

Ethics Year 2 Sample

A Level Revision Guide

OCR H573/2

2016 Specification

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Conscience

ISSUES

There are four major issues in a study of conscience.

- What is the **ORIGIN** of conscience: does it come from God, our upbringing or from reason?
- Does our conscience and sense of right and wrong emerge in childhood as a result of parental praise and blame? Is guilt a product of certain complexes, such as Freud's **OEDIPUS COMPLEX**?
- What is conscience, how does it **WORK**: is it a **MENTAL PROCESS** or part of our **REASON**, or a **FEELING**, or a **VOICE** in our heads (the voice of God?)?
- Can we go against our conscience and choose to reject it, in other words, is conscience **FALLIBLE** and so likely to make mistakes, or is it inerrant (incapable of error)? What is the relationship between conscience and human **WILL**?

SPECIFICATION

Requires us to consider **FREUD**'s Psychological approach and **AQUINAS**' Theological Approach, to compare and critically evaluate these two theories. We are at liberty to contrast them with Eric **FROMM**,

BUTLER or **NEWMAN** or anyone else - the syllabus is open-ended about additional material. We do, however, need to compare and contrast them with philosophers/authors of a different persuasion - so these are included in this guide. Students need to decide which is most relevant to their own approach of critical analysis and evaluation of Aquinas and Freud.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSCIENCE – SIGMUND FREUD

BACKGROUND

ENLIGHTENMENT – believed in reason and measurement but also hypothesis tested **A POSTERIORI**. Freud shared this belief that science could probe the deepest unconscious recesses of the human mind and so contribute to the advancement of human welfare.

- **COPERNICUS** taught us that humans were not the centre of the universe.
- **DARWIN** taught us that humans were just another species of animal.
- **FREUD** taught us that humans were not rational actors, but rather are driven by unconscious, primitive, instinctual desires.

KEY TERMS

CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE unconditional demands of the superego whose violation produces guilt

CONSCIENCE The part of human consciousness that guides moral decisions and equivalent to the superego

EGO The part of the human mind that forms our idea of self and presents a coherent image to the outside world. The ego longs for a moral guide.

ID The part of the human mind which processes passions and emotions. It is non-moral and is often in conflict with ego and superego.

SUPEREGO The part of the human mind which regulates behaviour, formed in childhood by relationships with authority figures (father and mother) and by praise and blame.

REPRESSION The suppression of our real emotions because they do not conform to ego-identity or are categorized as shameful by the superego.

EROS The creative life-force which is also the mischief-maker as it encourages the ego to take risks and cross boundaries.

THANATOS The death-instinct in conflict with eros, which appears in destructive patterns of behaviour (self-harm, aggression, and even suicide).

UNCONSCIOUS That part of the iceberg of the human mind which lies unseen but nonetheless influences and even controls behaviour.

LIBIDO The sexual instinct which forms part of eros and is often repressed or overly controlled by the superego.

NEUROSIS Mental illness which results from a failure to create a coherent and harmonious ego. Examples might be hysteria, obsessive-compulsive disorders (e.g. washing rituals) and phobias (e.g. fear of spiders).

GUILT Feelings of shame arising from the authority of the superego and the conflict with the id. Guilt can be suppressed and form part of the unconscious.

BACKGROUND

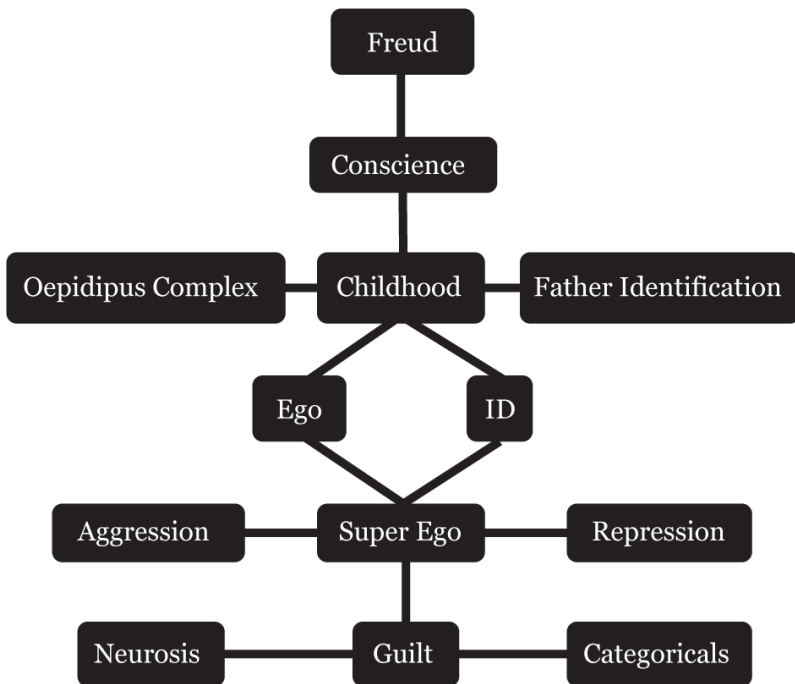
Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is the **FATHER OF PSYCHOANALYSIS** through his theories of how the conscious and unconscious mind develop and interact. He believed in the **ENLIGHTENMENT** assumption that science could understand all aspects of human behaviour by observing **A POSTERIORI** how patients respond to **PSYCHOANALYSIS** and by positing **THEORIES** (such as **EGO**, **ID** and **SUPEREGO**) which provide a **STRUCTURE** of thinking.

