



the purpose of rationalizing. Thus Freud's typical moralistic prescription that is implicit in this analysis is man's need for the further strengthening of reason.

L. The Primacy of Unconscious Processes

Our discussion of the criticism by our social psychologists that the Freudian theory of human nature assigns a position of primacy to man's unconscious processes, and disparages consciousness and conscious processes, can be fairly brief. A careful reading of Freud and analysis of Freudian doctrine make this kind of adverse generalization quite beside the point. Freud's historic and monumental contribution was his demonstration that unconscious processes are an integral part of man's being; that the unconscious processes are an ongoing contrapuntal accompaniment of our conscious existence; that unconscious processes exercise an influence upon our lives and behavior the strength of which was hitherto unsuspected; that the strength of the influence of some of the unconscious processes will vary from person to person and from situation to situation, and will depend in part upon the traumatic character of experiences that were repressed and upon the recalcitrance of the repression; that there is an intimate relationship between some of our unconscious processes and some of our most creative actions; and that unconscious processes are part of the psychological constitution of all human beings, the healthy as well as the unhealthy, the "normal" as well as the "pathological." It



is a clear implication of this part of the Freudian theory of man that a perennial aspect of the human condition is the dynamic equilibrium within each of us between our conscious processes, our conscious intentions and decisions, and on the other hand our unconscious processes; and that each of us may be called upon, or may be required at one time or another, through his conscious and rational processes, alone or with the aid of a psychoanalyst and psychoanalytic methods, to uncover some repressed unconscious processes in order to cope with them. Another obvious implication is that, if we are ever to learn to cope with the unconscious processes that may be troublesome or destructive, we must first learn to understand them. And here one must point out again, as has been pointed out earlier, that if Freud appears to place "disproportionate" emphasis on our unconscious processes, it is because he was a pioneer who had to argue and persuade contemporaries who resisted the new knowledge.

To be sure, our social psychologists do not deny the existence of unconscious processes, nor do they consider them unimportant. Here again the issue reduces itself to a kind of pseudo-quantitative debate as to greater or lesser emphasis, as to a position of primacy or a secondary position; a debate which at best is sterile, because it does not revolve around empirical evidence produced by our social psychologists that would tend to support their pseudo-quantitative judgment as against the judgment they attribute



to Freud. The debate is really about a priori value judgments as to the kind of being our social psychologists think man ought to be; and it is quite clear that they think that conscious processes ought to occupy a position of primacy in man's psychological make-up (whatever that may mean), and they imply that the reverse view is a downgrading of man. One is tempted to speculate whether our social psychologists, and others, may perhaps be misled by Freud's diagrams in which he attempted to give a graphic representation of the structure of the human personality and the relationships between the id, ego, and superego; the unconscious, the repressed, the pre-conscious, and the conscious. In these diagrams more than half of the enclosed area is occupied by the unconscious, another 1/3 of the area is given to the pre-conscious, and only a small area in which the very top of the egg-shaped diagram intersects with a small bulge that protrudes beyond the top of the egg, is given to the conscious.¹⁷⁶ While admittedly Freud attached some significance to these spatial proportions in his diagram (he observes that the area in the diagram given to the unconscious should be larger than it is, New Introductory Lectures, p. 110) essentially they are nothing more than graphic metaphors or pedagogic devices, and not intended to be strictly isomorphic with the structure of the personality.

¹⁷⁶For the diagrams see The Ego and the Id, p. 29, and New Introductory Lectures, p. 111.



The proportions in the diagram do not possess the kind of theoretical significance that would justify the charge that Freud gave a position of primacy to the unconscious.

Of our group of social psychologists, Allport is the most severe in his strictures against what he believes to be Freud's disproportionate magnification of the unconscious processes in man. Allport himself emphasizes the conscious character, the intentionality and the contemporaneity, the "functional autonomy" of man's motivation. It is therefore necessary to comment briefly on two phases of Allport's own theory that are germane to this issue.

