

## **Psihologia colectiva si analiza eului (Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego)**

**Sigmund Freud, traducere si studiu introductiv de  
Lucian Pricop, Cartex, Bucuresti, 2017, 111p.**

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The influential monograph of the Austrian psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, *Psihologia colectivă și analiza eului*, published in 1921 stands as a starting point for many other reinterpretations of the group mind concept. Freud continued the research of his predecessors on psychology, social psychology and sociology. *What he added is so vivid, even nowadays, in every society from socio-cultural-political point of view.*

*The present edition, translated and reviewed with an introductory text by Lucian Pricop and added in the collection “The History of political ideas”(2017), deals with collective spirit, suggestion and sexual drive, two artificial groups: the church and the army, identification, love and hypnosis, gregarious instinct, primal horde and the group to which he completed with his own theories of crowds and groups.*

He tries to answer the fundamental questions regarding group psychology and to grasp the difference between individual psychology and group psychology. This effort was necessary as no one, before Freud, dared to make a theory of the subject. The implication of his endeavor is beneficial for both the clinical treatment and organizational management of institutions. With

this framework in mind he could place the ego as a mediator between individual and groups.

Thus, in the first chapter, Freud clarifies a wrong idea that individual psychology would be separated by the group in a total isolation. He sees the individual in close connection to the rest of the group, the latter acting as a model, supporter and opponent for the former. In other words, individual psychology is integrated in social psychology. Acknowledging the interactive nature that establishes between the individual and the group it is quite difficult to name one without considering the other. That is because the collective's qualities are to be found in every individual. Therefore, the distinction is possible only by situating the individual in a certain context, as a member of a nation, of a race, of an institution, of a profession.

In the next chapters, Freud mentions the contribution of other authors, such as the social psychologist Gustave Le Bon, in order to determine how the group changes the individual psychology. The author exemplifies this transformation by making a comparison with the cells in a human body. Just as the cell, seen as an irreducible, complete entity, loses its individual identity in a human body, so does the individual psychology dissolves in a group. This would lead, according to Freud, to the outburst of the unconscious mind that endows the individuals with unknown power, lacked of inhibitions or restrictions of any kind. Freud continues the research of other psychologists and believes that there is a considerable influence of the group on each individual who becomes irrational unconscious of his or her actions when exposed to its powerful force. He suggests that the mass is endowed with an overwhelming power that can affect an individual emotionally, cognitively and volitionally. He also attributes the group a dispositional character that dissolves somehow the individual personal response to the same stimuli.

The mass acquires an unconscious mind or, better said, it falls to its basic, uncontrolled level and actions under the impulse of the moment. He also draws a separation line between the mob or the crowd and the group. Through the mob he understands a spontaneous, unorganised gathering of people that are easier prone to the “contagion effect”(Le Bon, 2016, 33-34) than the well-organised group, such as the church or the army. Another synonym for this phenomenon is herd behaviour or the substratum of ancient hereditary which, in a way, is not different from hypnotic state of mind due to the fascination, suggestion, imitation, infection, contagion, possession it carries.

I would reconsider this aspect because, even if it is partially true, no one can estimate accurately who and why some individuals lose more or less or, sometimes, none of their personal traits when they are taking part of a group. As I said, that cannot be a universal truth as we all experienced quite the opposite when we found ourselves within a group or an unknown crowd. I confess that if the group’s mentality does not coincide with mine, I can easily withdraw without being affected by it. However, whenever I willingly adhere the mass’ ideology I recognize a certain induction of it and a loss of a part of my own identity in favour of the whole group’s energy. Perhaps that is the logic of it: every single member of the group offers an amount of his/her own power to increase it as a whole. That is why it grows proportionally with the number of the entire group and it seems uncontrollable or impulsive because of the high energy gathered. I dare say, that what makes it destructive, sometimes, is the purpose and the quality of it. Freud also admits the possibility of superego or the consciousness to restrict the unconscious behaviour of the crowd or group but does not develop this instance. His preference, if I am allowed to say so, is for the inferior and basic impulses of a person. I suppose it justifies due to the socio-cultural-political

context he experienced. Today, a psychiatrist would definitely be concerned with human's consciousness potential rather than with the depth of his mind's darkness.

As for the two types of groups Freud mentions in his research, the church and the army also called "artificial groups"(Freud, 2017:47) the reader will be acquainted with another concept: that of identification. This is the consequence of the libidinal ties between the leader and the followers in a group. The point he makes is that identification has a major influence on the ego of the subject transforming the subject into the act of identification. In a group, the individuals identify with each other and with the ideal of the group sharing an ego-ideal; that is the Christ and His teachings in church and the patriotism or the desire to defeat the enemy in the army. Freud makes one clear distinction in group's mechanism of identification: in Christ the Christians do not see solely a group ideal, they try to acquire a similar conduct as well, that will help them identify with the divine leader whereas in the army, the members of the group aim to identify only with the other individuals but never with the leader, whom they project as a group ideal. Failure in identifying with the ego-ideal will lead the members of the group to a feeling of guilt and helplessness and, finally it is strong evidence that the libidinal connections, among the members of the group and leader, are interrupted.

To better understand the process of identification Freud connects it to the Oedipus complex. It is stated that this identification is utterly important in the first phases of shaping the Oedipus complex. Normally the little child sees his father as an ideal he wants to achieve while for his mother he manifests an affective attachment. These two directions go in parallel for some time to form the normal Oedipus complex once the psychic development unifies, but when the child encounters obstacles in his way towards his mother's affection the identification is no

longer possible and the solution is to replace the father. Therefore, the identification contains two opposing characteristics: integration and suppression. By integration Freud understands the feeling of tenderness of what initially was a sexual attachment. Here, Freud equals the concepts of sexual tension with love, though I cannot agree with this view, stating that the latter would be a form of sublimation of the former due to the deviation of the sexual instincts from their initial sexual aims. The disagreement is based on a structural arrangement of the libidinal development. If Freud sees the process organically from down to top, namely from instinct to sublimation, I see it quite the other way round; it is the sublime emotion of love that stays as the foundation of the instinct and of any other physical connection with individuals.

Extending the above analysis to the libidinal relationship in a crowd, Freud envisions the leader of the primal horde as being strong and opinionated. The leader or the father remains detached emotionally and is preoccupied solely with his own image. From this privileged position he can dominate his sons and daughters forcing them not to have sexual relationships and controlling them to such an extent that the collective psychology was born.

All in all, Freud's *Psihologia colectivă și analiza eului* is a stimulating referential book I warmly recommend to everyone interested in introspection and self-discovery. It is like a never-ending stream of water and every honest reader would feel free to follow one of its courses depending on his/her cultural background. Even though Freud's work is opened to debate, interpretation and improvement it is still a fundamental tool in understanding human's psyche.

**Bibliography:**

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