

## **Beyond the Trauma Principle in Education: Does Freud's Concept of *Nachträglichkeit* Imply the Possibility of Retroactive Education?**

Akira GESHI  
*Chuo University*

### **Introduction: Beyond the Trauma Principle?**

From their birth to the present day, Freudian theory and psychoanalysis have been the subject of both intense praise and criticism. Sigmund Freud's conceptualization of the unconscious mind has had a profound impact on various fields of the humanities and social sciences, in addition to psychiatry and clinical psychology. For example, the "trauma theory" originally proposed by Freud, which holds that psychic trauma that occurs between infancy and childhood can have serious consequences, is widely accepted, shared, and understood in our society. However, despite its significant influence, Freudian theory has been severely criticized for its lack of rigor and consistency, while Freudian psychoanalysis has been questioned for its low reproducibility and failure to satisfy scientific requirements.

This study focuses on Freudian theory because it has the potential to transcend these criticisms. In particular, Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* is still open to reconsideration in the context of educational theory; thus, this study applies the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* to educational theory and presents a new model of education, called "retroactive education." In their excellent dictionary of psychoanalytic terms, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis explain *Nachträglichkeit* (après-coup or deferred action) as follows: "[This] term [is] frequently used by Freud in connection with his view of psychical temporality and causality: experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new, meaning but also with psychical effectiveness" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 111). Since *Nachträglichkeit* is often described in relation

---

#### **Correspondence:**

Akira GESHI, Chuo University. Email: geshiakira.chuo.u@gmail.com

to etiology, it is generally considered to have negative implications; however, I propose that it may be possible to apply Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* theory to education and human formation (*Bildung* in German) theory in a positive manner.

At the outset, I would like to raise two questions regarding the foundations of modern educational theories. The first relates to the model of causality in educational theory. The model of causality discussed in this paper means the influence that a particular cause contributes to the production of a particular result. In general, in the social sciences, it is thought that there are complex factors and processes involved in the cause-effect relationship. However, a number of educational programs and policies in Japan continue to be based on the simple model of causality. In addition, there are many examples of such policies and programs in which the distinction between causality and correlation is unclear. One of the most famous illustrations of this confusion in recent years is exemplified by the national campaign, "Hayane, Hayaoki, Asagohan" ("Early to Bed, Early to Rise, and Don't Forget Your Breakfast"), promoted by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in recent years, the successful operation of the plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle, based on the causality theory of learning, is assumed to be the primary proof of excellent education. For instance, in "The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education" (provisional translation), MEXT clearly states: "In preschool, compulsory (elementary and lower secondary), and upper secondary school education, the government aims to develop in all children a definite zest for life by promoting collaboration and cooperation among schools, families, and communities and by completing the PDCA cycle in order to examine and improve educational contents and methods, educational environments, and the educational system, based on objective data" (MEXT 2013).

The other question relates to gradual learning theory, which is based on

---

<sup>1</sup> This campaign has been implemented by MEXT in cooperation with a private organization called "Hayane, Hayaoki, Aasagohan Zenkoku Kyougi-Kai" (National Council for the Promotion of "Early to Bed, Early to Rise, and Don't Forget Your Breakfast"), which was established in 2006. While there may be a correlation between a healthy lifestyle and academic achievement, this cannot be explained by simple causality; numerous studies indicate that children's academic achievement is determined by complex factors such as economic power, social and cultural capital of families, and parents' interest in their children (Kariya *et al.* 2004). Nevertheless, in several brochures and websites, MEXT repeatedly appeals to students to follow these three habits, especially eating breakfast, implying that doing so will surely lead to an improvement in academic achievement. For instance, see the two official brochures published by MEXT for elementary school students, "Hayane, hayaoki, Asagohan te Shitteru kana?" ("Do you know 'Early to Bed, Early to Rise, and Don't Forget Your Breakfast'?") (available online: [https://www.mext.go.jp/kids/find/kyoiku/mext\\_0020.html](https://www.mext.go.jp/kids/find/kyoiku/mext_0020.html)), and "Dekiru Kotokara Hajimetemiyou 'Hayane, hayaoki, Asagohan'" ("Let's start with what you can do, 'Early to Bed, Early to Rise, and Don't Forget Your Breakfast'") (available on [https://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shougai/asagohan/\\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2020/1324879\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shougai/asagohan/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2020/1324879_1.pdf)).

developmental stage theory, and relies on the assumption that education should be provided according to a child's developmental stage and the readiness of the learner. This schema, in general, is said to have been discovered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and developed by Jean Piaget, and is the foundation of the "Courses of Study" (the school curriculum criteria) in primary and secondary education in Japan.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the recent university reform movement in Japan has also advocated for a gradual and standardized curriculum that will enable the "quality assurance" of university education.<sup>3</sup> Here, I question this assumption and argue that some knowledge and experiences which are far beyond the learner's development stage and understanding can sometimes have important implications for them later in life, and question whether such a view of education deprives learners of the opportunity to break their own framework of understanding, thereby robbing them of the great opportunity of learning.

