

ONE

The Complex Phenomenon of Denial

abstract: Freud drew attention to the puzzling phenomenon of denial in many passages of his work. He focused on some of the contradictory aspects of the phenomenon in an article published in 1925. In that same article Freud theorized about a number of characteristics in human beings that one must postulate in order to do justice to these many puzzling and contradictory aspects of denial. One of the strongest conclusions that Freud made was the claim that negation is a precondition for human freedom. I will present Freud's ideas, but I will also demonstrate that his analysis is incomplete. In particular, Freud, in his crucial article on denial ("Negation" 1925), did not analyze the arduous work required to undo fully a denial and its consequences. In particular Freud did not draw attention to the need for acts of separation from primary care givers and for the creation of metaphoric moves in order to free oneself from the contradictions inherent in denials.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will present Freud's analysis of the puzzling phenomenon of denial, which consists of simultaneously denying and revealing the truth. Thus, when a patient answers that the female figure in his dream is not his mother, Freud interprets the answer as revealing that it really is his mother (Freud, *S.E.*, XIX, 235).¹ Or when a patient boasts that it is pleasant not to have had her headaches for so long, Freud interprets this as signaling that the attack is not far off (*Ibid.* 236).

I will start by delineating the problem as Freud treated it. Next, I will show that the phenomenon of denial is part of a larger process. I will also

point out that Freud refrains from fully analyzing that whole process, leaving a promising task for readers of this chapter. Third, I will describe and elaborate on three metapsychological insights of Freud, one of which, I will show, implies that realizing the truth hidden in a denial is more than an epistemological problem: it involves hard emotional work. Fourth, I will show some limitations in Freud's analysis of the phenomenon of denial. In particular, I will show that realizing the truth hidden in a denial requires more than epistemological work; it requires also acts of separation from intimate others and the mobilization of powerful aspects of language. Finally, I will briefly present and analyze an autobiography in which the author describes the undoing of a profound denial related to the death of his father on the battlefield when the author was a two-month old infant. This case will illustrate my theoretical claim that undoing a denial requires acts of separation and skillful usages of metaphors.²

1. DEMARCATION OF THE PROBLEM

By the examples he gives, Freud demarcates the problem he intends to discuss by means of the concept of *Verneinung*, translated in the the Standard Edition of Freud's works as "negation," but which I prefer to translate as "denial."³ Freud's demarcation is at the same time restrictive and expansive.

Let us first look at the restrictions imposed by Freud's examples on the domain of the concept *Verneinung*. In the first example, a patient rejects an emotion that might be imputed to her, given what she intends to say. Freud presents the case in this way: "Now you'll think I mean to say something insulting, but really I've no such intention" (Ibid. 235). Freud continues by presenting what he thinks goes on in the patient: "We realize that this is a rejection, by projection, of an idea that has just come up" (Ibid.). Typical for a denial is the fact that the patient labels a phenomenon—in this case an emotion—but that the labeling is incorrectly rejected as untrue.

The second example concerns a patient who has told Freud about a dream in which there is a female figure. Freud reports the case as follows: "You ask who this person in the dream can be. It is *not* my mother." Freud then continues: "We emend this to: 'So it is his mother.' In our interpretation, we take the liberty of disregarding the negation and of picking out the subject-matter alone of the association. It is as though the patient had said: 'It's true that my mother came into my mind as I thought of this person, but I don't feel inclined to let the association count'" (Ibid.). In his comments on this second example Freud is very explicit about the two dimensions he seems to consider constitutive of the phenomenon of denial. On the one hand, there is an activity of labeling. Freud describes it as an act of associating a known figure (mother) with the unknown figure in the dream. Describing what happens in the first constitutive moment of denial as an association

seems to me to underplay the role of linguistically identifying the unknown phenomenon. In a denial, one does not so much associate two images—the unknown figure in the dream and the figure of the mother—as one labels a previously unknown phenomenon. The other constitutive element of a denial is the negation of the labeling activity performed by the patient. Freud interprets the negation in a denial to mean, in the first example, a rejection of an idea that has come up, and, in the second example, a disinclination “to let the association count” (Ibid.).

Freud’s third example is of a neurotic who has already been informed by Freud of the workings of unconscious processes. Freud describes his patient as telling him: “I’ve got a new obsessive idea, . . . and it occurred to me at once that it might mean so and so. But no; that can’t be true, or it couldn’t have occurred to me.” Freud interprets the statements of his patient as follows: “What he is repudiating, on grounds picked up from his treatment, is, of course, the correct meaning of the obsessive idea” (Ibid.). In this example we have again two moments: 1) what Freud calls “the repudiation” and 2) the description of the meaning of a new obsessive idea.

