

## HOPE AND DEDICATION TO RESEARCH IN FREUD'S LETTERS TO FLIESS

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Within the theoretical frame of my research on social virtues (GALLI 1999, 2000), the purpose of this contribution is to study hope and dedication to research in FREUD. Using a phenomenological approach, I analyse FREUD's letters to his colleague and friend FLIESS during the last decade of nineteenth century.

### **The Beginning of the Friendship**

In his first and second letters, FREUD immediately reveals his hope and expectation of a "continuing and gratifying relationship" with the colleague.

*Vienna, November 24, 1887*

Esteemed friend and colleague:

My letter of today admittedly is occasioned by business; but I must introduce it by confessing that I entertain hopes [ *mir Hoffnung mache* ] of continuing the relationship with you and that you have left a deep impression on me which could easily lead me to tell you outright in what category of men I place you[...]

*Vienna, December 28, 1887*

Esteemed friend and colleague:

Your cordial letter and your magnificent gift awakened the most pleasant memories for me, and the sentiment I discern behind both Christmas presents fills me with the expectation [ *erfüllen mir mit Hoffnung* ] of a lively and mutually gratifying relationship between us in the future. I still do not know how I won you; the bit of speculative anatomy of the brain cannot have impressed your rigorous judgment for long. But I am very happy about it. So far I have always had the good fortune of finding my friends among the best of men, and I have always been particularly proud of this good fortune. So I thank you and ask you not to be surprised if at the moment I have nothing to offer in return for your charming present.

I occasionally hear about you - mostly wonderful things, of course [...]

### *Self-image and the image of the friend as opposite*

In the letters quoted from above, there is already an opposition between the images that FREUD offers of himself and the images of the friend: "a bit of speculative anatomy" in contrast to "the wonderful things" of his colleague; "nothing to offer" in comparison to the "magnificent gift" of FLIESS. This opposition increases in the

following letters. In the *letter dated May 28, 1888*, FREUD opposes his own “things not worthy of note” to the “heroic efforts” of FLIESS and describes his situation in funereal words:

[...] Time and leisure for work have been spent on several articles for Villaret, portions of the translation of Bernheim’s Suggestion, and similar things, not worthy of note. Wait! The first draft of “Hysterical Paralysis” also is finished; uncertain when the second will be. In short, one manages; and life is generally known to be very difficult and very complicated and, as we say in Vienna, there are many roads to the Central Cemetery .

I look upon your efforts, so close to the heroic, without envy but with truly empathic satisfaction. [...]

Two months later (*August 29, 1888*), FREUD describes the inadequacy of his professional practice as a specialist in opposition to the general practitioners, appreciated by FLIESS. In the field of research, FREUD describes various personal difficulties and the unfavourable atmosphere of Vienna in opposition to the optimistic milieu of Berlin:

[...] I have not learned enough to be a medical practitioner, and in my medical development there is a flaw which later on was laboriously mended. I was able to learn just about enough to become a neuropathologist. And now I lack, not youth, it is true, but time and independence to make up for it. Last winter I was quite busy, and that gave me just enough to live on with my very large family and left no time to learn something. The summer was rather bad, left me with sufficient time, but also brought worries that robbed me of my good mood. Moreover, the habit of research, to which I have sacrificed a good deal, my dissatisfaction with what the student is offered, the need to go into detail and exercise critical judgement interfere with my studying. The whole atmosphere of Vienna is such that it does little to steel one’s will or to foster that confidence of success which is characteristic of you Berliners and without which a mature man cannot think of changing the basis of his existence. So it seems I must remain what I am; but I have no illusions about the inadequacy of this state of affairs.

### *Images, roles and scenes*

The images that FREUD offers in his letters cannot be considered only as a description of his situation; he builds, through these pictures, interpersonal scenes in which complementary roles are assigned to himself and to his friend. Complementary roles are clearly expressed in the letters before FREUD’s meeting with FLIESS in the summer 1890:

#### *Vienna, July 21, 1890*

Dear friend:

[...] your invitation is the loveliest thing and the greatest honor that has happened to me in a long time. I very much look forward to seeing you again to hearing what you are up to, and to rekindling my almost extinguished energy and scientific interest on yours, [...]