To this end, this paper will reexamine trauma theories and present a new concept of learning called "retrospective education." In accordance with the principle of causality, trauma theories postulate that trauma (i.e., the cause) leads to disease (i.e., the result). In response to this assumption, the concept of "retrospective education" presented in this paper criticizes the causal scheme in which the implementation of a particular educational practice at particular developmental stage is believed to lead to a particular result. Thereafter, I propose a model in which a present or newer stimulus (new experience) activates a cause (old or preceding experience) that occurred in the past to retroactively produce education in the present. Moreover, unlike developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in educational theory, this model demonstrates the possibility that experiences beyond the learner's understanding can be retroactively (ex post facto) processed, and these experiences can also be characterized as educational.

It may become possible to reconsider the theoretical premise of modern educational theories, and to re-examine the common understanding of education with the affirmation of two aforementioned hypotheses. I believe that it is one of the missions of the philosophy of education to challenge the assumptions of our own educational theories just as Freud's psychoanalysis highlighted the limitations of conventional psychology.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Courses of Study, first formulated in 1947, which regulate the educational goals and content of elementary and secondary schools in Japan, are based on Piaget's developmental stage theory (Geshi 2013). Even in recent years, developmental stage theory has continued to form the basis for the Courses of Study. The Curriculum Division of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department of MEXT has provided an appendix document with the Courses of Study in 2021 that states "supporting students' development" is one of the most important aspects of education, and requires each school to "enhance instruction based on the developmental stages" (MEXT 2021: 23-28).

<sup>3</sup> See [https://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo4/houkoku/attach/1302346.htm](https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo4/houkoku/attach/1302346.htm) (Japanese language)

## I. Beyond the Model of Causality and Learning Stage Theory

### 1. Revisiting the Model of Causality

First, I would like to reconsider the model of causality according to which our shared understanding of education assumes that certain causes lead to certain results. As a typical example of causality, we will examine the “trauma theory” which evolved under the influence of Freudian psychoanalytic theories. It might be argued that the trauma theory, which posits that childhood trauma can lead to the development of mental diseases and disorders, has had more of an impact on education than any other psychoanalytic theory. For instance, Alexander Sutherland Neill’s Summerhill School, which allows children a great deal of freedom with the aim of avoiding trauma and repression among students, could be considered a clear application of trauma theory (Neil 1972). A more extreme example is the work of Alice Miller who, after criticizing “poisonous pedagogy,” rejected education in all its forms, deeming it inherently traumatic for children (Miller 1983). These two examples present variations within the trauma theory model. It should also be noted that the trauma theory of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) was formally included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition (DSM-III) published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, and has continued to appear as such, even in the updated DSM-V, published in 2013.

As is well known, some scholars consider Freud’s early “seduction theory” (*Verführungstheorie*) to be a precursor of PTSD as it was defined in the DSM-III. Freud initially believed that sexual seduction (which would be regarded as sexual assault and abuse by today’s standards) was the cause of neurosis. However, from the autumn of 1897 onward, Freud began to change his thinking by indicating that seductive scenes that were narrated contained phantasies and, therefore, began focusing on the psychic reality itself. In 1950 (English translation 1954), Ernst Kris coined this development as the “abandonment of the seduction hypothesis” (*Verzichts auf die Verführungshypothese*) and hailed it as a great step in the birth of psychoanalysis (Kris 1950: 36; 1954: 29).

However, toward the end of the 1970s, in response to trends such as anti-psychiatry and anti-pedagogy, many observers began to criticize Freud’s transition strongly. Alice Miller, for example, criticizes Freud’s psychoanalytic theory for masking real sexual abuse by understanding the patient’s traumatic memories as an expression of the Oedipus complex (Miller 1984). Similarly, Judith Lewis Herman, who popularized the concept of psychological trauma, also strongly criticized Freud’s abandonment of the seduction

hypothesis, stating that it regularly led to the assessment of actual abuse as a patient's phantasies, which also resulted in the concealment of criminal acts (Herman 1992).<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, while some researchers contend that Freud's seduction theory was the forerunner of trauma theory or PTSD, I insist that it could never be categorized as a simple trauma theory. The variations of trauma theory by Neill, Miller, and Herman described above were all based on the concept of causality, according to which the past defines the present. However, it is not commonly known among non-specialists that there are aspects of Freud's theory of trauma, which extend beyond simple causality. As mentioned above, from the autumn of 1897 onward, Freud abandoned his belief that the seduction scenes which his patients mentioned were correct memories or accurate reflections of real events, and began to emphasize "psychical reality" as distinct from external reality: "fundamentally what is involved here is unconscious desire and its associated phantasies," as Laplanche and Pontalis explain (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 363). Thereafter, advancing from the naive theory of trauma, Freud developed his psychoanalytic theory and the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*.

The idea of "retroactive education" presented here, based on Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, might open the possibility of the theory of education and human development that extends beyond the model of causality based on linear temporality, even if that model can explain some educational practices. The first question posed in this paper is: Can the entire practice of education be understood within the reductionist framework of a cause-effect paradigm or the model of causality?

