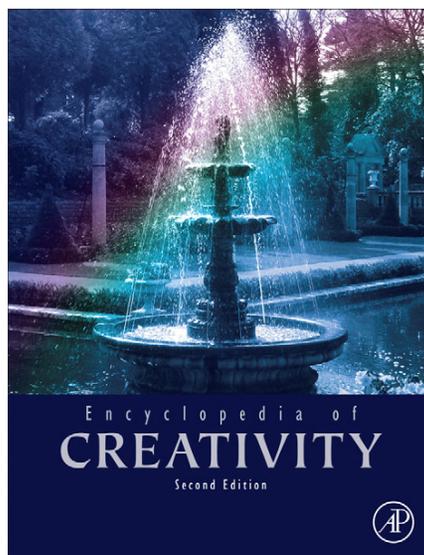


Provided for non-commercial research and educational use.
Not for reproduction, distribution or commercial use.

This article was originally published in *Encyclopedia of Creativity, Second Edition* published by Elsevier, and the attached copy is provided by Elsevier for the author's benefit and for the benefit of the author's institution, for non-commercial research and educational use including without limitation use in instruction at your institution, sending it to specific colleagues who you know, and providing a copy to your institution's administrator.



All other uses, reproduction and distribution, including without limitation commercial reprints, selling or licensing copies or access, or posting on open internet sites, your personal or institution's website or repository, are prohibited. For exceptions, permission may be sought for such use through Elsevier's permissions site at:

<http://www.elsevier.com/locate/permissionusematerial>

Wadlington W. (2011) Otto Rank 1884–1939. In: Runco MA, and Pritzker SR (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Creativity, Second Edition*, vol. 2, pp. 279-285 San Diego: Academic Press.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

R

Otto Rank 1884–1939**W Wadlington**, Penn State University, University Park, PA, USA

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Rank's Originality

Otto Rank was a highly original psychologist whose ideas continue to influence creativity researchers, psychotherapists, organizational theorists, and students of the arts and humanities (Figure 1). Many of his important concepts have entered the mainstream of psychological thought. He was Sigmund Freud's closest associate for 20 years, a major contributor to the literature of psychoanalysis, editor of two journals in the field, and a prolific writer and lecturer in France and the United States. He wrote about philosophy, art and literature, anthropology, spirituality, and education, and he developed an approach to psychotherapy based on existential and humanistic beliefs. Rank is known especially for his description of the 'artist-type,' the strong, self-created type of person Rank himself became.

Rank was a comprehensive thinker and researcher who, throughout his life, was drawn to aspects of human experiences that occur across cultures, and was fascinated with the recurrent themes of literature and myth: the mystery of creation, the heroic overcoming of tragedy, and the importance of living life artfully. From a young age he thought of his own life as a challenge to be met creatively through honest self-reflection, conscious and intentional action, and what he called 'self-appointment,' that is, creation of one's own personality.

Born in 1884 in Vienna, Otto Rank grew up in a working-class Jewish neighborhood. He was the second child of an alcoholic and abusive father. His older brother was permitted to pursue a career in law, but at age 14, after middle school, the young Rank was steered toward more practical, technical training that would equip him to work in a machine shop. Resolving as an adolescent to escape from his father's rages, Rank engaged in a process of self-reflection, reading, and self-education, and began recording his thoughts in a diary. At 19, as a gesture of rebellion against his father and renunciation of his Jewish religious heritage, he adopted the name 'Rank' to replace his given surname, Rosenfeld.

Hungry for intellectual and aesthetic stimulation, Rank immersed himself in the rich cultural environment of turn-of-the-century Vienna. The city was abuzz with new art, music, and theatre, and the latest thinking in philosophy and science. Rank frequented the library, where he read Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* as well as the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, and other philosophers. He attended the theatre, where he saw Henrik Ibsen's plays, and the opera, where Richard Wagner's work was being performed.

He was also fascinated with the newest thinking in psychology by another resident of Vienna, Sigmund Freud, whose book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, had created a cultural stir. Freud's book, and his thought in general, offered a new perspective on our psychic lives. Into the intellectual conversation of the time, Freud introduced the idea that many of the motives for our behavior are unconscious, but that a careful listener could follow the symbolism in a person's free associations back to early childhood feelings that had been ignored or forgotten. Rank was inspired by Freud's thinking but also stimulated in his own thinking. After reading Freud, he suggested in his diary that "art is life's dream interpretation." Even at an early stage in his life this precocious young man was contrasting his own ideas with Freud's. Rank noted in his diary that dreams may represent unconscious wishes, but that the 'driving element' in our conscious, waking lives is the 'will,' a notion that was to become central to his later 'Will Therapy.'

