



## CHAPTER III

### CRITIQUE OF THE FREUDIAN THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE

The critique directed by our group of social psychologists against the Freudian conception of human nature often overlaps with their critique of the S-R conception of man, and they often speak of both of them together. Allport, for example, using the term "positivism" as synonymous with what we here have called S-R psychology, displays the overlapping in the following:

Much has been written concerning the psychoanalytic image of man. . . . In some respects the picture is like that of positivism. . . Man is a quasi-mechanical reactor . . .<sup>1</sup>

And Asch, to use another example, includes both the Freudian and S-R conceptions of human nature in his broad indictment, when he says that

Modern psychology has often drawn, I suspect, a caricature rather than a portrait of man. As a result it has introduced a grave gap between itself and the knowledge of men that observation<sup>2</sup> gives us and from which investigation must start.

I shall not dwell on any of the specific points with respect to which there is overlapping in our social psychologists' critiques of the S-R and Freudian conceptions of man, since

---

<sup>1</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 552.

<sup>2</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 24.



it is not crucial for our inquiry whether, for example, the doctrine of tension-reduction as explanatory of all human behavior in S-R psychology is identical with the theory of id impulses and their pressure in Freudian psychology; or whether S-R psychology's reward and punishment doctrine as central to learning and motivation theory is the same as the Freudian "pleasure principle"; or whether there is an identical or similar emphasis in both psychologies on biological needs, drives, or impulses. The two critiques can be separated, and it will be both less confusing and more fruitful to outline and examine our social psychologists' critique of the Freudian doctrine of man separately, except at one or two points where the overlapping of the critique results in a distortion or misinterpretation of Freudian doctrine.

Before getting down to the analysis of some details of their critique, we may be helped in our understanding of it if we look at some of the broad-gauged criticisms of the Freudian image of human nature by several of the social psychologists under study here. Allport's indictment, in broad strokes, is summarized in three brief paragraphs under the heading "Psychoanalytic Formulations":

Man is a quasi-mechanical reactor, goaded by three tyrannical forces: the environment, the id, and the superego. . . . His vaunted rationality is of little account. . . . Since he is full of defenses and prone to rationalize, his search for final truth is doomed to failure . . .



There is a deep pessimism in orthodox psychoanalytic doctrine (Freudian style). Man is so heavily dominated by unconscious id forces that he never escapes the ferocity and passion in his nature. Sublimation is the best we can hope for. There is no genuine transformation of motives.

Grim as this picture is, no theory of modern man can safely overlook its elements of truth. How can we hope to see man whole unless we include the dark side of his nature? Many present-day psychoanalysts, however, feel that the image overweighs the role of unconscious and libidinal forces in personality.<sup>3</sup>

Asch, while acknowledging that, unlike other psychologies, Freudian theory "was the first to attempt a psychology of man," and that Freud "took as his object of investigation the human personality in its complexity, rather than isolated processes," criticizes Freud for his "principal thesis" that

society suppresses human impulses, that the social order is built on instinctual suppression. This conclusion follows directly from his account of instinctive needs . . . which are fundamentally sexual . . . they have a blindly craving character; they know no bounds. Their lack of restraint is contrary to social demands.<sup>4</sup>

It is not correct to say that Freud neglected the importance of reason (or morality) in human conduct. But . . . the function he assigned to reason . . . is [that of] a harassed mediator between unreasoning urges and the limitations set by reality. It possesses no energy and no goals of its own . . .<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 552.

<sup>4</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 18.



This starting point necessarily controlled Freud's conclusions about the social character of men. . . . There remains an ever-present and irreconcilable conflict between man and society.

. . . there is a great range of phenomena in the sphere of human behavior that Freud did not consider. First, and perhaps most important, he excluded from observation all reference to what we may call the 'daylight' aspect of human action and experience. He did not deal directly with the motives, decisions, and plannings of people as they face their problems of work, of making a living, of taking a political stand. . . . He failed to find a place for the growth of interest in other human beings and concern for them which is not based on the gratification of needs having reference only to the self. In short, Freud did not deal with the productive forces in man.<sup>6</sup>

With these two sweeping attacks as background, let us now look at some of the more detailed animadversions directed by our social psychologists against Freud's doctrine of human nature.

#### A. Maslow's Critique of Freudian Man

Maslow's critique of the Freudian image of human nature follows several lines of attack. First he identifies Freud with the tradition in Western thought which emphasizes the bad animal nature within us:

. . . western civilization has generally believed that the animal in us was a bad animal, and that our most primitive impulses are evil, greedy, selfish, and hostile. The theologians have called it original sin, or the devil. The Freudians have called it the id . . .<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 19, also pp. 347-48.

<sup>7</sup> Maslow, Motivation and Personality, pp. 129-30.



Then he attacks instinct theory generally, including Freud as one of his targets, and points an accusing finger to

the vital and even tragic mistake . . . of dichotomizing instinctive impulse and rationality in the human being.

He complains, with respect to instinctive impulses and rationality, that

it has rarely occurred to anyone that . . . their results or implied goals might be identical and synergic rather than antagonistic.<sup>8</sup>

Continuing his attack on instinct theory, Maslow rejects what he considers to be some of its social and political consequences:

. . . to accept as intrinsic an antagonism between instincts and society, between individual interests and social interests was a terrific begging the question. . . . Individual and social interests under healthy social conditions are synergic and not antagonistic. The false dichotomy persists because erroneous conceptions of individual and social interests are the natural ones under bad individual and social conditions.<sup>9</sup>

A broad, slashing attack follows, which Maslow concludes by making Freud a fellow-traveller of, God save the mark, Adolph Hitler's:

Any belief that makes men mistrust themselves and each other unnecessarily, and to be unrealistically pessimistic about human possibilities, must be held partly responsible for every war that has ever been waged, for every racial antagonism, and for every religious crusade. This false theory of human nature,

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



curiously enough, has been upheld by both instinctivists and anti-instinctivists to this day. . . . The instinctivists . . . have generally given up optimism with no more than a shrug of the shoulders. . . . We are reminded here of the alcoholism into which some go eagerly, and some go reluctantly; the ultimate effects are often similar. This explains why Freud can be found in the same camp with Hitler on many issues.<sup>10</sup>

I shall reserve for the chapter on "Human Nature and Democracy" (Chapter X, infra) my comments on Maslow's assumptions concerning some of the relationships between psychology and politics, and on his incredible bracketing of Freud with Hitler. At this point I only want to conclude the outline of Maslow's critique of Freud's image of man by calling attention to two more ingredients in it.

Proceeding on the basis of a widespread error which assumes that Freud and Freudians identify all unconscious processes with evil, Maslow rejects this identification and advocates the view that "our depths" can also be good:

Many people still think of 'the unconscious,' of regression and of primary process cognition as necessarily unhealthy, or dangerous or bad. Psychotherapeutic experience is slowly teaching us otherwise. Our depths can also be good, or beautiful or desirable. This is also becoming clear from the general findings from investigations of the sources of love, creativeness, play, humor, art, etc. Their roots are deep in the inner, deeper self, i. e., in the unconscious.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, as part of his rejection of the Freudian disparagement of instinctive impulses and insistence that

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 134-35.

<sup>11</sup> Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 184.



impulses must be controlled, Maslow contends that this view is a result of the Freudians' preoccupation with the study of sick people, and their failure to study human nature as it manifests itself in healthy people:

It is . . . understandable that the Freudian psychology should be built upon the . . . attitude toward motivation that impulses are dangerous and to be fought. After all, this whole psychology is based upon experience with sick people . . .<sup>12</sup>

I criticise the classical Freudians for tending (in the extreme instance) to pathologize everything and for not seeing clearly enough the healthward possibilities in the human being, for seeing everything through brown-colored glasses. . . . [it is] like a theology of evil and sin exclusively . . . and therefore . . . incorrect and unrealistic.<sup>13</sup>

#### B. Rogers' Critique of Freudian Doctrine

Carl Rogers' critique of the Freudian conception of man concentrates on a rejection of two notions, the notion that man is inherently destructive and evil, and that man is inherently irrational. Let me first quote some of Rogers on the Freudian view of human nature as evil:

. . . when a Freudian such as Karl Menninger tells me (as he has, in a discussion of this issue) that he perceives man as 'innately evil,' or more precisely, 'innately destructive,' I can only shake my head in wonderment. How could it be that Menninger and I, working with such a similar purpose in such intimate relationships with individuals in

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 46.



distress, experience people so differently? . . . my experience provides no evidence for believing that if the deepest elements in man's nature were released we would have a destructive and uncontrolled id unleashed in the world.<sup>14</sup>

. . . Freud was understandably very much excited by his discovery--a tremendous discovery for his time--that beneath a conventional or 'good' exterior, man harbored all kinds of aggressive and sexual feelings and impulses which he had successfully hidden from himself as well as from others. This discovery was shocking to the culture of that period and hence both his critics and Freud himself focused on the 'evil' feelings in man which lay beneath the surface. . . . Freud's own experience with his patients must have shown him that once these 'evil' feelings were known, accepted, and understood by the individual, he could be trusted to be a normally self-controlled, socialized person. In the furor of the controversy over psychoanalysis this latter point was overlooked, and Freud settled for what is, in my estimation, a too-superficial view of human nature.<sup>15</sup>

It disturbs me to be thought of as an optimist. My whole professional experience has been with the dark and often sordid side of life, and I know, better than most, the incredibly destructive behavior of which man is capable. Yet that same professional experience has forced upon me the realization that man, when you know him deeply, in his worst and troubled states, is not evil or demonic.<sup>16</sup>

The discussion of Rogers' view that man, in his basic nature, when he functions freely, is "constructive

---

<sup>14</sup>Carl R. Rogers, "The Nature of Man," The Nature of Man in Theological and Moral Perspective, ed. Simon Doniger (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), pp. 93-94.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>16</sup>Rogers, "Niebuhr on the Nature of Man," ibid., p. 70.





and trustworthy," belongs in later chapters, and will not detain us here. At this point it remains only to quote Rogers' rejection of Freud's doctrine of man's irrationality:

I have little sympathy with the rather prevalent concept that man is basically irrational, and that his impulses, if not controlled, will lead to destruction of others and self. Man's behavior is exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward goals his organism is endeavoring to achieve.<sup>17</sup>

### C. Fromm's Critique of Freud

Much of Erich Fromm's writing is devoted to a radical and oft-reiterated attack on Freud's conception of human nature. The major lines of attack are clear and reasonably consistent, and are always a direct reflection of Fromm's own preconceptions about the nature of man. However, here and there some puzzling self-contradictions appear which seem to betray, if I may indulge in this kind of characterological speculation, Fromm's deep ambivalence toward Freud, in addition to conceptual confusion. Two illustrations of such inconsistencies in Fromm's interpretation of Freud will suffice before presenting the major thrusts of his critique.

In his first book Fromm categorically ascribes to Freud the doctrine of the innate wickedness of man, a theme

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 70 and again p. 94, quoted by Rogers from his "A Therapist's View of the Good Life," The Humanist, No. 5, 1957, and reprinted in Reconstruction in Religion: A Symposium, ed. Alfred E. Kuenzli (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 173-189, under the title "The Meaning of the Good Life."



which he repeats in numerous other writings. In Escape from Freedom he says:

Freud accepted the traditional belief in a basic dichotomy between man and society, as well as the traditional doctrine of the evil of human nature. Man, to him, is fundamentally antisocial. Society must domesticate him . . .<sup>18</sup>

. . . Freud, on the basis of his instinctivistic orientation and also of a profound conviction of the wickedness of human nature, is prone to interpret all 'ideal' motives in man as the result of something 'mean' . . .<sup>19</sup>

But on the other hand, in his second book, while he again refers critically to Freud's doctrine of "the evil inherent in man,"<sup>20</sup> and to Freud's theory of the death-instinct as "the most radical expression of the view of man's innate destructiveness,"<sup>21</sup> Fromm at the same time gives a significantly different interpretation of Freud's position:

Freud's theory is dualistic. He does not see man as either essentially good or essentially evil, but as a being driven by two equally strong contradictory forces.<sup>22</sup>

Fromm is neither saying nor implying that Freud advanced two significantly different views and is guilty of inconsistency.

---

<sup>18</sup>Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>20</sup>Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.



The inconsistency is Fromm's. If we stick to "good" and "evil" as the polarized ethical terms for the characterization of the nature of man, then, as I shall try to show later, the image of man as being driven by these "two equally strong contradictory forces" comes much closer to what Freud was actually saying than the view ascribed to him of man as exclusively evil and wicked. The frequent ascription to Freud, by Fromm and others in our group of social psychologists, of the doctrine of the exclusive wickedness of man appears to be as much a result of their eagerness to propound their own assumption of the inherent goodness of human nature as it is of insufficient care in their reading of Freud, and of conceptual and terminological confusion.

Fromm's second inconsistency concerns one of the aspects of the nature of "the unconscious." Given the two mutually contradictory ethical terms "good" and "evil," is the unconscious, or are man's unconscious mental processes, to be characterized as good or as evil? In his book Psychoanalysis and Religion, Fromm asserts, again categorically, that they are evil:

In Freud's thinking the unconscious is essentially that in us which is bad, the repressed, that which is incompatible with the demands of our culture and of our higher self.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Erich Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 96.



Now this is most strange, since Fromm, in his earlier book, Man for Himself, had quoted Freud's well-known declaration in The Ego and the Id, which clearly contradicts Fromm's interpretation:

. . . we shall have to say that not only what is lowest but also what is highest in the ego can be unconscious.<sup>24</sup>

This declaration of Freud's is, in fact, nothing but a summary of the more extended discussion and clinical report that come immediately before it in Freud's book, and portions of which merit quoting at this point:

Accustomed as we are to taking our social and ethical standard of values along with us wherever we go, we feel no surprise at hearing that the scene of the activities of the lower passions is in the unconscious; we expect, moreover, that the higher any mental function ranks in our scale of values the more easily it will find access to consciousness assured to it. Here, however, psychoanalytic experience disappoints us. . . . In our analyses we discover that there are people in whom the faculties of self-criticism and conscience--mental activities, that is, that rank as exceptionally high ones--are unconscious and unconsciously produce effects of the greatest importance.<sup>25</sup>

This is strange also in the light of Freud's perhaps less well-known assertion, but one with which Fromm certainly is familiar, namely,

---

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, The Ego and the Id, trans. Joan Riviere (London: The Hogarth Press, 1947), p. 33; quoted by Fromm in Man for Himself, p. 33. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>25</sup> Freud, The Ego and the Id, pp. 32-33. (Emphasis mine)



that we can attribute to the id other characteristics than that of being unconscious, and you are aware of the possibility that parts of the ego and super-ego are unconscious without possessing the same primitive and irrational quality.<sup>26</sup>

And even more strange is the fact that only three sentences following the one in which he gave his misinterpretation of Freud's view on the moral qualities of the unconscious, Fromm presents his own view on this subject, agreeing with Freud's authentic position as it is expressed in the quotations above, and using some of the very words used by Freud in The Ego and the Id. This is Fromm's statement:

Our unconscious . . . contains both the lowest and the highest, the worst and the best.<sup>27</sup>

It is difficult to understand the reason for this self-contradiction and distortion in Fromm's interpretation of Freud; why, in stating as his own position the view that both the lowest and the highest, the worst and the best are contained in man's unconscious mental processes, he felt the compulsion to ascribe to Freud, erroneously, a view that contradicts this. I find nothing in the surrounding context of these passages in Psychoanalysis and Religion that would help explain the distortion. It may simply be another

---

<sup>26</sup> Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, trans. W. H. J. Sprott (New York: Norton & Co., 1933), p. 105. (Emphasis mine) Cf. also Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud (New York: Basic Books, 1957), Vol. III, pp. 281-283.