In the third paragraph of his article, Freud starts to conceptualize what he thinks to be the phenomenon he wants to study. He writes: “Thus the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is negated. Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed” (Ibid.). Freud here introduces explicitly a third constitutive element of denial: repression.⁴ The first constitutive moment was the correct labeling of the repressed. The second constitutive moment was the refusal of the revealed truth. A denial is then understood as a mechanism whereby an unknown repressed phenomenon “makes its way into consciousness” (Ibid.). Freud finds the mechanism of negating so essential for the result of a denial—letting the repressed make its way to consciousness—that he proposes a new technique for treating patients who have difficulty in revealing a piece of information about something that is repressed and thus unconscious. Freud writes: “‘What,’ we ask, ‘would you consider the most unlikely imaginable thing in that situation? What do you think was furthest from your mind at that time?’ If the patient falls into the trap and says what he thinks is most incredible, he almost always makes the right admission” (Ibid.). In order for Freud to invent this new technique and, even more, for this technique to be effective, it must be the case both that there are two centers of meaning creation and that the meanings created by these two centers are not compatible. Freud addresses this incompatibility between the two systems of meaning creation by giving consciousness a face-saving device. Freud asks what the most unlikely imaginable thing is or what was furthest from the patient’s thought. Freud provides consciousness with a form of distance from the truth it is invited to discover or, formulated differently, he provides consciousness with the opportunity to deny what it sees. Freud observes that when a patient

accepts the face-saving device and describes what he thinks is furthest from his mind, he *almost always* describes the unconscious correctly. In one of the next paragraphs, Freud calls the negation in a denial “the hall-mark of repression, a certificate of origin—like, let us say, ‘Made in Germany’” (Ibid. 236).⁵

Some authors have expanded the meaning of denial to include non-verbal activities.⁶ Thus Edith Jacobson uses the label ‘denial’ for such phenomena as amnesia (Jacobson 63, 64), disavowal or undoing of castration (Ibid. 74, 77, 83), avoidance (Ibid. 75), and wishful fantasies distorting reality when they are a means of defending against fearful objects (Ibid. 78). Such an expansion of the concept of denial omits, in my opinion, a crucial element in the phenomenon Freud wants to study: that is, a denial *correctly labels the repressed phenomenon*, even though a denial denies the correctness of the labeling. Labeling and correctly labeling that which is repressed are crucial aspects of the puzzle which Freud wants to study under the phenomenon called ‘denial.’⁷

There is, however, an expanded meaning of denial which does correspond to Freud’s interpretation of denial. I believe that I can argue for that expansion because Freud provided a fourth example of the kind of phenomena he was going to study. The fact that the example is mentioned not in the main text, but in a footnote, might indicate that Freud, too, felt that this example is a form of extension of the core phenomenon. He actually claims that the fourth example is using the same process; he does not claim that the process is identical with the process at work in the first three examples. Here is how Freud describes the new example, which he calls boasting: “‘How nice not to have had one of my headaches for so long.’ But this is in fact the first announcement of an attack, of whose approach the subject is already sensible, although he is as yet unwilling to believe it” (Freud, *S.E.*, XIX, 236). At first, one could argue that the patient in this new example does not make a false statement. It seems to be correct for the patient to say that he has not had the headaches for a long time. Therefore, this example could be said to be a misfit. It is not a proper example of the phenomenon Freud is studying, for in it nothing is falsely denied. However, when one looks in the rest of Freud’s oeuvre one can notice additional similar examples.⁸ Freud’s explanation of these examples provides arguments for seeing the similarity between the fourth example and the other three. In the process, Freud also forces us to accept a fourth not-so-visible constituent element in the phenomenon of denial.

Freud discusses the danger of boasting in his study of Frau Emmy von N. He does so in a long footnote, having warned his readers at the beginning of his study that he will reproduce the notes that he made at night during the beginning of the treatment and will put insights acquired later in footnotes (Freud, *S.E.*, II, 48). Emmy von N. regularly had “neck-cramps.” Freud describes them as consisting “in an ‘icy grip’ on the back of the neck, together

with an onset of rigidity and a painful coldness in all her extremities, an incapacity to speak and complete prostration. They last from six to twelve hours" (Ibid. 71). In the evening session of May 17, 1889,⁹ Emmy von N. "expressed her astonishment that it was such a long time since she had had any neck-cramps, though they usually came on before every thunderstorm" (Ibid. 75). The morning of May 18, Emmy von N. "complained of cold at the back of her neck, tightness and pains in the face, hands and feet. Her features were strained and her hands clenched" (Ibid. 75-76). In a footnote which may have been written up to five years after the treatment, Freud writes that Emmy von N.'s "astonishment the evening before at its being so long since she had had a neck-cramp . . . [can be understood as] a premonition of an approaching condition which was already in preparation at the time and was perceived in the unconscious" (Ibid. 76, n. 1). The patient disregards the true premonition.