At age 20, Rank eagerly incorporated Freudian notions into a manuscript he prepared about creative individuals, *Der Kunstler (The Artist)*. Through Rank's contact with his physician, Alfred Adler, the work was brought to Freud's attention. Freud read it approvingly, made suggestions for revisions, and the work was published. At this point in his life Rank was, as he would later acknowledge, fully 'under the spell' of Freud. The feeling was mutual: Freud was charmed by this bright, young, self-taught thinker. He sensed that Rank's appreciation for the arts and humanities, and his grasp of philosophy, myth, and literature, could help broaden and deepen psychoanalysis. Freud, by the way, welcomed those outside the medical profession into the newly emerging domain of psychoanalysis which he considered relevant to many other fields of endeavor. Freud named Rank secretary of the Wednesday night group that became the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. He encouraged and financially supported Rank's return to academic high school and his eventual doctoral studies in philosophy and German literature at the University of Vienna. Freud, who was almost 30 years older, was more than just a patron; he became a mentor and surrogate father to Rank, which would make their eventual separation especially difficult and painful.

Freud's project was interdisciplinary. He believed symbolic references to unconscious wishes were everywhere: in dreams, slips of the tongue, and jokes, but also in myths and fairy tales. Rank was already well versed in cultural anthropology and what we would today call ethnopsychology. Like the early



Figure 1 Otto Rank, about 1920.

psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, Rank thought myths provided insight into the inner psychic life. In *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, published when he was 25, Rank catalogues many stories across cultures and across time, in which a hero or savior is born under difficult circumstances or abandoned soon after birth. Rank looked for common themes in the stories of their births and applied a Freudian template to these stories, revealing recurrent Oedipal themes, that is, themes of ambivalence and conflict with one's same-sex parent.

Rank's doctoral thesis, the first on a psychoanalytic topic, *The Lohengrin Saga*, published in 1911, delves into the story of an Arthurian knight, the same knight who was the subject of Wagner's opera, *Lohengrin*. *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend*, a nearly 700 page study that showed Oedipal themes were universal, followed soon after, in 1912. Meanwhile bitter rivalries and conflicts had led to Freud's split with Adler in 1911 and Jung in 1912, and Freud sought to avoid such problems in the future by forming a group of trusted colleagues to further the movement. He invited Rank into his secret 'Committee' of followers and defenders of psychoanalysis. The other members were Karl Abraham, Sandor Ferenczi, Hanns Sachs, Ernest Jones, and Max Eitington. In 1913 Rank and Sachs wrote a monograph on *The Significance of Psychoanalysis for the Mental Sciences*, and in 1914 Rank wrote *The Double*, a study of the theme of an unconscious twin or substitute self, a book that continues to be appreciated by scholars of world literature. Thus, by age 30, Rank had firmly established his reputation as a Freudian thinker and a prolific writer.

The First World War dominated the landscape of Europe over the next several years. Rank served in the Austrian army in Poland as editor of a newspaper. He met and married his wife, Beata Mincer, in 1918. The birth of their child, Helene, in 1919, sparked Rank's interest in early childhood development, especially the pre-Oedipal phase before a child is four or five years old. This would eventually lead Rank to a way of thinking that would challenge his mentor. Freud believed that his patients did not have access to memories of this early time in their lives, and discounted the impact of pre-Oedipal experiences on the adults he analyzed, but Rank was beginning to think otherwise.

Rank worked closely with Freud over the next few years; they established an international journal and Rank was responsible for training psychoanalytic candidates who came to Vienna from around the world. Meanwhile, it was a time of both emotional and physical pain for Freud. The war, and postwar inflation had hurt him financially. In 1920, his beloved daughter Sophie died, and his grandson, Sophie's son, died a year later. In 1923 he underwent the first of what

were to be many surgeries for cancer of the jaw, during the remainder of his life. Rank's loyalty was important to Freud during this difficult period, and when Rank dedicated his new book to his adoptive father it was no surprise.

