

Lawrence Totaro

“He who hopes to learn the fine art of the game of chess from books will soon discover that only the opening and closing moves of the game admit of exhaustive systematic description, and that the endless variety of the moves which develop from the opening defies description; the gap left in the instructions can only be filled in by the zealous study of games fought out by master-hands.”

-- Sigmund Freud

“At one point he likened it to chess, where one can learn the opening moves and the end game moves, while the middle game can be acquired only by actual practice and contact with the games of great masters. Others since Freud have made many attempts to systematize the teaching of psychoanalytic therapy more thoroughly, yet there always remains a highly personal element in psychoanalysis which makes it in a sense more of an art than an exact science.”

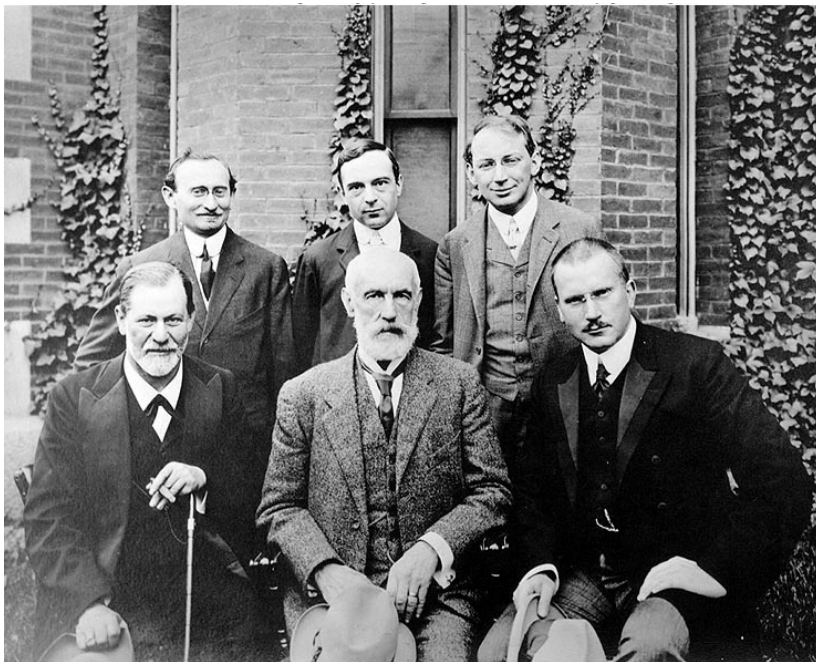
-- Reuben Fine from

Freud: A Critical Re-Evaluation of His Theories. Contributors: Reuben D. Fine - author. Publisher: David McKay. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1962 Page 97. Other books by Fine: *The Personality of the Asthmatic Child*, *Psychoanalytic Observations on Chess and Chess Masters*

TIME magazine article (September 4th, 1972) [Why They Play: The Psychology of Chess](#) by Gilbert Cant

Robert Wilcocks book [*Maelzel's Chess Player: Sigmund Freud and the Rhetoric of Deceit*](#)

It is an inevitable result of all this that we should seek in the world of fiction, in literature and in the theatre compensation for what has been lost in life. There we still find people who know how to die—who, indeed, even manage to kill someone else. There alone too the condition can be fulfilled which makes it possible for us to reconcile ourselves with death: namely, that behind all the vicissitudes of life we should still be able to preserve a life intact. For it is really too sad that in life it should be as it is in chess, where one false move may force us to resign the game, but with the difference that we can start no second game, no return-match. In the realm of fiction we find the plurality of lives which we need. We die with the hero with whom we have identified ourselves; yet we survive him, and are ready to die again just as safely with another hero. ("Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," 14:291)



Distinguished Psychologists at Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1909

Those present include (seated, front row): Sigmund Freud, Granville S. Hall and Carl Jung; (standing, back row): Abraham A. Brill, Ernest Jones and Sándor Ferenczi.

Sigmund Freud: Four Centenary Addresses. Contributors: Ernest Jones - author. Publisher: Basic Books. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1956.

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If the leading chess player of America can desert that fascinating occupation for the arduous life of a psychoanalyst it is not surprising that anthropologists, art critics and historians, not to mention educationists, have done the same.

