



***WILHELM  
STEKEL***

***THE DEPTHS  
OF THE SOUL:  
PSYCHO-  
ANALYTICAL  
STUDIES***

**Wilhelm Stekel**

# **The Depths of the Soul: Psycho-Analytical Studies**

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# PREFACE

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An old proverb says that every parent loves the ugly duckling most. My book, *The Depths of the Soul*, was, from its beginning, my favourite. It was written in the beautiful years in which the first rays of analytic psychognosis penetrated the darkness of the human soul. The reader may find between the lines the exuberant joy of a discoverer. First impressions are the strongest. It is an unfortunate fact that subsequent impressions lack the vividness, the intensity, the warmth, and the colours of the first emotions.

The great success of this book in many foreign languages has given me incalculable pleasure, because it has served to confirm my own blind love. No other book has brought me so many friends from far and near.

I am happy that my friend Dr. Tannenbaum has devoted his knowledge of the art of translation to my favourite child, and I hope that this translation will bring me many new English friends.

THE AUTHOR.

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# THE SECOND WORLD

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To poets it is a familiar world. The ordinary mortal wanders about in its wonderful gardens as if he were blind; he lives in it without knowing it. He does not know where the real world stops and where the fantasy world begins. In

the treadmill of grey day the invisible boundaries between these two worlds escape him.

The second world! What would our life be without it? What a vale of tears would this globe be were it not for this heaven on earth!

The reader probably guesses what I mean. All of us, the poorest and the richest, the smallest and biggest, rarely or never find contentment in our daily routine. We need a second sphere, a richer life, in which we may dream of everything that is denied us in the first sphere. Ibsen called this "The Great Life-Lie." But is it always a lie? Did not Ibsen go too far with this characterization? Who could doubt that the lie is not one of those eternal truths that is so incorporeal that we cannot grasp it, so colourless that we cannot see it, so formless that we cannot describe it.

The child finds its second world in play. The little duties of everyday life are for it only unnecessary interruptions in its play in the second world. Here the child's fantasy has ample room. It is a soldier, king, and robber, cook, and princess; it rides through a wide world on steaming express trains, it battles courageously with dragons and giants, it snatches the treasures of the earth from their guardian dwarfs, and even the stars in the heavens are not beyond its reach in its play. Then comes the powerful dictum called education and snatches the child out of its beloved second world and compels it to give heed to the first world and to learn things necessary to it in its actual life. The child learns of obligations and submits unwillingly to the dictates of its teachers. The first world is made up of duties. The second world knows no duties; it knows only freedom and

unrestrained freedom of thought. This is the root of the subsequent great conflict between feelings and duties. In our childhood we find duties a troublemaker who interferes with our playing; this childish hostility continues with us all through life. Our vocation, the sphere of our duties, can never wholly satisfy us. It is our first world; and even though we seem to accept it wholly, a little remnant of this hostility remains and this constitutes a part of our second world.

Primitive people find their second world in religion. From their primitive fears for the preservation of their lives they flee to their gods, whom they love and fear, punish and reward. The same thing is true of all those simple souls whom culture has not robbed of their religious belief. To them religion is the second world which gives them rich consolation and solace for the pains of the first world. In his book "Seelenkunde," Benedict attributes anarchism to an absence of consolatory life-lies. He says: "Our free-thinking times have stopped up this source and it is the duty of society to create a consoling life-truth, otherwise that psychic inner life which hoards up bitter hatred will not cease."

The more highly developed a person's mind is, the more complicated is his second world. People often express surprise at the fact that so many physicians devote themselves passionately to music or the other fine arts. To me it seems very simple. All day long they see life in its most disagreeable aspects. They see the innocent sufferings, the frightful tortures which they cannot relieve. They look behind the curtain of the "happy family"; they wade through all the repellant and disgusting filthiness of

this petty world, and they would have to become dull and non-partisan animals did they not have their second world.

There is first of all music, which is so dear to all of us because it is an all-embracing mother which absorbs all the emotions of hatred, anger, love, envy, fear, and despair, and fuses them all into one great rhythm, into one great vibrating emotion of pleasure. On its trembling waves the thoughts of the poor tortured human soul are borne out into the darkness of uncomprehended eternity and the eternally incomprehensible.

Then there is literature. We open a book and at once we are transported into the second world of another ego, a world which in a few minutes becomes our own. Happy poets, who have been endowed with the gift of saying what they see, of giving form to what they dream, of freeing themselves from their energies, of abreacting their secret sufferings and of making others happy by opening up to them a second world!

Then there are the thousand and one forms of play; sports and in fact everything that tears us away from our daily grind. What is the lottery ticket to the poor wage-earner but an instalment on the pleasures of the second world, or the purchased right of joyous hope?