<sup>27</sup> Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion, p. 97.



instance of the failure, by Fromm and others, to see and understand the dynamic character of man's psychological structure in Freudian doctrine, and their frequent and almost chronic misinterpretation of Freud's doctrine of man as a static one.

With this rather lengthy introduction behind us, we can now briefly sketch the highlights of the critique of Freud's doctrine of man that recur in Fromm's several books. Man according to Freud, says Fromm critically, is "fundamentally antisocial," and he always seeks "direct satisfaction of biological--and hence, ineradicable--drives."<sup>28</sup> According to Fromm,

The relation of the individual to society in Freud's theory is essentially a static one; the individual remains virtually the same and becomes changed only in so far as society exercises greater pressure on his natural drives . . ."<sup>29</sup>

"Freud assumes," according to Fromm, that "man is . . . primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others in order to satisfy his instinctual needs."<sup>30</sup>

Fromm expounds this criticism more elaborately in another place in connection with his exposition of Freud's libido theory. "Man is basically a machine, driven by libido." In order to reduce the painful libidinal tensions and achieve the pleasure that this tension-reduction brings,

---

<sup>28</sup> Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 290.



"men and women need each other." Their "mutual satisfaction of their libidinous needs" is what constitutes the interest in each other on the part of men and women. However, says Fromm about Freud's alleged doctrine of interhuman relationships,

. . . they remain basically isolated beings. . . . they never transcend their fundamental separateness. Man, for Freud, . . . was a social animal only by the necessity for the mutual satisfaction of his needs, not by any primary need to be related to one another.<sup>31</sup>

The same criticism is repeated by Fromm in another passage, this time in terms of a distinction between love and social cohesion:

Since for Freud love is in its essence sexual desire, he is compelled to assume a contradiction between love and social cohesion. Love, according to him, is by its very nature egotistical and antisocial, and the sense of solidarity and brotherly love are not primary feelings rooted in man's nature, but aim-inhibited sexual desires.<sup>32</sup>

Another target in Fromm's attack on the Freudian image of man is Freud's theory of the Super-Ego and of man's conscience. Freud, according to Fromm, fails to recognize the existence of an innate conscience in man which directs man toward a moral and good life. A person's Super-Ego is only an expression of those values and norms which were imposed on him by parental and other authority, and which

---

<sup>31</sup>Erich Fromm, Sigmund Freud's Mission; An Analysis of His Personality and Influence (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959), p. 98.

<sup>32</sup>Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 75.



he has internalized as a result of his fear that disobedience will bring upon him the retribution of these authorities.

To quote Fromm:

According to this theory, anything can become the content of conscience if only it happens to be part of the system of commands and prohibitions embodied in the father's Super-Ego and the cultural tradition. Conscience in this view is nothing but internalized authority. Freud's analysis of the Super-Ego is the analysis of the 'authoritarian conscience' only.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to the authoritarian conscience that he attributes to Freud's doctrine, Fromm propounds his own theory of a "humanistic conscience," and this will be discussed in the chapter on "The Inner Moral Sense as Ethical Guide" (Chapter VIII, infra).

However, a related point in Fromm's attack has reference to his interpretation of Freud's position on the nature of morality. He says that Freud's view is that man develops morality only in response to external pressures:

. . . morality is essentially a reaction formation against the evil inherent in man. . . . This theory is the secularized version of the concept of 'original sin.' Since these incestuous and murderous impulses are integral parts of man's nature, Freud reasoned, man had to develop ethical norms in order to make social life possible. . . . man established norms of social behavior in order to protect the individual and the group from the dangers of these impulses.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup>Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-35. (Emphasis mine)





Fromm thus charges Freud with assuming "a basic and unalterable contradiction between human nature and society, a contradiction which follows from the alleged asocial nature of man."<sup>35</sup> In addition, he also rejects Freud's doctrine of man because

For Freud, man is driven by two big logically rooted impulses: the craving for sexual pleasure, and for destruction.<sup>36</sup>

In connection with Freud's discoveries about sexuality in man, which Fromm interprets to mean man's wish for "complete sexual freedom, that is, unlimited access to all women he might find desirable,"<sup>37</sup> Fromm also indicts Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, which is "the other aim of sexual desire," namely, "the incestuous desire for the mother."<sup>38</sup> This Oedipus complex theory, according to Fromm, reinforces Freud's reprehensible concept of human nature as essentially competitive, since it

is based on the assumption of the 'natural' antagonism and competitiveness between father and sons for the love of the mother. This competition is said to be unavoidable because of the natural incestuous strivings in the sons. Freud only follows the same trend of thought in his assumption that the instincts of each man make him desire to have the prerogative in sexual relationships, and thus create violent enmity among

---

<sup>35</sup> Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



themselves. We cannot fail to see that Freud's whole theory of sex is conceived on the anthropological premise that competition and mutual hostility are inherent in human nature.<sup>39</sup>

Freud's "assumption of the basic hostility between men" is thus another target of Fromm's attack. "Man's aggressiveness, Freud thinks, has two sources: one, the innate striving for destruction (death instinct) and the other the frustration of his instinctual desires . . ." Moreover, in Freud's theory, "aggressiveness remains ineradicable. Men will always compete with, and attack each other, if not for material things, then for the prerogatives in sexual relationships."<sup>40</sup>

And finally, Fromm rejects Freud's view that, since a function of civilization is the control and frustration of man's instinctual impulses, one of the inescapable products of civilization is neurosis and, according to Fromm, "mental illness."<sup>41</sup> In Fromm's interpretation of this phase of the Freudian doctrine of man,

Freud must arrive at a picture of necessary conflict between civilization and mental health and happiness. Primitive man is healthy and happy because he is not frustrated in his basic instincts. . . . Civilized man is bound to be neurotic because of the continued frustration of his instincts, enforced by civilization. <sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



Fromm's own view is precisely the reverse: man is essentially good, and his innate impulses are constructive and beneficent. Mental health is the satisfaction of these innate impulses. It is society that is evil. Neuroses and mental illness are a result of society's suppression of man's spontaneity and of his gratification of natural impulses. It is from the point of view of this preconception about the goodness of human nature that Fromm charges the "Hobbes-Freudian view" with ignoring

the fact that society is not only in conflict with the asocial aspects of man, partly produced by itself, but often also with his most valuable human qualities, which it suppresses rather than furthers.<sup>43</sup>

D. Allport's Critique of Freud's Theory of Man

Now, to return to Allport, with whom we began this chapter, one of the major thrusts in his critique of Freud's theory of man centers upon the question of the relative autonomy and strength of the "conscious layer (Freud calls it the Ego)," vs. the unconscious processes in man:

The issue is central for our theory. The questions are simply these: Does the unconscious (with its primitive and archaic character) dominate the structure and functioning of personality, or does the conscious stratum do so?<sup>44</sup>

Allport acknowledges that "Freud was more successful than any other writer in history in calling attention to hidden formative processes," which shape our behavior and

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>44</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 145.



personalities "without our knowing that they do. . . . We often act for reasons we do not understand. . . . we harbor unconscious sentiments that would surprise us if we knew we had them."<sup>45</sup> However, Allport concludes that Freud was in error when he assigned greater potency and autonomy to the unconscious in man, to "primary processes," to the id, and painted the ego as merely a weak servant of the id, and as the arena of our "secondary processes." Here are Allport's own words:

. . . the unconscious . . . contains a steam boiler of basic energies, a 'seething cauldron' of instinctual drive (chiefly sex and aggression). The dynamic id is the original system of personality out of which the other systems differentiate. . . . The ego comes into existence early in life for the purpose of serving the id.<sup>46</sup>

The key conception in Freudian psychoanalytic theory is 'primary process.' . . .<sup>47</sup>

Freud's choice of these terms [primary and secondary process] betrays his whole theory of the nature of man. What is instinctual, blindly self-centered, immediately demanding, largely unconscious is primary. What is rational, controlled, adult is secondary. . . . Not even an adult escapes the primacy of the primary processes of his life. Freud insists that 'the ego has no energy of its own.' It does not exist until energy is diverted from the id to sustain the secondary processes that constitute the ego.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 145-46.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

One of the difficulties Allport finds in this Freudian position is that it makes all our adult acquisitions, altruism, ideals, mature tastes, the "ought" conscience, secondary in character, merely "transparent sublimations" (Freud) of the id processes, and this results in "an animalistic view of normal adult personality."<sup>49</sup> Like Fromm, Allport criticizes the Freudian conception of the superego as being "a 'must' conscience"<sup>50</sup> imposed on men by external authority, rather than what Allport prefers to call an "ought" conscience, i. e., a conscience innate in the species man.<sup>51</sup>

Another of Allport's attacks takes as its point of departure the fact that, on the one hand Freudian psychoanalytic doctrine arose to a considerable extent from the study of mentally troubled people, and on the other hand Freud believed that psychoanalysis offered a foundation for a general science of psychology. The result is that

Freud, for all his merits, has smudged the boundary lines between neurotic and normal mental functioning. He has done so by postulating (in all people) an unconscious heavily laden with antisocial impulses and repressions. . . . The normal processes of growth and becoming are, in the main, neglected in Freud's theories of personality. Although traces of neurotic

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>51</sup> Allport, Becoming, Chapter 16, pp. 68-74.



traits and mechanisms may be found in many healthy people, these threads are minor as compared with the sturdier weave of wholesome growth.<sup>52</sup>

We shall have occasion later to discuss the methodological significance of the allegation that certain aspects of man's psychological nature are "neglected" by a psychologist. We shall also have occasion later to touch on the "value" assumptions in discourse about such concepts as health, normality, maturity, growth, etc.

As part of his theory of motivation, Allport is severely critical of trying to explain adult human behavior through infantile biological motivation. He challenges "Freud's picture of an id that 'never changes,'" and insists, in an elaborate theory on the "functional autonomy" and contemporaneity of motives, that motives undergo transformations, and that a person's present thoughts and wishes, as well as his future intentions and purposes, explain a normal adult's behavior, rather than allegedly unchanging id impulses that survive and retain their potency from infantile experiences. The logic of Freud's position, says Allport,

seems to us inadequate to account for the qualitative differences between infant and adult (e. g., the emergent motives of social responsibility), and also for the extraordinary diversity of adult motives, unique in each particular personality.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 155. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>53</sup>ibid., p. 203. Also, Allport, "The Trend in Motivation Theory," Personality and Social Encounter, pp. 95-105, passim.



In an earlier work Allport's statement of opposition to this genetic approach to the explanation of human behavior, reads as follows:

Such a theory [of the functional autonomy of motives] is obviously opposed to psychoanalysis and to all other genetic accounts that assume inflexibility in the root purposes and drives of life. (Freud says that the structure of the id never changes.) The theory declines to believe that the energies of adult personality are infantile or archaic in nature. Motivation is always contemporary.<sup>54</sup>

Allport's rejection of the alleged Freudian disparagement of contemporary motives is of the same fabric as his rejection of the alleged Freudian disparagement of consciousness and conscious processes as ingredients in human nature, and as his critique of the use of indirect, projective methods in the study of human behavior. The picture presented by Freud, Allport complains, "ascribes to consciousness a passive and secondary role." "Like other writers I have been critical of Freud's depreciation of the role of consciousness."<sup>55</sup> This bias against consciousness, says Allport, affects research methodology: it results in an assumption that a person's conscious reports about his interests, desires, purposes, are unreliable, misleading, and can yield no useful knowledge in the study of human

---

<sup>54</sup>Gordon W. Allport, Personality: A Psychological Interpretation (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1937), p. 194.

<sup>55</sup>Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 148 and 150.



nature. In these theories, Allport maintains,

the individual's conscious report is rejected as untrustworthy, and the contemporary thrust of his motives is disregarded in favor of a backward tracing of his conduct to earlier formative stages. The individual loses his right to be believed.

It is now easy to understand why the special methods invented by Jung . . . , Rorschach . . . , and Murray were seized with enthusiasm by psychodiagnosticians. . . . The argument, of course, is that . . . only in an unstructured situation will he [the patient, or the interviewee, or the experimental subject] reveal his anxieties and unmasked needs.<sup>56</sup>

This, Allport claims, is a distortion of normal human behavior. The normal subjects, Allport insists, "tell you by the direct method precisely what they tell you by the projective method. They are all of a piece. You may therefore take their motivational statements at their face value, for, even if you probe, you will not find anything substantially different."<sup>57</sup> It is the psychoneurotic's true motives that are hidden, and require projective methods to uncover them, not the well-integrated person's. The latter is aware of his motivations, and his responses to the projective methods will not differ significantly from his responses to the direct methods. The implication Allport draws from this view of human nature in its "normal"

---

<sup>56</sup>Allport, Personality and Social Encounter, pp. 96-97.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 99.





manifestations is that the psychodiagnostician "should never employ projective methods in the study of motivation without at the same time employing direct methods," otherwise "he will never be able to distinguish a well-integrated personality from one that is not."<sup>58</sup>

And finally, Allport is also critical of Freud's emphasis on the irrational in man:

We are emerging from an epoch of extreme irrationalism when human motivation has been equated with . . . the steam boiler of the id (Freud). Under the powerful influence of these doctrines the role of 'the intellect' has been considered negligible. At best it was seen as an instrument for carrying out a motive. Cognitive functions are mere servants.<sup>59</sup>

Some theorists--the 'irrationalist,' such as Schopenhauer, Kempf, Freud, and others--have held that cognition (our thought-life) is essentially the servant of our needs and drives. . . . But nowadays we cannot accept this easy judgment . . .<sup>60</sup>

E. Asch's Critique of Freud's Image of Man

I shall conclude this inventory by returning to Solomon E. Asch and noting several of his specific criticisms of Freud's image of man in addition to his more general critique noted at the beginning of the present chapter (supra, pp. 54-55). Like Allport, Asch rejects the Freudian

---

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 259.



emphasis on seeking the roots of adult attitudes in childhood experiences. He deplores "the trend to comprehend adult behavior in terms of infantile motives and techniques." As a result of this trend, Asch avers, "the child has become the 'original man' of modern psychology," and the effects "of the immediate, actual conditions facing adults, the problems these pose in their own right, are often under-estimated."<sup>61</sup>

Asch also rejects the "ego-centered character of men" in Freudian psychology, and its "cardinal assumption . . . that man is an ego acting according to the pleasure-pain principle." These assumptions "are highly debatable," says Asch, and result in the neglect or denial of man's concern for the welfare of others and of his ability to "subordinate 'his' needs to those of others" as propensities inherent in human nature.<sup>62</sup> Asch is also sharply critical of the Freudian assumption of "the supremacy of irrational emotions." He claims that

no assumption has spread more widely in modern psychology than that men are ruled by their emotions and that these are irrational. Although there is much to support this view, it has nevertheless been responsible for a systematic depreciation of the possibilities of intelligence and thinking in human affairs.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 22, also 337.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21, 329, 332.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 21.