## 2. Revisiting Learning Stage Theory

The second question I would like to pose relates to learning stage theory. It is commonly believed that there are different stages of children's learning, and modern educational theory assumes that education should be based on children's developmental stages. Freud asserted that childhood sexual experiences tend to manifest as trauma later in life, as sex cannot be understood before puberty. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), he compared the psychic apparatus to a "living vesicle" with a "receptive cortical layer" that protects the subject from external stimuli (Freud 1920, S.E. 18: 27; G.W. 13: 26). When a strong stimulus breaks through this protective surface and invades the interior, it causes "traumatic neurosis" (Freud 1920, S.E. 18: 31; G.W. 13: 31). This

---

<sup>4</sup> How Freud reached his abandonment of seduction theory, as well as the issues pertaining to the formulation of the abandonment of seduction theory, is summarized in Geshi (2006).

protective shield is reminiscent of the “pedagogical barrier” described by German pedagogical theorist Klaus Mollenhauer. According to Mollenhauer, education does not simply “present” but rather “represents” the reality in which adults live, as it is, to protect children from real, visceral violence by adding a “filter” to the world and reconstructing it (Mollenhauer 1983).

The second question, then, is will an experience that ignores one’s developmental stage and readiness, breaks through Freud’s so-called “protective shield” and Mollenhauer’s “filter,” and goes beyond one’s comprehension only have negative consequences? In other words, can there be so-called “positive traumatic” experiences or any positive impact associated with trauma?<sup>5</sup>

## II. The First Formulation of *Nachträglichkeit*: The Case of Emma

### 1. *Nachträglichkeit* and the Model of Causality

Freud discussed deferred action in relation to etiology; however, *Nachträglichkeit* is not a simple causal theory. Laplanche and Pontalis describe the significance and advantages of *Nachträglichkeit* in the following manner:

The first thing the introduction of the notion does is to rule out the summary interpretation which reduces the psycho-analytic view of the subject’s history to a linear determinism envisaging nothing but the action of the past upon the present (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973:111-112).

However, the English translation does not fully reflect the nuance of *Nachträglichkeit*. In *the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (S.E.)*, edited by James Strachey, the translation of *Nachträglichkeit* is “deferred action.” Helmut Thomä and Neil Cheshire insist this choice of terminology may lead to a reading of Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* as a simple direction of causality (Thomä *et al.* 1991). As a starting point in the search for the traumatic event, Freud assessed the result of the disease or disorder and then sought the cause in the past.

---

<sup>5</sup> It has been claimed that positive personality transformation can occur after experiencing psychological trauma (Jayawickreme *et al.* 2014); however, this concept differs from that of the “retroactive education” that I present in this paper.

In this way, the causality of Freudian psychoanalysis can be considered the “backward causation” that Japanese philosopher Masaki Ichinose presented after examining the discussion of causality in Western philosophy. According to Ichinose, “Our causal inquiry begins with the recognition of the result as an extraordinary event, and then the cause that is considered to have caused the result is revealed” (Ichinose 2001: 130–132, 173, translation by the author).

Gregory Bistoën *et al.* also suggested that the English translation of “deferred action” does not adequately capture the retrospective connotation of the German *Nachträglichkeit*. “Deferred action suggests that something is deposited in the individual at T1 that suddenly detonates, like a time bomb, at T2” (Bistoën *et al.* 2014:674). The authors then examined Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* theory in one of his earliest works, “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (Freud 1950, written in 1895). “Emma,” a case that appears in this unpublished work by Freud, has a compulsion that prevents her from going to the shops alone. When she was eight years old, a shopkeeper had touched her genitals through her clothes (T1), although she did not understand the implications of this act at the time. However, upon reaching sexual maturity at the age of twelve, an event during which two shop assistants in another store laughed at her (T2) caused her memory of the previous experience (T1) to resurface, thereby activating a trauma response. Such activation is known as “deferred action.” It should be noted that the modern-day diagnosis of PTSD only focuses on the second traumatic experience (T2) while often failing to take into account the first trauma (T1) (Bistoën *et al.* 2014: 674).

## 2. Retrospective Construction of Traumatic Scenes

Though we have already seen that Freud’s method of exploring etiology is a form of “backwards causality,” his *Nachträglichkeit* theory is somewhat more complex in its temporal nature. Freud described Emma’s case as “typical of repression in hysteria” and as “a memory [that] is repressed that has only become a trauma *by deferred action* [*Nachträglichkeit*].” In Freud’s words, “Now this case is typical of repression in hysteria. We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *deferred action* [*Nachträglichkeit*]. The cause of this state of things is the retardation of puberty as compared with the rest of the individual’s development” (Freud 1950[1895], S.E.1:356; G.W.nb:448).

However, when we read “Project for a Scientific Psychology,” we find that the descriptions of the events that Emma is said to have experienced are arranged in an opposite order to the arrangement presented by Bistoën *et al.* (2014). These authors

described the trauma that Emma sustained at the age of eight as “T1,” and her trauma at the age of twelve as “T2” on the time axis, whereas Freud described Emma’s trauma at twelve years of age as “Scene I” and at eight years of age as “Scene II,” according to the order of recall in the analysis (Freud 1950 [1895], S.E.1: 353–354; G.W.nb: 445–446).