Separation and Individuation

In 1924 Rank published what was to become an historically important book, *The Trauma of Birth*. In it, Rank described birth as the prototype for anxiety and highlighted the patient's relationship with his or her mother as central to analytic work. Rank felt he was extending psychoanalytic thought into new territory. He didn't fully realize at the time that he was declaring his independence from Freud. Previous Freudian thinking emphasized the transference to the father in therapy (the unconscious way patients re-experience ambivalence toward the analyst who symbolically represents their father). At first *The Trauma of Birth* was welcomed by Freud, who only later criticized what we might today call the first 'neo-Freudian' approach. Rank was hurt by Freud's rejection of his thinking and by the cold response of Freud's associates who began to shun him. Being a rebel and an outsider was a familiar role for Rank, however, and over the next few years, while in his early forties, he essentially gave birth to a 'new,' more fully individuated, self.

At the same time his European colleagues were turning away, Rank found an eager audience of social workers and psychologists in the United States, who were looking for a shorter-term alternative to psychoanalysis. Over the next few years he developed what we today regard as one of the earliest existential-humanistic approaches. While psychoanalysis modeled itself on systematic scientific observation like that carried out in chemical analysis, Rank began to talk about therapy, which had connotations of a healing relationship. Rank wrote about his new approach to psychotherapy in *Truth and Reality* and *Will Therapy*, published in German between 1929 and 1931, and in English in 1936.

Rank's approach stands out in contrast to Freud's. While Freudian psychoanalysis traditionally takes place with the analyst behind and out of view of the patient, relies on the patient's memories, and encourages the analyst to be a neutral observer (a 'blank screen'), Rank's psychotherapy involves the face-to-face dialogue between therapist and client and emphasizes the actual relationship between the two in the present or 'here and now.' In this view the therapist is a real person to be dealt with, a presence in the room. Rank thought of the present moment in therapy as a microcosm, a world in miniature that provides access to the client's life struggles. Therapy becomes less a linear process of "recollection, repetition, and working through," as in the title of Freud's famous 1914 paper, but is rather a mindful engagement in the dynamic therapy relationship. Rank was prescient: current research on psychotherapy process points to just that relationship as a primary healing factor.

While Freud emphasized the importance of consciousness and insight – the gaining of understanding of factors in one's past that influence one's current feelings, Rank placed emphasis on intention and agency, which he called 'will'; this was one of his most important contributions to psychology. Rank thought will arose in response to early prohibitions. The child's

belligerent response to the parent's 'no,' may be the first manifestation of what Rank called 'counter-will,' a negative form of willing out of which positive willing emerges. As the child grows older and becomes socialized he or she learns to hold back or inhibit many impulses and conform to others' expectations. Later in life, the new adult may discover ways to assert him- or herself, separating in a creative and constructive way from others, and establishing a unique identity in the world. Thus will is an organizing, integrative force that can both inhibit and impel action; the ability to freely choose and act in accord with one's choices is essential to full individuation and self-determination.

In his new approach to psychotherapy, Rank was finding his own course of action, and choosing to go against Freud. What Rank called 'will therapy' or 'constructive therapy' elicits the intention and agency of the client. Consciousness alone, like that awakened in psychoanalysis, is not considered sufficient; action is needed to effect change. Insight is not enough; given the choice between new understandings of the self and new experiences, right here and right now in therapy, Rank would have always opted for the latter.

Life Fear and Death Fear

In emphasizing free will and self-determination, Rank was advocating an existential approach to psychotherapy: he thought Freud's view was too deterministic and fatalistic. For example, Freud believed patients are drawn toward death by a 'compulsion to repeat.' He spoke of a 'death instinct,' that inexorably leads toward entropy, an ultimate winding-down of all things in the universe. In contrast to Freud's notion of a 'death instinct,' a drive that impels us fatalistically toward the end of life, Rank talked about a dual fear: 'death fear,' accompanied by 'life fear.' Rank thought that becoming an individual requires separation, the willing choice to live as an independent person, which is the source of life fear. Death confronts us with the prospect of loss of individuality thorough dissolution into the whole, and thus elicits in us the fear of death. Rank recognized that living life fully, that is consciously and intentionally, brings with it an awareness that all things must end, that death is the ultimate limitation on freedom and choice. Both fears can easily lead to anxiety and inaction. Faced with the fear of life we inhibit ourselves and then feel guilt over the un-lived life. Faced with the fear of death, we become like a deer in the headlights, frozen in our tracks, and unable to make the choices and take the risks that a full life requires.