He questions this "cleavage between emotional and intellectual processes," and doubts the "axiom not only that emotions and thinking are different psychological operations, but that they are antithetical as well."<sup>64</sup> Further, Asch deplores the alleged Freudian claim of "the primacy of rationalization in human thinking." The view ascribed to Freud that "the reasons men give for their actions and convictions are usually not true causes but rationalizations" has become so widespread that it has been given "a central place among mental processes, until it has almost replaced thinking proper." But, Asch insists, it is "necessary to discriminate between rationalization and thinking" in order to know when we are dealing with evasions of the truth and when with the effort "to reach a true understanding."<sup>65</sup>

On the subject of relations between human beings, Asch alleges that Freud does not recognize man's desire for group life, and denies man's natural inclination toward affection for others as an end in itself:

I do not find in Freud's psychology a place for the desire to participate in group life and for sharing responsibilities; these, it appears, must have their roots in 'other' impulses. It even appears at times that the human species is essentially anti-social and that society is the expression of this trend.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 329.



. . . Freud focuses so exclusively on social friction that spontaneous social interest disappears as a relevant fact. . . . one cannot be interested in others except as one's own needs, in the narrowest sense, are served. Freud's position on this point is too clear to require restatement. There is in these views a denial of the psychological possibility of affection for others that is not affection for ourselves, of concern for the group that does not hide a concern for ourselves.<sup>67</sup>

And, finally, on the relationships between the individual and society, Asch criticizes Freud for being concerned exclusively with "the oppressive effects of social conditions on character."<sup>68</sup> He charges that Freud

in effect denied or ignored the positive striving toward others that is not the consequence solely of sexual and strictly personal problems. . . . What is lacking in Freud is the sense that society is the condition of freedom as well as a source of oppression. . . . the suppression of hostility . . . Freud explains . . . exclusively in terms of fear of punishment or retaliation. . . . In general, Freud treated . . . of the impairments of social life and not of its positive, productive impulses.<sup>69</sup>

F. The Syllabus of Freudian Errors

Out of this lengthy inventory of critical, anti-Freudian statements and declarations it is possible to distill a brief Syllabus of Errors, charged by our group of social psychologists against the Freudian image of man.

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 347-48.



This will make for greater convenience in the organization of the analysis and commentary that follow. Applying a fairly coarse grid through which to sort out the contents of the above inventory, and limiting ourselves to cold, prosy, pedestrian language (and thus regrettably missing some of the subtle nuances and distinctions observed by Allport and Asch but at the same time avoiding the purple, self-intoxicating rhetoric that punctuates Fromm's and Maslow's writing), I come up with a Syllabus of twenty-one propositions, each of which either states what our social psychologists believe to be an erroneous assumption or generalization in the Freudian theory of the nature of man, or propounds an interpretation placed by one or more of our group of social psychologists upon some aspect of the Freudian image of human nature. The following are the twenty-one "Errors" attributed to the Freudian doctrine of man:

1. That man is fundamentally an irrational being, and that irrational emotions and mental processes are assigned a position of supremacy in human nature.

2. That man's reasoning powers are employed principally for the purpose of rationalization, to justify what the person does independently of the reasons he gives for his actions, and to interpret reality to suit his wishes.

3. That primacy is given to the unconscious, or man's unconscious processes, and that the conscious processes are downgraded in importance.



4. That man's behavior is completely determined by unchanging, destructive id-impulses, primary processes, and biological instincts.

5. That man is dominated by sexual drives pressing for complete sexual freedom: man is depicted as "homo sexualis."

6. That man is fundamentally and ineradicably aggressive and destructive, being driven by a death-instinct or a death-wish; Freud uses Hobbes' phrase "Homo homini lupus"<sup>70</sup> to describe man's aggressiveness.

7. That man is basically selfish, ego-centered, acting always in accordance with the pleasure-pain principle, and having no innate interest in the welfare of other human beings.

8. That man is essentially competitive.

9. That human beings are fundamentally isolated beings, and that they relate themselves to other human beings only for the purpose of gratifying their sex drive and other primary needs.

10. That normal adult personality is looked at through an animalistic model.

11. That much of man's behavior is determined by the universal Oedipus Complex, with its inevitable and permanent

---

<sup>70</sup>Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 1930), p. 85.



antagonisms and sexual competitiveness between father and sons.

12. That much of adult behavior is determined by motivations that persist from experiences during infancy; that the roots of adult attitudes are to be found in a person's infancy; that the infant is the model for the study of man.

13. That man is depicted as a "quasi-mechanical reactor."

14. That human nature is depicted on the basis of the study of abnormal, pathological people, and that the model for the study of man is therefore the abnormal person.

15. That man is fundamentally antisocial.

16. That there is an ineradicable conflict between the individual and society.

17. That society's controls and frustrations of the individual's instinctive impulses and desires produce neuroses.

18. That man is fundamentally evil, and that one must therefore take a pessimistic view of human nature.

19. That man's superego provides him with an authoritarian or must-conscience based on fear, rather than an innate conscience, as a moral guide.

20. That morality is a reaction-formation against the evil inherent in man.

21. That culture is only the sublimation of suppressed id-impulses.



This catalogue of criticisms is a mixture of good and bad; more often than not, it seems to me, the bad outweighing the good. In what follows I shall try, in a limited way, to disentangle the good from the bad in this attack on Freud, mindful of the fact that a full length treatise would be required to do this adequately. Within this limited scope, I shall first offer some extended comments of a general nature on the critique as a whole, with an examination of some of the specific criticisms in the above "Syllabus of Errors" to follow afterward.

In general, it must be noted, some of the mannerisms in Freud's writing are regrettable because they are misleading, and result in misunderstanding of his doctrines. For one thing, the appearance of rigidity and inflexible dogmatism in some of Freud's statements often deflects the hostile reader's attention from the subtlety and sensitivity of many Freudian insights into human nature, and obscures the scientific tentativeness and provisional character that Freud attaches to many of his generalizations. Another misleading mannerism is Freud's addiction to overstatement. Often, when he presents a finding, a theory, or a generalization, it is overstated, overemphasized, in a manner that gives the impression that it is being advanced as an exhaustive statement of the whole truth on the subject. In one place Freud tries to overcome this effect by explaining that he gives greater emphasis to the evil in human beings





"only because others deny it."<sup>71</sup> None the less, this kind of frequent overstatement makes it possible for weak criticisms, or criticisms which are essentially nothing more than a counter-emphasis to Freud's emphasis, to wear a surface appearance of plausibility.

#### G. Freud's Hypostatizations

A more substantive difficulty in Freud's writings is his frequent hypostatization of his basic concepts, which leaves him open to justified conceptual and methodological criticism on the one hand, and on the other hand to misplaced interpretations of his meaning. Freud repeatedly uses such locutions as: "The id knows no values,"<sup>72</sup> "The ego has taken over the task . . .",<sup>73</sup> "From a dynamic point of view it [the ego] is weak,"<sup>74</sup> "The super-ego seems to have made a one-sided selection,"<sup>75</sup> ". . . the id . . . is totally non-moral, . . . the ego . . . strives to be moral, and . . . the

---

<sup>71</sup>Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, trans. Joan Riviere (Garden City, N. Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., 1938), p. 131.

<sup>72</sup>Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 105.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 89.



super-ego . . . can be hyper-moral and then becomes . . .  
ruthless . . .",<sup>76</sup> "the unconscious is a special realm with  
its own desires . . ."<sup>77</sup> To be sure there is much ambiguity  
and inconsistency in Freud's use of these concepts. For  
example, the word "unconscious," in spite of its frequent  
hypostatization by Freud, is used by him in three different  
senses in his many writings, as he himself pointed out.  
First, it is hypostatized when he speaks of it as "the  
system of the unconscious," or as "a mental province."<sup>78</sup>  
Secondly however, he points out that in his later writings  
the word is used to denote "a quality which mental things  
have."<sup>79</sup> And thirdly, he frequently uses the phrase  
"unconscious processes," or "unconscious mental processes."<sup>80</sup>  
In the case of "super-ego," while this word is almost always  
hypostatized, in at least one place Freud speaks of the  
super-ego as a "function in the ego."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Freud's  
conceptual confusion here is also revealed in his admonition

---

<sup>76</sup>Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 79.

<sup>77</sup>Freud, A General Introduction, p. 188.

<sup>78</sup>Freud, New Introductory Lectures, pp. 101-102.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 99 and passim., and Sigmund Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 37, 51 and passim.

<sup>81</sup>Freud, New Introductory Lectures, pp. 86-87.



on the one hand against envisaging too sharply the lines of demarcation between the ego, the super-ego, and the id within the human personality:

. . . I must add a warning. When you think of this dividing up of the personality into ego, super-ego and id, you must not imagine sharp dividing lines. . . . We cannot do justice to the characteristics of the mind by means of linear contours. . . . After we have made our separations, we must allow what we have separated to merge again.<sup>82</sup>

But on the other hand Freud at the same time persists in knowingly hypostatizing the "ego," and declares that "one cannot regret having personified the ego, and established it as a separate being."<sup>83</sup>

This raises the question of the logical status of these basic Freudian concepts: are they theoretical constructs, or do they denote real, existent entities within the human being, entities which are discoverable and, at least theoretically, are accessible to observation. So far as the concept of the "unconscious" is concerned, a good deal of illumination is brought to this question by A. C. MacIntyre in his incisive and lucid monograph The Unconscious. MacIntyre distinguishes two significantly different ways in which the concept "unconscious" functions in Freud's writings. It functions as a descriptive concept, and as an explanatory concept.<sup>84</sup> In its descriptive function the con-

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 108-109.

<sup>84</sup>A. C. MacIntyre, The Unconscious: A Conceptual Analysis (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 48-49.

cept appears in adjectival (or adverbial) form, and refers to a quality of mental events or processes, such as wishes, desires, anxieties, the existence of which was never scientifically demonstrated before Freud, and which now must be added to the conscious ones in "the catalogue of mental events."<sup>85</sup> When Freud uses this adjective he means that the mental events or processes characterized as unconscious were at one time repressed, that there is almost insurmountable resistance to their being brought to consciousness, and that they may sometimes be brought to consciousness successfully through the special techniques of psychoanalysis. The concept "unconscious" makes it possible "to describe what without [its use] could only be described inadequately or perhaps not at all."<sup>86</sup> This, it is almost universally agreed, is one of Freud's great contributions to the understanding of the nature of man.

When it functions as an explanatory concept, Freud gives it the substantival form of a noun: "the unconscious." In this form, MacIntyre makes effectively clear, the concept is "a theoretical and unobservable entity introduced to explain and relate a number of otherwise inexplicable phenomena."<sup>87</sup> The concept could not denote a real existent:

---

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 71.



if it did, empirical evidence would be required for its existence to be believed. However, MacIntyre reminds us, "ex-hypothesi it cannot be observed and so we cannot possibly have evidence of its existence."<sup>88</sup> Therefore, to speak of "the unconscious" in the sense of an existent entity, or of a "province," hitherto undiscovered by man--an hypothesis that Freud seems to have been advancing--is unscientific, and the hypothesis must be rejected "except perhaps as a piece of metaphysics."<sup>89</sup> As an explanatory concept, the unconscious has a logical status similar to that of, for example, the "electron and . . . the gene."<sup>90</sup> Freud tries to employ this theoretical concept to help provide an explanation of the mental events and processes that we characterized by the adjective "unconscious," and their relationships to the events of early childhood, the oedipal phase, repression, the infantile origin of adult attitudes and disorders, etc. MacIntyre expresses serious doubt as to whether "the supposition of such an entity" really helps explain these phenomena or formulate these hypotheses, and asks whether this could not be done satisfactorily or perhaps even better without the assumption of such an entity as "the

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 48.



unconscious."<sup>91</sup> But this question I shall not pursue, since it is not of direct concern for our inquiry.

Now, to return to the broader question, namely, whether Freud's major concepts generally are what MacIntyre calls "explanatory concepts" and what in the literature of the philosophy of science are often called "theoretical constructs" or "hypothetical constructs." Before proceeding, it may be in place to explain briefly what is meant by "theoretical construct." In general one may say that a theoretical construct is a concept which serves as an explanatory device. It is a concept

that represents relationships among things and/or events and their properties.<sup>92</sup>

. . . gene, atom, habit, personality, and anxiety are scientific examples [of constructs] . . .<sup>93</sup>

So far as the physical sciences are concerned, Bridgman speaks of "mental constructs" which help us to explain physical situations and relationships that are beyond the reach of direct experience. He describes and explains

mental constructs, of which physics is full. There are many sorts of constructs: those in which we are interested are made by us to enable us to deal with physical situations which we cannot directly

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-74.

<sup>92</sup> Melvin H. Marx, "The General Nature of Theory Construction," Theories in Contemporary Psychology, arranged and ed. Melvin H. Marx (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 41.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 10.



experience through our senses, but with which we have contact indirectly and by inference. Such constructs usually involve the element of invention to a greater or less degree.<sup>94</sup>

From among Bridgman's illustrations I select two especially instructive ones:

An example of a construct involving a greater amount of invention is the stress in an elastic body. A stress is by definition a property of the interior points of a body which is connected mathematically in a simple way with the forces acting across the free surface of the body. A stress is then, by its very nature, forever beyond the reach of direct experience, and it is therefore a construct. The entire structure of a stress corresponds to nothing in direct experience.<sup>95</sup>

Another indispensable and most interesting construct is that of the atom. This is evidently a construct, because no one ever directly experienced an atom, and its existence is entirely inferential. The atom was invented to explain constant combining weights in chemistry. For a long time there was no other experimental evidence of its existence, and it remained a pure invention, without physical reality, useful in discussing a certain group of phenomena.<sup>96</sup>

In general, therefore, theoretical constructs, although they themselves do not denote or directly refer to observable, experienceable entities, make possible the organization and explanation of the relationships among observable entities as a coherent system. That theoretical constructs do not refer directly to, and are not reducible

---

<sup>94</sup>p. W. Bridgman, The Logic of Modern Physics (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1960), p. 53.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 59.



to, empirical facts, is emphasized in a well-known paper by Kenneth MacCorquodale and Paul E. Meehl:

. . .in the statement of a hypothetical construction . . . there occur words (other than the construct name itself) which are not explicitly defined by (or reduced to) the empirical relations. Once having set up sentences (postulates) containing these hypothetical words, we can arrive by deduction at empirical sentences which themselves can be tested. But the words themselves are not defined directly by or reducible to these empirical facts.<sup>97</sup>

Far from being a defect, as some pragmatist or operationist methodologists might claim, this characteristic of theoretical constructs, namely, that they are not reducible to observable data, it is rather, as Carl G. Hempel claims, methodologically an asset:

The retort that all those concepts and principles are 'mere fictions to which nothing corresponds in experience' is, in effect, simply a restatement of the fact that theoretical constructs cannot be definitionally eliminated exclusively in favor of observational terms. But it is precisely these 'fictitious' concepts rather than those fully definable by observables which enable science to interpret and organize the data of direct observation by means of a coherent and comprehensive system which permits explanation and prediction. Hence, rather than exclude those fruitful concepts on the ground that they are not experientially definable, we will have to inquire what non-definitional methods might be suited for their introduction and experiential interpretation.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Kenneth MacCorquodale and Paul E. Meehl, "Hypothetical Constructs and Intervening Variables," Readings in the Philosophy of Science, ed. Herbert Feigl and May Brodbeck (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953), p. 598.