CONSCIENCE for Freud was a product of experiences in childhood which result in the creation of a **SUPEREGO** – an internal guide which seeks to calm our fears, order our world and resolve conflicts between **EGO** and **ID**. The conscience (superego) is the representative of the voice of our parents who in early childhood produced feelings of pleasure (approval/being loved) and pain (shame/punishment). Various attachments either dissolve (the **OEDIPUS COMPLEX**) or strengthen (gender identification with mother or father), and failure to reconcile a feeling of inner conflict or suppressed desire can lead to depression and **NEUROSIS**.

The structure of Freud's thinking is given on the opposite page, and his

theory is sometimes referred to as a **STRUCTURAL THEORY** of the human mind and consciousness. He explains behaviour in terms of the **UNCONSCIOUS** and the sublimation of desire (for example in ideas of God as **FATHER**), or the repression of desire (such as the **LIBIDO** or sexual desire).

STRUCTURE OF THOUGHT



EGO

The child develops a sense of **SELF** in relation to the external world. The **EGO** experiences feelings of pleasure and pain and also conscious and unconscious **DESIRES**. The pain of experience propels us towards change but can arise out of **REPRESSION** of urges which become unconscious.

The sense of self begins in childhood with an **IDENTIFICATION** with either **FATHER** or **MOTHER**. The origins of the relationship with the **MOTHER** are explained by the **OEDIPUS COMPLEX** and with the **FATHER** by a process by which the father (**AUTHORITY FIGURE**) becomes part of the infantile stage of the **SUPEREGO**.

CARL JUNG also proposed an **ELECTRA COMPLEX** in 1913 to explain a girl's psychosexual competition with her mother for possession of her father.

The **EGO** thus assumes a regulatory role - it excludes feelings and memories which don't fit our idea of self. For example, this repression resurfaces in **DREAMS** and also **PHOBIAS** – a fear of spiders, for example, which reflect unconscious sources of anxiety. Freud believed the **EGO** was striving to be moral.

The role of **PSYCHOANALYSIS** is to seek to integrate the “coherent ego and the repressed self which is split off from it” (Freud).

Our behaviour (**ACTION**) is a product of both conscious choices and **UNCONSCIOUS** forces 'which exert a driving force without the **EGO**

noticing the compulsion” (Freud). These forces result in behaviour which are driven by a complex **PSYCHIC ENERGY** which can leave the human being baffled and confused by their own behaviour – resulting in a feeling of **ANXIETY** or **GUILT**, and **DEPRESSION** (which Freud called ‘melancholia’).

ID

The **ID** is the seat of feelings, and passions. It is totally non-moral. The origin of the **ID** lies in our **EVOLUTIONARY** background but also in society itself which has conditioned us over generations.

The **ID** develops two broad categories of desire, according to Freud. **EROS** is the life-instinct, which gives us the desires for food, self-preservation, and sex. **THANATOS** is the death-instinct, which drives desires for domination, aggression, violence and self-destruction. These two instincts are at war within the id, and need to be tempered by ego constraints and by **CONSCIENCE**.

Children learn that authorities in the world restrict the extent to which these desires are satisfied. Consequently, humans create the **EGO** which takes account of the realities of the world and society. The ego Freud referred to as the **REALITY PRINCIPLE**, because our awareness of self and of others is crucial to our interaction with the world around us, and is formed at the age of 3 to 5 years.

Within the **ID** there is a battle going on between **EROS** – the life instinct – and **THANATOS** – the death instinct. **EROS** is the ‘mischief-maker’ (Freud) – the source of uncontrolled passion and also creativity. It is dominated by the **PLEASURE PRINCIPLE**, and yet not all pleasures are felt as acceptable or ‘good’. Hence the irrational guilt that can occur over,

for example, masturbation and its presence as a **TABOO** in Christianity. Indeed, **EROS** is often at odds with the demands and **CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES** (Freud's phrase echoing Kant) of the **SUPEREGO**.