Based in part on his reading of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, Rank had an existential understanding of death; he believed loss and limitation are part and parcel of everyone's lives, but that we tend to avoid and deny that reality. Therefore, for Rank, it is important for clients to acknowledge and come to terms with the inevitability of death; one way they do this is through dealing with time-limits, such as the necessary ending of the therapy relationship. Freud's view is sometimes characterized as pessimistic. He saw humans as subject to powerful instincts or drives, such as the drives toward sex and death. Rank, on the other hand, viewed his clients as capable of creating their own futures through acts of will, that is by taking responsibility for their own actions, challenging even death,

and by tapping into the creative resources available to each of us, but largely unused. Rank encouraged his clients to live fully 'in spite of' the inevitability of death and limitations.

In Rank's view, the human personality itself is a creative project. We are not hapless victims of fate, chance, genetics, or early upbringing; instead, we are each capable of creating our own destiny, legacy, or in Rank's terms, we are capable of immortalizing ourselves. Rank based his approach on a belief in transformation and the possibility of change; he saw the human personality as a medium to be formed and modified in response to life's changing demands.

Since the days of his adolescent diary, Rank had seen himself as a creative person, and it is not surprising therefore, that the creative individual, the artist, is the central figure in Rank's emerging theory of personality first articulated in the mid-1920s. His theory is based on three character types: the normal or 'average' type, the neurotic type, and the artist type. (Originally, Rank also wrote about a fourth type, the 'criminal type,' which we might today call the sociopath.)

The average person is someone who is not likely to seek therapy. For this type of person, life with its inevitable limitations presents a challenge that each of us must endure. Conformity to societal norms and expectations is the way to avoid internal conflict, and get on with one's life. Rank considers this type of person well-adjusted, as able to adapt to external circumstances without feeling burdened or victimized.

'Neurotic' is a term that has fallen out of favor these days, but it describes an inhibited and overly-self-conscious type of response to daily living. Rank thought neurotics are characterized by an excess of psychological knowledge, and a desire to interpret their behavior rather than act. Neurotics attempt to rationalize and justify their 'I can't,' obscuring the 'I won't' that lies behind it. The last thing a neurotic wants is to change. Neurotic individuals feel conflicted; they know what they could or should do, but feel constrained, inhibited, and unable to act.

Rank used a powerful economic metaphor to describe the neurotic's situation: life is a loan and death is the debt. According to Rank, the neurotic refuses the loan, which is life, in hopes of avoiding paying the debt, which is death. This is a superstitious approach to life, and one based on holding back, inhibiting, or postponing, rather than fully living. The neurotic person is plagued both by will, in the form of sensed inability to act, and by consciousness, manifesting itself as a relentless need to know. Rank saw neurotics as paralyzed and ineffectual in their actions, and insatiable in their introspective curiosity. At the core of this attitude is the neurotic's belief that what is needed is increased self-knowledge; that if only one knew oneself better one would understand why one does the things one does and why one feels the way one feels. Rank's insight was that the neurotic symptom – the apparent inability to act – is a distorted attempt at creativity. He proclaimed the neurotic a 'failed artist,' and encouraged the therapist to draw out the neurotic individual's creative resources to solve his or her own problems.

The Artistic Ideal

Rank thought every person was capable of creativity, but that some people typically responded to life's challenges by

attempting to live artfully. 'Artist,' for Rank, meant any person, regardless of their occupation. Thus scientists, musicians, mechanics, nurses, and painters are all capable of creativity. Rank's 'artist-type' is a person who lives fully in the present, overcomes personal and societal limitations, and makes a commitment to creating something enduring. In contrast to neurotics whose self-consciousness gets in the way of action, artists turn their energies outward; they come to know themselves as a result of their expressive actions in the world.

Rank's view of the artist, like many of the ideas he developed, stands in contrast to Freud's. In Freud's writings about artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, he emphasizes the artist's unconscious motives and the role of art in fulfilling wishes and desires. Although Freud appreciated art and collected historical art and artifacts, he tended to regard the artist's actions as an escape from conflicts and pressures into fantasy. Art, for Freud, was regressive – a return to an earlier, simpler time. Rank on the other hand, saw art as progressive; he believed works of art point toward something, that they refer not only to the past, but also to the future, and especially to the artist's own process of personality development. While Freud focused on the symbolism of the work of art and attempted to interpret its significance in terms of the artist's early life, Rank was one of the first psychologists to give attention to the creative process artists engage in, the actual making of art.

