

## Freud's Idea of Sublimation

### Introduction

IN HIS SHORT GLOSSARY of Freudian ideas and concepts Nick Rennison defines *sublimation* in this way:

Sublimation—the unconscious mental process by which instinctual, socially unacceptable energy or libido is transferred to a non-instinctual, socially acceptable activity, e.g., Freud believed that the sublimation of unsatisfied libido was behind the creation of great art and literature.<sup>1</sup>

Rennison describes *libido* in this way:

Libido—in psychoanalytic theory, the sexual drive and energy which is directed towards individuals and objects in the outside world. Neurotic and other psychiatric illnesses are often the result of libido that is inappropriately directed.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter we will present Freud's concept of sublimation, focusing on his presentation of the concept in several of his writings, including

1. Rennison, *Freud & Psychoanalysis*, 89.
2. *Ibid.*, 87.

*Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, which he delivered at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1909.<sup>3</sup>

### The Concept of Sublimation

Freud spoke about sublimation in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, which he presented in two successive winter terms at the University of Vienna (1915 and 1916). In the first lecture he commented on the fact that psychoanalysis has been criticized for asserting that instinctual impulses that must be described as sexual, in both the wider and narrower sense of the word, play an extremely large role in the causation of neuroses. But, Freud noted, psychoanalysis has emphasized that these same sexual impulses also make contributions “to the highest cultural, artistic and social creations of the human spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

Freud also notes that the second assertion has been subject to even greater criticism than the first, and suggests that the reason for this is that psychoanalysis holds that civilization has been created under the pressure of the exigencies of life at the cost of the instincts. Moreover, psychoanalysts believe that, because civilization is constantly being recreated, “each individual who makes a fresh entry into human society repeats this sacrifice of instinctual satisfaction for the benefit of the whole community.”<sup>5</sup> While various instinctual forces are subject to this sacrifice, among them the sexual impulses play an important role. In this process, “they are sublimated—that is to say, they are diverted from their sexual aims and directed to others that are socially higher and no longer sexual.”<sup>6</sup>

The problem is that this arrangement is unstable. The sexual instincts are “imperfectly tamed,” and so in every individual who is supposed to join in the work of civilization there is the risk that his or her sexual instincts may refuse to be put to that use. From the perspective of society, no greater threat to its civilization could arise than if the sexual instincts were to be liberated and returned to their original aims, and for this reason society “does not wish to be reminded of this precarious portion of its foundations.”<sup>7</sup> So, because psychoanalysis points out that this

3. Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*.

4. Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 26.

5. *Ibid.*, 27.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

process is going on all the time and that every individual is subject to it, psychoanalysis is subjected to a great deal of antipathy.

Freud returns to the topic of sublimation in his twenty-third lecture on the paths to the formation of neurotic symptoms. At the very end of the lecture, he cites the case of the artist who, typically an introvert, has a natural tendency toward neurosis. The artist is possessed by powerful instinctual needs, including desires for honor, power, wealth, fame, and sex, but he is not able to achieve these satisfactions. So he turns away from reality to the life of fantasy and transfers all his libido to the wishful constructions of his fantasies. This path could lead to neurosis. But if his constitution includes a "strong capacity for sublimation," this could enable him to shape some particular material until it has become a faithful image of his fantasy and yield him a great deal of pleasure. The artist also makes it possible for others to derive a similar pleasure that outweighs the fact that their own instinctual desires have been repressed and are no longer accessible to them. Freud concludes the lecture with the observation that when this occurs the artist earns the gratitude and admiration of others and thereby achieves *through* his fantasy what he had originally achieved only *in* his fantasy—that is, through sublimation he subsequently achieves honor, power, wealth, fame, and sex.<sup>8</sup>

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, originally published in 1921, Freud makes a brief reference to sublimation that has bearing on the fact that some sublimations are religious in nature. His observation occurs in the postscript. He notes that a psychology that will not or cannot penetrate the depths of what is repressed considers affectionate emotional ties to be the expression of forces that have no sexual aims in spite of the fact that they are actually derived from such aims. In contrast, psychoanalysis recognizes that these affectionate emotional ties have been diverted from their original sexual aims. Freud confesses that it is difficult to describe this diversion of aims, but we know that the instincts

8. *Ibid.*, 467–68. Later, in his lecture on transference, Freud comments briefly on the role that sublimation may play in the relationship between the analyst and the patient, and notes that it relates to the patient's wish to be loved by the analyst. He suggests that some women "succeed in sublimating this transference" of feelings onto the doctor and "in molding it till it achieves a kind of viability" whereas other women continue to express these transference-related feelings in their "rude, original, and for the most part, impossible form" (*ibid.*, 550). In his following lecture on analytic therapy, Freud indicates that, through interpretation, which transforms what is unconscious into what is conscious, the ego becomes more conciliatory toward the libido and allows it to be expressed in a sublimated form.

preserve some of their original sexual aims. Thus, “an affectionate devotee, even a friend or an admirer, desires the physical proximity and the sight of the person who is now loved only in the ‘Pauline’ sense.”<sup>9</sup>

Freud suggests that we may recognize in this diversion of aim the “beginning of the *sublimation* of the sexual instincts,” or, if we choose, we may wish to “fix the limits of sublimation at some more distant point.”<sup>10</sup> He implies here that there is some flexibility in the very idea or concept of sublimation, that some may think of it as occurring at the point when the original sexual aim is relinquished while others may want to reserve the term *sublimation* for a later stage in the process (i.e., when something of discernible social value is realized or achieved). In either case, what is noteworthy here is that Freud refers to love in the “Pauline” sense, that is, a form of expression of love that is spiritual in nature. He wants to suggest that such spiritual expressions of love have their origins in sexual desires that have undergone repression.<sup>11</sup>

In light of his observation in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* that this diversion of sexual aims is often unstable, it is interesting that Freud goes on to cite an example provided by his friend Oskar Pfister, a Swiss pastor who became an early convert to psychoanalytic ways of thinking, in Pfister’s book titled *Frömmigkeit des Graften von Zinzendorf*: “of how easily even an intense religious tie can revert to ardent sexual excitement.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Freud points out that it is also very

9. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 91.

10. *Ibid.* (italics original).

11. We are reminded here of cases in which pastors have used the word *love* in a spiritual sense, only to have it construed as having sexual connotations. See Capps, *Giving Counsel*, 235. Freud’s suggestion that spiritual expressions of love have their origins in sexual desires that have undergone repression suggests that there are grounds for such construals, however implausible this may seem.

12. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 92. Pfister’s best-known book is *Christianity and Fear*. Freud returns later in the postscript to his earlier discussion (in chapter 5) of the church and the army (in which he suggested that both are “artificial groups” in the sense that “an external force is employed to prevent them from disintegrating and to check alterations in their structure” [*Group Psychology*, 32]). He notes that the Roman Catholic Church had “the best of motives for recommending its followers to remain unmarried and for imposing celibacy upon its priests; but falling in love has often driven even priests to leave the Church” [*ibid.*, 94–95]. Freud adds that, in the same way, love for women by men “breaks through the group ties of race, of national divisions, and of the social class system, and it thus produces important effects as a factor in civilization,” and that “homosexual love is far more compatible with group ties, even when it takes the shape of uninhibited sexual impulses—a remarkable fact, the explanation of which might carry us far” [*ibid.*, 95].

usual for sexual impulses, “short-lived in themselves, to be transformed into a lasting and purely affectionate tie; and the consolidation of a passionate love marriage rests to a large extent upon this process.”<sup>13</sup>

If Freud emphasizes in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* the sublimation of instinctual desires in the form of affectionate emotional ties, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, originally published in 1930, he focuses on the sublimation of instinctual desires in the form of work. He acknowledges that work is often experienced as drudgery and that we do not look upon it as a source of pleasure. In fact, we tend to think of pleasures as experiences that occur only when we are not working. Yet, he cites the technique of shifting instinctual aims “in such a way that they cannot come up against the frustrations from the external world,” and here “sublimation of the instincts lends its assistance.”<sup>14</sup> What this involves is heightening the yield of pleasure from the sources of physical and intellectual work. Freud thinks in this regard of “an artist’s joy in creating, in giving his fantasies body, or a scientist’s in solving problems or discovering truths,” and notes that although we may not be able to account fully for this sense of pleasure, it seems “finer and higher” than the pleasures derived from “the sating of crude and primary instinctual impulses.”<sup>15</sup>

In a footnote, he suggests that no other technique for the conduct of life “attaches the individual so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work,” for one’s work at least gives one “a secure place in a portion of reality, in the human community.”<sup>16</sup> Freud adds that professional activity “is a source of special satisfaction if it is a freely chosen one—if, that is to say, by means of sublimation, it makes possible the use of existing inclinations, of persisting or constitutionally reinforced instinctual impulses.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, work is not highly prized as a path of happiness, and few of us strive after it as we do other possibilities of satisfaction. In fact, “the great majority of people only work under the stress of necessity, and this natural human aversion to work raises most difficult social problems.”<sup>18</sup>

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13. Ibid.

14. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 29.

15. Ibid., 30.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Freud considers work to be a sublimation of sexual impulses that are otherwise socially unacceptable. Given the examples of sublimation he offers in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* and in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, it is also noteworthy that when he was asked what he thought a normal person should be able to do well, he replied “to love and to work.”<sup>19</sup>

Finally, as his allusion to “Pauline” love suggests, some sublimations have religious associations and meanings. This is not surprising, for religion, after all, is an expression of civilization itself. It is also deeply implicated in other expressions of civilization, such as the ones that Freud himself discusses in the writings we have considered here (i.e., art and the sociopolitical order). It is especially noteworthy in this case that in *Moses and Monotheism*, which was published after his death (in 1939), Freud suggests that “the special peculiarities of a monotheistic religion borrowed by Egypt” shaped the character of the Jewish people “through the disdaining of magic and mysticism and encouraging them to progress in spirituality and sublimation.”<sup>20</sup>

Because most scholars tend to believe that Freud was irreligious, they have overlooked the fact that he recognized that sublimations may take a religious form. This does not mean, of course, that he would endorse all religious sublimations, or that we should do so. In fact, in Freud’s case history of a Russian patient of his, Sergei Pankejeff, he notes that when he was a young boy Sergei’s inappropriate sexual instincts were sublimated through the efforts of his mother and his nurse, who introduced him to the sacred stories of the Christian religion. As Freud puts it, “Religion did its work for this hard-pressed child—by the combination which it afforded the believer of satisfaction, of sublimation, of diversion from sensual processes to purely spiritual ones, and of access to social relationships.”<sup>21</sup>

However, in Freud’s view, the sublimation *was* successful for Sergei Pankejeff in the educational sense, but it was ineffectual as far as Sergei’s obsessional neurosis was concerned. Moreover, “a lasting disadvantage” resulted from the fact that the sublimation process “had led to a victory for the faith of piety over the rebelliousness of critical research.”<sup>22</sup> Sup-

19. See Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 136.

20. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 108–9.

21. Freud, *History of an Infantile Neurosis*, 115.

22. *Ibid.*, 70.

porting this conclusion was the fact that Sergei's "intellectual activity remained seriously impaired," for "he developed no zeal for learning."<sup>23</sup> Freud also notes that Pankejeff's homosexual feelings toward his father were repressed through his identification with Christ and the divine Father, and that this kept the sexual impulse directed toward its original aim "and withdrew it from all the sublimations to which it is susceptible in other circumstances."<sup>24</sup> It was only when this impulse was liberated through psychoanalysis years later that it could be redirected toward other social interests.

Having surveyed various writings of Freud's on sublimation, we would now like to turn to his *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. As we noted above, these lectures were delivered in 1909 at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts.

### Freud's Visit to America

Accompanied by Carl G. Jung and Sandor Ferenczi, Freud made a "historic expedition" to America in 1909.<sup>25</sup> Freud was fifty-three years old when the three colleagues made the trip; Jung was thirty-four; and Ferenczi was thirty-five. The occasion was the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Clark University. At the insistence of G. Stanley Hall, its first president, Clark University was established as a graduate school designed for the training of scientists, scholars, and teachers, and for twelve years it had remained an exclusively graduate-level institution. However, when its founder, Jonas Clark, died, an undergraduate college was added because he had explicitly provided for it in his will and designated that it not be under Hall's administration.<sup>26</sup>

Hall, a psychologist, was deeply invested in the study of children and had recently published his two-volume work on adolescence.<sup>27</sup> Previously, he had written articles on moral and religious education.<sup>28</sup> Later

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Rosenzweig, *Historic Expedition to America*.