Freud describes a second patient, Frau Cäcilie M., who regularly had similar premonitions. Thus, Freud writes, "while she was in the best of health, she said to me 'It's a long time since I've been frightened of witches at night,' or, 'how glad I am that I've not had pains in my eyes for such a long time,' I could feel sure that the following night a severe onset of her fear of witches would be making extra work for her nurse or that her next attack of pains in the eyes was on the point of beginning" (Ibid. 76, n. 1). Freud provides a beginning of a conceptualization of these phenomena. He says it this way: "On each occasion what was already present as a finished product in the unconscious was beginning to show through indistinctly. This idea, which emerged as a sudden notion, was worked over by the unsuspecting 'official' consciousness (to use Charcot's term) into a feeling of satisfaction, which swiftly and invariably turned out to be unjustified" (Ibid. 76, n. 1). These examples of boasting are therefore not, strictly speaking, like the other three examples of denial. In boasting the patient does not utter a falsity. It is indeed true that the patient has not had neck-cramp, been frightened of witches, or had pain in the eyes. However, what the patient is reporting is naive because it does not report the most interesting thing that could be reported. The patient does not say that he feels that an attack, or witches, or pain in the eyes is coming. Here we come to the essence of Freud's new insight. Freud claims that the unconscious has a wisdom that consciousness does not have. Freud claims that the cause for the boasting of his patients is the wisdom of the unconscious which feels that the attack or the painful crisis is coming. Consciousness, in its limited information capabilities, does not see the attack on the horizon. All that consciousness can report is that it is aware that these attacks have not occurred for some time. Freud thus tells us, on the one hand, that the unconscious takes the initiative and formulates the truth, but that, on the other hand, consciousness does not know what the unconscious already knows. Freud says as much when he explains the popular warning

against boasting: “We do not boast of our happiness until unhappiness is in the offing and we become aware of our anticipation in the form of a boast” (Ibid. 76, n. 1).¹⁰

In boasting, as in the other examples of denials, an all too real but frightening truth is denied. The real truth is that the unconscious is aware of a coming attack. Thus, things are bad. Consciousness, on the other hand, looking only to the past, says that things are good. But notice, boasting is not without epistemological value. Just as with the other examples, boasting hits the nail on the head by correctly labeling the problem. Only, as in the other examples, boasting wrongly evaluates the problem. One can therefore formulate the similarity of boasting to examples of clear-cut denial as follows: an unknown unpleasant truth has been correctly labeled but wrongly evaluated.

Let us make a further observation about Freud’s explanation of boasting. In a last attempt to clarify the superstition that boasting is bad, Freud writes: “[In boasting] the subject-matter of what we are recollecting emerges before the feeling that belongs to it—that is to say, because an agreeable contrasting idea is present in consciousness” (Ibid. 76, n. 1). We have here in Freud’s analysis of boasting the first hint that the unconscious and consciousness systems obey different logics in creating statements. The unconscious is able to present something to which unpleasant feelings are attached. Consciousness seems inclined to turn to pleasant feelings. Freud will explain later in the article that the ego, as the seat of consciousness, is, at some point in its development, unable to accept anything unpleasant associated with itself. He writes: “the original pleasure-ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to eject from itself everything that is bad” (Ibid. 237). The ego is thus at that point of its development a narcissistic, imaginary construction.¹¹

2. PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS OF DENIAL

Having delineated the phenomenon that he wants to analyze (verbal denial), Freud then proceeds to unpack the background of that phenomenon. Freud teaches us that a verbal denial is part of a larger process.

First, there is a postulated prior phase: repression. Freud points out that a *Verneinung* (denial) has the effect of “taking cognizance of what is repressed” (Ibid. 235). This idea is so important to Freud that he formulates it three more times. He writes: “Thus the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*” (Ibid.). Or: “it [*Verneinung* (a denial)] is already a lifting of the repression” (Ibid.). Or finally: “[by *Verneinung* (a denial)] one consequence of the process of repression is undone—the fact, namely, of the ideational content of what is repressed not reaching consciousness” (Ibid.). As already pointed

out in the analysis of the examples given by Freud, a necessary precondition for a denial thus seems to be the existence of repression. When the mechanism of repression is successful then consciousness is faced with a blank. For the patient who dreamed about a female figure, a successful repression would have resulted in her saying: "You ask me who that figure is in my dream? I do not know." We have an example in Freud's patient Emmy von N., when Freud asks her "what the stammer came from" (*S.E.*, II, 61). Freud reports that the patient reacted by silence, by giving no reply. When Freud insisted and asked: "Don't you know?" she replied "No." When Freud pressed her by asking "Why not?" the patient angrily replied: "Because I mayn't" (*Ibid.*).