Artists are different. The creative process often involves doing something radical, something so new that it may not initially be understood. Rank believed that artists need to distinguish themselves from others. He thought it essential for the creative person to establish a separate identity, to nominate or appoint oneself as an artist, and in this way to assert one's difference. It is important for the artist to separate from existing conventions and styles in order to make a unique statement. He called this aspect of the process 'self-appointment'; it involves a conscious choice to live a creative life. The neurotic questions his or her identity: 'Who am I?' The artist's question is instead one about individuation: 'Who do I want to be?' Rank believed that self-appointment is the first step in the process by which artists are able to regard their differentness as uniqueness and originality.

But the path is not always smooth for the artist. The sense of being different in one's approach to life can be alienating and isolating. Society resists change and rewards conformity. From Rank's perspective, though, even a negative reaction to the artist and his or her work can be used constructively; artists need the resistance of the world against which to form their personalities. Artists, in Rank's conception, make a willing sacrifice; being misunderstood or unappreciated goes with the territory.

The obstacles to creation are not all external. Artists face, and must overcome, inhibitions – apparent failures of will – along the way. Rank understood this well and first wrote about it in 1914 in his scholarly book on *The Double* or *Doppelgänger*. In works of literature or drama the double appears as a substitute self who takes the place of the person. In Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, for example, the double is a painted portrait of the main character that gradually grows old while Dorian Gray remains forever young. Rank, with his continuing interest in folk beliefs and mythological themes, traced the idea

to pre-literate cultures in which the double is the soul of a dead person, appearing in a dream. At first the double is a haunting, uncanny apparition and a cause for fear, but is eventually interpreted by the dreamer's culture as reassurance that there is an afterlife. Rank saw that, in a sense, the double is a reminder that what we don't know can hurt us, that there is a realm outside our awareness and control, but that conscious action is the antidote to fear.

For creative individuals, the double is an alter-ego, a potentially inhibiting aspect of the self that hovers over the artist and causes grief by judging and criticizing, and ultimately, by shutting down the creative process. Artists, in other words, are sometimes confronted by creative block, an inability to produce due to seemingly self-created conflicts. Problems like procrastination and avoidance, self-consciousness, self-criticism, and perfectionism have often been seen as symptoms of fear of failure or fear of success. Rank thought creative block had more to do with fundamental issues of birth and death. Artists sometimes struggle to let go of their works – to give birth to them so to speak. By keeping the work from public view, the artist attempts to avoid both failure and success; the failed work may be a monstrous source of embarrassment, but the successful work is problematic too: it represents a standard one can never meet, a success that can never be achieved again. Thus the work that has gone before as well as the work that is yet to come can both be sources of inhibition. In *Art and Artist*, Rank's most important book, published in 1932, he described an artist's way out of the dilemma of creative block: the two works. Rank noted that artists sometimes divide their attention between two projects simultaneously. The two works may represent different styles, they may be carried out in different media, or they may be executed in different locations. Rank thought keeping creativity going even when one feels stuck was the key to overcoming blocks and inhibitions. Rank himself was extremely prolific perhaps in part because he typically had several projects in the works at once.

The artist also struggles with the existential reality of limitation: the limitations inherent in the medium, the artist's own limited technical skill, and the limitations of time and energy in each person's life. The artist whose work is perpetually in process and unfinished is denying the real limitation that death imposes on life; that is to say none of us lives forever; each of us is mortal. For Rank the will at its highest stage is a creative urge to go beyond even the final limitation of death by immortalizing oneself in creative works. Artists who come to terms with both personal limitations and the limitations of the external world need not despair; instead, they can attempt to make a mark on life for all time, and in this way transcend death. Artists, according to Rank, make voluntary sacrifices. They invest their time and energy in creative pursuits, forgoing other pleasures and desires; they live life fully without attempting to cheat or bribe death. Their creative work is intrinsically meaningful and rewarding. For some rare individuals the works live on and have an enduring impact beyond the artist's life, but even if the person does not achieve this kind of immortality, the way the artist lives his or her life – consciously and willingly immersed in creative action – is what is important.

Rank identified with both ideal and real artists. He thought of himself at first as one of the rare individuals Freud singled out as constitutionally predisposed to creativity. It is clear

that Freud considered Rank especially suited to the tasks he had in mind. This, coupled with the respect and admiration he initially received from his colleagues, must have contributed to Rank's sense of himself as a specially gifted person.

Rank's avid interest in art provided him with larger-than-life heroes. Among those we know he admired to begin with were Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Henrik Ibsen. Early in his life he called Richard Wagner his 'ideal leader and guide.' During the later, especially productive period of Rank's life, he associated with members of the artistic community in Paris and New York who flocked to see him, and in whom he saw himself reflected.