<sup>98</sup> Carl G. Hempel, Fundamental of Concept Formation in Empirical Science ("International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, Vol. II, No. 7; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 31.





As to the logical status of Freud's basic concepts, it may be noted that Else Frenkel-Brunswick, in a study of psychoanalysis from the point of view of the philosophy of science of Logical Positivism, maintains that concepts such as unconsciousness, "id, superego, or repression, are "theoretical constructs, [and] refer only indirectly, and not completely at that, to observable data."<sup>99</sup> This, she adds, must not be made the basis of objections to psychoanalysis. She claims that, while some critics of psychoanalysis have attacked Freud for "his tendency to 'reify' his concepts," Freud himself, unlike some of his followers, "was keenly aware of logical and epistemological problems," and looked upon his basic concepts as theoretical constructs. She quotes Freud as saying that definitions of "basal concepts" in science

. . . are in the nature of conventions; although everything depends on their being chosen in no arbitrary manner, but determined by the important relations they have to the empirical material. . . . progressively [we must] so . . . modify these concepts that they become widely applicable and at the same time consistent logically. . . . The science of physics furnishes an excellent illustration of the way in which even those 'basal concepts' that are firmly established in the form of definitions are constantly being altered in their content.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup>Else Frenkel-Brunswick, "Confirmation of Psychoanalytic Theories," The Validation of Scientific Theories, ed. Philipp G. Frank (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1956), p. 98.

<sup>100</sup>Sigmund Freud, Instincts and Their Vicissitudes (1915), Collected Papers (London: Hogarth, 1925), Vol. IV, pp. 60-83, quoted by Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Ibid., pp. 98-99.



In an earlier and longer version of her study of psychoanalysis, Else Frenkel-Brunswick quotes Freud on the concept of instinct as additional evidence for her claim that Freud viewed his basic concepts as theoretical constructs:

The theory of instincts is, as it were, our mythology. The instincts are mythical beings, superb in their indefiniteness. In our work we cannot for a moment overlook them, and yet we are never certain that we are seeing them clearly.<sup>101</sup>

However, a critic like B. F. Skinner insists that for Freud these concepts were names for real entities, rather than theoretical constructs. Skinner's summary of the "principal features" of the portions of Freudian theory relevant to this part of our discussion is as follows:

Freud conceived of some realm of the mind, not necessarily having physical extent, but nevertheless capable of topographic description and subdivision into regions of the conscious, co-conscious, and unconscious. Within this space, various mental events--ideas, wishes, memories, emotions, instinctive tendencies, and so on--interacted and combined in many complex ways. Systems of these mental events came to be conceived of almost as subsidiary personalities and given proper names: the id, the ego, and the superego. . . . No matter what logicians may eventually make out of this mental apparatus, there is little doubt that Freud accepted it as real rather than as a scientific construct or theory.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup>Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 131, quoted in Else Frenkel-Brunswick, "Psychoanalysis and the Unity of Science," Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 80, No. 4, 1954, p. 286.

<sup>102</sup>B. F. Skinner, "Critique of Psychoanalytic Concepts and Theories," The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis, ed. Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. I, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 77-78. Also reprinted in The Validation of Scientific Theories, ed. Philipp G. Frank, op. cit., pp. 115-128.



My own view is that Freud's basic concepts are theoretical constructs, and that fundamentally Freud intended them as such, in spite of the many, many instances in which his linguistic usage gives the appearance of his having reified the concepts. This impression is especially true of the id, the ego, and the superego. Indeed, the essentially dynamic and interrelated psychological processes of the total human being to which Freud directs our attention with the aid of the constructs id, ego, and superego, are often congealed by his unfortunate metaphorical use of language into, as Skinner said, "subsidiary personalities," homunculi, autonomous little human beings within each of us, that act, as it were, apart from the total person. It is this reading, or I should say misreading, of Freud that misleads some of our social psychologists, and also makes some of their critique appear plausible. If the id is interpreted to be an entity, then it certainly does not appear to be a distortion to ascribe to Freud the doctrine of a static, unchanging id, and to criticize him for it. However, this approach only succeeds in removing the investigation from the territory where it should properly be and in deflecting our attention from the questions which should properly be asked about human nature, namely, whether the aggressive, destructive, self-centered, "evil," desires, impulses, processes, or propensities in each of us tend in the aggregate to persist through life; whether they can ever be totally eradicated; and whether any of them,



some of them, many of them, or all of them undergo any transformations in the course of a person's experience. I shall have occasion to comment on these questions later.

If the ego is seen as an entity, then Freud's saying that "the ego is weak" and is in the service of the id, creates an image of two homunculi competing inside each of us, with the id (the bad guy) always running the show and ordering the "poor ego"<sup>103</sup> around in a tyrannical way. As a result one may overlook Freud's instructive elaboration of his metaphorical scheme, in which the id is compared to a horse which "provides the locomotive energy," and the ego to the rider who "has the prerogative of determining the goal and of guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it."<sup>104</sup> Our social psychologists do precisely overlook this. Accordingly, they do not sound unreasonable when they criticize Freud for his allegedly static portrait of man as forever dominated by the evil id, and therefore (an assumed causal relation is smuggled in here) as incurably incapable of relating himself to other men, or of building and living in a good social order. Again, the result is an obfuscation of the real questions, such as: In the ongoing tensions within each of us between the selfish,

---

<sup>103</sup> Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 108. Cf. also Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 82.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.



.aggressive, voracious, anti-social impulses, and the impulses of reason, of control, of necessary social relatedness, is it possible to determine whether any id impulses are more recalcitrant and less responsive to controls than others? What kind of social order would be likely to maximize reasonable social controls and minimize the acting out of destructive id impulses? Is it possible to discover or determine for various types of id impulses the proper limits of reasonable social controls, limits beyond which any attempted controls would be likely to result in extreme frustration and large scale, destructive, mass-neuroses? What are some of the group techniques and individual techniques, if any, that might help the individual resolve some of the tensions between destructive id impulses and reasonable controls?

Again, if the superego is viewed as an entity or a kind of homunculus, then it does not appear to be a misrepresentation to criticize Freud, as he is criticized by our social psychologists, for allegedly making our ethical judgments exclusively a mechanical response to this little man's external, whip-wielding, fear-inspiring, dictatorial commands which he issues on behalf of parents and other threatening authorities, and for thus imposing upon us an external must-conscience, or authoritarian conscience, instead of endowing us with an innate ought-conscience that is an ethical voice from within. This approach makes it



possible for our social psychologists to ignore the need for a searching examination of the old philosophical problem as to whether and in what sense a so-called inner conscience is a reliable moral guide or a moral illusion. (This question will be examined in Chapter VIII infra.) The indictment against the hypostatized version of Freud's theory of the superego, and their assumption of the existence of an inner conscience, create the spurious impression of a problem having been solved. In turn this leads to the neglect, as part of the study of the nature of man, of the dynamic interplay and tension within the human personality, between the selfish and aggressive id processes, the individual's processes of reason and control, and the processes engendered as a response to the norms of the social environment; in other words, neglect of the study of the dynamic process of socialization and of the internalization of social norms. They thus fail to understand Freud's world, populated by individuals who exist in a state of permanent tension between the recalcitrance of their selfish and destructive id impulses, and their processes and impulses of reason.

These criticisms represent, I believe, a misreading of Freudian doctrine and its implications. However, the good in them resides in the fact that they serve to call attention to the misleading and distorting effects that Freud's hypostatization of some of his basic concepts has



upon other people's understanding of these concepts and of the dynamic interrelationships of the processes they point to, and upon the utilization of these concepts as heuristic tools in the further study of the nature of man.

#### H. Freud's Myth of Pre-social Man

Another Achilles heel in Freudian writing is his notion of pre-social, primitive, "original man," a notion which, as Asch points out,<sup>105</sup> is shared by instinct theories, including Freudian theory, with environmentalism. This is the old Hobbesian notion of primitive man living in virtual isolation from other human beings, and pursuing without inhibition his instinctive, selfish, aggressive, sexual and other desires. In contrast to men under civilization, who find it "so hard . . . to feel happy" because of the controls imposed upon "not only . . . sexuality but also . . . the aggressive tendencies in mankind," Freud tells us that

In actual fact primitive man was better off in this respect, for he knew nothing of any restrictions on his instincts.<sup>106</sup>

Indeed, the restrictions imposed in the early transitions from the primitive state to the state of civilization,

---

<sup>105</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p.77.

<sup>106</sup>Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 91.



inflicted upon primitive man traumas, according to Freud, which civilized men still carry around with them. The most striking example is

. . . the prohibition against incestuous object-choice, perhaps the most maiming wound ever inflicted throughout the ages on the erotic life of man.<sup>107</sup>

Part of the Freudian theory of human nature which attributes to man's psychological constitution selfish, aggressive, sexual, anti-social impulses and processes, seems to rest, or is interpreted to rest, upon the assumption that original, pre-social, "primitive man virtually survives in every individual."<sup>108</sup>

This notion of pre-social, primitive man is only one of a number of anthropological theories and speculations which Freud indulged in during various periods of his life and career, and which have often been dismissed by authorities in the field as being without scientific foundation. That such primitive, pre-social, "original" man ever existed is at least doubtful. It is in essence a mythical, fictitious assumption made by Freud in the tradition of Hobbes and Rousseau; a tradition continued today by Erich Fromm, though as to the nature of this original man, Fromm sides with

---

<sup>107</sup> ibid., p. 74.

<sup>108</sup> Sigmund Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, trans. James Strachey (London: The International Psychoanalytical Press, 1922), p. 92.





Rousseau and Freud with Hobbes. However, the cardinal point is that Freud does not need this assumption as a prop for his theory of human nature, which stands on its own feet as a theory of the nature of man in society. Having advanced the notion of "original man," Freud leaves himself wide open to methodological and conceptual criticism from the point of view of social psychology, criticism which is most systematically developed by Solomon E. Asch.

Asch quite properly points out and rejects two assumptions behind the doctrine of "original man": (a) that the basic constitutive elements in the psychological nature of man must be sought in the nature of man's ancestors during the early pre-civilizational, and essentially pre-human period in history; (b) that it is possible to arrive at conclusions about the nature of man today from information or speculations about the actions of individuals in a pre-social setting, from which interaction with other human beings is absent. As to the first of these assumptions, Asch deplores those doctrines which

. . . seek for the fixed properties in men at the earliest level of human development and at the earliest periods in the development of the race. . . . At the center of each doctrine is the category of an 'original man,' who is by definition stripped of all the accretions of experience.<sup>109</sup>

These doctrines, says Asch,

---

<sup>109</sup> Asch, Social Psychology, p. 75.



. . . reduce facts of a social content to the level of facts that are pre-social, and . . . deal with human actions in terms used to describe and explain pre-human action.<sup>110</sup>

Furthermore, in these instinct theories,

. . . the actions that serve as models . . . are pre-human models of action, lacking characteristics distinctively human. . . . [This] conceptual starting point . . . decrees the determined exclusion of any tendencies not found in infra-human groups.<sup>111</sup>

Accordingly, Asch concludes that

'original man' turns out to be a biological construct with characteristics lacking humanity.<sup>112</sup>

Asch's attack on the second assumption arises out of one of his fundamental principles concerning human nature, namely, that man is social man. (Cf. supra, Chapter II, pp. 29-33 ) He therefore denies categorically that

. . . the principle of psychological functions can be discovered by observing action and experience in an environment from which other men are excluded. . . .  
We conclude that to discover the full potentialities of men we must observe them in the social medium, that the basic problems of psychology require the extension of observation into the region of social processes.<sup>113</sup>

The full force of Asch's position that man is social man, may be seen in his simultaneous dismissal of the ascription to "original man" of anti-social traits which civilization

---

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 34.



curbs, and insistence that anti-social traits and actions are themselves social products:

It is particularly necessary to distinguish what has been said here, from a popular view that assigns to pre-social man qualities of savagery, which society curbs or tames. Brutality, hatred, envy, and servility are products of the social level of existence as much as public spirit and the search for the truth; it is only in society that we can be 'inhuman.'<sup>114</sup>

What seems to me significant in Asch's critique of the notion of "original man," irrespective of one's views on his definition of man as essentially social in nature, is his affirmation of the unity and integrity of the human being, and his refusal to fragmentize man. If man is essentially social man, and if man exhibits "brutality, hatred, envy, and servility," then these anti-social manifestations are also part of the psychological constitution of social man, rather than manifestations that are somehow alien to man as social being, and that must be explained through the importation into him of savage traits of a fictitious pre-social, original man. One of the major achievements of the entire Freudian enterprise, in spite of his reification of concepts dealt with earlier, is precisely his depiction of a unified image of man, in all its dimensions, the social and the anti-social, the creative and the destructive, the affiliative and the aggressive, the

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 137.



altruistic and the self-centered. For this theory of human nature there is no need of the hypothesis of pre-social, original man. Moreover, this assumption of original man constitutes a weakness in the Freudian theory of the nature of man, because it weakens the unity of man's image: instead of a unified image of the human being acting as a unit, as a whole human being, it makes possible the nonsensical image in which part of a human being is said to act, such as his intellect, or his libido, or his superego, or that little part in him which is the survival of original, pre-social man. This corrective to Freudian theory is needed. However, it needs to be pointed out that our social psychologists too, including Asch, fail in many respects to produce this unified image of man, and this will be argued in several places in later portions of the present inquiry.

#### I. General Observations

A scrutiny of the Syllabus of Errors charged by our social psychologists to Freud leads one directly or by implication to the above necessary criticisms. However, as to the major bulk of this Syllabus, I would make the following general observations before examining the specific criticisms:

1. It contains no powerful refutations of the major ingredients in the Freudian doctrine of human nature.

2. It contains little by way of additional conceptual analysis and criticism. Moreover, one is tempted to observe that our social psychologists, whose own conceptual houses



are made of glass (certainly no less brittle than Freud's), can hardly afford to throw stones at Freud's conceptual domicile.

3. Some of the critique of Freud by our social psychologists resolves itself in fact to differences not of a major substantive character, but rather differences, of emphasis: e. g., they do not deny the existence and the importance of unconscious mental processes, but claim that Freud emphasizes these disproportionately; they claim that they do not categorically deny (though most often they in fact do just that) that there are "dark," aggressive, destructive propensities in man's psychological constitution, but charge Freud with downgrading man by ascribing to these propensities a position of dominance in the human personality; they acknowledge that man's reasoning is often in fact self-deceptive rationalization, but they accuse Freud of distorting man by characterizing all or most human reasoning as rationalization. This appears to be bringing the level of the debate to about that of the difference between the pessimist's and the optimist's descriptions of the last remaining bottle of wine on the table: the pessimist argues that the bottle is half empty, the optimist argues that the bottle is half full. None the less, these differences in emphasis are not altogether devoid of significance, since, as we shall see below, our social psychologists provide a necessary corrective to some of Freud's overstatements, and



to the vulgarized "Freudianisms" of some of his misinterpreters.