26. Ibid., 19.

27. Hall, *Adolescence*.

28. Hall, "Moral and Religious Training of Children"; Hall, "Religious Content of the Child-Mind"; and Hall, "Some Fundamental Principles of Sunday School and Bible Teaching."

he wrote a book on Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Hall had formulated a plan for a Children's Institute at Clark University, and his invitation to Freud to participate in the twentieth-anniversary celebration was part of an attempt to enlist Freud in furthering his aims in establishing the Children's Institute. As Saul Rosenzweig points out, "He saw Freud as a developmental psychologist whose views on early childhood, including sexuality and the unconscious, were crucial for understanding the child below the surface of everyday observation."<sup>30</sup> Freud declined Hall's first invitation on the grounds that he could not afford to lose three weeks of private practice. He accepted the second invitation when Hall nearly doubled the honorarium intended to cover travel expenses, indicated that Freud would receive an honorary degree, and stated that the conference would be moved from July to September, which would not interfere with Freud's private practice. Rosenzweig suggests that Jung was invited to replace a previously invited lecturer on pedagogy and that Freud had played a role in arranging for his invitation.<sup>31</sup>

Twenty-nine lecturers participated in the conference (eight of whom were in the behavioral sciences), and all were awarded honorary degrees. Freud delivered five lectures, and Jung delivered three. Freud invited Ferenczi to accompany him to the United States, but he did not present any lectures. William James, the Harvard professor in philosophy and psychology and author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,<sup>32</sup> arrived in Worcester on Thursday afternoon. He attended Jung's lecture (which was on word association) and Freud's lecture (which was on the interpretation of dreams) on Friday morning. Later that day, James invited Freud to walk with him to the Union Depot, where James would take the train for Boston. In his autobiographical study, Freud describes what happened:

I shall never forget one little scene that occurred as we were on a walk together. He stopped suddenly, handed me a bag he was carrying and asked me to walk on, saying that he would catch me up as soon as he had got through an attack of angina pectoris which was just coming on. He died of that disease a year later;

29. Hall, *Jesus, the Christ, in the Light of Psychology*.

30. Rosenzweig, *Historic Expedition to America*, 23.

31. *Ibid.*, 36–37.

32. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.



and I have always wished that I might be as fearless as he was in the face of approaching death.<sup>33</sup>

Although Freud took James's self-diagnosis at face value, Rosenzweig suggests that James may have suffered a brief lapse of consciousness (*petit mal*) prompted by the fact that Freud had lectured on dreams, for James had mentioned having had several lapses in consciousness in recent months, one of which had to do with dreams.<sup>34</sup> In any event, James wrote in a letter to a friend that he had gone to the conference "in order to see what Freud was like," and added that he hoped "Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to their utmost limits, so that we may learn what they are," for "they can't fail to throw light on human nature."<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the impression that Freud made on James personally was that of "a man obsessed with fixed ideas"; and "I can make nothing in my own case with his dream theories, and obviously 'symbolism' is a most dangerous method."<sup>36</sup>

Another significant person who attended the conference was James Jackson Putnam. Like Freud's, his medical training was in neurology and he was one of the country's foremost pioneers in the Boston psychotherapeutic movement. He was also noted for his communal activism: he worked with charities and led campaigns against the use of neurologically damaging substances in common building materials.<sup>37</sup> Putnam's book *Human Motives*, published in 1915, contains chapters on the psychoanalytic movement and its educational value.<sup>38</sup> This is what Freud wrote about him in his autobiographical study:

We also met James J. Putnam there, the Harvard neurologist, who in spite of his age [he was sixty-two years old] was an enthusiastic supporter of psychoanalysis and threw the whole weight of a personality that was universally respected into the defense of the cultural value of analysis and the purity of its aims. He was an estimable man, in whom, as a reaction against a predisposition to obsessional neurosis, an ethical bias predominated; and the only thing in him that we would regret was his inclination to

33. Freud, *Autobiographical Study*, 99.

34. Rosenzweig, *Historic Expedition to America*, 177; James, "Suggestion about Mysticism."

35. Rosenzweig, *Historic Expedition to America*, 174.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Prochnik, *Putnam Camp*, 6.

38. Putnam, *Human Motives*, 67–133.

attach psychoanalysis to a particular philosophical system and to make it the servant of moral aims.<sup>39</sup>

Putnam invited Freud, Jung, and Ferenczi to a three-day sojourn at his camp in the Adirondacks following the conference. The camp had been purchased in 1876 by Putnam and his brother Charles, William James, and Henry Bowditch, a physiology professor at Harvard.

In his book on Putnam's camp, George Prochnik provides a full account of this three-day sojourn and of Putnam's work in behalf of psychoanalysis in America. He emphasizes that Putnam was profoundly impressed by Freud's presentation of the idea of sublimation in his fifth and closing lecture, and imagines that Putnam may well have steered the conversation toward this topic during the sojourn at Putnam Camp.<sup>40</sup> In any event, the subject of sublimation was a very prominent feature of their correspondence over the next several years (1909–1916). We will turn to this correspondence later in the chapter. But here we would simply note that when Freud learned of Putnam's death in 1918, he said that Putnam "was a pillar of psychoanalysis in his country" and added that, due to the war which had recently ended, he had received no news from America the past two years and now, he lamented, the news was that he had lost "dear old Putnam."<sup>41</sup>

### Freud's Presentation of His Concept of Sublimation

Because his lectures were presented extemporaneously in German, Freud wrote them out after his return to Vienna, largely at the instigation of G. Stanley Hall, who was planning to have them translated for publication in the *American Journal of Psychology*, of which he was founder and editor. He wanted to devote a single issue to Freud. In the course of writing the lectures, Freud made extensive changes, moving large amounts of material from one lecture to another. However, the general theme of the lectures was "On Psychoanalysis" and the topics of the individual lectures

39. Freud, *Autobiographical Study*, 98–99.

40. Prochnik, *Putnam Camp*, 37.

41. Prochnik, *Putnam Camp*, 375. Another early supporter of Freud was Isador H. Coriat, a psychiatrist in Boston. After Putnam's death he was the only practicing psychoanalyst in Boston. His views on sublimation as a goal of psychoanalysis were very similar to Freud's. He wrote two books on psychoanalysis, *What is Psychoanalysis?* and *Repressed Emotions* (see Capps and Carlin, "Sublimation and Symbolization").