Rank's writing, first about mythological themes in psychoanalysis, and later about his own unique approach, and still later about the artist and his culture, became his art work. Although in his personal notes he frequently refers to great novels or dramas he was attempting, only Rank's psychological writings have actually survived him. Rank poured himself into his works, and they represent an achievement that can justifiably be called 'art.'

The years between 1924 and 1932 represent a very productive period in Rank's life. With his colleague Ferenczi, Rank published *The Development of Psychoanalysis* in 1924: in it they offered some of the first criticisms of Freud's method. They challenged the focus on the patient's early childhood experiences and the emphasis on the patient's transference toward the analyst. In so doing, they paved the way toward an approach to psychotherapy in which the real relationship between client and therapist is acknowledged and appreciated. Not surprisingly, the book was attacked by several Freudians, notably two of Freud's followers, Abraham and Jones. The publication of Rank's *Trauma of Birth* that same year was too much for the Freudians to take; it seemed like heresy for Rank to suggest that the client's anxiety might arise from the trauma experienced in separating from the mother (at birth, at weaning, and when the child takes his or her first independent steps). That the relationship with the mother might be even more significant than that with the father was seen not as the post-Freudian revolution it represented, but as anti-Freudian, deviant, and even deluded.

Rank was turning 40 and separating from his mentor and surrogate father, Freud, after almost 20 years at his side. In the summer of 1924, when Rank visited The United States, it was as Freud's emissary and as a teacher of psychoanalysis. He was greeted by an eager audience of social workers and psychologists more interested in his therapeutic innovations than in orthodox analytic method. What Rank offered was the first active psychotherapy, a time-limited approach, in contrast to the seemingly endless process of psychoanalysis. The emphasis on the actual relationship between therapist and client gave the therapist an active role and allowed the therapist to address the emotions that arose in the relationship rather than interpreting the fantasies projected onto the therapist. The client's new emotional experiences in therapy were a necessary complement to the intellectual understandings possible in analysis. This was a precursor to the idea that therapy provides a 'corrective emotional experience,' introduced by Franz Alexander years later.

The appreciative reception Rank received at his lectures in New York and Philadelphia buoyed his enthusiasm, but he was

confused by Freud's reaction to his theories. Freud had responded warmly at first, but while Rank was in America, some of Freud's associates seized the opportunity to criticize him behind his back. On his return to Vienna in October, 1924, conflicts between Rank and Freud were more conspicuous. Rank briefly recanted some of his views, but by 1926 it had become clear that their differences were irreconcilable; Rank severed his ties with Freud's committee, resigned from his various editorial positions, and moved to Paris to set up a practice on his own. Back in New York and Philadelphia that year for lectures, Rank was now explicating his fully independent approach. Shunned during a chance encounter with his former friend, Ferenczi, in New York, Rank was now convinced he needed to speak for himself. Rank's membership in the American Psychoanalytical Association was revoked a few years later, and all those he had analyzed would now need re-analysis by more orthodox practitioners. The separation from what had become Freudianism was now complete.

Although hurt by the rejection, these events only served to stimulate Rank's independence and creativity, which was evident in his prolific writing during this period. His work included books that took a broad social and cultural perspective on religion, education, and art. Rank turned his own painful experience of separation into a creative act of willing. He was interested in how easily an interpretation can become a tenaciously-held belief or ideology, as he called it.

Psychology and the Soul, first published in 1930, challenged other psychological interpretations. Freud had a materialistic and scientific view of religion. He had called religion an illusion, and predicted it would have limited importance in the future. Carl Jung had studied religious writings in his search for universal symbols or archetypes, but skirted the topic of the function of religious beliefs. Rank looked at religious beliefs as natural human phenomena – as ways of collectively dealing with primitive fears, and making life meaningful and significant even in the face of death. Returning to a theme he previously developed in his work on the double, Rank traced the idea of a soul to the recurrent 'urge to immortality.' Rank's study of anthropology informed his theory that this urge is manifest in various forms: in the belief in a soul that lives on after physical death, in the belief in reincarnation, in ancestor worship, and in beliefs that one's group or society has special access to immortality through ritual or divine intervention. Rank thought that for individuals living in a more psychologically-minded, post-religious era, immortality was something to be achieved through one's creative legacy, through works that continue to have a life even after the person's death.

