A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Depression and Anxiety
The fog of depression
"I'm fine."

Feeling
I'm Nothing
to Everyone
Depression and loss

One aspect of depression can be interpreted as a reaction to loss; the loss of a loved one, of a parent, family, the loss of status, the loss of friends etc. The depressed person reacts to it intensely because the current situation brings back all the fears and feelings of an earlier loss that occurred in childhood, the loss of parental affection.
A description of depression

Depression is deadness, coldness, dryness: where everything is slowed down and colours fade to monochrome; where the brightness and warmth of the sun are insults to the senses, where the dark, slippery sides of the well offer no foot- or hand-hold.. but where progression is ever downwards, further into the darkness, further out of reach of any outstretched arm.

Depression can be almost banal, mundane: being too tired to cook a meal, or get out of an armchair to change a television channel to an only slightly preferred programme, It can surround itself with drama, involving others in guilt and the rage of impotence. Depression can be a defence against anger, disintegration, pain, choice, life.
The question of anxiety is central in psychoanalysis. In his Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Freud distinguished between two kinds of anxiety: “realistic anxiety”, i.e. fear of actual danger, and what he called “neurotic anxiety,” which stems from internal psychic conflicts. He also said that anxiety can be a stand-in for almost any feeling that transforms itself or discharges into the form of anxiety.
“Thus, the shadow of the object fell upon the ego.

Monsters don’t sleep under your bed, they sleep inside your head.
Freud’s Dual-Instinct Theory

**EROS**
Instinct for Life
- e.g., instincts for
  - sex,
  - nurturance,
  - affiliation

**THANATOS**
Instincts for Death
- e.g., instincts for
  - aggression toward self, (self-criticism, depression)
  - aggression toward others (anger, prejudice)
Eros (the life drive/instinct, libido)
Thanatos is associated with negative emotions such as fear, hate and anger, which lead to anti-social acts from bullying to murder, war (perhaps as projection of the death drive).
Conscious mind
(present awareness)

Preconscious mind
(outside awareness but accessible)

Unconscious mind
(not accessible)
The Id
"I want chocolate"

The Ego

The Super-ego
"You're on a diet"

Eat a small bar of chocolate
Freud’s theory of the personality

I NEED TO DO A BIT OF PLANNING TO GET IT.

YOU CAN’T HAVE IT. IT’S NOT RIGHT.

I WANT IT NOW!

ID  EGO  SUPER EGO
The Psyche (Personality)

Id:
Instincts

Ego:
Reality

Superego:
Morality
The poor ego has a still harder time of it; it has to serve three harsh masters, and it has to do its best to reconcile the claims and demands of all three...

The three tyrants are the external world, the superego, and the id.

(Sigmund Freud)
Superego

Definition

- An internal structure or part of the self that, as the internal authority, reflects on the self, makes judgements, exerts moral pressure and is the seat of conscience guilt and self-esteem.
Pressure to be perfect
A very harsh super-ego
A harsh voice
One needs to take cognizance that the concept of "depression" has had common currency only since the 19th century, whilst the condition is as old as humankind itself. Rowe (1978:1) viewed depression as a feeling of being pressed down by the world, that depression is a name for an experience, that, if we want to understand this experience, how it arises, what it means and, since it is an unpleasant experience, how to avoid it, we need to examine it and allow ourselves to go into it's depths.
Anger against oneself?

- For Freud, depression consisted of anger against oneself, anger, which might more logically be expressed against someone else, but which instead was turned inward and for that reason called it retroflexed rage.

- For Freud, distinguishing features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. Freud further noted that many melancholies tended to blame and even heap abuse on themselves.
Ella age 15

- I feel so heavy I can hardly get out of bed, the heaviness drags me down. If I cut myself then, I feel physical pain and I can hurt those who have hurt me.
Object harm sometimes not self harm?
Depressives' self-punishments

Freud noted that if one listens carefully to a depressives' self-criticisms, one often discovers that the most extreme complaints are less applicable to the depressed person than to someone that the depressed person loves, once loved or should love. This was a key observation for Freud. The self-criticisms of a depressed person had been shifted back from a loved object.

The lost object becomes an ego loss; as it is incorporated into the ego. The ego identifies with the lost object, and the conflict between the ego and the lost object becomes a conflict within the ego. Hostility that cannot be expressed directly to the lost object is heaped upon the portion of the ego that is identified with it, and it is reflected, in a loss of self-esteem and punishing self-criticism.
Stella aged 15 struggled with peers, not fitting in, feeling excluded, always on the edge and found herself easily put down by peers; entering year 11 she felt overwhelmed with anxiety and school work.

At first she found it hard to sleep she fretted at night and began to wake early in the morning, the tiredness dragged her down she became ill, with a cold and flu, the flu turned to exhaustion and she found it hard to get out of bed, hard to do anything. She stopped washing and stayed in her bedroom most of the day.
It's like being best friends with the class bully.
Case Study Stella

- We explored the depressed part of her the destructive gang of voices' that attack her, the mean girls...' that felt very powerful and omnipotent. Stella said, "They say that I'm useless and I don't deserve to live, that I should just kill myself as I'm so stupid." I wondered about the healthy part of Stella, the part that wants to get better and to go back to school, or change schools and be out with friends.

- Stella answered that this part of her felt very weak and small in the face of what the voices are constantly saying to her. Stella spoke of her fear of her rage and her destructive feelings, wondered if she could give me more of a visual description of the voices and she said that they were ghost like, grey and shadowy, 'a bit like the dementors.
they have voices, and are smaller but more of them and gathered together...' I commented that the voices are anti-life, are taking her away from life. I commented on how interesting it was that she had likened the voices to the dementors, (from the Harry Potter Stories) whose aim in the stories is to suck the life and soul out of your body leaving the victims an empty shell.
Winnicott’s view of depression was that it has value though it’s difficult to understand this at the time.

He felt that to enter, stay with and come out of was a triumph of integration.
Psychodynamic work aims initially to support the fragile ego by building a therapeutic alliance. An experience of a good object can then facilitate change, offer ego-strength, which in turn brings change.