For over thirty years, in various of his publications, Allport has given repeated and extended attention to the phenomenon which he calls expressive behavior. He devoted a full chapter to this subject in his 1937 book, Personality, and another full chapter in his most recent book.¹⁷⁷

Allport defines expressive behavior by distinguishing it from coping behavior. The latter is behavior which deals with, which copes with, problems or situations. Coping behavior is instrumental. It is the person's adaptive behavior through which he attempts to fulfill his purposes, desires, plans, intentions, etc. In contradistinction to this, expressive

¹⁷⁷Allport, Personality (1937), Chapter 17, pp. 464-495, also pp. 378-79; Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 445, and Chapter 19, pp. 469-494.



behavior is "the manner and style which marks each and every act of adaptive behavior."¹⁷⁸ The way a person walks, his posture, his gesticulation, his facial expressions, his voice and speech, his handwriting, these make up a person's expressive behavior.

Now, it is Allport's contention, and he presents it persuasively and marshalls evidence for it convincingly, that one can learn a great deal about a person by observing his expressive behavior. Man, Allport argues, is not only a coping being. Man is also a being who derives gratification and satisfaction out of natural grace of movement, eloquence of facial expression, rhythm of gesticulation, variations in intonation and volume in the use of his voice, the motor movements and visual patterns that are entailed in handwriting, etc. The degree of satisfaction derived from one or another of these behaviors varies from person to person, and also from mood to mood, from attitude to attitude, from situation to situation. One's posture, for example, reveals a great deal about one's emotional condition. The quality of a person's handshake is a useful clue to his personality or his state of mind. But what is special about expressive behavior is precisely the fact that its sources are unconscious. As Allport himself notes, expressive behavior is "more primitive and motor" than

¹⁷⁸Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 493.



179 coping behavior. Indeed, there can be little doubt that some of the expressive behavior of persons actually has its roots in repressed unconscious processes in the special Freudian sense, namely that they are resistant to being uncovered and brought to consciousness.¹⁸⁰ Accordingly it seems rather paradoxical for Allport to stress and convincingly demonstrate the significance of unconsciously motivated expressive behavior as part of the nature of man, and at the same time deplore the Freudian emphasis on the place of unconscious processes generally in man's psychological structure.

His critique of the "passive and secondary role" that allegedly Freud ascribes to consciousness, and of "Freud's depreciation of the role of consciousness,"¹⁸¹ serves as a jumping off place for Allport's attack on "Projective Methods" in the study of human personality. Reference to this attack has already been made earlier (supra, p.107). The essence of Allport's view is that, whereas the neurotic's true motives are hidden, and therefore projective methods are needed to uncover these

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 445.

¹⁸⁰ "Neurotic behavior, like much normal behavior, is not achievement behavior at all. It is expressive behavior." Balmuth, op. cit., p. 232. Cf. supra, p. 183.

¹⁸¹ Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 148 and 150. Cf. supra, p. 106.



motives, the normal, well-integrated person is fully aware of his motivations, and his responses to the projective methods will, on the whole, be no different from his responses to direct methods. The motivational statements of normal people may therefore be taken "at their face value, for even if you probe you will not find anything substantially different."¹⁸²

It is interesting to note Henry A. Murray's comments on this matter:

I am not sure how conscientiously, patiently, deviously, and subtly Professor Allport has probed; but I am sure that the probings of my collaborators as well as my own probings have yielded very different findings and conclusions than those which [Allport] reports in the excerpt quoted.¹⁸³

But the heart of the issue is stated by Murray in a more extended passage. He points out that

There would be nothing at all to write here (1) if every normal subject had an equally perfect knowledge and understanding of his past and present motivations and could accurately estimate their intensities relative to other subjects; (2) if the whole psychoanalytical theory respecting normal, beneficent repression were utterly invalid; and (3) if every normal subject, fully conscious of all that his personality contained, were ready to admit fully--under all circumstances and to any psychologist who asked him--every actuated and unactuated disposition of his nature--every deviant sexual impulse, every delinquent act of crime, every lie, every shameful stratagem or treachery, every hatred, every touch of

¹⁸²Allport, Personality and Social Encounter, pp. 99-100. Cf. supra, p. 107.