Psychology and the Soul also established Rank as a thoroughly modern thinker. For example, Rank thought soul-belief was a product of one's ideology, and attributed Freud's criticism of religion to his nineteenth century reductive, causal, and materialistic scientific thinking. Rank was by this time reading the latest scientific theories of Albert Einstein and Werner Heisenberg. He argued that notions like relativity and indeterminacy made it difficult to support a mechanistic, causal scientific attitude. He advocated factual relativism, the understanding that so-called 'facts' are actually interpretations, and criticized psychoanalysis for its insistence that repetition of the past is more important than even actual experience in the present.

The same year *Art and Artist* was published in 1932, also saw a book called *Modern Education*. Here again, Rank challenged an ideological approach. Freud had interpreted the child's behavior in terms of sexual striving, while his follower, Alfred Adler, had regarded the child as seeking power and recognition. While he saw in both of these approaches an advance over authoritarian educational systems of his day, he felt neither adequately addressed the emerging will of the child. Rank felt the child's independent willing was stifled by educational ideologies that reward conformity and suppression of feeling. Rank thought parents had a vital role in understanding and acknowledging the child's spontaneous expressions of emotion. Rank also proposed an alternative to education primarily designed to help the individual learn a vocation. He thought discovery of one's skills and talents was a lifelong process, and he encouraged supporting self-exploration rather than training the person to fit a pre-determined job-description. Rank was himself an interdisciplinary thinker and an inspiring educator who, through his teaching and his example, influenced numerous psychologists and social workers to find their own integrative paths.

By 1934, Rank's ideas were becoming known; his lectures were well received and some of his books had been translated into French and English. Rank resisted establishing a school of Rankian therapy, having seen for himself what can become of one's ideas in the hands of zealous followers who could become dogmatic and, in his terms, 'ideological.' Rank separated from his wife Beata, who several years later moved to Boston where she set up a psychoanalytic practice with children. Rank's secretary in Paris, Estelle Buel, an American, came along in 1935 when Rank moved from Paris to New York. There he continued lecturing and practicing. He spoke at Harvard, where he impressed the important American personality psychologist, Henry Murray. At a lecture in Rochester, New York, the following year, a young Carl Rogers was in attendance. The publication in 1936 in English of Rank's theory of psychotherapy (two volumes: *Truth and Reality*, and *Will Therapy*), introduced his approach to an even wider audience. In contrast to Freud's emphasis on the unconscious and instinctual drives, Rank saw conscious choice and intention as critical. His approach emphasized a creative, improvisational therapy in which the relationship between client and therapist in the present, or 'here and now,' was paramount.

Beyond Psychology

From 1937 until 1939 Rank worked on a draft, in English, of what was to be his final book, *Beyond Psychology*. As suggested by the title, at this point in his life, Rank was advocating an alternative to what he considered the overly rational and reductive attempt to explain human behavior scientifically, the tendency to 'psychologize.' He returned to several of the themes he had dealt with previously: neurosis is not the result of societal inhibitions or repression of impulses, but the attempt by the neurotic to exert excessive control over his own nature; Rank called this 'willing the spontaneous.' Returning to a recurrent theme in his work, he saw the double as representing: first the shadow or identical self, next the person with his or her past, and finally the immortal self. Again contrasting his 'constructive' experiential therapy with psychoanalysis, he regarded the

task of therapy as helping the client's steps toward life fully lived, not more interpretation. He challenged several of Freud's assumptions: that bringing the unconscious into conscious awareness is curative, that the actual unconscious is made conscious (and not just an interpretation of it), and that emotional expression in therapy is nothing but a projection, a transference onto the therapist. Rank claimed that what is unconscious is the 'life force' itself, the dynamic spark that animates everyday existence. Rank's final message in *Beyond Psychology*, which was published posthumously, was that the full meaning of human experience is not graspable with our rational intellect, and that we need to allow for the irrational in life.

The year 1939 was momentous. Rank had been in poor health, but having finished his draft of *Beyond Psychology*, in which he advocated a life lived fully, he was eager to get on with his own life. He traveled with Estelle Buel to the western United States. Once his divorce from Beata was finalized, he married Estelle in July. Returning to New York in September, just as the Second World War was beginning, Rank learned that Freud had died in London, relieved from his suffering by a morphine injection by his physician. Ironically, Rank was briefly hospitalized soon after with a kidney problem, and then struggled at home with infection and fever. Rank wrote to Jesse Taft, his first biographer, that despite his illness he was at peace with himself. On October 31, back in the hospital, he died from a reaction to medications used to treat his infection.