are as follows: (1) Beginnings: Breuer and the treatment of hysteria; (2) Methods of therapy: resistance and repression; (3) Free association and determinism; humor and slips; the interpretation of dreams; (4) Sexuality in normal development and in neurosis; and (5) Transference, sublimation, and culture.<sup>42</sup>

In the fifth lecture, Freud began by alluding to the topic of the previous lecture, in which he had discussed “infantile sexuality and the tracing back of neurotic symptoms to erotic instinctual components.”<sup>43</sup> He went on:

The deeper you penetrate into the pathogenesis of nervous illness, the more you will find revealed the connection between the neuroses and other productions of the human mind, including the most valuable. You will be taught that we humans, with the high standards of our civilization and under the pressure of our internal repressions, find reality unsatisfying quite generally, and for that reason entertain a life of fantasy in which we like to make up for the insufficiencies of reality by the production of wish-fulfillments.<sup>44</sup>

Freud notes that the “energetic and successful man is one who succeeds by his efforts in turning his wishful fantasies into reality,” but where this effort fails “as a result of the resistances of the external world and of the subject’s own weakness, he begins to turn away from reality and withdraws into his more satisfying world of fantasy, the content of which is transformed into symptoms should he fall ill.”<sup>45</sup>

However, in certain favorable circumstances “it remains possible for him to find another path leading from these fantasies to reality, instead

42. Rosenzweig, *Historic Expedition to America*, 393. Regarding the first lecture, at the time Breuer and Freud collaborated on their book *Studies on Hysteria*, published in 1893, Breuer (1842–1925) had a large practice in Vienna and a reputation as a man of scientific attainments, while Freud (1856–1939) was just qualifying as a doctor. However, the two men had been friends for some years. See Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*. As for lectures 3 and 4, as noted earlier, William James’s attendance at the fourth lecture prompted him to make comments about Freud’s views on dream interpretation. In the published lectures, Freud moved this material to the third lecture. This relocation also explains why James had nothing to say about Freud’s views on sexuality.

43. Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 54.

44. *Ibid.*, 55.

45. *Ibid.*

of becoming permanently estranged from it by regressing to infancy.”<sup>46</sup> For example:

If a person who is at loggerheads with reality possesses an *artistic gift* (a thing that is still a psychological mystery to us), he can transform his fantasies into artistic creations instead of into symptoms. In this manner he can escape the doom of neurosis and by this roundabout path regain his contact with reality.<sup>47</sup>

By this “roundabout path” one regains one’s relation to reality. But “If there is persistent rebellion against the real world and if this precious gift is absent or insufficient, it is almost inevitable that the libido, keeping to the sources of the fantasies, will follow the path of regression, and will revive infantile wishes and end in neurosis.”<sup>48</sup> Freud adds that today “neurosis takes the place of monasteries which used to be the refuge of all whom life had disappointed or who felt too weak to face it.”<sup>49</sup>

Freud then notes that the chief result of psychoanalytic investigation of neurotics is that “neuroses have no psychic content that is peculiar to them and that might not equally be found in healthy persons.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, whether the “struggle between the conflicting forces ends in health, in neurosis, or in a countervailing superiority of achievement “depends on *quantitative* considerations, on the relative strength of the conflicting forces.”<sup>51</sup>

This conclusion leads to a discussion of the role that transference plays in the psychoanalysis of a neurotic patient. Freud introduces the notion of transference because it proves the power of the sexual drive in neuroses. Transference, he explains, occurs when the patient “directs toward the physician a degree of affectionate feeling (mingled, often enough, with hostility) which is based on no real relation between them and which—as is shown by every detail of its emergence—can only be traced back to old wishful fantasies of the patient’s which have become unconscious.”<sup>52</sup> Only by reexperiencing these feelings in the therapeutic relationship does the patient become convinced of the existence and the

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 55–56. Here Freud cites Otto Rank’s *Der Künstler*.

48. Ibid., 56.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., 56–57.

power of these unconscious sexual impulses. It is also important to note that the analytic process itself does not create this transference (transference arises spontaneously in all human relationships), and what makes the psychoanalytic process different is that it reveals this transference “to consciousness and gains control of it in order to guide psychical processes towards the desired goal.”<sup>53</sup>

A brief discussion of the allegation that psychoanalysis does more harm than good follows. Freud addresses the concern that the patient’s “cultural acquisitions” will be destroyed by the release of his repressed impulses. This concern, he argues, fails to take account “of what our experiences have taught us with certainty—namely that the mental and somatic power of a wishful impulse, when once its repression has failed, is far stronger if it is unconscious than if it is conscious, so that to make it conscious can only be to weaken it.”<sup>54</sup> He adds, “An unconscious wish cannot be influenced and is independent of all opposing tendencies, whereas a conscious one can be inhibited by everything that is similarly conscious and stands in opposition to it. Psychoanalytic work, therefore, provides a better substitute for unsuccessful repression precisely by serving the interests of the highest and most valued endeavors.”<sup>55</sup>

### The Fate of Liberated Unconscious Wishes

This declaration brings Freud to the issue of sublimation, the concluding topic of the lecture and of the whole lecture series on psychoanalysis. He introduces the topic of sublimation by asking two related questions: “What, then, becomes of the unconscious wishes which have been set free by psycho-analysis?” And, “Along what paths do we succeed in making them harmless to the subject’s life?”<sup>56</sup> He suggests that there are “several such paths” that these unconscious wishes, now freed by psychoanalysis, may take:

The most frequent outcome is that, while the work is actually going on, these wishes are destroyed by the rational mental activity of the better impulses that are opposed to them. *Repression* is replaced by a *condemning judgment* carried out along the best

53. Ibid., 57.

54. Ibid., 59.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

lines. That is possible because what we have to get rid of is to a great extent only the consequences arising from earlier stages of the ego's development.<sup>57</sup>

In the past, the patient was able only to repress “the unserviceable instinct because he himself was at that time imperfectly organized and feeble.” But now, “in his present maturity and strength, he will perhaps be able to master what is hostile to him with complete success.”<sup>58</sup>

A second outcome of the work of psychoanalysis is that it becomes possible for the unconscious instincts that have been uncovered by psychoanalysis to be “employed for the useful purposes which they would have found earlier if development had not been interrupted.”<sup>59</sup> Freud explains,

For the extirpation of the infantile wishful impulses is by no means the ideal aim of development. Owing to their repressions, neurotics have sacrificed many sources of mental energy whose contributions would have been of great value in the formation of their character and in the activity of life. We know of a far more expedient process of development, called “*sublimation*,” in which the energy of the infantile wishful impulses is not cut off but remains ready for use—the unserviceable aim of the various impulses being replaced by one that is higher, and perhaps no longer sexual.<sup>60</sup>

Freud adds that it is the components of the *sexual* instincts that are especially accessible to “this kind of sublimation, for exchanging their sexual aim for another one which is comparatively remote and socially valuable.”<sup>61</sup> In fact, “it is probably that we owe our highest cultural successes to the contributions of energy made in this way to our mental functions. Premature repression makes the sublimation of the repressed instinct impossible; when the repression is lifted, the path to sublimation becomes free once more.”<sup>62</sup>

There is, however, a third possible outcome of the work of psychoanalysis. Freud explains,

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 59–60.