4. Our social psychologists' singling out for emphasis the "good" elements in human nature is certainly far less firmly grounded in empirical research without presuppositions than is Freud's singling out of the "evil" elements. Moreover, there is this added and rather important difference: Freud does not deny the "good" elements in man. Indeed, one of the fundamentals in Freudian doctrine is that without these "good" elements in man human life--which is in essence social life--would be neither possible nor desirable. Our social psychologists, per contra, especially Fromm, Maslow and Rogers, but to some extent also Allport and Asch, repeatedly deny any "evil" propensities in man, and euphorically insist that man is basically "good." This is an arbitrary presupposition on their part, made by them in their self-appointed though often disclaimed role of moralists. Their entire procedure creaks and groans with value-laden assumptions and biases, making theirs a largely normative and prescriptive enterprise, rather than an undertaking in descriptive science.

5. Much of the debate between our social psychologists and Freud concerning the nature of man therefore boils down to a contest of presuppositions. It is these presuppositions about man, which in turn lead to differences in the selection for emphasis of some and



neglect of other elements in human nature. They are theoretical, often a priori, assumptions or presuppositions in conflict with each other, though they are often paraded in the guise of empirical, descriptive statements about the nature of man. When our social psychologists reject what to them looks like a downgraded image of man, with its emphasis on the "dark" elements in human nature, this is more a normative value judgment than an empirical generalization based on descriptive evidence. Their repugnance arises out of an erroneous inference they make from the Freudian conception of man, namely that on the basis of Freudian man, as they see him, it is impossible to construct a humane and effective system of normative ethics or to develop and maintain a just, democratic social order. They therefore take as points of departure their own a priori presuppositions about man, value-laden, "optimistic" presuppositions, and advance them as if they were empirical findings or generalizations in a descriptive science of psychology. This will be developed further in later chapters.

6. In a number of instances the critique by our social psychologists is based on sheer misreading or misinterpretation of Freud, in part as a result of their reliance on one Freudian text rather than another, in connection with problems on which changes took place in Freud's own views. I shall try to point out such instances as I go along.



In the commentary on some of the individual indictments in the Syllabus of Errors listed above (pp.111-114), to which the remainder of this chapter will address itself, we shall concentrate on some conceptual analysis, on clarification of some of Freud's meanings and implications, and on corrections of erroneous interpretations of Freud's doctrine of human nature. This may be helped if it is preceded by a pulling together into a brief, broad-gauged statement of one of the major thrusts of Freud's theory of man as I see it, out of the several references and allusions that appear earlier in the present chapter.

It is of course true that Freud often wrote as if he believed man to be exclusively evil (which he emphatically did not believe), and as if he thought that in the interaction between the "evil" propensities in human nature, and man's other propensities, or in the interactions between the individual and other persons and groups of persons, no alchemy takes place which results in any transmutation of any of these propensities. This impression is a product of two of Freud's preoccupations:

(a) Freud's eagerness, as has been pointed out earlier (supra, p.115), to call attention to those propensities in man that others ignored. Freud never denied the "good" in man. His own words on this subject are most eloquent:





It is no part of our intention to deny the nobility in human nature, nor have we ever done anything to disparage its value. On the contrary, I show you not only the evil wishes which are censored but also the censorship which suppresses them and makes them unrecognizable. We dwell upon the evil in human beings with the greater emphasis only because others deny it, thereby making the mental life of mankind not indeed better, but incomprehensible. If we give up the one-sided ethical evaluation then, we are sure to find the truer formula for the relation of evil to good in human nature.<sup>115</sup>

(b) Freud's eagerness to make clear the role of these "evil" propensities as among the variables in the psychological constitution of man, variables which are always present as processes and potentialities, and the functioning of which undergo or are capable of undergoing numerous modifications in the multitudinous interactions with other variables and with other human beings.

In essence therefore, Freud's enterprise adheres with fidelity to the requirements and canons of scientific inquiry that leads to empirical knowledge. He assumes, as must all inquiry, a determinate subject matter, namely, man. Man is a recognizable species with determinate characteristics. This means that the members of this species vary in their characteristics over a determinate range, within certain limits. As men, in the course of their experiences, find themselves among, and interact with other individuals in certain situations, they react or

---

<sup>115</sup>Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, p. 131.



respond on the basis of the total character of each situation and of the interactions within it. The basic propensities of the person remain the same, but they manifest themselves in multitudinous ways, depending upon the experienced interactions. This is true also of certain experiences during early childhood. The impact of these experiences also persists as part of a person's psychological equipment: they remain "virtually immortal," as Freud said.<sup>116</sup> However, they do not remain unaffected by subsequent experiences. This statement would appear to be contradicted by Freud's reference to "the indubitable fact that the repressed remains unaltered by the passage of time."<sup>117</sup> However, I believe this apparent difficulty can be cleared away through certain distinctions that must be noted, and which will be discussed presently.

In the meantime let us use the concepts of the Oedipus complex and the oedipal phase as illustrations of the point just made. According to Freud, all people, or almost all, go through an oedipal phase in early childhood. But what happens to the individual personality as a result of this fact will depend in part upon how the people around the child, father, mother, siblings, etc., interact with him during this oedipal phase. What turns out to be repressed

---

<sup>116</sup>Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 104.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.



out of the child's experiences during the oedipal phase, and with what depth and what degree of resistance to being brought to consciousness later in life, will also depend on the nature of these interactions. Now, it is a salient part of Freudian psychology and theory of human nature that these repressed memories of experiences during the oedipal phase become part of the person's mental constitution and persist as such unconsciously throughout the person's life. These repressed memories, as part of the total personality, enter into that person's future interactions, and they therefore do not remain completely unaffected by these later interactions. Certainly this is a necessary part of the logic of Freudianism. At the very least Freud must acknowledge, indeed he must and does claim it, that the interactions between patient and analyst during psychoanalysis will to a greater or lesser extent affect these repressed memories, and in fact may result in their altered functioning within the patient's personality. The crucial distinction here is between affecting the functioning of a person's given psychological elements or processes, and on the other hand eliminating them. Freud's point in saying that "the repressed remains unaltered by the passage of time" is the all-important point that the repressed will never be eliminated from the person's psychological make-up. It will continue to function in the man's personality and in his interactions with other people during his entire lifetime, but its functioning will be different from what



it had been before his interactions during analysis. Naturally, the interactions during analysis are significantly different from the vast number of other interactions we experience, but they form only part of a spectrum of possibilities. There is no reason to assume that only the patient-analyst interactions during analysis, and no others, may affect the functioning of the instinctual and the repressed in the individual's personality. Whether or not any particular interaction or series of them will have such an effect on the functioning of the repressed elements in a person's mental constitution will depend in part on the depth, the salience of the experience: the human interactions entailed in an all-consuming love affair, in a critical illness, in the death of a beloved person, in one's survival of extreme persecution or of a concentration camp incarceration, in a profound religious conversion, or in the creation and performance of a work of art, may be among those that would have some effect on the functioning of repressed elements in the person involved. Indeed, Freud himself recognizes and points out that the very processes of social life affect the functioning of the instincts: the "processes of cultural development--some call it civilization -- . . . displaces the aims of the instincts."<sup>118</sup> Just how the interactions within culture affect the functioning of

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 244.



the instincts is a matter to be studied. In this connection Freud expresses a hope for a "true social science" of the future, which would show the functioning of the instincts is modified by interactions with other social factors. Such a true social science would

show in detail how these different factors--the general human instinctual disposition, its racial variations, and its cultural modifications--behave under the influence of varying social organization, professional activities and methods of subsistence, how these factors inhibit or aid one another . . .<sup>119</sup>

The logic is the same if we take as illustrations those of man's psychological processes symbolized or pointed to by the constructs Id, Ego, and Superego (and if we resolve to ignore Freud's regrettable hypostatizations). All people, Freud tells us, or almost all, have

(a) strong self-centered, sexual, aggressive, competitive, destructive propensities that make certain impulses and actions on the part of the individual possible or in some instances likely;

(b) a sense of reality, an awareness of other people and their propensities, and consequently a force that tends to restrain and control these aggressive, hostile impulses and actions; and

(c) a sense of good and bad, of right and wrong, of what is permitted and what is forbidden, etc., which

---

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 245.



grew out of the internalization of ethical norms absorbed from parents and other respected or feared sources of society with which the person interacted in early childhood.

How each of these three psychological constituents, propensities, or processes in fact functions in the case of a given individual, depends again on the nature of the person, the person's interactions during his experiences in the course of his lifetime, and on the nature of any given new interaction. These propensities never disappear, but neither do they remain unaffected by experience. Id impulses are not unchangeable, that is, in the sense of always functioning in an identical fashion (although, it must be pointed out again, Freud's language often sounds as if he thought they were unchangeable in this sense); but, and again this is Freud's cardinal point here, neither can there be any abolition of id impulses as a potentiality in the individual's psychological make-up.

A person's experiences and interactions will modify the functioning of some of his id processes, but the reservoir of repressed id processes and impulses is always present in all men. New interactions will result in new ways of their functioning. Men who are "good" or generous or considerate today, may behave like monsters at a later time, in a new situation, and relative to the total character of the situation and its interactions. Solid,



respectable, upper and middle class citizens, who in one situation were honorable businessmen and good family men and neighbors, in a new situation some time later had their factories manufacture and deliver the chemicals for Zyklon-B gas for the gas chambers, as well as ovens and auxiliary implements for the crematoria, in the Nazis' mass murder factories where the extermination of the Jews of Europe was being implemented.

#### Discussion of Specific Criticisms

I shall now turn to an examination of the specific criticisms set forth in our Social Psychologists' Syllabus of Freudian Errors.

#### J. Man is Fundamentally Irrational

There is certainly enough in the corpus of Freudian writing to give the sound of plausibility to this criticism of the Freudian image of man, i. e., to the complaint that Freud pictures man as being forever sunk in a "marshland of unreason." With the emphasis and importance assigned by Freud to the unconscious id impulses in man's personality, what other conclusions could be drawn perfunctorily from such statements as the following?

The laws of logic--above all, the law of contradiction--do not hold for processes in the id.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 104.



The governing laws of logic have no sway in the unconscious: it might be called the Kingdom of the illogical. Impulses with contrary aims exist side by side in the unconscious without any call being made for an adjustment between them.<sup>121</sup>

However, this is at best a perfunctory conclusion. Looked at closely, the rational--irrational dichotomy presents many complexities that need to be disentangled, and ambiguities that require certain distinctions to be drawn. The meaning of the statement that man is fundamentally irrational is far from being automatically clear, because the concept "rational-irrational" is far from clear. However, I believe we can achieve some clarity if we distinguish between two levels on which it is possible to discuss the ascription to Freud of the doctrine that man is fundamentally irrational. At the first level the discussion proceeds on the basis of an uncritical acceptance of the "rational-irrational" dichotomy, and, using the concept in its crude, unrefined sense, inquires whether the ascription of this doctrine to Freud is in fact correct or incorrect. At the second level, the discussion inquires into the meaning or meanings of the concept "rational-irrational," and uses the results of this conceptual analysis to ascertain and evaluate Freud's meaning.

---

<sup>121</sup> Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, p. 53.





1. Man Is Fundamentally Irrational: Discussion at the First Level.--Now, using the concept in its crude, unrefined sense, it is certainly correct to say that Freud emphasized irrational elements and processes in the psychological constitution of man. Much of the conceptual apparatus of psychoanalysis conveys this: the id, primary processes, Eros--the sexual drive, the death instinct, the pleasure principle, etc., certainly fit the category of irrationality in this crude sense. But the significance of this is reflected quite inadequately in the criticisms by our social psychologists. What is significant is that Freud's discoveries blasted the rationalist theory of human nature which had depicted man as completely rational, always guided by the intellect in the infinite variety of his actions, free from any hidden or unknown motivating forces, and open to the persuasion or influence of reasoning and of consciously held information and knowledge. In doing this Freud was helping to banish man's illusions about himself and to correct the then prevalent distortions about the nature of man and of his relations to other men and to the world around him. In doing this he also made one of the most important and most lasting contributions to man's fulfillment of the Socratic admonition: "Know thyself!"

However, in doing this Freud also amassed, in the course of a lifetime, a weighty body of evidence which forces upon us the rejection of the naive rationalist image of man. In the course of piling up this evidence



Freud indulged from time to time in what appeared to be over-emphasis or overstatement, in part because so often he found himself having to stress especially the existence and potency of irrational processes "only because others denied them." But the simple fact is that Freud never maintained that man is fundamentally irrational in the sense of being exclusively or principally irrational, and that he did not assign "a position of supremacy" to irrational mental processes and emotions. He rejected, as an account of what man is, the "rationalist conception of man as a self-sufficient, self-aware, self-controlled being."<sup>122</sup> However, he did not say or imply that reason, reasoning, rational processes, do not occupy an important and fundamental place in the psychological constitution of man, or that it should not be one of the major ethical goals of man to maximize the role of reason and make of reason the dominant force that will suppress and control his irrational processes and impulses. Indeed, while for Freud the scientist, discovery of man's irrational processes is of supreme importance simply as true knowledge of the nature of man, for Freud in his still insufficiently appreciated role as moralist, knowledge of man's irrational processes and propensities is of transcendent importance because it makes possible a realistic approach to their control. Erich Fromm acknowledges this

---

<sup>122</sup>MacIntyre, The Unconscious, p. 93.



as part of the Freudian undertaking, when he says:

Up to Freud the attempt had been made to dominate man's irrational affects by reason, without knowing them, or rather without knowing their deeper sources. Freud, believing that he had discovered these sources . . . had to believe that now, for the first time, the age-old dream of man's self-control and rationality could be realized.<sup>123</sup>

The contention that Freud gave a position of supremacy to the irrational is completely refuted by some of Freud's own descriptive statements about the dynamic tensions within man between irrational impulses and the force of reason; by his normative assertions about the ethical goal of the domination of reason over the irrational elements in men; and by the very essence and goal of psychoanalysis as therapy. As to descriptive generalizations concerning the place and power of reason and the rational in human nature, one can easily counter the quotes in which Freud emphasizes the irrational by quoting Freud's statements about the force of reason. "The ego stands for reason and circumspection,"<sup>124</sup> and it is therefore reason that, in relation to the id with its illogicality, is compared by Freud to a horseback rider who "has the prerogative of determining the goal and guiding the movements of his powerful mount . . ."<sup>125</sup> The all-important identification

---

<sup>123</sup>Fromm, Sigmund Freud's Mission, p. 94. Cf. also Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion, p. 6.

<sup>124</sup>Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 107.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 108.



of the ego with reason is a major theme in Freud's analysis of the human personality:

The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions.<sup>126</sup>

[the ego] is entrusted with important functions. By virtue of its relation to the perceptual system it arranges the processes of the mind in a temporal order and tests their correspondence with reality. By interposing the process of thinking it secures a postponement of motor discharges and controls the avenues to motility. . . .<sup>127</sup>

The ego develops from perceiving instincts to controlling them, from obeying instincts to curbing them.<sup>128</sup>

One of Freud's clearest statements on the dynamic tension between reason and unreason in man, both as description, and as proclamation of "the primacy of the intellect" as man's ultimate goal, though still "in the far, far . . . distance," is the following from The Future of an Illusion.

We may insist as much as we like that the human intellect is weak in comparison with human instincts, and be right in doing so. But nevertheless there is something peculiar about this weakness. The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest until it has gained a hearing. Ultimately, after endlessly repeated rebuffs, it succeeds. This is one of the few points in which one may be optimistic about the future of mankind, but in itself it signifies not a little.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 30.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 82. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>129</sup> Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: Horace Liveright and The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1928), p. 93.