The question of where to place the starting point becomes important in the development of *Nachträglichkeit* theory. The trauma that Emma sustained at the age of eight was believed to have actually occurred. However, as described above, Freud overturned his position in 1897 that traumatic memories reflect reality. Freud’s so-called “abandonment of the seduction theory” led to the development of the view that childhood memories are not necessarily a reflection of reality, but rather a mixture of both phantasy and reality. In “Screen Memories” (1899), he observed that the scene of trauma does not “emerge” but is “formed” at the time of recall:

Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves (Freud 1899, S.E.3:322; G.W.1:553-554).

However, even if the scene of trauma could be reconstructed through analysis, Freud claimed the trauma itself existed before the analysis and became a disorder after the second event. This *Nachträglichkeit* theory was further refined in the case of the “Wolf Man.”

### III. The Second Formulation of *Nachträglichkeit*: The Case of the “Wolf Man”

#### 1. The most famous example of *Nachträglichkeit*

There are two main periods in which *Nachträglichkeit* (or *nachträglich*) appears frequently in Freud’s writings. The first is in the work he published during the period of his initial contemplation, which lasted until 1902. The second is in “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918), which is also known as the case of the “Wolf Man” (Thomä *et al.* 1991: 408-409).

As Freud himself recognized, he needed to rethink the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*

in the “Wolf Man” in order to clarify the theoretical differences to his former colleagues, Alfred Adler and Carl Gustav Jung, who broke away from Freud between 1911 and 1913. Both Adler and Jung regarded trauma as a reflection of a patient’s current conflict, and not as a real event in the past. James Strachey, the editor and principal translator of *the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (S.E.), notes “The primary significance of the case history in Freud’s eyes at the time of its publication was clearly the support it provided for his criticisms of Adler and more especially of Jung” (Strachey 1955, S.E.17:5), who asserted that early childhood memories were merely a reflection of a patient’s current situation:

The greater part of the psychoanalytic school is still under the spell of the conception that infantile sexuality is the *sine qua non* of neurosis. It is not only the theorist, delving into childhood simply from scientific interest, but the practicing analyst also, who believes that he has to turn the history of infancy inside out in order to find the fantasies conditioning the neurosis. A fruitless enterprise! In the meantime the most important factor escapes him, namely, the conflict and its demands in the present. In the case we have been describing, we should not understand any of the motives which produced the hysterical attacks if we looked for them in earliest childhood. Those reminiscences determine only the form, but the dynamic element springs from the present, and insight into the significance of the actual moment alone gives real understanding (Jung 1913, C.W.4:167).

In opposition to Adler and Jung, Freud emphasized the significance of the past experience in etiology, describing the points of the dispute between them as “the significance of the infantile factor.” For Freud, the “Wolf Man” was a clear case that proved “the influence of childhood” as an etiology:

I am of opinion *that the influence of childhood makes itself felt already in the situation at the beginning of the formation of a neurosis, since it plays a decisive part in determining whether and at what point the individual shall fail to master the real problems of life.*

What is in dispute, therefore, is the significance of the infantile factor. The problem is to find a case which can establish that significance beyond any doubt. Such, however, is the case [Wolf Man] which is being dealt with so exhaustively in these pages and which is distinguished by the characteristic that the neurosis in later life was preceded by a neurosis in early childhood (Freud 1918, S.E.17:54; G.W.12:83).

The “Wolf Man” was a Russian man whom Freud began analyzing when the subject was twenty-three years old. This man had developed an infantile neurosis just before his fourth birthday, which lasted up until approximately the age of ten. He had also suffered a breakdown at the age of seventeen, triggered by gonorrhoea (Freud 1918, S.E.17: 121; G.W.12:157). The analysis revealed that the cause of his symptoms was not an external trauma, but rather an anxiety dream of a wolf (Freud 1918, S.E.17: 28; G.W.12:53).<sup>6</sup> The Wolf Man recalled:

*I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in my bed. (My bed stood with its foot towards the window; in front of the window there was a row of old walnut trees. I know it was winter when I had the dream, and night-time.) Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheep-dogs, for they had big tails like foxes and they had their ears pricked like dogs when they pay attention to something. In great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed and woke up (Freud 1918, S.E.17:29; G.W.12:54).*

This dream occurred immediately before his fourth birthday, which was on Christmas Day. Thereafter, Freud supposed that before the anxiety dream of the wolf took place, there must have been an original element, i.e., the primary scene, that was distorted and represented as the dream. The scene was that of his parents copulating, which the “Wolf Man” had witnessed at the age of eighteen months:

If, however, the effects of a scene of this sort appear in the child’s fourth or fifth year, then he must have witnessed the scene at an age even earlier than that (Freud 1918, S.E.17:56; G.W.12:85).

What sprang into activity that night out of the chaos of the dreamer’s unconscious memory-traces was the picture of copulation between his parents, copulation in circumstances which were not entirely usual and were especially favourable for

---

<sup>6</sup> In the Wolf Man’s case, the threat of castration by his babysitter and the seduction of his older sister can be recognized between the primal scene and the anxiety wolf-dream. Although these events may have formed part of the etiology, they are not considered in this paper.

observation (Freud 1918, S.E.17:36; G.W.12:63).