59. Ibid., 60.

60. Ibid. (*italics original*).

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

A certain portion of the repressed libidinal impulses has a claim to direct satisfaction and ought to find it in life. Our civilized standards make life too difficult for the majority of human organizations. Those standards consequently encourage the retreat from reality and the generating of neuroses, without achieving any surplus of cultural gain by this excess of sexual repression. We ought not to exalt ourselves so high as completely to neglect what was originally animal in our nature. Nor should we forget that the satisfaction of the individual's happiness cannot be erased from among the aims of our civilization.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, we need to view the second outcome of psychoanalysis—that of *sublimation*—with a degree of caution:

The plasticity of the components of sexuality, shown by their capacity for sublimation, may indeed offer a great temptation to strive for still greater cultural achievements by still further sublimation. But, just as we do not count on our machines converting more than a certain fraction of the heat consumed into useful mechanical work, we ought not to seek to alienate the whole amount of the energy of the sexual instinct from its proper ends. We cannot succeed in doing so; and if the restriction upon sexuality were to be carried too far it would inevitably bring with it all the evils of soil-exhaustion.<sup>64</sup>

Noting that his audience may regard this warning as an exaggeration, he “ventures on an indirect picture of my conviction” by relating an old story and leaving to them to make use of it as they choose. He continues:

German literature is familiar with a little town called Schilda, to whose inhabitants clever tricks of every possible sort are attributed. The citizens of Schilda, so we are told, possessed a horse with whose feats of strength they were highly pleased and against which they had only one objection—that it consumed such a large quantity of expensive oats. They determined to break it of this bad habit very gently by reducing its ration by a few stalks every day, till they had accustomed it to complete abstinence. For a time things went excellently: the horse was weaned to the point of eating only one stalk a day, and on the succeeding day it was at length to work without any oats at all. On the morning of

63. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

64. *Ibid.*, 61.

that day the spiteful animal was found dead; and the citizens of Schilda could not make out what it had died of.<sup>65</sup>

Freud comments: “We should be inclined to think that the horse was starved and that no work at all could be expected of an animal without a certain modicum of oats.”<sup>66</sup> And with this observation he concluded his lecture, thanking his audience “for your invitation and for the attention with which you have listened to me.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, his last official words to his American audience were ones that cautioned against the temptation “to strive for still greater cultural achievements by still further sublimation.”<sup>68</sup>

### Sublimation and Psychoanalytic Method

As we noted earlier, Freud and Putnam corresponded on a regular basis over the next seven years. In the first of these letters (dated November 17, 1909) Putnam began by stating that Freud’s “visit to America was of deep significance to me,” and then went on to say that although he had begun to use psychoanalytic methods in his therapeutic work, he felt that the “psychoanalytic method needs to be supplemented by methods which seek to hold up before the patient some goal toward which he [or she] may strive.”<sup>69</sup> For example,

I am now treating a lady of much intelligence—a school-teacher—who is a great sufferer from morbid self-consciousness and blushing. I am making good headway and tracing out the origin of these symptoms, but find that I have also to meet the difficulty that she has lost all interest in life and living. The current theories of the universe do not bring her any satisfaction, her work bores her, and she wishes only to “get out.” I feel that it ought to be possible for us to work up ways of dealing systematically with such a state of mind as this. Perhaps you would say and perhaps it is true, that a complete psychoanalysis accomplishes this result by discovering the causes for the state of general discouragement but if that is so I should like to see that side of the matter developed more fully.<sup>70</sup>

65. *Ibid.*, 61–62.

66. *Ibid.*, 62.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. Hale, *James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis*, 87.

70. *Ibid.*



In his response (dated December 5, 1909) Freud wrote that he thought Putnam's "complaint that we are not able to compensate our neurotic patients for giving up their illness is quite justified."<sup>71</sup> On the other hand,

It seems to me that this is not the fault of therapy but rather of social institutions. What would you have us do when a woman complains about her thwarted life; when, with youth gone, she notices that she has been deprived of the joy of loving for merely conventional reasons? She is quite right, and we stand helpless before her, for we cannot make her young again. But the recognition of our therapeutic limitations reinforces our determination to change other social factors so that men and women shall no longer be forced into hopeless situations.<sup>72</sup>

Freud goes on to suggest that our "therapeutic impotence" indicates the need for the prevention of the neuroses, but, in any case, "Where the conditions are not so hopeless sublimation creates new goals as soon as the repressions are lifted."<sup>73</sup> Thus, Freud responded to Putnam's view that psychoanalytic method needs to be supplemented by methods that seek to hold up before the patient "some goal toward which he may strive" with the observation that the sublimation itself will create its own goals.

As their correspondence continued, a central theme emerged: Whenever Putnam proposed that the sublimation of sexual instincts should be an integral part of psychoanalytic treatment, Freud would express his own refusal to take this step, preferring instead to limit psychoanalysis to overcoming the repression of sexual instincts and leaving patients to develop their own sublimations.<sup>74</sup>

71. *Ibid.*, 90.

72. *Ibid.*, 90–91.

73. *Ibid.*, 91.