For various reasons, FREUD is prevented from meeting his friend and expresses his disappointment in the *letter dated August 1, 1890*:

Esteemed friend:

Very reluctantly, I write you today that I cannot come to Berlin; I do not care at all about the city or the congress, but I do care that I cannot see you in Berlin[...] Very reluctantly, because I had expected a great deal from my contact with you. Otherwise quite content, happy if you will, I still feel quite isolated, scientifically dulled, lazy and resigned. When I talked with you

and saw that you thought well of me I even used to think something of myself, and the picture of absolutely convincing energy that you offered was not without its effect on me. Moreover, medically I undoubtedly would have profited from your presence and perhaps from the atmosphere in Berlin as well, since for many years now I have been without a teacher...

In these early letters, FREUD offers an image of himself as a scholar who is “isolated, scientifically dulled, lazy and resigned”, who “cannot think of changing the basis of his existence”. This picture can be interpreted as the assumption of a passive and dependent role with the aim of assigning an active complementary role to the other, who will stimulate and rekindle the energy of the friend. This role of FLIESS is recognised in the letter dated January 1, 1896.

### *The image of the “resigned” man as a mask*

The images that FREUD offers of himself as “scientifically dulled, lazy and resigned” can also be interpreted as a mask in the sense of NIETZSCHE (1886):

Whatever is profound loves masks; what is most profound even hates image and parable. Might not nothing less than the opposite, be the proper disguise for the shame of a god? [...]

A man whose sense of shame has some profundity encounters his destinies and delicate decisions, too, on paths which few ever reach and of whose mere existence his closest intimates must not know: his mortal danger is concealed from their eyes, and so is his regained sureness of life. Such a concealed man who instinctively needs speech for silence and for burial in silence and who is inexhaustible in his evasion of communication, wants and sees to it that a mask of him roams in his place through the hearts and heads of his friends. And supposing he did not want it, he would still realise some day that in spite of that a mask of him is there -and that this is well. Every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely shallow, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives.

The function of a ‘mask’ makes it possible to progress secretly and at the same time to avoid arousing the envy of the other.

### **Freud’s dedication to research as ‘Objective’ Motivation’**

FREUD uses several different metaphors to describe his commitment to research. In the *letter dated May 25, 1895*, we read many of these metaphors:

[...] a man like me cannot live without a hobbyhorse, without a consuming passion, without in Schiller’s words -a tyrant. I have found one. In its service I know no limits. It is psychology, which has always been my distant, beckoning goal, and which now, since I have come upon the problem of neuroses, has drawn so much nearer. I am tormented by two aims: to examine what shape the theory of mental functioning takes if one introduces quantitative considerations, a sort of economics of nerve forces; and, second, to peel off from psychopathology a gain for normal psychology. Actually, I believe that a satisfactory general conception of neuropsychotic disturbances is impossible if one cannot link it with clear assumptions about normal mental processes. During the past weeks I have devoted every free minute to such work; have spent the hours of the night from eleven to two with such fantasizing, interpreting, and guessing, and invariably stopped only when somewhere I came up against an absurdity or when I actually and seriously overworked, so that I had no interest left in my daily medical activities. It will still be a long time before you can ask me about results.[...]

In this text, we find some qualities of FREUD’s commitment to research. He has devoted every free minute to his work, so that he has no interest left in his medical

activity. His scientific interest borrows energy from other interests and reduces the intensity of motivation which has other directions.

In the letter dated May 25, 1895, FREUD says that he is “tormented” by the aim of elaborating a new general conception of mental processes because the current theory are not satisfactory. FREUD feels he is in the “service” of psychology, his “tyrant and consuming passion”. In the *letter dated October 16, 1895* FREUD writes:

[...] I am almost certain that I have solved the riddles of hysteria.... This gives me a kind of faint joy -for having lived some forty years not quite in vain- and yet no genuine satisfaction because the psychological gap in the new knowledge claims my entire interest [...]

What kind of motivation governs the psychological field of FREUD?

His motivation can be defined “objective” because it arises from theoretical thinking and not from egocentric interest

WERTHEIMER (1935), in accordance with the Gestalt theory, says that “*the principle is wrong that asserts that all acts of man are centred by the “ego” (striving for one-sided satisfaction of ego interests) ... “The vectors often arise in actual situations from the requirements of the situation, not from egocentric interest”*”.