This primal scene that the Wolf Man had witnessed at the age of one and a half years finally became understandable at the age of four as a result of his maturing. During this time, as with any trauma and/or seduction, the event gained an etiological significance due to “deferred operation [*nachträgliche Wirkung*]”:

We have now carried our account down to about the time of the boy’s fourth birthday, and it was at that point that the dream brought into deferred operation [*nachträgliche Wirkung*] his observation of intercourse at the age of one and a half. It is not possible for us completely to grasp or adequately to describe what now ensued. The activation of the picture, which, thanks to the advance in his intellectual development, he was now able to understand, operated not only like a fresh event, but like a new trauma, like an interference from outside analogous to the seduction (Freud 1918, S.E.17:109; G.W.12:144).

However, Freud avoided casting judgment on the reality of the primal scene at this stage of the analysis since determining whether the primal scene was an actual experience or a phantasy would not yield significant results:

I should myself be glad to know whether the primal scene in my present patient’s case was a phantasy or a real experience; but, taking other similar cases into account, I must admit that the answer to this question is not in fact a matter of very great importance. These scenes of observing parental intercourse, of being seduced in childhood, and of being threatened with castration are unquestionably an inherited endowment, a phylogenetic heritage, but they may just as easily be acquired by personal experience. [...]

All that we find in the prehistory of neuroses is that a child catches hold of this phylogenetic experience where his own experience fails him. I fully agree with Jung in recognizing the existence of this phylogenetic heritage; but I regard it as a methodological error to seize on a phylogenetic explanation before the ontogenetic possibilities have been exhausted (Freud 1918, S.E.17:97; G.W.12:131).

At first glance, it appears as if the position Freud is describing here is similar to that of Adler and Jung, who saw memory as a reflection of the present. However, Freud maintained that even if a trauma scene is reconstructed through analysis, or the scene

itself is a phantasy, it is still a trigger from the past that operates after the event took place.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The second example of *Nachträglichkeit*

It should be noted that in the case of the “Wolf Man,” Freud is discussing “another instance of *deferred action*.” Going back in time, according to the analysis process, it is possible to recall the anxiety dreams (S2) of a four-year-old in the analysis of a twenty-five-year-old (S1), with the primal scene witnessed by a one-and-a-half-year-old (S3) forming the basis of such dreams. When the Wolf Man becomes conscious of the primal scene (S3) that he witnessed at the age of one and a half (S1) and understands it during the course of the analysis, he returns to his “self” at the age of four (S2). In other words, the time between S3 and S2 disappears, and the infantile neurosis is resolved.

We must forget the actual situation which lies behind the abbreviated description given in the text: the patient under analysis, at an age of over twenty-five years, was putting the impressions and impulses of his fourth year into words which he would never have found at that time. If we fail to notice this, it may easily seem comic and incredible that a child of four should be capable of such technical judgements and learned notions. This is simply another instance of *deferred action* [*Nachträglichkeit*]. At the age of one and a half the child receives an impression to which he is unable to react adequately; he is only able to understand it and to be moved by it when the impression is revived in him at the age of four; and only twenty years later, during the analysis, is he able to grasp with his conscious mental processes what was then going on in him. The patient justifiably disregards the three periods of time, and puts his present ego into the situation which is so long past (Freud 1918, S.E.7:45; G.W.12:72).

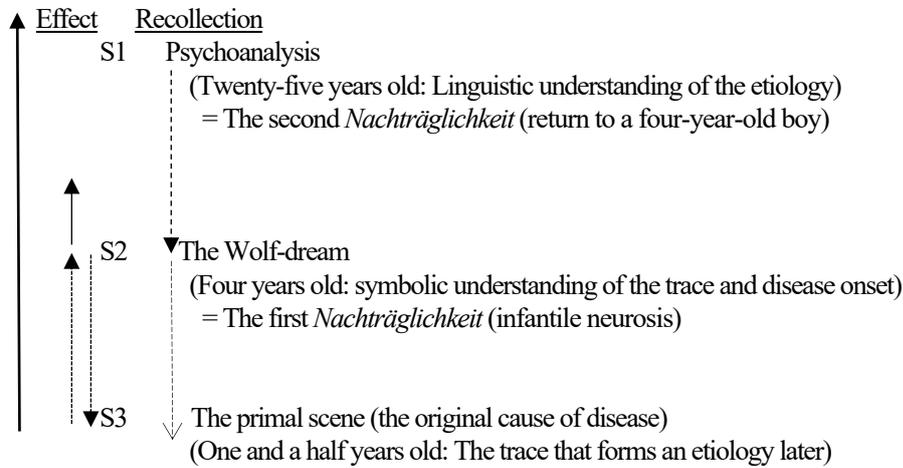
The sequence of the recollection and timeline of events, based on Freud’s description, are presented in Figure 1 below. If we were to elaborate on Freud’s description, there would be two *Nachträglichkeit*.

---

<sup>7</sup> The discussion between Freud and Jung on the possibility of the primal scene originating from phylogenetic heritage is discussed in Geshi (2006: I-3).