Among the ideals and aspirations Freud enunciates for mankind, the most prominent is: "Where id was, there shall ego be."<sup>130</sup> In an exchange of letters with Albert Einstein, published under the title "Why War?", Freud maintained on the one hand that "there is no likelihood of our being able to suppress humanity's aggressive tendencies." On the other hand, as an ideal, as a norm to be aspired to, he suggested that

The ideal conditions would obviously be found in a community where every man subordinates his instinctive life to the dictates of reason.<sup>131</sup>

It is these consistent moralistic enunciations of ethical goals to be attained through the use of reason, in so many of Freud's writings, that lead MacIntyre to conclude that Freud "promotes a moral ideal for which rationality is central,"<sup>132</sup> and leads Fromm, once again giving evidence of his ambivalence toward Freud, to assert that

Freud was a rationalist, and his concern with the understanding of the unconscious was based on his wish to control and subdue it.<sup>133</sup>

The central role assigned to reason and rationality in the therapeutic process is of the very essence of

---

<sup>130</sup> Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 112.

<sup>131</sup> "Why War?: Open Letters between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud" (July and September, 1932), trans. Stuart Gilbert, Jewish Frontier, May, 1935, p. 18. Later reprinted in Freud's Collected Papers. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>132</sup> MacIntyre, The Unconscious, p. 93.

<sup>133</sup> Fromm, Sigmund Freud's Mission, p. 53.



psychoanalysis as therapy. The goal of psychoanalytic treatment is the essentially cognitive, rationalist goal of self-knowledge. It is designed to lead the patient to the triumph of the intellect over irrational feelings and beliefs through the very act of understanding them rationally, and through perceiving that these feelings and beliefs are illogical today and are understandable only in relation to formerly repressed "reasons" which the patient rejects today. Thus the course of therapy is predicated on the fundamental assumption that, given the availability of the uncovering techniques of psychoanalysis that can help bring the repressed to the level of consciousness, men are capable of looking rationally at what has been uncovered, and through the use of their reason overcome the irrational beliefs, feelings, or attitudes that have their roots in what was repressed. Thus, for Freud, man's ethical goals and the goals of psychoanalytic therapy coincide, namely, to bring about the control by reason and rationality over the irrational processes, feelings, or impulses that are fundamental ingredients in human nature. To quote Freud (remembering that "the ego stands for reason"):

. . . the therapeutic efforts of psychoanalysis [have as] their object . . . to strengthen the ego . . . to widen its field of vision, and so to extend its organization that it can take over new portions of the id. Where id was there shall ego be.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup>Freud, New Introductory Lectures, pp. 111-12.



The ego develops from perceiving instincts to controlling them, from obeying instincts to curbing them. . . . Psycho-analysis is an instrument to enable the ego to push its conquest of the id further still.<sup>135</sup>

Accordingly, with the concept rational-irrational used in its crude, unrefined signification, one can summarize this part of the examination of our social psychologists' critique of Freudian doctrine as follows:

(a) Freud does emphasize the presence of powerful irrational processes and impulses among the psychological constituents of man. His demonstration of their existence is one of Freud's most important and lasting contributions to our knowledge of human nature.

(b) In his persistent accumulation and publication of evidence with respect to these irrational elements in man, the existence of which was vigorously denied by so many of his contemporaries, Freud often over-stated the case, giving the appearance of disproportionate emphasis on their power and importance.

(c) However, Freud also stressed the forcefulness and importance of reason and rationality in man's psychological make up, with the individual always in an ongoing, dynamic state of tension between irrational impulses and the dictates of rationality to control those impulses.

---

<sup>135</sup> Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 82.



(d) Our knowledge of the existence and the nature of the irrational impulses and processes in man provides us with an invaluable tool for the realistic coping with and control of these irrational elements. These elements can not be eliminated: they are ineradicable, and it is part of Freud's admirable realism to insist that they are ineradicable. What Freud is talking about is their control, regulation, subjugation by man's rational processes. This, Freud believed, was possible, and would become increasingly more possible in the future, since we have now made a promising beginning in man's understanding of his own irrationality.

(e) This victory of reason in man and its domination over man's irrational impulses is not only possible, according to Freud the psychologist and explorer of the nature of man. It is also, according to Freud when he slips into the role of moralist, a moral desideratum, perhaps man's highest ethical goal, the attainment of which can be helped by realistic descriptive knowledge of human nature.

(f) The goal of psychoanalytic therapy also involves man's reason and rationality in a role of crucial and essential importance. In short, its goal is to lead the patient to a rational recognition and understanding of his irrational feelings, attitudes, and behavior, and through the use of his reason, to overcoming them. Thus, the goals of ethics and the goals of therapy coincide in Freudian doctrine, and are essentially rationalist in character.





(g) Accordingly, to the extent to which the anti-Freudian critique by our social psychologists serves to call attention to Freud's overstatements or overemphases, it is valuable. However, to say that Freud assigned to the irrational a position of supremacy in human nature is a distortion, and is unsupported by the evidence in Freud's writings. This distortion of Freud's findings and views can in turn be accounted for by the overemphases on the part of our group of social psychologists who are eager to draw attention to man's rationality. They do this not because they can adduce weightier empirical evidence in support of their emphasis on rationality than Freud's evidence in support of the existence of fundamental irrationality in man. They do this rather on the basis of their presuppositions about the nature of man, and of certain assumptions concerning the relationships between human nature and ethics, which lead them to do the reverse of what they accuse Freud of doing, namely, they single out for almost exclusive attention man's rationality and ignore or play down man's irrationality.

2. Man Is Fundamentally Irrational: Discussion at the Second Level.--We may approach the allegation that Freud assigned a position of supremacy to the irrational in human nature by using the tools of conceptual analysis, and inquiring into the meaning or meanings of the concept rational-irrational. This approach raises significant doubts



about the assumed dichotomy in the pair of terms "rational-irrational," doubts which are not reflected at all in the writings of our social psychologists, and which are present in Freud's writings by implication.

In the preceding chapter we developed the distinction between two types of explanation of human behavior, explanations in terms of reasons, and explanations in terms of causes. Sufficient explanations of human acts which conform to the purposive, directed, rule-following paradigm can only be explanations in terms of reasons. For human behavior which fails to conform to the purposive, directed, rule-following model, explanations in terms of causes may be sufficient explanations; these are instances of a person's behavior about which we would ask "What made him do it?", or "What drove him to do it?", or about which we would say that "something was happening to the person," that the person was passive rather than active.<sup>136</sup> We noted that there were conflicting views as to whether Freud's explanations of human actions in terms of unconscious processes were of the purposive, rule-following type or of the causal type. This question, as we shall see, has some bearing on the rational-irrational dichotomy.

However, on the subject of explanations of human actions, we must immediately nail down a major point,

---

<sup>136</sup>Supra, pp. 50-63.



namely, that one of Freud's great innovations was that he was the first to furnish systematic psychological explanations for many psychological phenomena which before him were either ignored and no attempt was made to explain them; or were "explained away" as accidents (which were assumed, because they were called accidents, to require no explanation); or were assumed to have some organic, physiological explanation, but which no one was able to furnish. In his two great pioneering works The Interpretation of Dreams and The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Freud showed that such occurrences as dreams, hallucinations, obsessions, anxieties, perversions, lapses of memory, slips of the tongue or of the pen, certain kinds of errors, some erroneously carried out actions, etc., can be explained in psychological terms by showing their relationships to other psychological events or processes, and he thus brought psychoanalysis into the orbit of general psychology. As Peters reminds us:

Freud claimed in 1913 that the main contribution of psychoanalysis to general psychology was to link together and to give psychological explanations for happenings which had previously been left to physiology or to folk-lore.<sup>137</sup>

In connection with Freud's psychological explanations, however, it is important to point out parenthetically that Freud probably never gave up the assumption and the

---

<sup>137</sup> Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 11.



expectation that, so far as "higher order," ultimate explanations are concerned,<sup>138</sup> science would at some future time succeed in discovering organic, physiological, or neuro-chemical explanations for all human behavior. We, in turn, advanced cogent reasons in the last chapter for serious doubt that such ultimate physiological explanations could ever be sufficient explanations for purposive, goal-directed human actions. I am aware of nothing in Freudian theory to justify the belief that Freud's assumption about the possibility or even likelihood of the discovery of ultimate physiological explanations of all human behavior meant that he thought such physiological explanations would also be sufficient explanations of individual human actions. That Freud himself did not find such organic, physiological explanations for human actions did not in his mind constitute grounds for doubting that the psychological explanations he discovered were sufficient explanations. It is this that it seems to me Freud meant in one of his early statements, in a letter to William Fliess, written at the time when he was working on The Interpretation of Dreams:

. . . I . . . have no desire at all to leave the psychology hanging in the air with no organic basis. But, beyond a feeling of conviction [that there must be such a basis], I have nothing, either theoretical or therapeutic, to work on, and so I

---

<sup>138</sup>Cf. supra, pp. 65-83.



must behave as if I were confronted by psychological factors only.<sup>139</sup>

In other words, having discovered psychological explanations for these previously obscure phenomena in human behavior, explanations in terms of unconscious processes, wishes, etc., and having found it possible to explain what their point was, Freud was convinced that he had found a sufficient explanation, and that he had no logical need for inquiring further into physiological explanations. The logical requirements of his program of providing scientific explanations for certain psychological phenomena were satisfied, since he was able to relate his psychological findings systematically to a comprehensive psychological theory of human nature and human behavior, to make deductions from this theory, and to pursue further his studies of human behavior without having to have recourse to physiological explanations.

We shall have to return later to the subject of ultimate explanations, in order to clarify, at least in brief, summary form, what Freudian theory tells us about ultimate, "higher order" explanations of human behavior. However, if we continue to focus our attention on the kinds of psychological phenomena Freud dealt with in The

---

<sup>139</sup>Sigmund Freud, The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to William Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, Ernst Kris, Authorized trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1954), Letter No. 96 (September 22, 1898), p. 264.



Interpretation of Dreams and The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, it is clear that, in giving for the first time systematic psychological explanations for these puzzling human actions, Freud's point was that they are not pointless acts. Although he showed that others had had the same insight, Freud's originality here consisted precisely in his demonstration that these apparently meaningless, illogical, irrational acts are not meaningless or purposeless. While the acts are often delusional, and are explained by reference to unconscious and apparently irrational impulses, wishes, or desires, wishes which the patient or the actor often vigorously denies, there is none the less a purposive character to them, i. e., there are reasons for them. Freud's own words clearly show this. In connection with lapses of speech and erroneously carried-out actions, Freud observes that

. . . there is a sense and purpose behind the slight functional disturbances of the daily life of healthy people.<sup>140</sup>

In another place, after describing a case history of delusional behavior, Freud proceeds to explain the case, and offers, as part of the explanation, the significant comment that

---

<sup>140</sup> Sigmund Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, in The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, trans. ed. A. A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), p. 113. (Emphasis mine)



. . . the delusion is no longer senseless and and incomprehensible; it is sensible, logically motivated. . . . it has arisen as a necessary reaction to another mental process. . . . It is something desired in itself, a kind of consolation.<sup>141</sup>

A few pages earlier Freud had described and analyzed a certain "symptomatic act" and commented that "the conclusion is that it is no accident but has in it motive, meaning, and intention."<sup>142</sup> Tying together the analyses of the delusion just referred to and of the symptomatic act, Freud draws attention to "the two important analogies" between the two cases,

. . . namely, the discovery of the sense or intention behind the symptom and the relation of it to something in the given situation which is unconscious.<sup>143</sup>

Now, while the reasons for these puzzling acts are unconscious, and thus by definition are not examples of deliberate, conscious intent, they are none the less reasons, in the sense defined by Peters in the discussion referred to above, and as distinguished from physiological causes; and explanations in terms of reasons are, as Peters properly pointed out, explanations of purposive actions. (Cf. supra, p. 74 and infra, p. 251 on Peters' uncritical assumption that causal explanations of behavior must be physiological, and that psychological explanations are not

<sup>141</sup>Freud, A General Introduction, p. 225. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 221. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 225. (Emphasis mine)



causal.) Thus Freud's description of these acts and Peters' analysis of explanations by giving reasons coincide. Freud describes these puzzling or neurotic acts as meaningful and purposive, and Peters shows that explanations in terms of reasons are explanations of purposive acts. To be sure, when these acts are explained by Freud, many are not shown to conform to the "rule-following" part of Peters' model of a large part of human behavior. Neither are they explained in terms of what Peters calls "his reason" explanations, that is, the actor's reason, since the actor often denies that these are his reasons for his performance of his puzzling acts. But they are naturally accommodated within Peters' classification of "the reason" explanations. While some explanations of the reason type may turn out to be causal (physiological) explanations, other explanations of the reason type may be according to Peters,<sup>144</sup> and indeed often are, explanations which show the individual to be "pursuing or avoiding relevant goals" of which he "might be quite unaware," or explanations in which we would be "insisting that a different directive disposition is being exercised" from the one claimed or offered by the actor.<sup>145</sup> It is clear therefore that actions explainable in terms of unconscious wishes or impulses fit exactly into this

---

<sup>144</sup>Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 9.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid. (Emphasis mine)





category of actions for which the reason explanations can be given. Peters is thus both wrong and inconsistent when he says that a "mistaken thesis" is being advanced by those who argue that the Freudian explanations of these puzzling acts have shown that there are

. . . reasons for acts which were previously only explained in terms of causes.<sup>146</sup>

Peters is of course right in his insistence that Freudian explanations in terms of unconscious wishes are not, as I just pointed out above, and cannot be, "his reason" explanations. However, in his eagerness to make this point, he ignores the persuasive point he had made earlier that "the reason" explanations may be either causal or purposive. He thus fails to note that Freudian explanations in terms of unconscious impulses or wishes are purposive explanations, and therefore are explanations in terms of reasons, i. e., the reason rather than his reason. To say that explaining a puzzling act by reference to the actor's unconscious desires, wishes, or purposes is to give a reason for the puzzling act, is surely to use the word reason in a meaningful rather than unusual or bizarre sense.

Peters tries to draw support for his attack on those who believe that Freud's theory of unconscious wishes offers reasons for psychological phenomena which were previously

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., pp. 11 and 62. (Emphasis mine)

deemed explicable only in terms of causes, from his interpretation of Freud's distinction between id processes and ego processes as an absolute, completely dichotomized distinction. First he thinks it is "fairly safe" to claim that "right up to the last Freud insisted on the radical difference between explanations in terms of conscious and unconscious processes."<sup>147</sup> Second, he also makes this distinction between id and ego processes completely congruent with the two other basic Freudian distinctions, namely, the distinctions between unconscious and conscious processes, and between primary processes and secondary processes.<sup>148</sup> He thus appears to think in terms of two sets of equivalences:

- (a) Id processes = unconscious processes = primary processes
- (b) Ego processes = conscious processes = secondary processes

Certainly others have made the same interpretation. Certainly also there is much in Freud's own words to suggest this interpretation. Accordingly, since the id processes and the primary processes are repeatedly characterized by Freud as the realms of the irrational, where the laws of logic and

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-71 passim.



particularly the law of contradiction do not operate, and since unconscious processes are, according to Peters, identical with the id processes and primary processes, it would seem to follow that unconscious processes are exclusively irrational. It therefore also follows, according to Peters, that no explanation of human action in terms of unconscious processes can ever be said to be an explanation in terms of reasons. Moreover, Peters appears to get additional support for this conclusion from the fact that, as we pointed out earlier,<sup>149</sup> Freud does often write as if he believed the unconscious processes to be completely irrational. In this connection Peters quotes Freud's statement in "An Outline of Psychoanalysis" that the unconscious "might be called the Kingdom of the Illogical."<sup>150</sup>

However, there are two difficulties here: one is textual, and the other is conceptual. The textual difficulty is that the evidence in Freud's writings does not support the notion that he equated without remainder unconscious processes with Id and primary processes. The conceptual difficulty is that there is a confusion here between the different meanings of "irrational." Let us dispose of the

---

<sup>149</sup>Cf. supra, pp. 146-147.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 70. Also quoted in another connection supra, p. 147.



textual difficulty first.