There is the devotion to clubs and fraternal associations. The henpecked husband flees wrathfully to his club where he can freely and fearlessly launch all those fine argumentative speeches which he has to suppress at home. Here he can rule, here he can play the role of the independent master. For many thousands the club is nothing more than an opportunity to work off their energies,

to get rid of unused emotions and to play that role which life in the first sphere has denied them.

And thus everyone has his second world. One who does not have it stands on the level of animals, or is the happiest of the happy. By happiness I mean the employment of one's energies in the first sphere. There is a wide gulf between happiness and the consciousness of happiness. The consciousness of happiness is such a fugitive moment that the poorest wage-slave in his second world can be happier than the truly happy who does not happen to be thinking of his happiness. Happiness is like the possession of a beautiful wife. If we are in danger of losing her we tremble. Before we have obtained her and in moments of jealousy we guard her possession as fortune's greatest gift. But in the consciousness of undisturbed possession can we be saying to ourselves every second: I possess her, I am happy? No! no! Happiness is the greatest of all life's lies and one who has had least of it may be the happiest in his second world.

Rose-coloured hope! Queen of all pleasurable emotions, our all-preserving and all-animating goddess! You are the sovereign of the second world and beckon graciously the unhappy weeping mortal who in the first world sees the last traces of you disappear.—

Marital happiness depends very largely upon whether the two spheres of the couple partly overlap or touch each other at a few points. In the first world they must live together. But woe if the second world keeps them asunder! If the two spheres touch each other even only in one point and have only one feeling tangent between them, that will bring them closer together than all the cares and the iron constraint of



the first world. Women know this instinctively, especially during the period of courtship. They enthuse about everything over which the lover enthuses; they love and hate with him and want to share everything with him. Beware, you married women, of destroying your husband's second world! If after the day's toil he soothes his tired nerves in the fateful harmonies of Beethoven, do not disturb his pious mood; enthuse with him, do not carry the petty cares and the vulgar commonplaces of life into the lofty second world. Do you understand me, or must I speak more plainly? Do not let him go alone on his excursions into the second world! A book that he reads alone, understands alone, enjoys alone, may be more dangerous to you than the most ardent glances of a wanton rival. Art must never become the man's second world. No! It must become the child of both the lovers if the beats of their souls are to be harmonious.

True friendship is so lofty, so exalting, because it is dependent upon a congruence of the second spheres. Love is a linking of the first worlds and if it is to be permanent it must journey forth into the second world. Genuine friendship is born in the second world and affects the first world only retroactively.

The second world need not necessarily always be the better world even though to its possessor it may appear to be the more beautiful and the more desirable. Rarely enough it is the supplement to the first world but frequently the contrast and the complement to it. Pious chaste natures may often give their coarser instincts undisturbed expression in the second world. Day-dreams are frequently

the expression of life in the second world. But on careful analysis even the dreams of the night prove to be an unrestricted wallowing in the waters of the second world. Dreams are usually wish fulfillments, but in their lowest levels we find the wishes of the second world which are only rarely altered by unconscious thought processes.

One who dreams during the day flies from the first world into the second. If he fails to find his way back again into the first world his dreams become delusions and we say that he is insane. How delicate are the transitions from sanity to insanity! Inasmuch as all of us live in a second world, all of us are insane at least a few seconds every day. What distinguishes us from the insane is the fact that we hold in our hands the Ariadne thread which leads us out of the labyrinth of thoughts back into the world of duties.

It is incredible how happy an insane person can be. Proudly the paranoid hack writer marches up and down in his pitiful cell. Clothed in rags, he is king and commands empires. His cot is a heavenly couch of eiderdown; his old dilapidated stool is a jewel-bedecked throne. The attendants and the physicians are his servants. And thus in his delusion he is what he would like to be.

The world is only what we think it; the "thing itself" is only a convention of the majority. A cured maniac assured me that the period of his insanity had been the happiest in his life. He saw everything through rose-coloured glasses and the awful succession of wild thoughts was only a succession of intensely pleasurable emotions. Obviously those, on the other hand, who suffer from melancholia and delusions of inferiority are the unhappiest creatures. The

invalid who thinks himself made of glass trembles apprehensively for his life with every step. The unhappy experiences of the first world have become so fixed in his brain that they follow him into the second world and transform even this into their own image.

Every impression in our life affects our soul as if it were made of wax and not one such impression can be lost. That we forget so many impressions is due to the fact that we have repressed them out of our consciousness. Repression is a protective device but at the same time a cause for many serious nervous disorders. A painful impression, an unpleasant experience in the first or the second world, is so altered as to be unrecognizable in consciousness. As a reaction to this serious nervous disturbances, especially hysterical alterations of the psyche, may occur,—conditions which can be cured only by tracing out the dark pathways of the repressed emotions and reintroducing them into consciousness. They are conjured out of the dark realm of the unconscious into the glaring light of day and, lo! the ghosts vanish for all time and with them all those unpleasant symptoms which have so exercised the physician's skill.

