

DARWIN'S EVOLVING LEGACY

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EVOLUTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY: CLASSICAL PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ATTACHMENT THEORY

FERNANDO ORTIZ LACHICA*

FREUD AND EVOLUTION

Acknowledged or not, the theory of evolution is a founding block of psychoanalysis, and psychology, although it has been subject of interpretations according to the values of different authors, starting with Freud. For him, Darwin was always "The Great Darwin." In his autobiography Freud wrote: "The theories of Darwin [...] strongly attracted me for they held out hopes of an extraordinary advance in our understanding of the world" (1925/1964: 1014) and he had a copy of Darwin's book in his library. According to Gay (1988) both as a physiologist, who did research on the reproduction of eels and the nervous cells of crabs, and as a psychologist, who studied the human psyche, Freud considered himself part of a great collective endeavor, demonstrating the various ways in which evolution works.

Not even men of extraordinary talent can escape the limitations of their times and Freud was no exception. Implicit in his writings is a biased, "popular" interpretation of evolution, in which it is defined as a series of progressive states and "more evolved" is necessarily better. Freud was convinced of the superiority of the western civilization, and judged other cultures in accordance to this prejudice. The cost of civilization was neurosis, but without its restrictions we would all be cannibals, murderers and succumb to incestuous desires. But then, even savages prohibited incest with such zeal that one could only assert that the drive towards incestuous relations was as strong as the restrictions that prohibited even casual contacts with relatives of the opposite sex.

A comprehensive analysis of Freud's so called "social works" would

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gate the effects of maternal deprivation on personality development. In those days, when a young child was hospitalized, the mother was allowed to visit her child just one hour per week, due to the belief, supported by both classical psychoanalysis and learning theory, that the child's tie to the mother was secondary, emerging because the mother feeds him. Thus, if a child were cared for and fed, he would have no need of his mother. Bowlby and his colleague found that the loss of the maternal figure produced more conflict and distress than was generally acknowledged. They documented three stages following a child's separation from his mother. At first, young children protested angrily showing fearful expressions and desperate efforts to find her. These reactions were usually interpreted as tantrums that should be ignored or punished, but in the late 1960s Bowlby thought they made sense in order to survive during evolutionary history. The initial protest would bring caregivers back to infants who otherwise would have accidents or be killed by predators. The protest stage was followed by despair. In this stage, children are silent and passive, relatively uninterested in their environment. This strategy also promotes survival, for to move and scream would attract predators. After a period of despair, if the child did not reunite with his caregiver, he entered a stage of detachment, becoming independent and self-reliant. Should the parent reappear in this stage, the child did not seem interested at first, and it took some effort for the parent to reestablish the bond. This stage, too, makes sense. To let go of the bond with the caregiver allows the child to attach to someone else or become self-sufficient (Bowlby, 1988).

In a 1951 report on mental health of the homeless children in post-war Europe, Bowlby (1988) concluded that "the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment." These findings were very influential and caused changes in institutional care for children, but still the reasons for the importance of the relationship and the consequences of separation and loss were not accounted for by prevailing psychoanalytic theory.

Thus, Bowlby went on to seek understanding outside psychoanalysis and became acquainted with control systems theory and the work of leading ethologists such as Niko Tinbergen, Konrad Lorenz and Robert Hinde. His research led to attachment theory, "one of the

broadest, most profound and most creative lines of research in twentieth century psychology" (Cassidy and Shaver, 1999) inspiring thousands of journal articles dealing with subjects such as physiological, clinical, social and developmental psychology.

Bowlby concluded that the infant's tie to his mother resulted from evolutionary pressures. Mammals, and in particular primates who stayed close to their mothers, not only gained access to nursing and learned about the environment but were also protected from predation and accidents, which were, on the short run, even more dangerous than starvation or thirst. In the "environment of evolutionary adaptadness" infants who were disposed to seek proximity to their caregivers were more likely to survive and pass on their genes. Thus, there was no need to view bonding to mothers as a by-product of a primary drive, such as food or even pleasure, as infants become attached even to abusive mothers.

In different phases of development, infants and children seek and maintain proximity to their caregivers in various ways, such as signaling (smiling, crying and calling for mother) and moving (following with their gaze, crawling and walking). These behaviors are part of a system that comes into action when the child experiences distress. Bowlby deliberately chose the word attachment and not dependence, because the latter word is associated with immaturity, whereas attachment is a normal and healthy function even if the attachment figures vary in different life periods, mothers and relatives being substituted by peers and romantic partners at the end of adolescence.

Attachment should not be confused with caregiving. A child attaches to a parent or someone who is perceived as interested in her and more capable in dealing with dangerous and novel situations in the environment; whereas caregiving occurs when someone is driven to protect and nurture someone who is perceived as needy. Although the primary attachment figure is usually the mother, as proved by cross-cultural studies, there are other attachment figures that the child chooses hierarchically. For instance, should the mother be absent the child calls for the father and then the grandmother and so on. Once the bond is established, children use attachment figures as a secure base for exploring the world and as a safe haven in times of distress.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Cassidy and Shaver, 1999) maintains that bonding to a caregiver is a primary —i.e. neurolog-

Furthermore, attachment patterns may increase inclusive fitness, that is, the probability that one's genes are passed on to the next generation. Adults who were securely attached as children tend to mature sexually and start having intercourse at a later age, and have fewer offspring. Thus they, in turn, have resources to invest time and energy on rearing fewer children. Avoidant children tend to engage earlier in sexual relations and become parents at an earlier age, so they tend to have more children and care for them less. Finally, adults who had resistant attachment patterns tend to remain close to their original families and assist in caring for siblings or nephews. Each pattern may increase inclusive fitness in different environments (Simpson, 1999).

Some of these propositions remain speculative, but there is striking evidence that seem to support them. For instance, girls who have conflicts with their mothers and grow up without their fathers tend to menarche and have sexual relations earlier. These findings allow us to go beyond the nature-nurture debate and point to the complex interaction of hereditary and environmental factors to create and maintain social behavior.

Modern evolutionary perspective assumes that "much of the human mind and human social behavior reflects adaptations to major obstacles to inclusive fitness that humans recurrently faced in evolutionary history" (Simpson, 1999). Contemporary research in neurosciences asserts that the brain is a social organ (Siegel, 1999) whose specifically human and mammalian structures originated in order in the context of attachment and caregiving and fail to develop in isolated individuals (Lewis, Amani and Lannon, 2000).

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