Rank's Immortality

Only recently has Rank's influence begun to be acknowledged. *The Denial of Death* by sociologist Ernest Becker, brought Rank's ideas to a broad spectrum of the intellectual community. A full biography has been published, Rank's influence on post-Freudian psychology has been explicated, and several of his major books have been re-translated and made available to a wider readership. Rank's American lectures, delivered by Rank in English, have also been published. Various myths and rumors about Rank (e.g., that he was mentally ill, that he was a 'fascist'), have also been debunked by serious scholars. Many of Rank's ideas about creativity, education, human culture, and psychotherapy have entered into the mainstream of thinking in psychology.

Rank's work has had impact in several fields. Creativity researcher Donald MacKinnon, who had had been introduced to Rank's thinking by Henry Murray at Harvard years before, found Rank's notion of the artist type invaluable in his study of architects. Rank's theory of creativity has also influenced Organizational Theory, especially in the 'action learning' approach to team building and group problem solving. 'Terror Management Theory' in experimental social psychology, owes a debt to Rank's ideas about death fear. Rank is also receiving attention these days for his ideas about soul-belief and the development of spiritual traditions across cultures. Rank's works have continually been held in esteem by scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

Rank's creativity speaks very directly to psychotherapists. Carl Rogers incorporated Rankian notions into his client-centered psychotherapy, and Rollo May acknowledged Rank's influence on his existential approach, as did Irvin Yalom.

Writer Paul Goodman considered Rank's work essential to the newly emerging Gestalt psychotherapy. Transpersonal psychology, as practiced by Stanislav Grof for example, has been influenced by Rank's thinking about birth trauma. Rank's emphasis on the early mother-child relationship, ego development, and the importance of the actual therapeutic relationship anticipated key features of post-Freudian interpersonal and relationship therapies. Depth psychotherapy approaches that acknowledge the importance of irrational and unconscious processes are indebted to Rank, as are experiential psychotherapies that call on the therapist's ability to improvise in the moment.

Rather than leaving behind a school of thought or an ideology, Rank left a body of work that continues to inspire. He refused to become an inhibiting precursor, whose ideas become rigid and petrified in the hands of dutiful followers. Rank instead stepped aside to allow future psychotherapists to discover their own unique ways of eliciting their clients' creativity and resourcefulness. Over the years writers like Anais Nin and Henry Miller, as well as other artists, were drawn to Rank, in part because they felt understood by him, and especially because he resisted tampering with their creativity. Rank left artists alone, believing that the last thing they needed was more analysis, more psychological interpretation. A creative person who was not fully appreciated in his own time, Rank spoke with prescience about the future of psychological thought and practice. Rank's legacy is a creative, improvisational, approach to life that is constantly being rediscovered.

See also: Art, Artists, and Arts Audiences: Their Implications for the Psychology of Creativity.

Further Reading

- Becker E (1973) *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press.
 Lieberman EJ (1985) *Acts of Will*. New York: The Free Press.
 MacKinnon DW (1965) Personality and the realization of creative potential. *American Psychologist* 20: 273–281.
 Menaker E (1982) *Otto Rank: A Rediscovered Legacy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
 Menaker E (1996) *Separation, Will, and Creativity: The Wisdom of Otto Rank*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
 Progoff I (1956) *The Death and Rebirth of Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
 Rank O (1958) *Beyond Psychology*. New York: Dover (Original work published 1941).
 Rank O (1971) *The Double*. Tucker H (trans.). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (Original work published 1914).
 Rank O (1978) *Will Therapy*. Taft J (trans.). New York: Norton (Original work published 1929, 1931).
 Rank O (1989) *Art and Artist*. Atkinson C (trans.). New York: Norton (Original work published 1932).
 Rank O (1996) *A Psychology of Difference: The American Lectures*. In: Kramer R (ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
 Rudnytsky P (1991) *The Psychoanalytic Vocation: Rank, Winnicott, and the Legacy of Freud*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
 Taft J (1958) *Otto Rank: A Biographical Study*. New York: The Julian Press.
 Wadlington WL (2001) Otto Rank's art. *The Humanistic Psychologist* 29 (Spring, Summer, Fall): 280–311.
 Wadlington WL (2005) The birth of tragedy and The trauma of birth. *The Humanistic Psychologist* 33(3): 175–186.

Relevant Websites

- <http://www.ottorank.com/> – Otto Rank.
<http://www.ernestbecker.org/> – The Ernest Becker Foundation.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Rank – Otto Rank wiki.
<http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/rank.html> – Personality Theories – Otto Rank.