If the psychotherapist is to fulfill his difficult task he must acquaint himself with the patient's second world even more thoroughly than with the first. And so, too, a judge ought never to pronounce sentence without first having thoroughly penetrated the second world of the condemned. In that world are the roots of good and evil in human life. In his "Crime and Punishment" Dostoyevsky's genius shows in a masterly way the relationship between the two worlds of a

criminal. And so, too, Tolstoy, in his "Resurrection," in an endeavour to enlist our sympathies in her behalf, describes the second world of a courtesan. It is her life-lie that she makes all the men in her embrace blessed. And in sooth, a spark of truth seems to slumber in this life-lie.

Physicians, judges, lawyers, and ministers ought all to have a thorough training in psychology. Not psychology in the sense of that school philosophy which flourishes in theoretical phraseology and in theoretical facts remote from the green tree of life. Life can learn only from life. One who knows the secrets of the second world will not be surprised by any happenings that the day may bring forth. He will understand the weaknesses of the great and the strength of the small.

He will see virtue and vice coalesce in one great stream whose murky waters will flow on into unknown regions.

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## **GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE**

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Very few people perceive the ridiculous element in the frequent complaints about the wickedness of human nature. "Human beings are ungrateful, false, untrustworthy," and so forth. Yes, but we are all human. We ought, therefore, logically speaking, complain: "We human beings are ungrateful, we are false, we are untrustworthy." But naturally this requires a measure of self-knowledge that is seldom to be found in those bearing the vesture of humanity. Let us make a modest beginning; let us try to look truth in the face. Let us not put ourselves on a pinnacle

above the others till we know how high or low we ourselves stand.

We like to deceive ourselves, and, above all, not to see our faults. That is the most prevalent of all weaknesses. We look upon ourselves not only as cleverer but also as better than all others. We forget our faults so easily and divide them by a hundred, whereas our virtues are ever present to our mind and multiplied by a thousand. To himself everybody is not only the first but also the wisest and the best of mortals. That is why we complain about the ingratitude of our fellow-men, because we have forgotten all the occasions on which we proved ungrateful,—in exactly the same manner in which we manage wholly to forget everything calculated to awaken painful emotions in ourselves.

The complaint about man's ingratitude is as old as the history of man himself. The Bible, ancient legends, the folk-songs, and the proverbs of all nations, ancient and modern, bewail man's ingratitude. It is "the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin." A trait that is so widely distributed, investing the egoist with the glory of supreme worldly wisdom and branding the altruist as half a fool, must be founded deep in the souls of men. It must be an integral part of the circumstances conditioning the life of the individual. It must send its roots down into the unconscious where the brutal instincts of primal man consort with humanity's ripened instincts.

But if ingratitude is a genuinely (psychologically) established fact then we must be able to determine the dark forces that have it in them to suppress the elementary

feeling of gratitude. For even to the most casual observation it is apparent that the first emotion with which we react to a kindness is a warm feeling of recognition, gratitude. So thoroughly are we permeated by it that it seems impossible ever to withhold this gratitude from our benefactor, let alone repay him with ingratitude. The first reaction with which the human soul requites a kind deed is a firm purpose "ever" to be grateful therefor. But purpose, "the slave to memory," is only the puffed sail that drives the boat until the force of the storm and the weakness of the rudder compel a different course. So, too, the intent to prove grateful is driven about fitfully by the winds of life. Of course, not at once. It requires the lapse of a certain latency period ere gratitude is converted to ingratitude. In the beginning the feeling of gratitude reigns supreme. Slowly it grows fainter and fainter, is inaudible for a time, then on suitable occasions is heard again but ever more faintly. After a while, quite unawares, ingratitude has taken its place. All those pleasurable emotions that have accompanied gratitude have been transformed into their opposites: love into hatred, attraction into aversion, interest into indifference, praise into censure, and friendship into hostility.

How does this come about? Where lie the sources of these hidden streams that drive the wheels of our emotions?

We pointed out at the very beginning that everybody regards himself as the wisest, the best, and the most capable of men. Our weaknesses we acknowledge very reluctantly. A losing chess-player is sure to say in ninety-

nine out of a hundred instances: "I did not play this game well." The opponent's superiority is always denied; defeat is attributed to a momentary relaxation of the psychic tension, to carelessness, to some accident, etc. And if an individual is compelled to admit another's superiority, he will do so only with reference to some one point. He will always make reservations leaving himself some sphere of activity in which he is king. That constitutes a man's secret pride: the sphere in which he thinks he excels all others. This self-consciousness, this exaggerated apperception of the ego is a natural basis of life, a protective device of the soul which makes life bearable, which makes it easier to bear our fardels and endure the pricks of destiny, and which compensates us for the world's inadequate recognition of us and for the failure of our efforts which must inevitably come short of our intentions. "The paranoid delusion of the normal human being," as Philip Frey aptly named it, is really the individual's "fixed idea" which proves him to be in a certain sense pathologic and justifies the opinion that the whole world is a great madhouse.

