

Discovery of the unconscious

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Chapter 36 “ Modernism and the Discovery of the Unconscious” evaluates the concept of psychoanalysis and how it was developed by Sigmund Freud who is considered the father of that branch of psychology. The idea of the “ unconscious” relates to the attempt for psychoanalysts to try to find out what goes on in the subconscious mind of a person and what influences a person's views and ideas. This has proven to be important in dealing with people's mental and psychiatric health.

The development of psychology as a science did not come as a straightforward process. Nietzsche stated that psychology is the core of the sciences but it was affected by religious, social and cultural prejudices (Watson 1996). And this played a significant role in the development of the concepts that formed the foundations of psychoanalysis. This is because for the generations before the Age of Reformation in Europe, religion and spirituality was used to explain everything. Issues like mental illness was seen as some kind of punishment and these are Biblical images that are related to curses and negativity being connected to people who do bad deeds.

Thus, at the end of the Middle Ages, whilst the natural and physical sciences developed, aspects of the soft sciences like psychology took a longer time to be accepted into mainstream society. Earlier researchers who sought to develop concepts and ideas that were used in the development of the unconscious came up with various approaches. They based their arguments that the self is double, there was the normal mind and the deeper mystical and esoteric self which had been explored by members of Eastern and oriental religions through meditations and other practices. One thing that was universally accepted was that the “ second” self influenced people's

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behaviours and feelings. Great philosophers like Pascal, Hobbes and Edgar Allen Poe mentioned issues relating to the “ second” self which has become known as the subconscious mind.

Some earlier philosophers sought to find linkages between external environmental factors and the mind. Some scientists like Franz Anton Mesmer (1734 – 1814) postulated that just as the appearance of the moon caused the tides to rise, there were bodily fluids in irrational or mad people that also rose during the full moon. This thereby caused the impetus for the concept of “ lunatics” (pertaining to the moon). Other approaches came forward and these were based on issues like hysteria and its logical linkage to female sexuality since most of the victims were female.

As these theories developed, Freud, a medical doctor who abandoned medical practice sought to find methods of analysing and rationalising the actions of mentally challenged people. This was done by trying to find the link between these persons and things in their past lives. The death of Freuds father caused his dreams to change and he concluded that he had so much animosity for his father in his lifetime. Although he became increasingly reclusive, Freud provided lectures on dreams and continued to use some established practices to try to rationalise the subconscious mind. Four main things came up. The first was the free association technique which he used to take submissions and views from his patients. Secondly, he classified the mind into units, super ego, childhood sexuality, repression/conscience and id. Thirdly, he tried to link sexuality with some kinds of mental problems like hysteria. Finally, he developed the concept of psychoanalysis which involved examining symptoms, listing them and trying to formulate abnormal issues and come up with their implications.

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Freud's methods were considered to be a quack science because it was allegedly conducted through pressure and guesswork. This cast a slur on Freud's image as a scientist. However, over the years, Freud's approach was accepted as the main approach of studying and examining psychology.

Work Cited

Watson Peter. "Modernism and the Discovery of the Unconscious" Ideas: A History of Thought and Invention from Fire to Freud. Pp977 – 998. 2009. Print.