The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud: Years of Maturity, 1901-1919. Volume: 2. Contributors: Ernest Jones - author. Publisher: Basic Books. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1953.

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(11) The next paper, "On Beginning the Treatment," 24 published in January and March of the following year (1913), dealt with the various problems that arise at the inception of the treatment. This paper is full of worldly wisdom garnered from his years of experience. What to say to the patient in the first interview, how much to explain, arrangements about time and money, the suitability of various cases, are among the matters he treated. Freud was always very apt at analogies, and here he remarked that those who are learning "the noble game" of chess soon find out that only the openings and the end game permit of systematic presentation; much the same applies to a psychoanalysis. He admitted, however, that even here the variations among patients are so great that none of the rules he proposes has any absolute validity; they all may have to be altered according to the case. One can only describe an average procedure.

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Freud played a good deal of chess in coffee houses in the earlier years, but he came to find the concentration more of a strain than an enjoyment, and after 1901 he gave it up altogether. An evening spent at a theater was a rare event. It had to be something of special interest to him, such as a performance of a Shakespeare play or a Mozart opera before he could tear himself away from his work.

The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud: The Formative Years and the Great Discoveries, 1856-1900. Volume: 1. *Contributors: Ernest Jones - author. Publisher: Basic Books. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1953.*

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To return to the choice itself, Freud had a very orderly mind (and also orderly habits), and his power of organizing a mass of facts into a systematic grouping was truly remarkable; his command of the literature on the subject of childhood paralyses, or on that of dreams, is one example alone of this. But on the other hand he rather spurned exactitude and precise definition as being either wearisome or pedantic; he could never have been a mathematician or physicist or even an expert solver of chess problems. He wrote easily, fluently, and spontaneously, and would have found much rewriting irksome

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There were two quite distinct groups of strictly personal friends: those he got to know in his medical and scientific work, mostly older than himself; and a little group of about his own age. The latter, fifteen or twenty in number, constituted what they called the Bund (Union). They used to forgather regularly once a week in the Café Kurzweil for conversation and games of cards and chess.

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Freud had one important hobby, but few relaxations apart from holidays. He played a certain amount of chess, but gave it up entirely before he was fifty since it demanded so much concentration which he preferred to devote elsewhere. When alone he would sometimes play patience, but there was a card game he became really fond of. That was an old Viennese four-handed game called tarock. He was playing this in the nineties, and probably earlier; later on it became an institution, and every Saturday evening was religiously set aside for it.

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There is no point in giving a list of twenty or thirty names, since none of them were of much importance to Freud. His chief friends were Bloch, Oscar Rie, and Königstein. It was about this time that he was giving up chess for tarock, the card game to which he remained faithful; they would often play this until one or two in the morning. When Freud spoke later of the ten years of isolation one must understand that this referred purely to his scientific, not to his social, life.

Letters of Sigmund Freud. *Contributors: Ernst L. Freud - editor, Sigmund Freud - author, James Stern - transltr, Tania Stern - transltr. Publisher: Basic Books. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1960.*



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To Martha Bernays discussing the death of Freud's friend, Nathan Weiss.

Vienna, Sunday September 16, 1883

“For fourteen years he hardly ever left the hospital, whirled like a fast-moving automaton out of the building and into the restaurant, into the coffeehouse, and back. His recreation consisted of playing cards and chess, at which he was a master, and in spite of the agitation it produced in him and which sometimes caused him to be exceedingly ruthless, it was a pleasure comparable to a theater performance to watch him at play and to listen to his original, biting wit.”

(Freud's colleague in the General Hospital who committed suicide in 1883 L.T.)

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To Martha Bernays

Vienna, Wednesday March 19, 1884

It grew more and more easy, after a warm bath I could walk quite well, then I dashed into the laboratory, made up my mind to start work again, in the afternoon played chess in the coffeehouse, and on receiving a brief visit from Prof. Hammerschlag I decided to return it in the evening. This I did; of course they were all rather concerned and soon threw me out again, but here I am in the saddle once more, have no pains despite the long day, only feelings of fatigue which is understandable, can work again and am immensely, immensely pleased that I have recovered by my own decision.