This exaggerated self-consciousness manifests itself with pathological intensity especially in these times. The smaller the individual's share in the real affairs of the world is, the more must his fantasy achieve so as to magnify this function and have it appear as something of vital importance. In those cases in which individuality is crushed, a hypertrophied delusion of greatness is developed. Everyone thinks himself important, everyone is indispensable, everyone thinks himself an important power in the play and interplay of forces. Our era has created the

type of the “self-made man.” Everyone is willing to be indebted only to himself, his qualifications, his power of endurance, his energy, his individual efforts for his achievements. “By his own efforts”—so runs the much-abused phrase,—does each one want to get to the top.

All want it—but how few really make it come true! Who can know to-day what is his own and what another’s? Who knows how much he had to take before he was able to give anything? But no one wants to stop for an accounting. Each one wants to owe everything to himself.

Something of this is in every one of us. And this brings us to the deepest root of ingratitude. The feeling of being indebted to another clashes with our self-confidence; the unpleasant truth contrasts sharply with the normal’s deep-rooted delusions of greatness. In this conflict of emotions there is only an either ... or. *Either* once for all to renounce this exaggerated self-consciousness, *or* to forget the occasion for gratitude, to repress this painful memory, to let the ulcerous wound on the proud body of the “ego” heal to a scar. (The exceptions that prove the rule in this matter, too, we shall consider later.)

The first road that assures us eternal gratitude is chosen only by those who by the “bludgeonings of fate” have been wholly stunned, who are life-weary,—feel themselves goaded to death,—the wholly crushed. These unfortunates no longer need the play of their hidden psychic forces. The need of the body has strangled the cry of the soul. These are grateful, grateful from conviction, grateful from necessity. Their dreams are veritable orgies of benefactions. For them the benefactor is the deliverer from bodily



torment. They see “dead souls” whom everyone who so desires may purchase.

But one who has not for ever renounced the fulfillment of his inmost longings will rarely be capable of gratitude. His ego resents being indebted to anyone but himself. But this ego will never permit itself to face the naked brutal fact of its ingratitude. It seeks for causes and motives, for justification. In this case the proverb again proves true: “seek and you shall find,” the kindness is scrutinised from every side till a little point is found which reveals a bit of calculating egoism from which the kindness takes on a business aspect. And what human action does not permit of many interpretations? Our self-preservation impulse then chooses the interpretation that suits us best, the interpretation that relieves us of the oppressive feeling of gratitude. Such is the first step in the transformation of gratitude into ingratitude. Rarely does the matter rest there. Usually it requires also a transformation of the emotion into its opposite ere the galling feeling of gratitude can be eradicated. What execrable wretches would we not appear even to ourselves if we could not work out reasons for the changes in our feelings? And so we convert the good deed into a bad one; if possible, we discover stains and blots in our benefactor’s present life or pursuits that can blacken the spotlessness of his past. Not until we have done this are we free from the oppressive feeling of gratitude. Thus, with no further reason for being grateful left, our personal pride survives unshaken, the bowed ego again stands proudly erect.

This explanation of the psychology of ingratitude draws the veil from a series of remarkable phenomena which we pass by in our daily life without regard or understanding. We shall cite only a few instances from the many at our disposal: the ingratitude of servants and all subordinates,—a species of ingratitude that is so obvious that if an exception occurs the whole world proclaims it as an exception; the ingratitude of pupils to the teacher to whom they owe all (this explains the common phenomenon that pupils belittle the scientific attainments of the teacher,—a phenomenon that may almost be designated “the pupil’s neurosis”); the deep hatred with which artists regard those of their predecessors to whom they are most indebted; the tragedy of the distinguished sons whose fathers paved the way for them; the great injustice of invalids towards the physicians to whom they owe their lives; the historic ingratitude of nations to their great leaders and benefactors; the stubborn ignoring of the living great ones and the measureless overvaluation of the dead; the perpetual opposition to whatever administration may be in power, whence is derived a fragment of the psychology of discontent; the quite frequent transformation of a friendship into its opposite.

Verily, one who counts upon gratitude is singularly deficient in knowledge both of human nature and of his own nature. In this connection, we must consider also the fact that owing to an excessive overvaluation of the performance of our most obvious duties, we demand gratitude even when there is no reason for expecting it. I refer to only one example: Is there not an obvious obligation