of his life. In order to refute these accusations, in 1957-58 he carried on an intense correspondence with many people who had known Ferenczi, among whom Clara Thompson and Izette de Forest, who had both been analyzed by Ferenczi. Fromm published the result of this work in 1958.

I have reported this defence of Ferenczi on Fromm's part in order to stress some fundamental differences between these two authors, and between them and Freud. In 1896, Freud, without another group of reference, confronted by the hostility of his colleagues lost courage and changed his mind. Ferenczi, in 1932, confronted by the same disapproval, remained faithful to his ideas but, being isolated, he suffered from the excommunication to the point of dying. Fromm succeeded twice in firmly defending Ferenczi and in proclaiming the truth because he was backed by alternative groups of reference. In 1935 he belonged to the Frankfurt Institute of Sociology, which had a critical position towards society. He published his defence of Ferenczi on the "Zeitschrift fuer Sozialforschung", the journal of the Institute, which at the time, after the advent of Nazism, was being printed in Paris. In 1957-58 he belonged to the William Alanson White Institute of New York, an alternative school of psychoanalysis, following the interpersonal-cultural approach, which he himself had founded in 1946 together with Sullivan. Whereas Ferenczi was alone and died of his excommunication, Fromm was backed by strong alternative and critical groups of reference.

Fromm in turn underwent excommunication. Paul Roazen, the historian of psychoanalysis, speaks of his "de facto excommunication" on the part of the psychoanalytic community. In common with Bowlby, whom I shall examine below, Fromm was very independent and had the capacity of creating new groups of reference. At one point he estranged himself to some degree also from the Neofreudian school he himself had founded and reached out to a wider public of readers. After having in vain tried to be accepted by the IPA, in 1962 he contributed to the foundation of an alternative international association, the IFPS (International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies).

Masson

In 1984 Jeffrey Masson published a book, *Assault on Truth*, on Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory. Masson was director of the Freud Archives in London, after having completed a classical psychoanalytic training. In this capacity he had access to Freud's unpublished correspondence and realized that the orthodox Freudian establishment (Anna Freud, Kurt Eissler and others), in publishing Freud's letters to Fliess, had made selective omissions. He was also enabled to view the later correspondence of Freud on the case of Ferenczi. When Masson started to make public the results of his research, he elicited the typical reaction of excommunication and lost his post as director of the Freud Archives. He was a highly qualified scholar and, like Fromm, he turned to a wider readership. In his book, in addition to reestablishing the first phase of Freud's work, he also gives a detailed account of the case of Ferenczi, towards whom, again like Fromm, he shows strong fellowship.

Miller

The Swiss author Alice Miller, like Masson, comes from a classical Freudian training. Ever since her first book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, of 1979, she dealt with deep compassion with childhood traumata. The usual reaction of disapproval on the part of the orthodox led to her resigning from the IPA in 1988. In her later books she radically challenged psychoanalysis and included in her critique also the alternative psychoanalytic approaches. Since then she does not want to be defined as a psychoanalyst. Predictably, a circular process was set in motion. If she ignores the psychoanalysts, both the orthodox and the non-orthodox, they in turn ignore her. As in the case of Fromm, the excommunication has taken the form of the wall of silence. Miller has reacted by proceeding along her solitary road with a series of other books, relying on a loyal readership, with which she is also in contact through her website. In one of these books (*Banished Knowledge*, pp. 140 and 187 of the British paperback edition) she twice mentions Galileo, presumably because of the obvious similarity to her own case. She also (p. 187) establishes a link between the case of Galileo and that of Sigmund Freud. Both exhibited a severe somatic pathology. Galileo went blind and Freud developed cancer of the jaw. She views these pathologies as a reaction of the body to the denial of important truths, which in turn is the consequence of the subjection to an external authority.

