

Otto Rank

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Otto Rank (1884-1939) was an Austrian psychoanalyst, writer, and teacher. He was born with the name Otto Rosenfeld but he preferred to legally adopt his pen name "Otto Rank". He is known for applying psychoanalytic theory to the analysis of myths and art. Rank also proposed that one of the bases of neurosis is psychological trauma which transpired during birth.

As a young man, he read Sigmund Freud's "The Interpretation of Dreams" which inspired him to write "The Artist" which attempted to psychoanalytically explain art. He then presented his manuscript to Freud who was highly impressed that he invited Rank to be the secretary of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. They became very close colleagues for almost 20 years; Rank was the editor of the "International Journal of Psychoanalysis" from 1912 to 1924, directed the publication of psychoanalytic works from 1919 to 1924, and was regarded by Freud as "his heir". However, Rank's friendship with Freud turned sour when he published "The Trauma of Birth" in 1924. Since he proposed that anxiety neurosis may be caused by the traumatic experience during birth (the transition from inside the womb to the outside world), Freud viewed this as an opposition to his theory on the Oedipus complex. After his separation from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, Rank lectured and practiced psychotherapy in the United States and France. In the 1930s, he suggested that the "will" is personality's guiding force and that it can be employed to influence instincts. Thus, in psychoanalysis, a client's resistance is an evidence of his will which may be proactively used towards self-development. This kind of approach ran counter to Freud's techniques. Rank finally settled in New York in 1936.