¹⁸³Henry A. Murray, "Drive, Time, Strategy, Measurement, and Our Way of Life," Assessment of Human Motives, ed. Gardner Lindzey (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 189.



malice or ignoble envy, every hurt or vanity or season of inflated pride, every extravagance of rivalrous ambition, etc., etc. If all people were as conscious, judicious, and open as this, the injunction 'Know thyself' would be unnecessary . . . 184

The differences here between Allport and Murray are significant. They go considerably beyond mere differences in emphasis or in pseudo-quantitative, comparative judgment. Allport's view here implies a philosophy of man which claims that a "normal" individual's consciously held and publicly acknowledged motives, purposes, intentions, etc., exhaust without remainder that person's wishes, desires, propensities, or inclinations to act. A corollary of this view, of course, is that in the normal individual's being there are no significant wishes, impulses, propensities that are unconscious, in the Freudian sense, and that are co-present with the individual's conscious and acknowledged wishes and propensities. If this is what Allport means, though he does not say quite this most of the time, then one has a right to wonder and ask whether Allport has some empirical evidence for such a contention, or whether it is an a priori assumption about human nature, which in turn guides and determines Allport's research.

In any event, so far as the specific problem of indirect versus direct methods in the study of human personality, Henry Murray is quite in agreement with Allport

184 Ibid., p. 188.



that "direct methods should not be abandoned."¹⁸⁵ Nor do I know of any psychologists who have seriously advocated the abandonment of the use of direct techniques. Murray goes on to explain that their

abandonment would be fatal to a major focus of concern, namely, to the relation between overt and covert, avowed and unavowed, conscious and unconscious, voluntary and involuntary processes.¹⁸⁶

It would therefore seem that, without hazarding a prediction as to what precisely the outcome would imply as far as the theory of human nature is concerned, the specific question under debate between Murray and Allport is empirically researchable, and that it is at least theoretically possible that experimental data may be available to answer the question. While the problem of defining with precision what is meant by a "normal" person presents some difficulties, it should be possible nevertheless to study groups of persons through direct methods, and to subject these same persons to study by means of indirect methods, and compare the results. Allport's hypothesis would thus appear to be empirically testable. Why this has not been done systematically is puzzling. One wonders whether this might not be a case of resistance to empirical investigation even where it seems possible, lest the investigation cast some

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.



doubt on long-held and deeply cherished a priori assumptions.

M. Man Is Dominated by Unchanging Destructive Id-Impulses, Sexual Drives, Ineradicable Aggressiveness, Selfishness, Competitiveness

In the interest of brevity, it may be desirable to cluster together the accusations numbered 4 through 8 above in our Syllabus of Freudian errors, and comment on them as a group. Some of the analyses and observations made above in connection with the criticisms that Freud gives us an image of man as fundamentally irrational, as forever a captive of rationalization, and as a puppet under the control of unconscious processes (with conscious processes assigned a secondary role) apply also to the five criticisms grouped here together, and I shall try to avoid repeating them.

The interpretation of Freudian doctrine which ascribes to Freud the view that the processes and impulses comprehended under the name id are unchanging was discussed earlier in the present chapter (supra, pp.139-144). However it is in order to point out that this interpretation is not limited to our social psychologists, and it appears that one can find support for it in Freud's writings. This is the interpretation upon which Ernest Nagel bases one of his criticisms of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, says Nagel, often traces a patient's present difficulties to an unfulfilled wish in early childhood, "which persists in self-



identical manner and produces discord in the unconscious stratum of mentality." Nagel then raises the question as to what the evidence is for the assumption that none of the person's experiences subsequent to the early traumatic experience "need be considered in accounting for the patient's present neurosis." Nagel concludes that

the assumption that the repressed wish has continued to operate essentially unmodified in the subject's unconscious, despite the countless number of more proximate happenings in the subject's life, cannot be accepted as a matter of course.¹⁸⁷

Nagel bases his interpretation, as do others, on Freud's own words. In the New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis Freud tells us that

In the id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time, and . . . no alteration of mental processes by the passage of time. Conative impulses which have never got beyond the id, and even impressions which have been pushed down into the id by repression, are virtually immortal and are preserved for whole decades as though they had only recently occurred. . . .