The death-instinct (**THANATOS**) is experienced in the desire to kill the **FATHER** and replace him in the mother's affections in the **OEDIPUS COMPLEX**, but is also present in the destructive desires of the **DEPRESSIVE** or self-harming **NEUROTIC**. The death instinct also emerges in **AGGRESSION**, violence and war. In the individual it can have its final expression in **SUICIDE**. But is the positing of a sexual complex just pseudo-science?

SUPEREGO

The **SUPEREGO** represents the **INTERNAL** world of **CONSCIENCE**. "The superego represents the relationship to our parents" (Freud) and particularly our **FATHER** as authority figure and source of rules and punishments.

To Freud there is a conflict within the human psyche between **EGO** and **ID** and **EROS** and **THANATOS**. A sense of dread emerges in childhood from a fear of castration, a fear of death and a fear of **SEPARATION** from our parents, particularly a fear of loss of the mother's love. The superego can have a destructive power: causing the **EGO** to feel deserted and unloved, abandoned to an anxious and uncertain world and 'fuelling the death-instinct by making the Ego feel abandoned'. This sense of abandonment and powerlessness resurfaces in **DREAMS** (often of failure or of loss of control).

So the **SUPEREGO** can have both a **POSITIVE** and a **NEGATIVE** role – positive in controlling unbridled and anti-social desires and passions, but

also **NEGATIVE** in forming an extreme critical voice "brutally chastising and punishing" with guilt, or shame and ultimately a sense of **SELF-HATRED** which cause self-harm and depression.

We can also experience the **SUPEREGO** as **SAVIOUR** and project our guilt and shame onto a sense of **SIN** and a **FATHER-FIGURE** – whom we call **GOD**, who replaces lost love and provides a **SUBLIMATION** of our sexual desires. Christianity teaches that we deserve death, but that our place is taken by a substitute, Jesus Christ, who removes the **GUILT** and takes on himself the **PUNISHMENT**. (Isaiah 53 "the punishment that makes us whole is upon him").

The **SUPEREGO** in this way grows into a life and power of its own irrespective of the rational thought and reflection of the individual: it is programmed into us by the reactions of other people.

This 'superego', conscience, restricts humans' aggressive powerful desires (**THANATOS** within the id) which would otherwise **DESTROY** us. So guilt "expresses itself in the need for punishment" (Civilisation and its Discontents 1930:315-6). **ERIC FROMM**, quoting Nietzsche, agrees with Freud's analysis of the destructive nature of the **AUTHORITARIAN** conscience.

"Freud has convincingly demonstrated the correctness of Nietzsche's thesis that the blockage of freedom turns man's instincts 'backward against man himself'. Enmity, cruelty, the delight in persecution...- the turning of all these instincts against their own possessors: this is the origin of the bad conscience".
Eric Fromm, Man For Himself, 1947:113

Our superego can lead us to **INTERNALISE** shame, and to experience conflicts between the id desires and the shame emanating from the

superego responses. The more we suppress our true feelings, the more that which drives us comes from what Freud described as the **SUBCONSCIOUS**, which like an iceberg lies hidden in the recesses of our minds.

GUILT

Freud believed that the more rapidly the **OEDIPUS COMPLEX** succumbed to **REPRESSION** of our desire for our mother, the stronger will be the domination of the **SUPEREGO** over the **EGO** in the form of a severe and dictatorial **CONSCIENCE**.

So “the tension between the demands of conscience and the actual performances of the ego is experienced in a sense of guilt” (Freud). But guilt can itself be **REPRESSED** and so **UNCONSCIOUS**. Unconscious guilt expresses itself in **NEUROSIS** and other forms of **MENTAL ILLNESS**.

SYNOPTIC POINT Freud sees the structure of our Psyche much as Plato describes it in the analogy of the Charioteer (reason) who seeks to harmonise the twin horses of virtue and passion. A man on horseback (the **EGO**) tries to hold in check the superior strength of the horse (**ID**). But unlike the horseman, the **EGO** uses forces borrowed from the **SUPEREGO** – such as shame and guilt. But a result of this is that **EGO**-identity increasingly fails to represent **ID**-desire. The unfulfilled **ID** resurfaces in sick behaviour or **UNCONSCIOUS** forces (**COMPULSIONS**).

OEDIPUS COMPLEX

Oedipus so loved his mother that he killed his father and assumed his father's role. Infants start with **MOTHER-ATTACHMENT** which is reinforced by the **PLEASURE PRINCIPLE** as the mother satisfies the infants need for sustenance, love and erotic feeling. The hostility to the **FATHER** gradually subsides in healthy children who become more fully identified with the **MOTHER** (girls) or the **FATHER** (boys) as puberty approaches.