### **The turning point in the friendship. Territoriality and Revealing of Secret Hope**

The *letter dated January 1, 1896* is a turning-point (SCHUR, 1972) in the relationship with FLIESS. The first part of the letter is a kind of assessment of what FLIESS has done for FREUD in the past. FREUD expresses his gratitude for FLIESS’ active role.

My dear Wilhelm,

The first leisure time in the New Year belongs to you- to clasp your hand across these few kilometers and to tell you how glad I was to have your recent news from the family room and study. That you have a son- and with him the prospect of other children; as long as the hope for him was still a distant one, I did not want to admit either to you or to myself what you would have missed. Your kind should not die out, my dear friend; the rest of us need people like you too much. How much I owe you: solace, understanding, stimulation in my loneliness, meaning to my life that I gained through you, and finally even health that no one else could have given back to me. It is primarily through your example that intellectually I gained the strength to trust my judgment, even when I am left alone- though not by you- and, like you, to face with lofty humility all the difficulties that the future may bring. For all that, accept my humble thanks! I know that you do not need me as much as I need you, but I also know that I have a secure place in your affection.

The letter continues with the total admiration of FREUD for the “scientific insights” of FLIESS:

Even if you had not said so explicitly, I would have noticed that your confidence in your therapy was finally borne out in your own case as well. Your letters, as again the last one, contain a wealth of scientific insights and intuitions, to which I unfortunately can say no more than that they grip and overpower me.

After this expressions of admiration, FREUD continues:

The thought that both of us are occupied with the same kind of work is by far the most enjoyable one I can conceive at present. I see how, via the detour of medical practice, you are

reaching your first ideal of understanding human beings as a physiologist, just as I most secretly nourish the hope [ *im geheimsten die Hoffnung nähre* ] of arriving, via these same paths, at my initial goal [ *Anfangsziel* ] of philosophy. For that is what I wanted originally, when it was not yet at all clear to me to what end I was in the world.

Analysing this text from an interpersonal point of view, we note that FREUD, at first, describes with joy his relationship with FLIESS ( “..both of us are occupied with the same work...” ). Besides, FREUD points out that each of them has his own territory of research: FLIESS physiology and FREUD philosophy. In other words, FREUD expresses his belonging, as We-part, to the relationship with FLIESS but, at the same time, he feels he must walk alone in a field that nobody has explored. In the *letter dated January 1, 1896*, FREUD makes a clear distinction between physiology and psychology not only as two territories that distinguish his field of research from the field of FLIESS. This distinction applies to his own research: from now on FREUD will elaborate his conceptions in psychological terms and no longer in neurophysiological expressions. FREUD can purify his object of research because he has discovered a new way in psychology: the interpretation of dreams. In the *letter dated June 12, 1900*, FREUD says: “..on July 24, 1895, the secret of dream revealed itself to Dr. Sigm. Freud”

This research-field is defined as “initial goal”, what FREUD “wanted originally”. This “initial goal”, “distant, beckoning goal” ( May 25, 1895 ), is considered by FREUD as his vocation, his existential project as he writes in later essays.

SCHUR has pointed out that FREUD, in the *Appendix* (1935) to his *Autobiography* (1925), uses the same expressions of the *letter dated January 1, 1896*:

After a detour, during all life, in natural science, medicine and psychotherapy, my interest is again turned to the cultural problems, that, in the past, fascinated the young man, when he had not yet come to the world of thinking.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of FREUD’s friendship with FLIESS, FREUD’s “initial goal” was faintly outlined, too vast and connected to intense wishes, that were impossible to fulfil. At this time FREUD is discouraged and appeals to FLIESS. He continues, nevertheless, to persevere in his intense activity. Over time the initial goal is refined, clearly defined even though this involves renouncing some wishes. The refined goal can now rekindle the hope of arriving and the early results increase hope in a virtuous circle. This change is clearly expressed by FREUD in the *letter dated June 9, 1901*:

You have reminded me of that beautiful and difficult time when I had reason to believe that I was very close to the end of my life, it was your confidence that kept me going. I certainly behaved neither very bravely nor very wisely. I was too young, my instincts still too hungry, my curiosity still too great to be able to remain indifferent. But I have always lacked your optimism. [...] So I am more humble now, and more ready to bear what will come. There is no doubt that not all wishes can be fulfilled. Some things for which I fervently strove have become impossible; why should I not have to bury a new hope each year?