There is important evidence that for Freud there was not a complete equivalence between unconscious processes on the one hand, and id processes and primary processes on the other hand. While Freud meant to assert the proposition that all primary processes and id processes are unconscious, he did not mean to assert the converse of this proposition, i. e., he did not mean to state, as Peters implies,<sup>151</sup> that all unconscious processes are id processes or primary processes, or that all unconscious processes are illogical or irrational in every sense. HIS talk about unconscious processes as if he were characterizing them as without exception and in every sense irrational appears to have been more a facon de parler than a precise assertion. Per contra, when he was drawing refined distinctions and making precise statements, Freud said something quite different: he said that there are often processes in the unconscious that are not primitive and irrational, indeed, there are unconscious processes that represent man's highest mental activities. In The Ego and the Id Freud cautions us that we are accustomed to hearing that "the scene of the activities of the lower passions is in the unconscious." Moreover, he warns, we expect that the higher a mental function is rated by us, the more easily access to consciousness is assured

---

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 64.



for it. But, says Freud, and I quote his words in full, though we had occasion to quote them once before in another context,

Here . . . psychoanalytic experience disappoints us. . . . In our analyses we discover that there are people in whom the faculties of self-criticism and conscience--mental activities, that is, that rank as exceptionally high ones--are unconscious and unconsciously produce effects of the greatest importance. . . . we shall have to say that not only what is lowest but also what is highest in the ego can be unconscious.<sup>152</sup>

And in a later work Freud said (this quote has also been used earlier in the present chapter):

. . . we can attribute to the id other characteristics than that of being unconscious, and you are aware of the possibility that parts of the ego and superego are unconscious without possessing the same primitive and irrational quality.<sup>153</sup>

Thus Peters' rigid, absolute dichotomy does not stand up, for the reasons just given, and for other reasons as well.<sup>154</sup> Peters seems to have fallen here into the trap of Freud's hypostatizations. But the fact is that the Freudian concepts we have been discussing (id, ego, superego) are constructs used for talking about certain psychological processes; and the processes are nowhere as sharply demarcated

---

<sup>152</sup>Freud, The Ego and the Id, pp. 32-33, and cf. supra, pp. 95-96.

<sup>153</sup>Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 105 (emphasis mine), and cf. supra, p. 96

<sup>154</sup>Cf. supra, p. 117.



or divided as Peters seems to imply. It is therefore clear that nothing that Peters has said or implied here refutes the idea that explanations for human actions in terms of unconscious wishes or impulses may also be purposive explanations, and thus may also be explanations in terms of reasons, "the reason" explanations of course, not "his reason." It is perhaps significant that after a lengthy argument of some eight pages opposing the idea that when a piece of behavior is explained by reference to unconscious processes or wishes, this may at the same time also be an explanation in terms of reasons, Peters ends up by making what appears to me to be a complete volte face. For he admits that Freud

made the extremely fertile and useful suggestion that acts can be unconsciously as well as consciously directed.<sup>155</sup>

This is rather disappointing. For, what does it mean to say that an act is "unconsciously directed" other than that one can find unconscious reasons to explain it, even as calling an act "consciously directed" means that one can find conscious reasons to explain it? After all, quite early in his monograph Peters told us that one of the characteristics of "motives" as an explanatory concept in ordinary language is that "they are reasons of a directed sort."<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 70.  
(Emphasis mine)

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., pp. 31 and 35. (Emphasis mine)



Now, to take up the conceptual difficulty. In the preceding section we used the concept "irrational" uncritically, in a crude and unrefined sense. Hopefully this uncritical use in that section served its purpose of showing that our social psychologists' charge that Freud assigned to the irrational a position of supremacy in human nature is a distortion. Manifestly, however, the concept "irrational," as applied in Freudian theory to various psychological phenomena and modes of human behavior, is not a univocal concept: it has more than one meaning. It will therefore be useful to separate out some of the meanings of "irrational," in order to help us understand what Freud's doctrine of the irrational in man really comes down to, and to determine in each case which of the meanings is really the critic's target. For our purposes, four meanings of "irrational" may be distinguished:

irrational<sub>1</sub> = actions and other psychological phenomena which are expressions of basic drives or prime motivators, e. g., sex, hunger, thirst, aggression, etc.

irrational<sub>2</sub> = actions and other psychological phenomena which are non-purposive, which Peters calls "pointless" (we shall later refer to them as "nonrational").

irrational<sub>3</sub> = actions which do not turn out to be effective means for bringing about explicitly recognized or implicit ends, i. e., which do not achieve what was intended; actions which are not reasoned; "self-defeating mechanisms."

irrational<sub>4</sub> = actions or other psychological phenomena which are "illogical," i. e., logically inconsistent, in the sense of violating the canons of logical reasoning, e. g., violating the law of contradiction.

Now, in his implied generalization that all unconscious processes are irrational, Peters lumps together all the four meanings of irrational listed above. He brings in unconscious "primary processes" and id processes, which are expressions of basic drives and prime motivators, and are therefore instances of "irrational<sub>1</sub>."<sup>157</sup> He points out that "thinking about getting to the goal cannot be described as either correct or incorrect, efficient or inefficient" so far as "unconscious processes are involved,"<sup>158</sup> and here is

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., pp. 64, 70.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 64.





of course referring to their irrationality in the sense of "irrational<sub>3</sub>." He quotes Freud on the "illogical" character, violative of the law of contradiction,<sup>159</sup> of the unconscious primary and id processes, and their irrationality is comprehended under the meaning of "irrational<sub>4</sub>." What Peters fails to see is that Freud was saying that whereas unconscious processes and actions which are their expressions are irrational in or more of the sense of irrational<sub>1</sub>, irrational<sub>3</sub>, or irrational<sub>4</sub>, there are many instances of unconscious processes and actions that are their expressions which are not irrational in the sense of irrational<sub>2</sub>, i. e., they are not "pointless," not senseless or meaningless, not without intention, not purposeless. These include what Freud called "the slight functional disturbances in the daily life of healthy people," such as slips of the pen and of the tongue, lapses of memory, common errors, and such psychological phenomena as dreams, hallucinations, obsessions, anxieties, etc.

These distinctions in meaning, and the long digression which preceded them, bring us back to the question of the "supremacy" of the irrational or of the rational in man, but now in a new perspective. That one can properly say that Freud succeeded in discovering unconscious reasons which provide sufficient explanations

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 70.



for some previously obscure human acts, and that these are purposive and therefore are not irrational in the sense of irrational<sub>2</sub>, has led some to the conclusion that men are more rational than was ever suspected before. This certainly contradicts the views of our social psychologists. Anthony Flew quotes Freud's pupil, W. Stekel, as saying:

To whatever school of analysis we belong Freud is the master of us all . . . who opened our eyes . . . found reason in unreason.<sup>160</sup>

Flew himself, in a later paper, states that

. . . the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis ["including such notions as motive, intention, purpose, wish, and desire . . . which are not known to, and the behavior resulting from which is not under the immediate control of the person who harbors them"] are precisely the notions which rational agents employ to give account of their own conduct and that of other rational agents.<sup>161</sup>

And MacIntyre makes the sweeping claim that

Freud's whole recognition of unconscious purposes is a discovery that men are more, and not less, rational than we thought they were.<sup>162</sup>

On the other hand, Peters, who reports that "It is often asserted, even, that Freud showed that men are more rational than was previously assumed," understandably

---

<sup>160</sup>Anthony Flew, "Psychoanalytic Explanation," in Philosophy and Analysis, ed. Margaret Macdonald (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), p. 145, n. 1. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>161</sup>Anthony Flew, "Motives and the Unconscious," in Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. 1, ed. Feigl and Scriven, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>162</sup>MacIntyre, The Unconscious, p. 93.



attacks this thesis "that appeals to those who believe in the rationality of man" because he believes that the thesis is "riddled with ambiguities, and, . . . it overlooks crucial logical distinctions, . . ." <sup>163</sup> This is strange in view of Peters' own failure to make distinctions between various meanings of "irrational." More recently this thesis was systematically attacked in a challenging paper by Peter Alexander, entitled "Rational Behavior and Psychoanalytic Explanation," <sup>164</sup> in the quarterly review Mind. This was followed by two rather acute discussions in two subsequent issues of Mind. <sup>165</sup> I shall conclude this section with a review of the major contentions presented by Alexander and by his two critics as part of their subtle and discerning conceptual analyses, and of their implications and significance for the Freudian theory of human nature, and its critics.

Alexander states the problem by presenting the two contending views:

---

<sup>163</sup>Peters, The Concept of Motivation, p. 62.

<sup>164</sup>Peter Alexander, "Rational Behaviour and Psychoanalytic Explanation," Mind, LXXI, No. 283 (July, 1962), 326-341. (Will be referred to below as Alexander, with the page number following.)

<sup>165</sup>Theodore Mischel, "Concerning Rational Behavior and Psychoanalytic Explanation," Mind, LXXIV, No. 293 (January, 1965), 71-78. (Will be referred to below as Mischel.)

J. Balmuth, "Psychoanalytic Explanation," Mind, LXXIV, No. 294 (April, 1965), 229-235. (Will be referred to below as Palmuth with page number following.)



It is often said that psychoanalysis has drawn our attention to the irrational springs of human behavior. Recently, however, I have heard it said that, on the contrary, psychoanalysis has revealed that our behavior is more rational than we usually suppose it to be (Alexander, p. 326).

He then states more precisely the view he is going to attack: it is a "central assertion of Freudian theory" that much of our behavior can be explained in terms of unconscious wishes, purposes, etc.; accordingly it is claimed that behavior which we usually call "irrational" can be shown to be based on reasons; it therefore seems to be plausible to say that, since reasons can be given for it, this so-called irrational behavior is really rational, at the unconscious level; it therefore follows in turn that Freud has shown irrational behavior to be "really" rational, and that men are therefore more rational than we usually suppose.

To bring order into the discussion, Alexander proceeds to define "rational behavior" as follows:

What makes a piece of behavior rational in a given situation is that there are good reasons for behaving thus; what makes A's behavior rational is that. . . . the good reasons were his reasons (Alexander, pp. 328-29).

This definition is further refined. Good reasons are reasons that constitute a sufficient reason (Alexander, p. 329), that is, that the reason "was likely to achieve what was intended" and unlikely to lead to undesirable consequences (Alexander, p. 330). To be his reason, the



agent "should be able to become aware of [his] reason," and he should be able to recognize it as his reason for that behavior (Alexander, p. 331). Now, it is Alexander's principal point that neurotic behavior, and the Freudian "explanation" of it through unconscious "reasons," do not satisfy these criteria of rationality:

(a) The unconscious reasons offered by Freudian theory do not constitute sufficient reasons, because the neurotic behavior could not possibly achieve the goals stated in unconscious reasons. If the unconscious reason for a woman's always reading "storcks" instead of "stocks" is that she had no children but wanted children badly, then it must be clear that this mode of behavior is not at all an effective way to get children (Alexander, p. 339). Similarly, if his secret desire to kill his father is the Freudian reason discovered for the neurotic's lunging with his umbrella at lamp-posts, then it is necessary to point out that this purpose could hardly be achieved by lunging at lamp-posts.

(b) The unconscious reasons adduced by psychoanalysis to explain the neurotic's puzzling acts are not his reasons, not just in the superficial sense that, since the reasons are unconscious, he is, by definition, unaware of them; but in the more significant sense that--and this is an essential point in Freudian theory--these reasons are repressed. Being repressed means, in Freudian theory, that the unconscious reason is beyond the power of the agent to



discover it without the assistance of an analyst and psychoanalytic techniques. Moreover it means that the agent not only fails to recognize the reasons for his behavior (suggested to him by the therapist) as his own reasons; he vigorously rejects the suggestion that those were his reasons. Even when later, after considerable preparatory work, the patient accepts the explanation, it is doubtful that he really recognizes these as having been his reasons. It is more probable that his acceptance is a kind of intellectual conviction that it looks like these apparently were the reasons for his actions, though he was not aware of them then, and has no recollection or recognition of them now (Alexander, pp. 336-37).

Alexander therefore concludes that psychoanalytic explanations through unconscious reasons are very different from "everyday explanations of rational behavior" (p. 336), and that

. . . unconscious reasons are very unlike conscious reasons, . . . 'good reasons' or 'sufficient reasons' for behavior. If we do call them 'good reasons' it is clear that we use these words in an unusual sense and are therefore not entitled to go on and say that such explanations show our irrational behavior to be really rational (Alexander, p. 341).

In formulating his definitions and drawing his distinctions, Alexander has rendered a useful service toward clarifying the issues. Obviously Alexander uses "irrational" in the sense of "irrational<sub>3</sub>," and given his definition, it certainly follows that compulsive neurotic acts, or "the slight functional disturbances of the daily life of healthy



people," are irrational, and that the psychoanalytic explanations for these puzzling acts in terms of reasons do not prove that our irrational behavior is "really rational." However, the principal difficulty with Alexander's analysis is that he draws too narrow and rigid a definition of rational behavior, limiting it exclusively to instrumental action, coping action, or achievement action, in other words, action designed to achieve a specific result outside itself. This is Alexander's paradigm of rational, everyday behavior, and explanations in terms of specific objectives to be achieved as the conscious reasons for the behavior, furnish the paradigm for normal explanations of normal, rational behavior. All behavior that does not conform to this paradigm is ipso facto irrational. Alexander misses the point that while behavior may be irrational<sub>3</sub>, it is not necessarily irrational in the other senses; certainly not in the sense of irrational<sub>2</sub>.

It does not require any profound study of the nature and behavior of men to recognize, as both Mischel and Balzuth point out, that there is a large class of human actions that, admittedly, do not fit Alexander's paradigm of rational action.<sup>166</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup>Cf. also J. W. N. Watkins, "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation," Readings in the Philosophy of Science, ed. Herbert Feigl and May Brodbeck (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953), pp. 741-42. Watkins makes the same point, both with respect to non-instrumental behavior generally, and with respect to the purposiveness of some of the behavior and psychological phenomena that require Freudian explanations in terms of unconscious processes, or require psychoanalytic therapy.