However, a failure to identify successfully with one or other parent can lead to transfer of love (Freud saw this as the origin of **HOMOSEXUAL LOVE**). The **EGO** deepens its relationship with the **ID** in rituals which may be associated with shame, such as masturbation, and fantasies that produce guilt. So the **LIBIDO** can be redirected or even suppressed altogether in a sublimation which we call **RELIGION**.

Ultimately, to Freud, Religion is an infantile projection of our desires and longings onto an image which is an **ILLUSION**. In the Christian Thought paper we study more of this theory in Freud's work, The Future of an Illusion.

EVALUATING FREUD

Weaknesses

REDUCTIONIST George Klein (1973) argues Freud reduces the human mind to an object of enquiry by positing unprovable theories of how conscious and unconscious processes interact. In so doing he reduces human behaviour to a dualism of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' behaviour. Like the criticism levelled at geneticist **RICHARD DAWKINS**

we can see this as a form of scientific reductionism.

OVERSEXUALISED Freud argues that the relationship of child and parent has sexual desire through the development of the **OEDIPUS COMPLEX** as a key factor. The success or failure of a child's sexual feelings for one or other parent as key to child development is highly contentious. For example, a boy's father is his mother's lover, but he's also the disciplinarian. So, assuming boys do harbour feelings of fear toward their fathers, is this because they fear castration by a romantic rival or because they're afraid of ordinary punishment?

SAMPLING Freud's sample is primarily Austrian upper-class woman, who manifested hysteria. The sample is too small and gender-biased to be truly scientific and the emphasis on sex reveals the cultural repression of that age. Scholars argue Freud fabricates the claim that "almost all of my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father". John Kihlstrom comments: "While Freud had an enormous impact on 20th century culture, he has been a dead weight on 20th century psychology. The broad themes that Westen writes about were present in psychology before Freud, or arose more recently, independent of his influence. At best, Freud is a figure of only historical interest for psychologists".

Strengths

REVOLUTIONARY Freud was the first person to analyse and theorise about the human unconscious. His argument that dreams are a key to unlocking the secrets of the subconscious mind, his belief that hypnotherapy could change behaviour and his invention of **TALKING THERAPIES** have fundamentally changed our treatment of mental illness.

SECULAR Freud believed religion was a neurosis based on delusions

and projections – for example God is a father-substitute onto whom we project our desire for an authority figure, our fear of death and our sense of abandonment. This to Freud was infantile. Westen (1998:35) argues "the notion of unconscious processes is not psychoanalytic voodoo, and it is not the fantasy of muddle-headed clinicians. It is not only clinically indispensable, but it is good science".

HUMANE Freud treated the whole human personality rather than condemning aspects of it as shameful, evil or unacceptable. He thereby challenged the old religious **DUALISMS** of good versus evil, monster versus hero, to give a humane alternative and offering hope of cure and transformation to those whose lives were blighted by mental health problems.

KEY QUOTES - FREUD

1. *"In the Ego and the Id Freud abandons the simple dichotomy between instinct and consciousness and recognizes the unconscious elements of the ego and superego, the importance of nonsexual impulses (aggression or the 'death instinct'), and the alliance between superego and id, superego and aggression". Christopher Lasch The Culture of Narcissism page 32*

2. *"While Freud had an enormous impact on 20th century culture, he has been a dead weight on 20th century psychology. The broad themes were present in psychology before Freud, or arose in more recently independent of his influence. At best, Freud is a figure of only historical interest for psychologists." John Kihlstrom*

3. *"When we were little children we knew these higher natures of our parents, and later we took them into ourselves". Freud*
3. *"All that is repressed is unconscious, but not all that is unconscious is repressed". Freud*
4. *"To the ego, living means the same as being loved". Freud*
5. *"By setting up the superego, the ego has mastered the Oedipus Complex and placed itself in subjection to the Id". Freud*
6. *"The tension between the demands of conscience and the performance of the ego is experienced as guilt". Freud*
7. *"As the child was once under the domination of its parents, so the ego submits to the Categorical Imperative of the superego". Freud*
8. *"Human megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from the psychological research of the present time which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house". Freud*

Postscript

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In 2007 he set up a philosophy and ethics community dedicated to enlarging the teaching of philosophy in schools by applying the theory of multiple intelligences to the analysis of philosophical and ethical problems. So far over 700 schools have joined the community and over 30,000 individuals use his website every month.

To join the community please register your interest by filling in your details on the form on the website. We welcome contributions and suggestions so that our community continues to flourish and expand.

www.peped.org contains **EXTRACTS** and **FURTHER READING** mentioned in the exam specification, plus additional articles, handouts and essay plans. Notice that the exam specification merely gives guidance as to further reading - you may use any source or philosopher you find relevant to the construction of your argument. Indeed, if you have the courage to abandon the selection (and any examples) introduced by your textbook, you will relieve the examiner of boredom and arguably launch yourself on an A grade trajectory.