74. In *Freud and the Americans*, Nathan Hale notes, "As Freud argued, one might initiate sublimation by conscious choice, but the process itself worked spontaneously and unconsciously. Moreover, it was concerned chiefly with the childhood partial sexual drives rather than adult genital sexuality. Many people were seizing on sublimation as the only 'respectable' side of psychoanalysis, and saddling 'neurotics, perverts, criminals and social failures' with 'all too heavy reconstruction programs,' according to Monroe A. Meyer, a New York psychoanalyst who had worked with Freud. He thought that his countrymen delighted in sublimation because of their zeal for aspiring to 'dizzy, puritanical heights' (341; quotations are from Meyer's review of Ernest Jones, *Papers on Psychoanalysis*, 266–67). Hale goes on to note Freud's insistence that "patients would discover their own modes of sublimation," and that, in this, Freud "exceeded the American faith in human capabilities" (341).

### Friendship as a Form of Sublimation

Another topic that emerged in their correspondence was the matter of religion. At one point Freud said that it “would be a great delight to me to discuss religion with you since you are both tolerant and enlightened,” and suggested that they might have the chance to do so at the next psychoanalytic congress (as Putnam had indicated his intention to attend). Freud added, however, that he is afraid that religion may be only “a pious wish-fulfillment,” that a “‘Just God’ and ‘kindly Nature’ are only the noblest sublimations of our parental complexes, and our infantile helplessness is the ultimate root of religion.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, he suggests that religious ideas may offer a valuable sublimation, but essentially because the ultimate root of religion is our infantile helplessness.

A related issue concerned Putnam’s view that sexual instincts, now no longer repressed, may be put into the service of higher ethical purposes. As their discussion of this issue continued, it became clear that Freud was comfortable with the view that sublimations may be moral, but resisted Putnam’s view that they may be expressive of higher ethical purposes, such as communal responsibility, friendship, and love. That these ethical principles exist was not under dispute, for Freud knew full well that there are many persons—including philosophers and theologians—who have presented and promoted such principles. What he questioned was the claim that these principles are appropriately called sublimations. After all, Putnam had not provided any solid evidence that these ethical principles derive from the *un*-repression of sexual instincts. In fact, Freud contended that we do not know enough about human psychology to be able to say with any degree of certainty where these ethical principles originate. Here, again, religion was implicated in these differences of view, for in the course of their correspondence, Freud made several allusions to the fact that he was “irreligious,” while Putnam wanted Freud to recognize that his commitment to truth was a form of “religion,” and because it was, this should have enabled Freud to view Putnam’s emphasis on our community obligations and ethical aspirations more positively.

In this regard, Putnam played a role similar to that of Oskar Pfister, the Swiss pastor who, as we noted above, embraced psychoanalysis. Like Putnam, Pfister did not take Freud’s claims to be irreligious at face value. In fact, he once asserted that, among his friends, there is no “better Christian” than Sigmund Freud. This declaration prompted Freud to

75. Hale, *James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis*, 97.

reply that he was more than content simply to know himself as Pfister's friend.<sup>76</sup> This response to Pfister, although obviously said in jest, points to what we consider one of Putnam's most important insights, namely, that friendship itself may be viewed as a form of sublimation. To explore this insight, we turn to Putnam's letter (dated September 30, 1911) in which he discussed his own self-analysis and included a detailed interpretation of a dream of his.<sup>77</sup>

The dream account follows a description of an event that had occurred when the family was at the Hague on their way to Paris. His sixteen-year-old daughter had experienced an attack that he feared was epileptic in nature. It occurred in the morning when she was dressing, and at a time when her menstruation was expected. He does not describe the attack, but notes that over the past year she had been experiencing frequent but very slight momentary "jerkings" or "shakings" but without any alterations of consciousness. Recalling their earlier conversation about the difficulty of distinguishing epilepsy from hysteria, Putnam asks for Freud's advice as to whether he should arrange for her to be psychoanalyzed, although he believes that the usual signs of a marked hysteria are absent, and that except for the physical symptoms of jerkings and shakings, she seems to be healthy and normal.

The dream occurred the night before he left the conference at Weimar. It was a picture, but the symbolism seemed fairly clear. A simple drawing appears alongside his verbal account of the dream:

It appears that (as in an earlier dream) I was driving, and (perhaps) in a similar wagon to the one I described to you as a "dog-cart." I was near the top of a hill. At first I was on the road indicated by the dotted line F.G., which wound down the hill in a generous curve. At once however I became aware of leaving this (safe?) road and driving across the grass, which was short, as if intending to make a "short cut" in the general direction of E. At first all went well but very soon I became aware of two facts; first, that the hill was getting steep; next, that at E. it was marshy and that I could see several irregular spots or holes containing water, which reflected the blue of the afternoon sky.<sup>78</sup>

76. Gay, *Freud*, 191–92.

77. Hale, *James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis*, 125–29.

78. *Ibid.*, 126. We have made slight editorial changes in this and the following quotations (for example, providing English translations of German words).

Putnam makes an association between the blue of the afternoon sky and an earlier dream, which he had related to Freud previously, in which he saw a brilliant blue or yellowish stone hanging from the neck of a young girl, and notes that his daughter, the same daughter who was experiencing unusual jerking and shakings, had recently purchased a bluish emerald pendant. His account of the dream continues:

I then tried to stop the horse but my pulling on the reins seemed to make no impression on him whatever. He plodded steadily on without seeming to notice my pull or perhaps the latter was like the efforts which patients with hysterical paralysis make, when they apparently use great effort but bring nothing to pass. Then I woke up.<sup>79</sup>

Following this description of the dream itself, Putnam relates his “general interpretation” of it:

The horse stands for my instinctual drive (sexual, mainly) which I would wish to regulate but cannot check. My “driving alone” and leaving the safer road, yet feeling anxious on account of the steepness of the hill and the boggy ground below (in which I imagined I should get overturned) indicates my wish to be independent, yet points also to the fact that I am rather dependent on my brother and on my wife, both of whom I associate in my mind with “driving,” especially in the above mentioned “dog-cart.” Possibly this feeling about my wife and my brother (dependence, yet “protest,” and sometimes irritation—really, at myself) may refer both to father and mother or homosexual vs. heterosexual. The holes containing water may have a sexual meaning, as I seemed to be going into them, yet dreading the fact.<sup>80</sup>

To clarify the suggestion that the holes containing water may have a sexual meaning, he continues:

I should say, in this connection, that my sexual relations with my wife have been rather infrequent for many years, of late years exceedingly infrequent, and that I have “dreaded” them—partly because I believed that many of my friends did not continue such relations at my age [he is sixty-four years old], but mainly because although the first effect was one of great relief from a very unpleasant state of tension yet for a number of days

79. *Ibid.*, 127.