【Figure 1: The sequence of recollection and timeline of events in the “Wolf Man” case】

### Timeline



## IV. Application: The Pedagogical Turn of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*

### 1. An Educational Theory of *Nachträglichkeit*

Based on these examples, this study presents an educational theory that re-envision the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit* in the form of a theory of “retroactive education.” First, this educational theory of *Nachträglichkeit* assumes the occurrence of an extreme experience that breaks through “protective shield” identified by Freud, or “filter” to borrow the term used by Mollenhauer, to block out the harsh (extreme) reality, and the experience leaves only a memory trace as a result of its going beyond the realm of an individual’s understanding at the time (S1). Nevertheless, it acts a posteriori, through later experience (S2). Second, in this theory, the original traumatic experience (S1) operates after the later traumatic event (S2), and these experiences are not limited to the sexual domain, as in Freud’s theory. As Freud observed, the reason a sexual experience in childhood can become a posttraumatic event is that sexual maturity has not yet been reached. Similarly, events or experiences that are beyond the understanding of a child or an individual in an immature state can also be processed retroactively, and this can lead to retroactive learning. Furthermore, as Britzman (2010) indicated, there is an unconscious drive behind learning and education; thus, besides the narrowly defined sexual experiences of Freud’s theory, other non-sexual experiences can also come to have

retroactive and educational value after the fact. Third, such “retroactive education” does not necessarily require psychoanalytical therapy. Freud understood his early childhood through his own self-analysis, which he described in letters to Wilhelm Fließ (Freud 1985; 1986). Even if one does not conduct a thorough self-analysis like Freud’s, it is possible that deferred understanding and transformation can still be brought about through introspection, dialogue with others, and new experiences.

In summary, past experiences of which individuals are unaware because these experiences were, at one point, beyond the realm of their comprehension, can eventually be understood through the occurrence of similar experiences after puberty. In this way, responses to past events are activated afterward and bring about changes in the self. The self is then reconstructed by linking and understanding the two separate experiences that occurred, after the point at which these experiences took place. However, it is impossible to predict in advance what kind of experience will be activated at a later time.

Thus, it is necessary to explore the kinds of experiences that are recognized as “educational” upon later reflection. The work of Jacques Lacan is relevant in this regard. While the training standards of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) require “a training analysis” that differs from “a therapeutic analysis,” Lacan criticized this institutional distinction. “For Lacan, there is only one form of analytic process,” as Dylan Evans (1996: 210) observed. Lacan established his own school (the *École Freudienne de Paris*) and created new training criteria called “the pass” (*le passant*). However, in the Lacanian system, there are no pre-established criteria for deciding whether to admit a candidate as an analyst: “The jury then decides... whether to award the pass to the candidate. There were no pre-established criteria to guide the jury, since the pass was based on the principle that each person’s analysis is unique” (Evans 1996:135). Lacan states that whether an analysis is considered a training analysis or not can only be determined after it is complete. As the Japanese psychoanalyst Kosuke Tsuiki observed, the Lacanian “pass” is, thus, not merely a certification system for psychoanalysts; rather, certifying an individual as an analyst must be also an affirmation of the psychoanalytic process (Tsuiki 2008: 348–349). However, institutional stability in psychoanalysis cannot be guaranteed if the nature of psychoanalysis itself is re-examined every time an analyst is born, and such issues may be at the root of the long-standing dispute between Lacanian groups as to the definition of psychoanalysis.

## 2. Examples of “Retroactive Education”

At this point, I would like to provide some examples in relation to the theory of

“retroactive education” described above. I believe that many of those who study philosophy and the philosophy of education have experienced “retroactive education.” Such experiences might involve the reading of complex documents, including classical texts, which often require a re-reading. The experience of re-reading is a good example of deferred learning. For instance, a book that was impossible to understand at first can be retroactively understood by the act of re-reading, or a reader might sometimes understand the meaning of a text only after they have matured. If the meaning of the text is restructured by a later (re-)re-reading, the event of the first reading will still function as the determining factor that leads to changes in the present self after the event. Encountering the unknown – in the example above, a text that is not understood at the time of reading it – has important implications for the future.

Going on the Grand Tour (traveling abroad), which John Amos Comenius (1967 [1633–1638]: Chap.31) and John Locke (1989 [1693]: Chap.23) recommended as the finishing touch of education, might be another example of retroactive education. The main purpose of traveling abroad during the Middle Ages in Europe was to go on a pilgrimage; however, this practice gradually came to be understood as an important activity for broadening an individual’s knowledge in general. Such journeys could be unpredictable and beset by danger (Chard 1999; Black 2011). However, that is exactly why they were thought to hold significance in helping individuals understand the world, as they forced the traveler to go beyond the existing realm of their own understanding. An encounter with a different part of the world can also make it possible to (better) interpret an impression of a former experience that one might have had in the past, which could not be understood at that point in time, thereby reconstructing the self. Furthermore, recalling a past journey may have the effect of reconstructing the self retroactively.