However, neither are they "irrational<sub>2</sub>" actions, or "non-rational" actions in the sense of being purposeless or pointless, or that it would be odd to say either that they were done for a reason or that they were not done for a reason (Alexander, p. 332). irrational<sub>2</sub> or non-rational actions "could not be intended": they would include fainting, jumping when startled, sheer accidents such as "unavoidably running over someone who runs in front of a car," etc. (Ibid.). The class of actions which are neither irrational<sub>2</sub> or non-rational in the above sense, nor rational in terms of Alexander's means-to-end definition, includes both so-called normal, everyday behavior, and the kinds of puzzling behavior which are explainable within the framework of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. What is common to the large number of human actions in this class is that, while it is not possible to explain them in terms of "efficient reasons" (in Alexander's sense) related to some specific instrumental or achievement goal (and they therefore fit the meaning of irrational<sub>3</sub>) they require precisely "reasons" for their explanation, and physiological causes do not constitute appropriate explanations for them. Moreover, while the reasons which explain these actions do not satisfy Alexander's norm of "efficiency," i. e., they do not show the action as able to achieve a certain specific objective, none the less these reasons make it quite natural to say that the actions are rational, or at least that they are





neither non-rational nor irrational in the sense of irrational<sub>2</sub>.

Illustrations are non-instrumental actions like the following:

If I give as my reason for enlisting in the service that I love my country, or as my reason for getting up from my chair that a lady has entered the room, it is not obvious that the reason shows the action 'one likely to achieve what was intended' (Balmuth, p. 230).

These actions look perfectly rational. However, to meet Alexander's criteria it would have to be claimed that I enlisted in order to show that I love my country, or in order to strengthen the armed forces. But these are of course different reasons from the one I gave (Ibid.). "If a man gives as his reason for taking confession simply that he is a Catholic," this is a sufficient reason for his conduct (Ibid.), "his action is neither caused nor irrational" (Ibid.), and to suggest that he intended through this act to achieve some separate end or to avoid something, would be to accuse him of hypocrisy. Such explanations as "I play chess because I enjoy it," or "I took a walk because I felt like it," provided the situation in which they are offered contains no requirements for some pressing business to get done, surely can not justify saying that the behavior which they explain is irrational<sub>2</sub> behavior. The explanation here explicitly denies that these actions were means to any end (Mischel, p. 73), but there is still a purposiveness in actions thus explainable by reference to reasons or wishes. Purposiveness is not synonymous with means-to-end



achievement or coping behavior, and actions that are irrational in the sense of irrational<sub>3</sub> may be perfectly rational in the sense of not being irrational<sub>2</sub> actions.

Now, these illustrations of non-instrumental behavior help throw some light on the Freudian explanation of various puzzling human actions by reference to unconscious reasons. Alexander is of course right in his contention that the unconscious reason that the psychoanalyst uncovers as an explanation of neurotic behavior does not show the act to be rational in Alexander's sense, that is, likely to achieve the intended objective. However, neither Freud, nor psychoanalytic theory generally, ever claimed or meant that the acts explained through unconscious reasons fulfilled or could fulfill the purpose or the wish uncovered by the psychoanalytic treatment. What psychoanalysis does claim is that the recurrent pattern of the neurotic behavior becomes intelligible in the light of the unconscious wish or desire uncovered through analysis, because the behavior is now seen as part of a pattern of purposefulness that appears to have an "appropriateness" in relation to the wish (Balmuth, p. 230). Balmuth uses the illustration of the explanation "He loves her" which may account for a variety of the person's actions, though none of them separately is an act of love, or is designed to achieve some goal, or is intelligible in isolation from the other actions in the pattern of the person's behavior. The person may in fact not be aware that he is in love, and may even vehemently



deny it if it is suggested to him that he acts thus and so because he is in love. There is thus a clear analogy between some ordinary explanations of normal behavior, and psychoanalytic explanations. "Ordinary explanation allows for the possibility that a man's actions may reveal something about his reason for acting which he himself may disclaim, but which he subsequently comes to admit." Similarly, the unconscious reason uncovered by the analyst "is the attempt to construe a person's neurotic behavior so as to see what it reveals, despite the person's denial that he entertains such a purpose as the reason for his behavior" (Balmuth, pp. 231-32).

The case of the woman who reads "storks" instead of "stocks" (reported by Freud), because she has no children but badly wants them, is quite analogous to the woman who misses her absent husband, Jim, and might talk about him without being aware why, or might ask "for another Jim when she wants another gin." Reading "storks" will not give children to the woman any more than talking about her husband or asking for another Jim will bring the other woman's husband back. This is not the significance of the two reasons as reasons. Their significance as reasons is that they make intelligible the pattern of behavior. The woman who has children on her mind thinks of and finds opportunities to talk about things related to children, including storks; and the woman who has her absent husband



on her mind also thinks and finds opportunities to talk about matters relating to her husband, including his name. Or, as the case may be, the woman who wants children may wish to avoid reminders of her unhappy childless state, and therefore may both wish and not wish to mention the stork, and in her ambivalence she may mistake "stocks" for "storks." But neither of these women may be said to behave "irrationally" in the sense of irrational<sub>2</sub> since there is an appropriateness in the explanation in relation to the purposiveness displayed in her behavioral pattern (Mischel, pp. 72-73).

The kind of behavior we are discussing is not achievement or coping behavior. It is not an attempt to fulfill the reason or the wish uncovered by psychoanalysis. The behavior is related to the unconscious wish "as the expression of the wish." In other words, "according to Freudian theory, neurotic behavior, like much normal behavior, . . . . is expressive behavior." The neurotic behavior is a case of "the act expressing--acting out--the desire or wish, but in such a way that it is not the attempt to fulfill the wish" (Balmuth, pp. 232-33, emphasis is original). Indeed, it is part of the essence of psychoanalytic theory that while the agent seeks opportunities to express his wish, he seeks "also neither to achieve its normal expression, either in admission or performance, nor reveal that he has such a wish" (Ibid., p. 233). The neurotic is torn by conflicts,



and one of the powerful poles of his inner conflict is the effort to frustrate, to prevent, rather than to fulfill the goal of the unconscious wish, and therefore not even to acknowledge its existence. The neurotic's lunging with his umbrella at lamp-posts is an expression of his unconscious hatred for his father and his wish to kill him. The neurotic has unconsciously "identified" lunging at lamp-posts with killing his father. "If we see what he is doing in this way, then we can see the point of his irrational behavior, the reason in his unreason" (Mischel, p. 75, emphasis mine).

### Conclusions

The conclusions one may draw out of our conceptual analysis, and the analysis to which Alexander, Mischel, and Balmuth subjected the concept of "rational behavior," may be summarized in the following statements:

1. There is a clear analogy between psychoanalytic explanations of some human actions and some ordinary explanations of some human behavior.
2. This suggests, not that irrational behavior is rational, but rather that some human behavior and some psychological phenomena which are explained by means of unconscious processes, and which have often been referred to as irrational, are not irrational in the sense of



"irrational<sub>2</sub>", i. e., they are not pointless, senseless, or non-purposive; they are not non-rational; and they cannot be explained satisfactorily in terms of causes. They can be explained satisfactorily in terms of reasons, and can therefore be understood "in a similar way to that in which we understand rational behavior" (Mischel, p. 78).

3. Freud, in his analyses, showed that much of "irrational<sub>2</sub>" behavior has reasons or purposes, and is therefore really rational. Freud therefore showed men to be "more rational" in the sense of shrinking or contracting the sphere of "irrational<sub>2</sub>", but not those of "irrational<sub>1</sub>", "irrational<sub>3</sub>", or "irrational<sub>4</sub>".

4. There is no sharp dichotomy or rigid line of demarcation between rational and irrational behavior or psychological phenomena, since there are marked analogies between psychoanalytic explanations in terms of unconscious reasons and purposes, and ordinary explanations of some normal or rational behavior.

Thus, the rational-irrational dichotomy that underlies our social psychologists' attack on Freud's alleged assignment of a position of supremacy to the irrational in



man, and the attack itself, begin to look a little anemic and irrelevant in the light of the above conceptual analysis. Man, his nature, his propensities and intentions, his psychological processes and his overt actions, can not simply be dichotomized into the categories "rational" and "irrational." Some of the phenomena which are called irrational turn out, upon analysis, not to be irrational. On the other hand, what are called the rational and the irrational are often intricately intertwined in dynamic rather than static interrelationships, and man is too complex a being for such simple pigeonholing.

Our social psychologists' insistence that man is a rational being, i. e., that he is capable of reasoning, is of the highest importance. But so is Freud's emphasis on the fact of man's irrationality as well as on the fact of his possession of reason. The former is important because it tells us that man is able, by the employment of reason, to control some of his irrational propensities, though often it is rather hopelessly intertwined with them. The latter is important because it tells us something about the forces of unreason that reason has to try to control, and therefore also something about the difficulties and depths of complexity that man experiences as a perennial counterpoint to this struggle within him. But whether the fact that man possesses reason and rationality means ipso facto that he does or that he will utilize it to control his



impulses, or whether on the contrary, he will sometimes, or often, or perhaps always employ his reason in the service of his irrational desires or impulses, is another question. Some aspects of this question will be dealt with immediately below, and others will be explored later, in Chapter IX.

K. Man's Thinking Is Principally Rationalization

The existence of the phenomenon of rationalization is not denied by any of our social psychologists. The attack on the Freudian doctrine is in this case also a matter of emphasis, almost a matter of the ascription of quantitative claims to psychoanalysis, and the propounding of quantitative counterclaims by our social psychologists. It seems doubtful that this kind of pseudo-statistical debate, in terms of greater or lesser frequency of rationalization, is fruitful. However it may be useful to point out that there is no evidence that Freud ever maintained that man's thinking is principally rationalization. I do not recall Freud himself ever using the term "rationalization" in this sense in any of his writings.<sup>167</sup> But the psychological mechanism which we call by that name is among the "defenses" identified by psychoanalytical theory and clinical experience. The essence of rationalization is the

---

<sup>167</sup> The term "rationalization" is used once in the English translation of New Introductory Lectures, p. 109, but in a different sense.





utilization of reason or intellect to justify or approve, or to ignore, dismiss, or explain away perceptions, or experiences, or acts, or impulses, which on the one hand are pleasing to us or fit into our emotional state, or which on the other hand are displeasing to us, are inconsistent or dissonant with our emotional state, or are frowned upon by the superego,<sup>168</sup> or provoke anxiety, damage self-esteem, or are otherwise disturbing.<sup>169</sup> What is important is that this psychological mechanism is among the constituent elements in human nature; that Freudian theory has explained it and has exhibited its character; and that an understanding of the phenomenon of rationalization must lead to an even more vigorous repudiation of any sharp dichotomy or line of demarcation between the "rational" and "irrational" in man.

Of course, the recognition of the influence of our emotions not only on our attitudes, but on our perceptions and intellectual judgments as well, and of the utilization of the intellect for evasion or self-justification, is by no means an original contribution of Freud's. Philosophers, poets, novelists, and sacred scriptures, have displayed this

---

<sup>168</sup> Calvin S. Hall, A Primer of Freudian Psychology (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1954), p. 92.

<sup>169</sup> Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner, Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. 282.



insight from earliest days, beginning perhaps with the report of Adam's evasive rationalization when, to God's question whether he had eaten from the fruit of the forbidden tree, he replied: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat,"<sup>170</sup> and of Cain's reply, "Am I my brother's keeper?", when God asked him "Where is Abel thy brother?" just after Cain had killed him.<sup>171</sup> Aristotle showed some awareness of this psychological phenomenon in his well-known passage in the Rhetoric:

When people are feeling friendly and placable, they think one sort of thing; when they are feeling angry or hostile, they think either something totally different or the same thing with a different intensity; when they feel friendly to the man who comes before them for judgment, they regard him as having done little wrong, if any; when they feel hostile, they take the opposite view.<sup>172</sup>

What Freud's contribution consists in is his analysis and explanation of this ingredient in human nature, namely, that when our emotions, or wishes, or desires, or neuroses, distort our perception or judgment, or produce evasions of facts or situations, the intellect is put to work to produce pseudo-justifications, explanations, or denials in order to meet our need to eliminate contradictions, incongruities, or

---

<sup>170</sup> Genesis III, 12.

<sup>171</sup> Genesis IV, 9.

<sup>172</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric* 1377b 31 - 1378a5, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 1379-80.



inconsistencies and thus to feel comfortable with our distortions or evasions. A rather extreme statement of the utilization of reason in the service of the neuroses occurs in a recent paper by John Hospers:

One's intelligence and reasoning power do not enable one to escape from unconsciously motivated behavior; it only gives one greater facility in rationalizing that behavior; one's intelligence is simply used in the interests of the neurosis--it is pressed into service to justify with reasons what one does independently of the reasons.<sup>173</sup>

One does not have to accept Hospers' sweeping generalization that the intellect can never enable us to escape from or overcome the pressures of our neuroses or our wishes, in order to appreciate the force of his statement. It delineates sharply the essence of the process and function of rationalization. It also makes it crystal clear that it is reason, intelligence, the intellect that functions in the process of rationalization, the same reason that functions in all our rational, intellectual, reasoning activities. To resort for a moment to the use of the concept of human "faculties," man does not possess two separate faculties, the faculty of reason and the faculty of rationalization. Man is a reasoning being. At one time our reasoning processes are busy with solving a problem in geometry, at another time with figuring out how to reach

---

<sup>173</sup> John Hospers, "What Means This Freedom?", Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Science, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: N.Y.U. Press, 1958), p. 117.



the apples at the very top of a tall apple tree, and at still another time our reasoning processes are busy with devising a pseudo=explanation for our leaving the preparation of our income tax return to the very last evening, and just missing the deadline for mailing it, year after year after year.

In this connection there is a troublesome ambiguity in S. E. Asch's admonition that it is necessary "to discriminate between rationalization and thinking."<sup>174</sup> If he means that it is necessary to learn to identify those instances of thinking which devise for us pseudo-justifications for our emotion-directed evasions, in order to be able to recognize and overcome them, then he is of course thoroughly right. However, Asch's statement is pregnant with other overtones. He urges that we distinguish between "thinking" and "rationalization," as if these were two generically different processes.<sup>175</sup> This interpretation seems to be justified by the context in which Asch's statement appears. Asch deplors the position of "primacy" allegedly assigned to rationalization in Freudian psychology, because rationalization is, of course, a regrettable, even

---

<sup>174</sup>Asch, Social Psychology, p. 22. See supra, p. 110 and infra, Chapter IX, pp. 605-606.

<sup>175</sup>Allport seems to intend the same thing when he says: "It is an absurdity of the English language that the term [rationalization] signifies the opposite of 'rational' or 'reason'" (Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 159-60). However, this is somewhat unclear, since Allport does not develop this point any further, whereas Asch does.



reprehensible process. It is a disparagement of human nature, according to Asch, to hold that man is the captive of his rationalizations. Since Asch is eager to develop a worthier image of man, he seems to wish to effectuate a separation between thinking and rationalization, to deny that rationalization has a position of primacy in the psychological constitution of man, and to proscribe the idea that reason, thought, the intellect are ever tainted by rationalization.

But Freudian doctrine refuses to indulge in this evasion. It is part of the dynamic and realistic image of man in Freudian theory that men's intellectual capacities may be used for realistic reasoning and thinking, and may also be used for rationalization, and that the individual is often poised between these two alternatives. In analyzing and explaining systematically the process of rationalization, Freud has made it possible for us to be on guard and to recognize our own rationalizations, and thus perhaps to overcome them. In helping us to identify those instances of thinking which are rationalization, Freud has also proved the falsity of the contention that all man's thinking is rationalization. And finally, Freud's reliance on reason and rationality again asserts itself here. For, in the last analysis, it is only through reason or rationality itself that it is possible to recognize rationalization, and to exercise control over our tendency to misuse reason for