Second, there is the actual phase of denial. By contrasting the phenomenon of denial with the postulated state that preceded it, Freud is able to emphasize the novelty in the phenomenon of denial. The novelty is that consciousness is now aware of a phenomenon that it was not aware of before. Further on in his reflections, Freud describes denial as contributing to freedom of thinking because it provides consciousness with content that it lacked, insofar as consciousness is now aware of that which it previously was not. Furthermore, repressed thoughts are important—Freud even claims that they are indispensable—to the patient. Freud puts it this way: "With the help of the symbol of negation [in a denial], thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and enriches itself with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning" (*S.E.*, XIX, 236). Again: "But the performance of the function of judgment is not made possible until the creation of the symbol of negation has endowed thinking with a first measure of freedom from the consequences of repression and, with it, from the compulsion of the pleasure principle" (*Ibid.* 239).

Freud, however, points out that one should not be too enthusiastic about the presumed victory of denial over repression. He describes that victory in a variety of ways. He writes that a denial is "a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed . . . though not, of course an acceptance of what is repressed" (*Ibid.* 235–36). Or: "With the help of negation only one consequence of repression is undone" (*Ibid.* 236). Or finally: "The outcome of this is a kind of intellectual acceptance of the repressed, while at the same time what is essential to the repression persists" (*Ibid.*). A denial is thus a very ambiguous performance.¹² It undoes one crucial aspect of repression in that a denial labels the repressed. A denial lets a careful listener know precisely what the object of an effort of repression is. On the other hand, a denial makes it clear to any listener that the patient does not accept the truth as it is labeled and thus revealed in a denial. Freud knows that the female figure represented—let us suppose as domineering—in the patient's dream is in truth the patient's mother. But the patient's denial states the contrary: that female figure is not my mother. Freud describes the ambiguity of this denial quite well when he

writes: "It is as though the patient had said: 'It's true that my mother came into my mind as I thought of this person, but I don't feel inclined to let the association count'" (Ibid. 235). In a denial, a patient thus rejects or refuses to accept a true proposition.

Third, Freud informs us that therapy can promote further progress. Freud reports that it is possible to conquer "the negation as well and [bring] about a full intellectual acceptance of the repressed" (Ibid. 236). He adds, however, that in this new phase "the repressive process itself is not yet removed" (Ibid.). One can imagine that Freud asked the patient who dreamt about the female figure what eyes the female figure had, what hair, what clothes, what shoes, and so forth. If the patient was forced to recognize each time that the eyes, the hair, the clothes and the shoes of the figure all resembled those of his mother, he might then have concluded: "I guess it then must be my mother." Such an intellectual acknowledgment is clearly not a full emotional acknowledgment.¹³ As in the case of denial, here too there is a split between the intellectual and the affective processes.¹⁴

Clearly, this latter situation suggests the expected existence of a fourth stage in the process of denial wherein that which is repressed is overcome both intellectually and affectively.¹⁵ One can imagine that the patient who dreamt about a domineering lady and who subsequently identified her as his mother is now able to solve the emotional conflict arising from the fact that the female figure is simultaneously a domineering figure and his mother. Freud does not provide us, in his article, with any hints of the steps that will have to be taken to achieve that fourth stage.¹⁶ In the rest of this chapter I will articulate insights derived from studying that fourth stage.¹⁷

3. FREUD'S META-PSYCHOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Having observed a difference between the emotional reaction and the intellectual attitude towards a repressed phenomenon as revealed in a denial, one would have expected that Freud would have reflected on that difference. Instead, Freud uses most of the rest of the article on denial to explain how the intellectual function, that is, judging, is similar to and possibly emerges out of the affective life.¹⁸ He makes use of the generally accepted distinction between an attributive and an existential judgment. In an attributive judgment one is concerned with whether an object—in Freud's examples, the ego—has a particular quality. Am I a person who insults people, has bad ideas about my mother, and so forth? An existential judgment must decide whether a representation exists only in my memory or in my mind or, on the contrary, also exists in reality. Freud gives as example the child who imagines the mother's breast. An existential judgment must make the distinction between a representation to which nothing corresponds in reality and a representation that fits the reality.

In the process of reflecting on attributive judgments, Freud reminds us of a first meta-psychological thesis which will be very useful to explain a puzzling aspect of denial. It will also give us a hint of the difficult road that must be traveled to undo a denial. The piece of psychoanalytic theory that Freud reminds us of is the thesis that the ego is a narcissistic construction whose judgments, at first, follow the pleasure principle and not the reality principle. Freud writes that “the original pleasure-ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to eject from itself everything that is bad. What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical” (Ibid. 237).