In addition, when we read essays on school life, we often come across episodes detailing how the authors were shocked by people and/or texts they could not seem to understand. One such example is an essay by the famous Japanese writer Morio Kita, in which he reflects on his life in the old high school system that was equivalent to the liberal arts program of today’s universities and abolished in 1950. In his essay, Kita recalls his admiration for the seniors and their intellectual knowledge, and his amazement at their casual use of academic terms he could not understand at all: “[intellectual awakening] first appeared to me in the form of senior students. How great they seemed to us! They seemed to have been taught directly by people like Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, whose names I only knew, and they seemed to be friends with Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dostoevsky. They spoke bewildering words like *Gemeinschaft*, *Aufheben*, *Logos*, *Pathos*, and so on... We admired them and wished we could be like them. Good or bad,

this is what we call the tradition of high school under the old system of education” (Kita 2000: 36, translation by the author).

These accounts then explain that while the authors were unable to deduce the meaning of something that they could not understand at the time of the encounter, they were able to understand its significance later. In other words, the experiences that they could not understand in the past were later understood, given meaning to, and contributed towards the formation of a sense of “self.”

### **Conclusion: Revisiting the Concept of Education from the Perspective of “Retroactive Education”**

As mentioned in the introduction, traditional educational theories have compared education to the process of developing a seed into a plant by providing it with water and sunlight at the right time.

This assumption relies on the model of causality (stimulus-response) and the model of developmentally appropriate teaching.

This study critiques these assumptions by examining Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* and attempting to apply it to educational theory, proposing a new model called “retroactive education.” Experiences (sometimes “traumatic”) that go beyond the realm of understanding at the point of their occurrence can transform an individual’s personality by becoming comprehensible later on. If such a transformation is a negative one, then it becomes a disease or a disorder (e.g., PTSD); however, if the transformation has a positive effect, such as Kita’s episode, it can be characterized as educational (i.e., a “positive” traumatic experience).

However, the reader might wonder whether “retroactive education,” should be regarded as “education” at all. This is because education is generally considered to be a planned practice, the outcome of which can be predicted to some extent. In other words, education is an activity that is planned based on the prediction of learning outcomes based on teaching strategies/practices/methods/methodologies.

On the other hand, “retroactive education” presented in this paper is entirely unpredictable. No one can predict whether an experience that can only be understood after the event will have a positive effect, nor is it possible to determine which experience will turn out to be positive in the first place. As mentioned earlier, Bistoën *et al.* compared “deferred action” to a “time bomb.” In keeping with this analogy, the concept of “retroactive education,” presented in this paper may be likened to a “land mine” – no one

knows where it might be and when it might explode, or in fact whether it exists at all.

In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, I believe that “retroactive education” is a form of education that has not received any attention. The concept of “retroactive education,” enables us to better understand phenomena related to education and human formation (*Bildung*) that we have not been able to make sense of within the framework of traditional educational theories. Let us be more ambitious and let our imaginations run wild without hesitation. If we do so, we may find that many phenomena that have been understood within the scope of “education” can in fact be classified as “retrospective education,” but were analyzed in terms of traditional educational theories such as theories of developmental stages and causality.

## References

- S.E.** = *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., James Strachey (ed. & trans.), London, Hogarth Press, 1953-73.
- G.W.** = Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke: Chronologisch Geordnet*, 18 Bde., Bde.1-17, London, Imago Publishing, 1940-52, Bd.18, 1968, Nachtragsband, 1987, Frankfurt am Main, S. Fischer.
- Bistoën, Gregory & Vanheule, Stijn & Craps, Stef (2014) “The Freudian Concept of Nachträglichkeit is Central to the Psychoanalytical Understanding of Trauma,” *Theory & Psychology*, Vol. 24(5), pp.668-687.
- Black, Jeremy (2011) *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century*, UK, History Press.
- Britzman, Deborah P. (2010) *Freud and Education*, New York, Routledge.
- Chard, Chloe (1999) *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography 1600-1830*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Comenius, John Amos (1967[1633–1638]) *The Great Didactic of John Amos Comenius*, W. Keatinge (trans.), New York, Russell & Russell.
- Evans, Dylan (1996) *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, New York, Routledge.
- Freud, Sigmund (1899) “Screen Memories,” James Strachey (trans.), S.E. 3:299-322; “Über Deckerinnerungen,” G.W.1:529-554.
- Freud, Sigmund (1918) “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,” Alix and James