80. *Ibid.*

afterwards I always felt exhausted, sleepy, depressed, etc. At the time of the meeting at Weimar I had had no such relations for a good many months, but the “tension” was I think coming on, partly as a result of the fact that I was expecting to meet my wife after a two weeks absence, partly as a “reaction” from the intellectual excitement of the congress. I did not sleep more than one or two hours that last night at Weimar and although I was not aware of any sexual excitement yet it may have been present “in the unconscious.”<sup>81</sup>

Putnam concludes his general interpretation of the dream by noting that “it is certainly true that the sexual drive *has* always been like a horse that I could not satisfactorily drive or restrain, though I have never been, in any sense, a ‘pervert,’ and never experienced the exhaustion after sexual intercourse until a good many years after being first married.”<sup>82</sup>

He goes on in the letter to relate a fantasy of his adolescence, one in which he longed for a married life and home of his own and pictured himself sitting before an open fire in an otherwise unlit room, with wife and young children playing about and receiving the usual caresses and attentions. He notes that in his vision the children were more prominent than the wife. He recognizes that this was a rather common picture of domestic happiness, one that he supposes was idealized somewhat from personal memories, but “possibly referring to a close feeling for my mother and father.”<sup>83</sup> Then he adds,

Affection, readiness to be caressed, narcissism, “protest,” autoeroticism, homosexuality, heterosexuality—all played large parts in my early life, as also a sense of inferiority (“too small sexual organs,” etc.) and desire for recognition as an escape from inferiority. I think I have also tried, as I imagine many others have, to compensate for assumed internal lacks, by external aids—things that I could *buy*, influential friends, etc.<sup>84</sup>

Putnam adds that he has been fond of courageous people but timid himself and “not at harmony with myself.”<sup>85</sup> In addition, he has been “ill at ease with others,” but far less so since his marriage.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., 128.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

In his response (dated October 5, 1911), Freud noted that Putnam describes himself as “a very bad character,” but Freud added that “a far worse man would be uncovered were I to lay myself bare in an analysis as you have done,” and furthermore, Freud wrote, “you overlook the fact that your sincerity itself indicates greatness of soul.”<sup>86</sup> He then proceeded to answer Putnam’s questions “to the best of my ability.” With regard to his daughter, Freud suggests that “the most probable diagnosis is nine to one in favor of hysteria rather than epilepsy.”<sup>87</sup> This being the case, he can simply disregard the symptoms if no others appear and the attack is not repeated. If, however, it seems to be progressive, “an analysis is surely indicated, and, I hope, would show you the advantage of this form of therapy in the case of someone dear to you.”<sup>88</sup> He added that he would, of course, keep this confidential.

As for Putnam’s dream, Freud replies that his interpretation seems entirely correct, but that there may be one additional interpretation:

The safe road you followed might refer to the therapy you had used before; the new route which soon proves to be so disagreeable, is psychoanalysis, of which you seem to be very much afraid. You are much too frightened by your fantasies, and do not seem to wish to believe that they cannot possibly be transformed into reality. As soon as you give up that fear, you will learn more about your fantasies, find them interesting and experience relief.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, Putnam is not in any danger of acting on his fantasies.

As for Putnam’s adolescent fantasy, Freud notes he cannot say much about it “because you described the underlying motives so hastily and piled up everything disagreeable.”<sup>90</sup> What he *can* say is that his friend should not attribute too much importance to Alfred Adler’s concepts of organ inferiority, protest, and the desire to dominate because “these are superficial, secondary and most often conscious” and “do not touch the real forces at work.”<sup>91</sup> Freud thinks that, on the whole, Putnam is

86. *Ibid.*, 129.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.* See also Capps, “Teenage Girls in Rural New York.”

89. Hale, *James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis*, 130.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Ibid.*

suffering from a too early and too strongly repressed sadism expressed in over-goodness and self-torture. Behind the fantasy of a happy family life, you would discover the normal repressed fantasies of rich sexual fulfillment. It is the influence of these fantasies which causes the sense of physical dissatisfaction with one's wife. These are symptoms of aging, which I am beginning to experience myself, as I told you in Zurich.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, Freud reacted to Putnam's allusions to his organ inferiority but did not respond in any direct way to his sexual confusion during adolescence (as suggested in Putnam's allusion to his autoeroticism and homosexuality), nor did Freud comment on Putnam's observation that he has tried to compensate for "assumed internal lacks" by external aids, such as trying to *buy* his friendships. Also, Freud did not have anything to say about Putnam's suggestion that in his ideal domestic scene, the children had a more prominent place than the wife, or his observation that he became more at ease with others after he became married. These thoughts, together with his disclaimer to being a "pervert," suggest that, as an adolescent, Putnam was struggling with his homosexual desires that perhaps played a role in his feeling ill at ease with others. His marriage, therefore, reinforced his heterosexuality, as it enabled him to relate to other men from the safety of his marital state.

However, the dream, together with his adolescent fantasy, suggest that Putnam's homosexual desires have been reactivated by the very fact that he has spent the past couple of weeks with other men, and he now dreads the prospect of meeting his wife after two weeks' absence and the likelihood that their reunion will involve sexual relations. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Putnam characterizes the "excitement" of the Congress as "intellectual," as this suggests that his homosexual desires are, in fact, sublimated ones. This being so, Freud is correct in his reassurances that Putnam need not be frightened by his fantasies because they cannot possibly be transformed into reality. These fantasies, at any rate, have been successfully sublimated over the years.

What remain repressed, however, are his sadistic desires, a repression manifested in his overgoodness and self-torture. Freud seems to have in mind, here, Putnam's sexual feelings relating to his wife, as he relates this repressed sadism to his fantasy of a happy family life behind which lies "the normal repressed fantasies of rich sexual fulfillment."<sup>93</sup> If these

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

fantasies were no longer repressed but allowed to be fully entertained, Putnam would no longer feel “the sense of physical dissatisfaction” with his wife. This too would constitute a significant sublimation.

