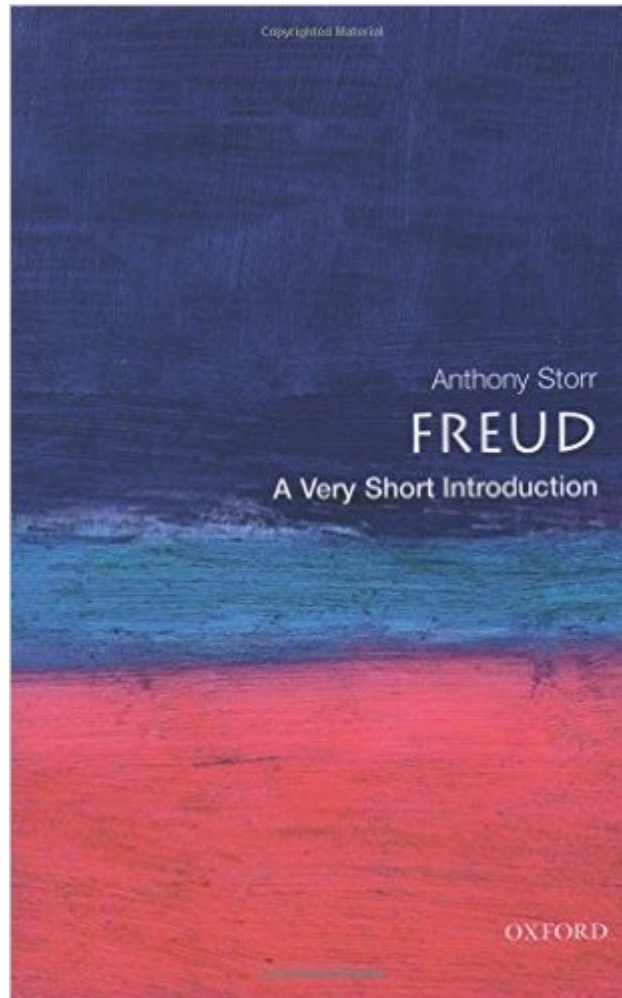


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Freud: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, developed a totally new way of looking at human nature. Only now, with the hindsight of the half-century since his death, can we assess his true legacy to current thought. As an experienced psychiatrist himself, Anthony Storr offers a lucid and objective look at Freud's major theories, evaluating whether they have stood the test of time, and in the process examines Freud himself in light of his own ideas. An excellent introduction to Freud's work, this book will appeal to all those broadly curious about psychoanalysis, psychology, and sociology. About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; Oxford University Press edition (June 28, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0192854550

ISBN-13: 978-0192854551

Product Dimensions: 6.8 x 0.6 x 4.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #97,358 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) [#43 in Books > Medical Books > Psychology > History](#) [#50 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > History](#) [#75 in Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Movements > Psychoanalysis](#)

Customer Reviews

This is one of the best (and definitely among the longest) of the books that I have read in the Very Short Introduction series. I have to confess at the outset that I'm not a fan of Freud. Over the years I've dipped into his work from time to time, but each time have found him off putting and many of his ideas counter intuitive. It was helpful for me to realize that many others, including psychologists like Anthony Storr, also find much of what Freud wrote to be either wrong or in need of considerable emendation. I was always sceptical that our dreams (or at least my dreams) had the kind of structure that Freud insisted that they did. And I felt his reasoning about the sexualization of desires of very small children implied a vastly more sophisticated understanding of sex than I possessed as

a young child. I have found the object-relations school to be infinitely more persuasive than Freud on child-mother or child-father attachments, and not just because that school actually saw a major role for the mother compared to Freud. I was also hurt in my explorations of Freud by reading what Storr argues are his worst books, things like *MOSES AND MONOTHEISM*, which I frankly found absurd, or his book on jokes. So, my impression over the years was that Freud was borderline silly. I credited him with causing us to take more seriously child development and to acknowledge the centrality of sexuality in our lives, but I found the general contours of his thought to be quite unhelpful in understanding my own life. I must admit that I was also put off Freud by a host of writers who misused psychology in exploring everyday life. I once was talking to my professor at Yale, Paul L. Holmer, about W. Jackson Bates's great biography of Samuel Johnson.

We are all aware of many of Freud's ideas, even if we're not conscious aware of that derivation. The concept of the id, the ego, the super-ego, Oedipal complex, etc., are now so much a part of our everyday language that we could find it easy to forget that they have not always been so. This little book is truly a perfect introduction to Freud's life and work for those who'd never read any Freud and who want to get a good starting point. The writing is exceptionally clear and remarkably unbiased - readers will gain a good understanding of why Freud was so fascinated and they will also have the information to make decisions on whether his theories are justified. To acknowledge that Freud was a highly intelligent man is not to admit that he understood human nature. In fact, in his case studies and his determined turning of every neurosis to a sexual starting point is the most exasperating element one encounters in reading Freud - that of Freud's certainty of his own right point of view, without the evidence to support that viewpoint. But certainly the reader will be able to follow up on the writing here. For those wishing to read Freud's own works, his books have been translated into English for those who are not able to read the original German. I have always found reading Freud to be a puzzling experience. On the one hand, the man had a very intelligent way of writing. On the other, he leapt to conclusions without bridging the gap with anything other than his own certainty. One can certainly "interpret" Freud in terms other than the organic or strictly literal, but any reading of his own writing will reveal to the reader that Freud didn't have a metaphorical interpretation in mind. But even if his ideas were often stubbornly wrong, Freud is well worth reading.

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