- Strachey (trans), S.E.17: 1-124; “Aus Der Geschichte Einer Infantilen Neurose,” G.W.12:29-157.
- Freud, Sigmund (1920) “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” James Strachey (trans), S.E.18: 1-64; “Jenseits Des Lustrinzips,” G.W.13:1-69.
- Freud, Sigmund (1950 [1895]), “Project for a Scientific Psychology,” James Strachey (trans), S.E.1:281-391; (1987) “Entwurf Einer Psyghologie,” G.W.nb:373-486.
- Freud, Sigmund (1985) *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*, J. M. Masson (ed. & trans.), Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press; (1986) *Briefe an Wilhelm Fließ 1887-1904 Ungekürzte Ausgabe*, J. M. Masson, Michael Schroter (eds.) Frankfurt am Main, Fischer.
- Geshi, Akira (2006) *Seishinbunseki-teki-Kodomo no Tan’jyo: Huroitosyugi to Kyoikugensetsu, (The Emergence of ‘Psychoanalytic Child’: Freudism and Educational Discourse)*, Tokyo, University of Tokyo Press.
- Geshi, Akira (2013) “Hattasu: Sengo-Kyouikugaku no Piaje Juyou (How postwar pedagogy has accepted Piaget’s theory),” Hisato Morita and Nobuko Morita (eds.) *Kyoiku Shisousi de Yomu Gendai Kyouiku (How to Understand Contemporary Education from the Perspective of the History of Educational Thought)*, Tokyo, Keiso Shobo, Tokyo, pp.307-329.
- Herman, Judith Lewis (1992) *Trauma and Recovery*, New York, Basic Books, 2nd ed., 1997.
- Ichinose, Masaki (2001) *Gen’in to Kekka no Meikyū (The Labyrinth of Cause and Effect)*, Tokyo, Keiso Shobo.
- Jayawickreme, Eranda & Blackie, Laura E. R. (2014) “Post-traumatic Growth as Positive Personality Change: Evidence, Controversies and Future Directions,” *European Personality Reviews*, July/August 2014, pp.312-331.
- Jung, Carl Gustav (1912) “The Theory of Psychoanalysis,” R.F.C. Hull (trans.), in *The Collected works of C.G. Jung*, v. 4, New York, Pantheon Books, 1961, pp.83-226.
- Kariya, Takehiko & Shimizu, Kohkichi (eds.) (2004) *Gakuryoku no Syakaigaku: Chousa ga Shimesu Gakuryoku no Henka to Gakusyu no Kadai (The Sociology of Academic Achievement: Changes in Academic Achievement and Learning Tasks as Indicated by Researches)*, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo.
- Kita, Morio (2000) *Dokutoru Manbou Seisyun-ki (The Memoirs of Dr. Mambo: A Recollection of His Younger Days)*, Tokyo, Sintyosya, 1<sup>st</sup> published 1968.
- Kris, Ernst (1954) “Introduction,” *Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, & Ernst Kris (eds.), E. Mosbacher & J. Strachey (trans), London, Imago Publishing, pp.1-47; (1950)

- “Eintleitung,” *Aus den Anfängen der Psychoanalyse: Briefe an Wilhelm Fliess, Abhandlungen und Notizen aus den Jahren 1887-1902*, London, Imago Publishing, pp.5-56.
- Laplanche, Jean & Pontalis, J. B. (1973) *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, Donald Nicolson-Smith (trans.) New York, Norton & Company; (1967) *Vocabulaire de la Psychoanalyse*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Locke, John (1989[1693]) *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, John W. and Jean S. Yolton (eds.), Oxford; New York, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press.
- MEXT (2013) “The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (provisional translation),” June 14, 2013,  
<https://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/lawandplan/title01/detail01/sdetail01/1373808.htm>
- MEXT (2021) “Gakusyu-Shidou-Youryou no Syushi no Jitsugen ni muketa Kobetsu-Saitekina-Manabi to Kyoudoutekina-Manabi tonon Ittaiteki na Juujitsu ni kansuru Sanko-Shiryō, Reiwa 3nen Ban” (“An Appendix on the Integrated Enrichment of Individualized and Collaborative Learning to Realize the Purposes of the Courses of Study, March 2021 Edition”), Monbukagakusyo, Syotou-Tyuutou Kyohuikukyoku Kyouiku-Kateika (School Curriculum Division, Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).
- Miller, Alice (1983) *For Your Own Good, Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence*, Hildegard and Hunter Hannum (trans.), Farrar Straus Giroux; (1980) *Am Anfang war Erziehung*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp.
- Miller, Alice (1984) *Thou shalt Not Be Aware*, Hildegard and Hunter Hannum (trans.), New York, Farrar Straus Giroux; (1981) *Du sollst nicht merken*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main.
- Mollenhauer, Klaus (1983) *Vergessene Zusammenhänge: über Kultur und Erziehung*, München, Juventa.
- Neill, Alexander Sutherland (1972) *Neill! Neill! Orange Peel!: An Autobiography*, New York, Hart.
- Strachey, James (1955) “Editor’s Note to ‘From the History of an Infantile Neurosis’,” S.E.17:3-6.
- Thomä, Helmut & Cheshire, Neil (1991) “Freud’s Nachträglichkeit and Strachey’s ‘deferred action’: Trauma, Constructions and the Direction of Causality,” *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 18(3), pp.407-427.
- Tsuiki, Kousuke (2008) “Lakan-ha no Shiten kara: Seido wo Tsukatta Seishin-ryōho to Lakan-ha Ouyō Bunseki (from the Lacanian Point of View: Psychotherapy and

Lacanian applied Psychoanalysis),” Shigeru Taga, & Yasuo Miwaki (eds.) *Iryo kann'kyo wo Kaeru: 'Seido wo Tukatta Seishin-ryoho' no Jissenn to Shiso (Changing Medical Environment: Practices and Theories of 'Psychotherapy which use Institutions')*, Kyoto, Kyoto University Press, pp.347-371.