

## AN OPERATING MANUAL FOR THE PSYCHE

Like it or not we do have an animal within us. An animal presence in our genes that contain a blueprint for a brain that is biologically disturbingly similar to an animal's brain. As anyone who has taken a sip of alcohol or psychoactive drug can tell, if the chemistry of the brain changes so do our thoughts and feelings. Since the chemistry of our brain is so similar to that of our nearest animal ancestors, the chimp, with whom we share 98% of our DNA (we are closer to a chimp than is a gorilla), then we also have an animal within us not just biologically but behaviorally as well.

The major difference between the chimp brain and ours is our greatly enlarged human frontal lobe. The frontal lobe serves the "executive" function of our brain. Instead of giving the animal *instinctual* response to the sights and sounds we see in our life, our frontal lobe inhibits this reflex response allowing us enough time to substitute through the process of *sublimation* a socially acceptable response we have learned. Instead of throttling someone who made us mad we can say, "I have feelings I would like to share."

The most commonly accepted model of the psyche, the one developed by Freud a century ago before much of this biology and *instinctual* behavior was known, has proven very prescient in predicting just what modern biological and behavioral science has taught us about the brain/mind's workings.

Based upon his work with patient's with emotional problem, Freud created four groundbreaking concepts: the *id*, *ego*, *superego*, and *sublimation*. The "*id*" is that place in our mind where rests a variety of *instinctual drives* passed on to us from our animal ancestors. Freud focused on the sex drive and in this case sex is not just about the act of mating but spans from making ourselves appealing to the opposite sex to the variety of

behaviors related to child rearing. In Freud's Victorian Austria where sexual *suppression* was the order of the day it should come as no surprise that this *instinctual* drive was the most frustrated and thus the source of most of Freud's patient's troubles.

We now know that two additional *instinctual* needs also play an important role in our behavior. One is our need to have a territory, a place we call our own where we keep our valued possessions safe from harm. The other is our need to be somebody, to find a position in the social order, technically called a dominance hierarchy. Some want to be top-dog and nothing else will suffice, but most just want to stake out a position somewhere in the social order, our status, preferably as high as possible.

We humans are social animals and in our earliest days led lives in small tribes that roamed their lands following their food supply and were ruled by an all-powerful chieftain/warlord. This state of affairs mimics very closely the social order of chimps ruled by their dominant males. But once we learned how to grow crops, raise animals for food, and developed writing and complex language, we began to come together into larger and larger groups and cities, then states, and eventually nations were formed.

Yet we still had these genetically based *instinctual* needs of sex, territory and dominance, that were ready to cause conflict when people lived in close proximity to one another: "keep your hands off my wife, that is mine not yours, and what's it to you buddy." Fortunately our frontal lobes allowed us to control these first-strike responses and a gradually expanding code of laws and moral guidelines gave us the groundrules for socially acceptable ways we could express these behaviors.

The system of laws and rules of behavior that we begin to learn from our parents as soon as we are born creates within our mind what Freud called the "*superego*." On the

one hand we have our *id* wanting us to act *instinctually* as do animals. Yet on the other hand we want to stay out of jail but still find a way through some *sublimated* behaviors to satisfy these needs to the greatest extent that we can. This process, the little voice that goes on in our minds, our conscious experience that thinks through how we should act Freud labeled the “*ego*.” Our *ego* exists as the thought processes that solve the problems of reconciling the *id* and the *superego* and finds for us the most productive *sublimated* course of action.

We can not mate with every hot babe or stud we see. We have to get a job and act in a moral and legal way in order to earn money to buy a territory and possessions that gives us as high a place in the dominance hierarchy as possible. Our *ego*'s thoughts as to how we should go about in a moral and legal way to satisfy these *sublimations* can never find a pure 100% satisfaction for our *instinctual* needs. The friction of frustrations, the left over energy, created through this incomplete *sublimation* of the *id*'s desires, Freud called “*neurosis*.” Everyone experiences *neuroses*, the failure to give complete satisfaction to the *id*'s desires. In our common use of the term, *neurosis* has come to mean a troubled emotional life, but originally it simply meant the frustrations everyone experiences in trying to satisfy their instinctual needs.

For some people these *neuroses* are no end of trouble, they grind on them and produce a variety of self-destructive behaviors with their accompanying emotional anguish usually experienced as *anxiety* or *depression*. For others, these *neuroses* are relatively benign and serve as the driving force to get people up each day and out there pursuing a more successful *sublimation* of their *instinctual* needs within their strivings for success in their relationships and careers.

This voice in our mind, our *ego*, the story we tell ourselves as we interact with the outside world has a lot of tricks up its sleeve in order to defend itself from the inevitable attacks of job and relationship failure. The *ego* is one strong critter, an affront is met by a number of *defense mechanisms*, tricks to protect itself from admitting to its failures. Examples of these defense mechanisms are: *compensation, compulsion, displacement, projection, rationalization, repression, and resistance*. We do not consciously experience these defense mechanisms as if we purposely decide to engage them; however we certainly experience the emotions triggered by their activation.

As an example of these *defense mechanisms*, we can use the very simple case of the *instinctual drive* to satisfy our need for nourishment. Seemingly far removed from the animal's prey-killing feeding behavior is our going out to eat in a restaurant. Yet at its core, the *same instinctual drive* to provide life-sustaining nourishment.

Eating in a nice restaurant demands a certain level of table manners, especially if it is a business dinner. For someone who has never been taught fine manners, he will push ahead and do this and that wrong. The next day at work he is called in by his boss and criticized for his demeanor at the dinner. Chastised he returns to his office. His boss's criticism is a clear challenge to his *ego* where resides his self-pride. A healthy *ego* that had been trained how to be aware of its own functions would accept the boss's criticism and realize that to achieve a higher level of career success he had better get a book from the library about table manners.

Sadly, the chances are that he would react as most do, with a full blown blast of *ego defense mechanisms*. His *resistance* would make him demean his boss in order to save his *ego's* pride. Perhaps he might *repress* the whole thing and never give it a thought.

Maybe he will go home and discharge the *ego's* tension through *displacement* and *identification* by mimicking his boss and giving his children hell at dinner over their own manners.

It is these fictitious and self-deceptive *ego defenses* which create the fog of emotion that leads us to make poor and self-destructive decisions. The fictions come from our failures and our *ego's* need to protect and or excuse our sense of “self” from admitting to our responsibility for these failures. With all these *defense mechanisms* available to our *ego* in order to protect itself from recognizing its weaknesses, the chances are great that we will carry on acting in the same self-destructive way. This is how most people lead their lives of quiet desperation. However, it need not be so. Only through gaining a self-awareness of this duplicity on the part of our *ego* can we stop repeating these mistakes and break the chain of self-destructive behaviors.

The remaining essays in this toolkit describe real-life situations and *ego defense mechanisms* that we use in our daily lives. At times they are described explicitly in terms of the needs of our *id*, *ego*, and *superego* while other essays are “do it yourself” and the reader is on their own be to be able to see this interplay between our needs for dominance, sex, and territory and the standards of our culture and legal system to which we must adhere. Each of these essays provides you with a tool, taken as a group, a toolkit, for self-awareness of how your mind operates that will allow you to keep it a finely tuned machine capable of taking you anywhere you desire without getting off track.

Participating in the program of Clarity of Purpose & Thought then Action will assure that you fully understand the tools and train you in how these tools can be applied most

effectively to your own life. In this way we lift the fog of emotions so you can see yourself and others as you and they really are and move forward making the honest decisions that bring you closer to achieving the goals of both your personal and professional life.