. . . the repressed remains unaltered by the passage of time.¹⁸⁸

Freudian passages of this kind give point to Allport's charge that Freudian theory of human nature leaves no room for any "transformation of motives." ¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷Ernest Nagel, "Methodological Issues in Psychoanalytic Theory," Psychoanalysis, Scientific Method, and Philosophy, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 54.

¹⁸⁸Freud, New Introductory Lectures, pp. 104-105.

¹⁸⁹Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 3, 202-203, 207-208. Also supra, p. 86.



But it seems to me that this interpretation transforms Freud's image of man into a static image, and is inconsistent with the essentially dynamic character of man's psychological make-up, with its multiple interacting processes, depicted in Freudian doctrine. The difficulty here, as I pointed out earlier, arises, I believe, out of a failure to distinguish between the elimination of the repressed elements from the individual's personality structure, and on the other hand affecting or modifying the functioning of these elements within the individual in relation to his interactions within varying situations. Certainly what Freud means is that these repressed and unconscious (again, in the Freudian sense) processes become an integral part of the individual's personality, and cannot be eliminated or eradicated; they are "virtually immortal" and are "preserved for whole decades," and "the passage of time" will not alter their presence in the individual's mental make-up.

However, Nagel's criticism is directed not against Freud's doctrine of the persistence or survival of the repressed for many decades. Nagel attacks what he believes to be Freud's assumption that the repressed wish "has continued to operate essentially unmodified" in the person's unconscious. If this were what Freud maintained, it would admittedly be a most serious defect in Freudian doctrine. However, except for the looseness of language in the above quotation from the New Introductory Lectures, there seems to



be no evidence that this is what Freud meant. The dynamic logic of the Freudian image of man belies this. Man's various interactions in the course of his lifetime, particularly his interactions in profoundly stirring experiences, will have some effects on the functioning of the repressed elements, both within the given interaction, and in future interactions. I have given illustrations of this earlier (supra, p. 143). The extreme case, the limiting case, of interactions which affect the functioning of the repressed, is of course the interaction between patient and analyst in the course of psychoanalytic treatment. As a result of the interactions during analysis, Freud tells us, the repressed elements can

be recognized as belonging to the past, deprived of their significance, and robbed of their charge of energy, after they have been made conscious by the work of analysis . . .¹⁹⁰

No doubt, the interactions during the course of analytic treatment are sui generis. But they are sui generis only in that they represent the extreme, limiting case of a possible spectrum of interactions, in which the functioning of the repressed elements within the individual is affected in varying degrees, though not as fundamentally as in the interactions in the course of a successful process of psychoanalysis.

¹⁹⁰ Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 104.



That the functioning of at least some of a person's unconscious id processes may be affected by his personal experiences and interactions, is a view that is not alien to Freud. After discussing the differentiations between the id, ego, and superego, Freud observes that "it is very probable" that there are very great variations in the extent of these differentiations from person to person. Moreover, says Freud,

it is possible that their function itself may vary, and that they may at times undergo a process of involution.¹⁹¹

In addition, Freud points out that mental illness, and experiences and practices of mystics, may cause variations in the functioning and the relationships of the id, ego, and superego:

It is also incontestable that the same thing can come about as a result of mental disease. It can easily be imagined, too, that certain practices of mystics may succeed in upsetting the normal relations between the different regions of the mind, so that, for example, the perceptual system becomes able to grasp relations in the deep layers of the ego and in the id which would otherwise be inaccessible to it.¹⁹²

If, as Freud maintains, such experiences are able to affect the relationships between the id, ego, and superego; and if, further, they are able to bring about the uncovering to a person's perception or consciousness of "relations in the

¹⁹¹Ibid., pp. 110-111.