FREUD’s hope of arriving at his “initial goal” is an authentic hope, because his expectation of a good future (*bonum arduum futurum* of the medieval philosophy) has not led him to neglect the present. On the contrary, hope stimulates FREUD’s dedication to his clinical and intellectual activity.

<sup>1</sup>There are analogous expression in *The Psychology of Schoolboy* (1915): “It seems to remember that in all those years I had a premonition of a task, at beginning faintly outlined...to contribute to the develop of human science”.

### Summary

Within the theoretical frame of my research on social virtues, the purpose of this contribution is to study hope and dedication to research in FREUD.

Using a phenomenological approach, in FREUD's letters to FLIESS in the years 1887-1891 there is an opposition between the images that FREUD offers of himself and the images of the friend. FREUD builds, through these pictures, interpersonal scenes in which complementary roles are assigned to himself and to his friend.

In several of the letters, FREUD describes his dedication to research: he feels he is in the "service" of psychology, his "tyrant and consuming passion". FREUD's dedication to research is supported by an "objective motivation" in the sense of WERTHEIMER.

The letter dated January 1, 1896 marks a turning point in FREUD's friendship with FLIESS: FREUD makes a clear distinction between physiology and psychology. He distinguishes his field of research from the field of FLIESS and applies this distinction to his own research. At this point, FREUD can reveal his "secretly nourished hope of arriving at his initial goal" [*Anfangsziel*]. This "initial goal", that FREUD describes as his "always distant beckoning goal", what "he wanted originally" is psychology.

FREUD's hope of arriving at his "initial goal" is an authentic hope, because his expectation of a good future (*bonum arduum futurum* of the medieval philosophy) has not led him to neglect the present. On the contrary, hope stimulates FREUD's dedication to his clinical and intellectual activity.

### Zusammenfassung

Innerhalb des theoretischen Rahmens meiner Forschung über die sozialen Tugenden ist es das Ziel dieser Arbeit herauszufinden, welchen Platz Hoffnung und Hingabe zur Forschung in FREUDs Werk haben.

Einen phänomenologischen Zugang benützend kann man in FREUDs Briefen an FLIESS aus den Jahren 1887-1891 einen Unterschied erkennen zwischen FREUDs Bildern von sich selbst und denen des Freundes. FREUD malt durch diese Bilder interpersonelle Szenen, in denen ihm und seinem Freund komplementäre Rollen zugeteilt werden.

In etlichen dieser Briefe beschreibt FREUD seine Hingabe an die Forschung: er fühlt sich als der Psychologie dienend, seinem „Tyrannen“, seiner „herrschenden Leidenschaft“. FREUDs Hingabe an die Forschung wird durch eine „objektive Motivation“ im Sinne WERTHEIMERS unterstützt.

Der mit 1. Januar 1896 datierte Brief stellt einen Wendepunkt in FREUDs Freundschaft mit FLIESS dar: FREUD trifft eine klare Unterscheidung zwischen Physiologie und Psychologie. Er unterscheidet sein Forschungsfeld von jenem von FLIESS und wendet diese Unterscheidung auf seine eigene Forschung an. An diesem Punkt kann FREUD seine „heimlich genährte Hoffnung, mein Anfangsziel zu erreichen“ offenbaren. Dieses „Anfangsziel“, das Freud als sein „von jeher fern winkendes Ziel“ beschreibt, das „was er ursprünglich wollte“, ist Psychologie.

FREUDs Hoffnung sein „Anfangsziel“ zu erreichen ist eine authentische Hoffnung, weil seine Erwartung einer guten Zukunft (*bonum arduum futurum* der mittelalterlichen Philosophie) ihn nicht dazu verleitet, die Gegenwart zu vernachlässigen. Im Gegenteil, die Hoffnung stimulierte FREUDs Hingabe an seine klinische und intellektuelle Tätigkeit.

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