If we apply this piece of psychoanalytic theory to the person who makes a denial, one must accept the proposition that the ego of that person does not follow the logic of the reality principle in which truth is recognized even if it is unpleasant. Rather, the ego in that case follows the logic of what Freud calls the pleasure principle.¹⁹ That logic is described as introjecting into oneself anything that is good and rejecting from oneself all that is bad. Such an explanation fits the examples given by Freud. Insulting thoughts about someone one depends upon, a negative image of one’s mother, headaches: all are undesirable things and the logic of the pleasure principle demands that each of them be rejected from the original pleasure-ego. Under the logic of the pleasure principle, only elements having the narcissistically pleasing characteristics of being good and nothing else but good can be admitted.

Enlightened by this Freudian idea, one is able to predict that fully undoing a denial will involve much more than epistemological work. It will involve addressing the ego’s love of a narcissistic self-image. Giving up such a narcissistic image is for the ego to accept that it is less than what it thought it was and loved thinking itself to be. The great question is then: How will the person react to such a demand? Will he react with aggression? Will he mourn? Will he look for a creative way to somehow recover that which he denied? Or finally, will he select a combination of these techniques?²⁰

When reflecting on the judgment of existence, Freud develops a second meta-psychological idea. He starts by pointing out that a judgment of existence is necessary when a person has developed a more realistic ego, an ego that obeys the reality principle. Freud himself gives the example of the infant who must be interested in distinguishing an imagined breast from an imagined breast which also exists (*Project for a Scientific Psychology*, S.E., I, 327–30). An imagined breast or, more generally, a representation of something is by itself already a warrant of the existence of the represented thing because “The antithesis between subjective and objective does not exist from the first” (S.E., XIX, 237). Freud then continues his argument by claiming that the opposition between the subjective and the objective is the result of the activities of the mind. The mind can bring before itself “once more something that has once been perceived, by reproducing it as a presentation without the

external object having still to be there" (Ibid.). Also "the reproduction of a perception as a presentation is not always a faithful one; it may be modified by omissions, or changed by the merging of various elements" (Ibid. 238). The judgment of existence must then verify if the object that is presented by the mind is still there in reality. Freud is now ready to make his second meta-psychological comment while reflecting on the process of denial. Freud writes: "The first and immediate aim, therefore, of reality-testing is, not to *find* an object in real perception which corresponds to the one presented, but to *re-find* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there" (Ibid. 237–38). Or "it is evident that a precondition for the setting up of reality-testing is that objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction" (Ibid. 238). This line of thinking by Freud suggests that truth telling as it is conditioned by judgments of existence requires more than the acquisition of the linguistic function of negation. *It also requires a non-linguistic form of negativity.*²¹ It requires that something that once provided real satisfaction has been lost. But such a loss cannot just be passively undergone. It will also have to be actively created. Some act of separation will have to be made.

Freud presents a third meta-psychological idea when he concludes his reflections on judgments. He argues that he has been able to show the psychological origin of judgments because they make moves similar to those of the primary instincts. In attributive judgments—so Freud tell us—a characteristic of a thing is to be accepted and thus affirmed or is to be rejected and thus denied. In judgments of existence one wants to know whether a presentation of a thing is only a presentation and is thus to be considered worthless or whether, on the contrary, something real corresponds to the presentation and thus the presentation is valuable because it corresponds to something that exists. Freud writes: "The polarity of judgments appears to correspond to the opposition of the two groups of instincts which we have supposed to exist. Affirmation—as a substitute for uniting—belongs to Eros; negation—the successor to expulsion—belongs to the instinct of destruction" (Ibid. 239). Freud thus makes the connection between judgments and emotions by means of three pairs of concepts. The first pair is *affirmation* and *negation*. The second pair is *substitute for uniting* and *successor to expulsion*. The third pair is *Eros* and *instinct of destruction*.

The last pair, Eros and instinct of destruction, expresses the polarity of human affectivity as Freud sees it. From early on Freud explained neurosis by means of the notion that a human being is a battlefield for different emotional forces. Originally, he thought that the basic opposition was between sexuality and ego-forces. Sexuality assured reproduction. The ego-forces assured self-preservation and expressed themselves most strongly in hunger. Freud called the sexual energy libido.²²

When Freud analyzed the problem of narcissism he noticed that the libido was directed not only towards the sexual object but also towards the

ego itself. This insight destroyed the opposition between the libido (a force for reproduction) and the “ego-force.” In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explicitly accepts this conclusion and therefore reduces both the ego-instincts and the libido to one force, Eros (Freud, S.E., XVIII, 44–61). The force opposing the libido (or love-force) is the instinct of destruction (which in its ultimate form is the death-instinct). Thus, Freud reintroduces psychological duality.