¹⁹²Ibid., p. 111.



deeper layers of . . . the id which would otherwise be inaccessible"; then it would be a fortiori true that such experiences would have some effect on the functioning of some of these elements in the "deeper layers" of the id. This point gains additional cogency from the interpretation by Calvin Hall, who, approaching Freud principally as a psychological theorist states that, according to Freudian theory, as the progressive development of the ego's resources, capacities, and strengths takes place, the danger represented by the repressed elements can be coped with rationally, and it may even be possible to lift the repression. This again exhibits the effects of a person's experiences and interactions upon the functioning of his id processes. It is useful to quote Hall's own words:

Repressions may be lifted when the source of the threat disappears so that the repression is no longer necessary. However, . . . one has to discover that the danger no longer exists. . . . Although repression is responsible for many abnormal conditions, its role in normal personality development should not be minimized. The erection of a battery of repressing forces . . . protects the infantile ego from attacks by the id and enables the ego to develop its latent resources and capacities. When the ego has acquired sufficient strength to cope with danger by more rational methods, repression is no longer necessary and its persistence constitutes a drain upon the ego's energy. The lifting of repressions as one grows older frees the energy . . .¹⁹³

Freud's repeated emphasis on the destructive id-impulses, sexuality, aggressiveness, selfishness, and

¹⁹³ Calvin S. Hall, A Primer of Freudian Psychology, pp. 90-91.



competitiveness in man must be seen within the same frame of reference as his theory of the irrational and unconscious processes in man. These doctrines too met with resistance and derision from many of Freud's contemporaries. To carry conviction, Freud had to repeat, reiterate, explain, and overwhelm his hearers or readers with illustration after illustration, clinical and other empirical evidence, and varying theoretical formulations. Often Freud's own reaction to the opposition encountered by his theory of human nature is given sarcastic expression, as when he ponders the reasons for the rejection by his contemporaries of his "hypothesis" of the existence of an "aggressive instinct." This hypothesis, says Freud, was felt by many to be an innovation, "and indeed a most undesirable one which ought to be got rid of as soon as possible." Freud proceeds to explain this:

I think a strong emotional factor was responsible for this rejection. Why have we ourselves taken so long to bring ourselves to recognize the existence of an aggressive instinct? Why was there so much hesitation in using for our theory facts which lay ready at hand and were familiar to every one? to introduce [this instinct] into the human constitution seems impious; it contradicts too many religious prejudices and social conventions. No, man must be by nature good, or at least good-natured. If he occasionally shows himself to be brutal, violent and cruel, these are only disturbances of his emotional life, mostly provoked, and perhaps only the consequence of the ill-adapted social system which he has so far made for himself.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 142.



In a later chapter we shall have occasion to comment briefly on the nature and usefulness of the concept of "instinct." However, if we resolve to ignore that question at this point, and to concentrate only on the doctrine of the existence of aggressive propensities in man, we cannot fail to notice the close resemblance between Freud's sarcastic words above, and almost any contemporary attempt at a rejoinder to the utopian assumptions about the nature of man on the part of our social psychologists. Freud continues his "rejoinder" by labelling such utopianism a dangerous illusion:

Unfortunately the testimony of history and our own experience do not bear this out, but rather confirm the judgment that the belief in the 'goodness' of man's nature is one of those unfortunate illusions from which mankind expects some kind of beautifying or amelioration of their lot, but which in reality bring only disaster.¹⁹⁵

Freud here is trying to discharge with fidelity his responsibilities as a descriptive psychologist, and to present an account of human nature and human behavior based on empirical data and their most fruitful theoretical interpretation, rather than on religious, moral, or social preconceptions. He goes on to explain that it is not even on the basis of "the teaching of history and of our own experience of life" that he propounds "the hypothesis of a special instinct of aggression and destructiveness in man." Rather, his hypothesis is based on