Bowlby

The experience of John Bowlby, the initiator of attachment theory, is similar in a way to Ferenczi's, but with a vastly different outcome. In a chapter of *A Secure Base*, his last book, of 1988, he describes the origins of attachment theory. On behalf of WHO, he carried out a study of the effects of inadequate maternal care, which was published in 1950. Also in this case it was a question of traumatic childhood experience due to external factors, even if it was not described in these terms. Bowlby then turned to the direct observation of the effect on children of separation from the mother due to hospitalization. At this point Bowlby speaks of "the sharp controversy aroused" by this research. In particular, "many psychoanalysts ..., especially those whose theory focused on the role of fantasy in psychopathology ... remained unconvinced and sometimes very critical." What allowed Bowlby to proceed with his research and theoretical development? Again, as with Fromm, an institution, the Tavistock, and, in addition, a wide network of friends and collaborators in various scientific disciplines (Mary Ainsworth, Mary Main, the ethologist Robert

Hinde, the specialist in grief and mourning Colin Murray Parkes, and many others). In a word, a group of reference alternative to the British Psycho-Analytic Society where Bowlby came from. In common with Fromm, Bowlby had original views and indifference to hostile reactions. Unlike Fromm, Bowlby chose to avoid controversy and continue his research. In common with Masson he had scientific exactness, which Masson applied to historical research and Bowlby to empirical research and theoretical development. The outcome was a theory firmly rooted in the theory of evolution and now widely accepted in the scientific community.

Discussion

These remarks may be included in a macro-structural paradigm. The analogy between the excommunication inflicted on Ferenczi by orthodox psychoanalysis and those inflicted by the Catholic Church is not only formal but also substantial. These two excommunicating groups are social institutions, even if of different dimensions. They both belong to the patriarchal culture, which, as Bachofen (rediscovered by Fromm in 1934) stated in 1861, was superimposed on the original matriarchal culture only 4-5 thousand years ago. The matriarchal culture dates from an immeasurably longer time, it is therefore still present in our genes, even if, since the advent of patriarchy, it is submerged and forbidden.

Every time the matriarchal culture resurfaces, it elicits punitive reactions. Ferenczi may be viewed as a great representative of matriarchal culture, severely punished by his patriarchal group of reference.

Conclusion

The five cases examined, of Ferenczi, Fromm, Masson, Miller and Bowlby, suggest that, in order to challenge an ideology in the scientific domain, an individual effort is not sufficient, but a strong alternative group of reference is required.

Ferenczi's innovative and liberal personality made it possible for a great many creative people from a variety of scholarly fields to become closely associated with psychoanalysis and to enjoy greater freedom in their work in such areas as ethnography, pedagogy, literature and even economics. The catalyst: Ferenczi was a catalyst for the development of psychoanalysis. Through his tireless work in teaching and public speaking in Hungary, the new human view, as Ignatius, a contemporary literary figure, called psychoanalysis (Ignatius, [1933] 2000, 39), was soon embraced by receptive modernist intellectuals. The role of media forums for psych Ferenczi has only recently been recognized for his contribution to psychoanalysis, today "created and founded" as a forerunner of Relational psychoanalysis and short-term psychodynamic therapy (Neil Altman's "Echoes of Ferenczi's" ideas can be found in streams as diverse as object relations). Although Ferenczi, like Freud, was embedded in cultural streams of patriarchy and misogyny, and no less likely to repeat its ideologies wholesale (Meszaros, 1993), one can nevertheless discern that he struggled with these discourses. A no less ambivalent example of Freud's enthusiasm and reserve for the development of technique, followed by eventual excommunication, is Ferenczi and Rank's monograph, *The Development of Psychoanalysis* (1925). Learn how psychoanalysis, an approach to therapy that emphasizes childhood experiences and the unconscious mind, influenced the field of psychology. Psychoanalysis is defined as a set of psychological theories and therapeutic techniques that have their origin in the work and theories of Sigmund Freud. The core of psychoanalysis is the belief that all people possess unconscious thoughts, feelings, desires, and memories. Basic Tenets. Psychoanalysis suggests that people can experience catharsis and gain insight into their current state of mind by bringing the content of the unconscious into conscious awareness. Through this process, a person can find relief from psychological distress. Psychoanalysis also suggests that