The second pair, substitute for uniting and successor to expulsion, is a strange one. The way Freud labels them indicates that the two elements of the pair are not co-equal; there is no symmetry between the two. The German word *Nachfolge* (successor) indicates that a prior action has taken place—referred to as expulsion. Freud’s understanding of the way the original narcissistic ego constructs itself is consonant with the idea that it is a “successor.” Indeed, Freud claims that the narcissistic ego is the result of—metaphorically—‘spitting out of itself’ what is considered bad (Freud, S.E., XIX, 237). The German word *Ersatz* (substitute), on the other hand, is used for an object or a situation. The idea that something is a substitute presupposes that something precedes the substitute either in time or in thought. The idea of unity does not include that same suggestion of a prior state as suggested by the idea of substitute. Could this mean that, according to Freud, unity is the primary situation of the child, whereas rejection (spitting out) is a secondary reaction?²³

The asymmetry signaled in the choice of labels for the second of the three pairs of words relating judgments and affective forces can be clarified further by reflecting on the central problem of this article: negation-denial. A denial presupposes, first, a connection between two facts, that is, a form of unity. A denial also presupposes that this connection was repressed. A negative judgment—particularly a denial—is then the expression of an original connection *and* of a trace of a prior repression, that is, a negation. An affirmative judgment expresses only a relation between the two contents. Whether or not there was a split between them is not expressed in an affirmative judgment. Thus, an affirmative judgment has less expressive potential than a negative judgment. In an affirmative judgment one only affirms a connection or a unity. What preceded the connection cannot be expressed by an affirmative judgment.

This leads us to the first pair mentioned by Freud: the affirmative and the negative judgment. This pair too must consist of parts that are not equally important. The negative judgment has more expressive potential. Thus, it is understandable that Freud finishes the paragraph by underlining the central function of the symbol of negation. Negation expresses both a connection between two concepts and a rejection of that connection. When the negative sentence is a denial, then the negation is a sign of a repression which is simultaneously overcome and maintained at a new level.

Freud uses his meta-psychological speculation on the connection between affective forces and judgments and the primacy of Eros to explain a clinical fact: the negativism of many psychotics.²⁴ Freud thinks the negative attitude of this type of psychotic results from a withdrawal of the libidinal components of the instincts such that too much destructivity remains. A normal person seems to need a quantity of libido. This type of psychotic is then one who lives in a degenerated situation because of a lack of sufficient libido. Psychosis is here explained as degeneration. In *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, S.E., XIX, 40–47, especially 40–42), Freud talks about the mixing of the libido and the aggressive tendencies. Here, Freud takes a developmental point of view. The child's libido develops from an oral to a genital phase. This happens, says Freud, through the addition of erotic components. The regression from a genital to an anal-sadistic libido is the result of the disappearance of the erotic elements. In these reflections Freud moves from his epistemological problem of denial to anthropological concerns about the development of libidinal and aggressive tendencies. It is a connection that will prove very valuable for exploring an aspect of denial that Freud did not explicitly address: the full undoing of a denial.

4. SPECIFICATIONS AND CORRECTIONS OF FREUD'S REFLECTIONS

However influential this short paper of Freud's has been, it is important to show its limitations. First, Freud seems to have a misconception of his own analysis. Freud claims to be analyzing the function of judgments. In fact Freud is not analyzing judgments but rather is analyzing the prehistory of judgments. Using Merleau-Ponty's terminology, one could say that Freud is sketching the preverbal history of the judgment. In that preverbal history Freud emphasizes the great importance of the acquisition of the linguistic symbol of negation. In doing so he either overlooks or fails to emphasize two other dimensions in a person's preverbal history.²⁵ Both dimensions remain hidden behind Freud's emphasis on the importance of acquiring the linguistic symbol of negation. This dimension has to do with the human requirement to elevate thoughts and feelings to the level of language. Acceding to this requirement is not restricted to the act of repressing or negating; Lacan understood this when he interpreted Freud's concept of *Bejahung* (affirmation) in the pair *Bejahung-Verneinung* as a "saying yes" to the whole symbolic system in general.

Independent of the psychoanalytic tradition, Hegel also seems to have understood the requirement for human beings to elevate needs and feeling to the level of language. Hegel does not use the word language but points to a requirement that must produce two characteristics consonant with elevating things to the level of language. Thus, Hegel writes: "as the feeling too is itself

particular and bound up with a special corporeal form, it follows that . . . the subject . . . is still susceptible of disease, so far as to remain fast in a *special* phase of its self-feeling, unable to refine it to 'ideality' and get the better of it" (Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 122–23). Bringing feelings (and needs) to the level of 'ideality' allows free subjectivity to assign feelings and needs the relative places that subjectivity wants and needs to assign them. By elevating feelings and needs to 'ideality,' consciousness acquires a form of fluidity (Ibid. 124) compatible with the requirement of freedom. Such a consciousness can then proscribe to itself "behaviour which follows from its individual position and its connection with the external world, which is no less a world of laws" (Ibid. 123). If consciousness is unable to elevate a particular feeling to 'ideality,' then consciousness "is engrossed with a single phase of feeling, it fails to assign that phase its proper place and due subordination in the individual system of the world which a conscious subject is" (Ibid. 123). Consequently, such "a feeling with a fixed corporeal embodiment sets [itself] up against the whole mass of adjustments forming the concrete consciousness" (Ibid. 124).²⁶