But we are primarily concerned here with Putnam’s view that friendship may be a form of sublimation. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in his account of his adolescent fantasy, he indicates he felt that, in order to compensate for “assumed internal lacks,” he needed to *buy* his friendships. Putnam assumed, in other words, that others would not agree to be his friend merely for his own sake. There had to be something in it of extrinsic value for them. This is, in fact, a continuing theme in his correspondence with Freud, for both men recognize that Putnam can be of great service to Freud in creating a hospitable climate for psychoanalysis in America; and, conversely, Freud continued to arrange for Putnam’s articles to be published in the *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse* and in *Imago* (the journal for the application of psychoanalysis to the humanities and social sciences, which Freud himself edited).<sup>94</sup>

On the other hand, Freud’s allusion to “the symptoms of aging” as a possible explanation for Putnam’s “sense of physical dissatisfaction” with his wife, and to the fact that he had mentioned his own struggles in this regard to Putnam when they were in Zurich, indicates that their friendship went far beyond these extrinsic values. Their correspondence indicates that they could confide in one another, as when Freud would complain to Putnam about the untrustworthy members of the psychoanalytic movement, and Putnam revealed his struggles with what he called the feeling of not being “at harmony with myself.” In addition, there is the simple fact that in their correspondence from November 17, 1909, to June 2, 1914, Putnam addressed Freud as either “Professor” or “Dr. Freud,” and Freud addressed Putnam as “Colleague.” Then, on June 19, 1914, Freud addressed Putnam as “Friend and Colleague.”<sup>95</sup> Putnam addressed Freud as “Dr. Freud” and “Professor” in two subsequent letters, but then in a letter dated February 22, 1915, he addressed Freud as “Friend,” and drew a picture of two hands clasping one another. Freud responded by addressing Putnam simply as “Friend,” and said that his “handclasp across the wide ocean made me very glad” and added, “Let me assure you that even the postal disruptions of this war will not estrange us.” Freud went on to

94. See Hale, *Freud and the Americans*.

95. Hale, *James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis*, 175.



note, however, that at times “the idea that there is a censor paralyzes the desire to write.”<sup>96</sup>

In all subsequent letters except one (a brief letter from Putnam addressed to Freud as “Professor,” in which he apologized for misrepresenting Freud’s relationship to Josef Breuer in his book *Human Motives*), both men addressed one another as “Friend.” In many of these letters, they expressed frustration over the fact that they could not assume that their letters were arriving at their intended destinations due to the war. We believe that this very frustration was itself a sign of their friendship, and thus further confirmation of Putnam’s view that friendship is a form of sublimation.

## Conclusion

Freud’s essay “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” was published at the very time that the two men were commenting on the role the war was playing in frustrating their desire to communicate with each other. In a lengthy letter dated August 13, 1915, which he decided not to send, Putnam suggested that Carl Jung’s attitude toward Freud should not be “laid at the door of religion itself, any more than the behavior of soldiers, as you yourself pointed in your paper on the war, ought to be laid to the failure of sublimation.”<sup>97</sup> He added,

You said, very truly, that we ought not so much to feel disappointed at the apparent downfall of civilization in war, but ought, instead, to recognize that we had overrated the amount of civilization which had actually been present.<sup>98</sup>

Freud, however, had also argued that the very “pressure of civilization” is “shown in malformations of character, and in the perpetual readiness of the inhibited instincts to break through to gratification at any suitable opportunity,” and, therefore, “anyone thus compelled to act continually in the sense of precepts which are not the expression of instinctual inclinations, is living, psychologically speaking, beyond his means, and might

96. Freud’s reference to a censor is noteworthy in light of the fact that psychoanalysis is itself a method intended to overcome the censorship of desires, especially sexual desires, which are considered by the patient to be morally inappropriate and personally demeaning.

97. Hale, *James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis*, 195.

98. *Ibid.*

objectively be designated a hypocrite, whether this difference be clearly known to him or not.”<sup>99</sup>

This observation about living beyond our psychic means brings us back to Freud’s story about the efforts of the citizens of Schilda to break the horse of his “bad habit” of eating a large amount of expensive oats. At first, the project of weaning him off his instinctual desires worked, but eventually the fact that he was living beyond his psychic means caught up with him and with the people who relied on him to do the work they expected of him.<sup>100</sup> And Freud’s observation also brings us back to Putnam’s dream about his effort to keep the horse he was driving from leaving the safe road and taking off into the marshy grass, and to Freud’s reassurances that Putnam can trust the horse and the place to which the horse is taking him.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the lifting of sexual repression need not be feared, but neither is it necessary to force upon ourselves—and on others—sublimations that are excessively demanding and high-minded. The correspondence between Putnam and Freud expresses a sublimation that takes the form of friendship, and neither man feels any particular need to elevate this particular friendship into some sort of ethical ideal. That this sublimation occurred in the rather ordinary process of an exchange of letters from 1909 to 1916 supports Freud’s point that sublimation need not be made a conscious or explicit goal of psychoanalysis. It also supports Putnam’s view that sublimation often takes a “communal” form, in this case, a handclasp across the sea. The very fact that the two men do not seem to be especially aware that their correspondence has become an instance of sublimation over the years supports Freud’s view that it is usually best to allow sublimation to create its own goals.

What lessons may we learn from the fact that the sublimation—in the form of friendship—that these two men experienced occurred largely through correspondence? The obvious lesson is that they did not need to be in each other’s physical presence to experience a close relationship to one another.<sup>102</sup> In fact, it may well have been the case that if they had been

99. Freud, “Thoughts for the Times upon War and Death,” 217.

100. Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 61–62.

101. Hale, *James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis*, 126, 130.

102. In his article on male body image and intimacy titled “From Grace Alone to Grace Alone,” Nathan Carlin discusses male friendships and cites Philip Culbertson’s identification of types of friendships among men today. These types include friendships of convenience, special-interest friendships, historical friendships, crossroad friendships, cross-generational friendships, and close friendships (Carlin, “From

in each other's physical presence to a much greater degree they may have found reasons to distance themselves from one another. A less obvious lesson is that their friendship was largely based on the intellectual stimulation they received from one another. Although each made references to their personal lives, their correspondence was largely professional in nature. In fact, the sublimation that occurred between the two men was a direct consequence of their ongoing discussions and reflections on the very subject of sublimation. We doubt very much that it would have occurred if their correspondence had focused instead on their personal friendship. Sometimes, perhaps especially for men, such matters are better left unsaid.

SAMPLE

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Grace Alone," 287). Culbertson defines "close friendships" as "involving revealing aspects of our private self—our feelings and thoughts, our wishes and fears and fantasies and dreams" (Culbertson, *Counseling Men*, 79). The friendship between Freud and Putnam was a close one even though—or perhaps because—it occurred primarily through correspondence.