Freud: A Life for Our Time. *Contributors: Peter Gay - author. Publisher: Norton. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1998.*

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"I give myself over to my fantasies, play chess, read English novels; everything serious remains banished. For two months not a line of what I am learning or surmising has been put into writing. Hence I live as a sybaritic philistine as soon as I am free of my trade. You know how constricted my indulgences are; I may not smoke anything good, alcohol does nothing for me at all, I am done begetting children, my contact with people has been cut off. Thus I vegetate, harmless, taking care to keep my attention diverted from the theme I work on during the day."

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FREUD'S PAPER "On Beginning the Treatment," with its reassuring, reasonable tone, is representative of the series as a whole; he was offering flexible suggestions rather than ironclad edicts. The felicitous metaphor—chess openings—that he enlisted to elucidate the strategic initial moment in psychoanalysis is calculated to woo his readers; the chess player, after all, is not tied to a single, dictated line of procedure. Indeed, Freud observed, it is only just that the psychoanalyst should have some choices open to him: the histories of individual patients are too diverse to permit the application of rigid, dogmatic rules. Still, Freud left no doubt that certain tactics are plainly indicated: the analyst should

select his patients with due care, since not every sufferer is stable enough, or intelligent enough, to sustain the rigors of the psychoanalytic situation. It is best if patient and analyst have not met before, either socially or in a medical setting—certainly one among his recommendations that Freud himself was most inclined to flout. Then, the patient duly chosen and a starting time set, the analyst is advised to take the initial meetings as an opportunity for probing; for a week or so, he should reserve judgment on whether psychoanalysis is in fact the treatment of choice.

Collected Papers. Volume: 2. *Contributors: Sigmund Freud - author, Joan Riviere - author. Publisher: Basic Books. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1959.*

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FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE TECHNIQUE OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS
1 ON BEGINNING THE TREATMENT. THE QUESTION OF THE FIRST
COMMUNICATIONS. THE DYNAMICS OF THE CURE. (1913)

HE who hopes to learn the fine art of the game of chess from books will soon discover that only the opening and closing moves of the game admit of exhaustive systematic description, and that the endless variety of the moves which develop from the opening defies description; the gap left in the instructions can only be filled in by the zealous study of games fought out by master-hands. The rules which can be laid down for the practical application of psychoanalysis in treatment are subject to similar limitations.

I intend now to try to collect together for the use of practicing analysts some of the rules for the opening of the treatment. Among them there are some which may seem to be mere details, as indeed they are. Their justification is that they are simply rules of the game, acquiring their importance by their connection with the whole plan of the game. I do well, however, to bring them forward as 'recommendations' without claiming any unconditional acceptance for them.

Freud for Historians *Contributors: Peter Gay - author. Publisher: Oxford University Press. Place of Publication: London. Publication Year: 1986.*

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If it is change, then, that makes history possible; it is persistence that is the foundation of historical understanding. Like the game of chess, human nature constructs dramatic and inexhaustible variety from a few elements and a handful of rules.

Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought. *Contributors: Margaret J. Black - author, Stephen A. Mitchell - author. Publisher: Basic Books. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1995.*

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The psychoanalytic process can be, and has been, conceptualized in many different ways. The metaphors that are chosen to illustrate principles of clinical technique often provide the best indication of the underlying assumptions of each analytic model. Freud's metaphors all have an adversarial quality: war, chess, hunting wild beasts. As the ego psychologists shifted the focus from the id to the ego, from the repressed to the central nexus of psychological processes, their models of the analytic process also began to change.

The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud's Aesthetics. *Contributors: Sarah Kofman - author, Winifred Woodhull - transltr. Publisher: Columbia University Press. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1988.*

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In "applying" psychoanalysis to art, Freud advocates the murder of the father and his substitutes. Clearly, the public worships the artist and all other "great men." Yet in *Moses and Monotheism*, where Freud tries to define the nature of the great man, he shows that no thinker, artist, technical expert, or great chess player is worthy of the name. Success in a life of action is no more satisfactory as a criterion, as Freud shows by deliberately citing the examples of Goethe, Leonardo da Vinci, and Beethoven. The concept of the "great man" is vague, and connotes nothing more than the presence of numerous human capabilities in the individual so designated.