I interpret Hegel's claim that human beings must elevate feelings and needs to 'ideality' as similar to the Lacanian claim that human beings need to insert themselves with all their needs and wishes into the world of language so as to make all and each of these needs and wishes interconnected and thus relative. Failing to do so leads, according to both Lacan and to Hegel, to mental illness.²⁷ By overemphasizing the importance of replacing repression by a linguistic negation, Freud neglects to bring out the important point that the whole of life needs to be elevated to a linguistic world.

The second dimension hidden behind Freud's emphasis on the importance of acquiring the linguistic form of negation is the individual's prehistory of negation, with its effort at separation and the aggression involved in it. Freud does mention that the "the original pleasure-ego wants . . . to eject from itself everything that is bad. What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical" (Freud, *S.E.*, XIX, 237). Spitz does not just mention that prehistory of negation, he also analyzes it. In particular, he analyzes the function of aggression related to saying "no" (Spitz 1957, 51–52, 56–59, 130–33).

Spitz starts by pointing to the fact that prior to the acquisition of saying "no," at about fifteen months of age, the child's relation to its mother undergoes a drastic change. As the child begins to crawl and/or walk, the child moves away from the mother and does things that might endanger it. The mother, acting as the external ego of the child, constantly issues prohibitions in word and gesture. These prohibitions force the child into passivity and are experienced as frustrations. Among the most frequently returning means for the mother's expression of prohibitions is the use of the word "no." According to Spitz, the child responds to the frustrations resulting from the prohibitions in progressively more complicated ways. First, the child sides with the

adult who prohibits and does what the adult wants—for example, not touching an electric outlet (Ibid. 56). However, such a reaction leads to unacceptable frustrations for the child. Furthermore, the passivity forced upon the child provokes an aggressive reaction from the unconscious. The child is thus put in a paradoxical situation: he/she is still in a very dependent relation with the maternal figure while also feeling aggression towards that same figure. Spitz believes that the child resolves this tension by identifying with its mother as an aggressor (Ibid. 56, 133).²⁸ By such a move the child dynamically satisfies both contradictory feelings. In consequence, the child acquires no-saying and is now able to use the word or gesture with all the frustration and aggression attached to it. Finally, the child can make use of the newly acquired word (or gesture) either against him or herself or against the mother. In using the no-saying against him or herself the child creates a cleavage within between him or herself as an object observed and as an observer (Ibid. 130, 133). In using the no-saying against a person with whom the child has “primary narcissistic dependent relations” (Ibid. 56), the child severs his/her dependency relations with that person (Ibid. 52) and establishes separateness (Ibid. 57). From then on the child will have to establish new kinds of relations with that person. Spitz calls those new relations “highly enriched” (Ibid. 57, 129, 131).²⁹ By means of a case I will study in the next section, I will demonstrate that the acts of separation and severing involved in no-saying introduce a need for metaphorical relations. The linguistic form of negation will thus lead us by means of the idea of separation and the idea of aggression hidden in acts of separation to the appearance of the phenomenon of metaphor.³⁰

5. COMPLETING FREUD’S REFLECTIONS

In his study on denial, Freud greatly stressed the importance for the human being of acquiring the linguistic symbol of negation. However, I claim that, in laying this stress, Freud was also undervaluing the many other functions of language, as well as undervaluing the act of separation, with its implied aggression, that is behind the no-saying. I will now illustrate my claim with a concrete case of denial and the person’s successful efforts at overcoming the denial.

In *Father, Son, and Healing Ghosts*, the author, Anthony Moore, provides us with an autobiographical account of dealing with his father’s death. When Moore was two months old, his father died on a battlefield in the Second World War. As a young boy, Moore developed several strategies to deal with this traumatic event. He identified with his father, the dead marine officer, so strongly and imitated him so much that the young Moore at one point felt that “he was unable to be [himself] (Moore 4).³¹ At the same time, when asked about his feelings about the loss of his father, Moore had the habit,

from his childhood on, of answering: “You can’t miss what you never had” (Ibid. 1). Clearly this is a denial. We can see the pain of losing his father in his attempts to erase it via suffocating imitation and identification. We also find traces of young Moore’s pain—some of it self-inflicted—in two fantasies related to his father’s death. As he was born April 16, 1944, and his father died June 15, 1944, young Moore developed the fantasy that there must not have been space enough in the world for both of them together and that thus he was the cause of his father’s death. He further fantasized that if he were to father a child that would be his own death warrant (Ibid. 3, 98).

With the help of a therapist, as in Freud’s own reported examples, Moore was able to undo intellectually the denial that he did not miss his father. In the case of Moore, the therapist said: “You can also miss what you never had but know you had every right to have” (Ibid. 4). Emotionally undoing the conflict and healing the wound behind the denial is a more complicated story.

Moore’s efforts at distancing himself from the idealization of his father were crucial. After years as a dedicated and enthusiastic student in a military high school, the young Moore avoided ROTC in college. He gives as his reason that he felt he “had had enough of the military” (Ibid. 2). By his senior year, Moore returned to his love for the Marines and took the entrance exam for the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School (Ibid. 2). His first attempt at separating from his idealized father had not stuck. A second and new form of separation was initiated when he told his mother and grandmother of his plans to enroll in the Marine Officer School while the Vietnam War was taking place. What the young Moore saw in their eyes was either their fear of his death or their disapproval of his risking his life. His mother (and grandmother) had put a wedge between the young Moore and his father by appealing to his own wish to live (Ibid. 2). The young Moore accepted their invitation to make the separation from his idealized father.

Moore himself tells us that once he had separated himself from his father’s identity he felt the need “to reconnect to the energy and meaning that continued to flow from the image of [his] father” (Ibid. 5). Moore thus found himself in the contradictory situation that he wanted to be both separate from and remain connected with his father. He found a solution to this challenge in what in Lacanian terminology is called a metaphoric move.³² Having refused to become a Marine because that might lead to death, the young Moore lost an important connection with his father. Moore recovered that connection with his father by becoming a Jesuit. Moore writes about this decision: “Being a Jesuit was like being a Marine. Sometimes the Jesuits were even referred to as the Pope’s Marines. Furthermore, the idea of joining a religious order carried with it an image of dying, dying to the world, particularly the world of marital love” (Ibid. 3).³³ By the metaphorical power of the words “Marine” and “dying” the younger Moore was able to reconnect with his father after having separated himself from him.³⁴

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Moore's undoing of his denial can help us clarify the concept of self-deception. One is right in saying that the younger Moore deceived himself when he was telling himself and others during his adolescence that he could not miss his father since he never had one. One is also right in saying that the younger Moore did not know that he was deceiving himself. He only knew that he had been deceiving himself after he was helped by his psychiatrist-psychoanalyst, who told him that one can also miss what one never had but knows one had every right to have.³⁵ At that moment the younger Moore knew that he had been deceiving himself; he knew that his claim that one cannot miss a father one never had was a denial. One can therefore claim that it is possible to deceive oneself without knowing that one is deceiving oneself. Self-deception is thus, strictly speaking, not a lie.³⁶ It becomes a lie only after the moment in which a denial has been intellectually undone and the person refuses to do the emotional work involved in taking the steps implied by the intellectual undoing.

Freud praised the linguistic symbol of negation as a great instrument of freedom. It would be wrong, however, to attribute the healing of Tony Moore simply to the magic power of the symbol of negation in his fundamental denial. The healing was also based on several acts of cutting himself loose from his father and on the great metaphor of being a Jesuit. I believe that I have been able to show that Freud's analysis of the function of negation is but the tip of an iceberg in the process of healing. The iceberg includes at least the idea that one has to cut oneself loose from others with all the aggression (and guilt) that this involves and the idea that the richness of language must be used in its many dimensions, including the metaphoric dimension made available by the cultural tradition in which one lives. I was able to rely on Spitz for pointing out the negative acts required for personal growth. I was able to rely on Lacan and Hegel to point to the requirement that the totality of human life needs to be elevated to the level of language. Clearly, correcting the epistemological mistake present in a denial requires addressing the great anthropological puzzle of human growth with its demand for aggressive separation from and creative (metaphorical) connection with our original caregivers. Not properly dealing with the demand for separation and connection with his father was for Moore a form of self-deception even before he formulated a denial. When Moore formulated his denial, it was possible for others to see the self-deception at work. Only when he was able to intellectually undo his denial was Moore confronted with the choice of lying to himself or being authentic. As I see it, Moore avoided lying to himself because he was willing to face the difficult emotional demands made on himself in order to deal in a dif-

ferent way with the need to separate himself from his father while satisfying his need to remain connected with him. Thus, although the concepts of denial, self-deception, and lying about oneself partially overlap, they are not identical and should be carefully distinguished. I will devote the next chapter to this problematic.