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.



general considerations, to which we were led in trying to estimate the importance of the phenomena of sadism and masochism.¹⁹⁶

As scientist, Freud was determined to "follow the facts wherever they lead." As moralist and for the use of other moralists, Freud considered this kind of knowledge about man indispensable, as was pointed out earlier, in order to know the kind of materials he, the moralist, or political or social planner, has to deal with. As Freud puts it:

One has, I think, to reckon with the fact that there are present in all men destructive, and therefore anti-social and anti-cultural, tendencies, and that with a great number of people these are strong enough to determine their behavior in human society.¹⁹⁷

A realistic look at the evidence adduced by Freud and in subsequent literature can hardly fail to persuade one of the very potent factors of destructiveness, aggressiveness, sexuality, self-centeredness, and competitiveness as tendencies or propensities in human nature. What the ethical significance is of these propensities, is of course an important question, and the assumption made by our social psychologists that these propensities are all ethically "evil," and that the contrary human propensities which they stress are ethically "good," will be examined below in Chapter IX. Of course, to repeat, Freud does stress these "evil" propensities, and often conveys an impression of

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 142-43.

¹⁹⁷ Freud, The Future of an Illusion, p. 11.



over-statement both because some of his doctrines were new and revolutionary, and because they were met with hostility and condemnation. Freud's discovery of the importance of sexuality in man, and his theories of infantile sexuality, of erotogenic (or erogenous) zones, and of the Oedipal element in human motivation and behavior, were both revolutionary and, to many people, repugnant. The cluster of propensities such as aggressiveness, self-centeredness, and competitiveness, in so far as they are associated with sexuality and "the drive for complete sexual freedom," met with no less resistance. Freud's related theory of the "pleasure principle" which, according to his critics, is made by him a major, perhaps the major, determinant of human behavior, met with the same kind of resistance.

Indeed, if one were to accept the ascription to Freud of the doctrine that man is driven exclusively by the "pleasure principle," with the tensions it creates and the consequent need for tension-reduction, it would be necessary to apply to Freud the same critique that was applied to the tension-reduction doctrine of the S-R theory of human nature, and to point out, for example, that many persons often decline to pursue "pleasure" and choose to endure tensions and pains, and thus simply do not fit into this explanatory model. (Cf. supra, pp. 34-48). However, such an interpretation, it is necessary to point out again, is a fatal misreading and distortion of Freudian doctrine, and misses



completely the infinite complexity and dynamic character of the human personality portrayed in it. Freud never propounded or espoused the proposition that man is driven exclusively or even principally by the "pleasure-principle." His theory said that much of man's behavior, normal as well as pathological, can be understood in terms of twin principles, the pleasure-principle and the reality-principle, and the ongoing, dynamic tensions between them. Freud never gave primacy to the processes in the "primary system." He portrayed man as containing within his psychological processes both a primary system and a secondary system. Freud never pointed only to the destructive instinct, the death instinct in man. He pointed to both Eros and Thanatos as co-existing in dynamic tension within man. Freud never painted man as dominated exclusively by id-processes and id-impulses. His portrait of man always included the ego-processes and the superego-processes, and all three in juxtaposition and continuing interaction with each other.

It is quite remarkable that our social psychologists, and other critics, neglect or ignore these sets of twin concepts, or twin principles, that are so essential to Freud's doctrine of man as a dynamic being within whom these bi-polar forces are in a perennial condition of dynamic counterpoise with each other. The Freudian texts offer abundant evidence of this, as was shown above in connection with the concepts of rationality-irrationality and conscious-unconscious. If Freud, as part of his realistic



portrait of man, emphasized the presence and potency of destructive id-impulses, selfish sexual drives, ineradicable aggressiveness, ego-centered competitiveness, Freud also emphasized reason, the ego and the superego, and the "impulse toward merging with others in the community"¹⁹⁸ as controls, checks, curbs on the other forces within man. For him the drama of the interplay and struggle between these two sets of forces in "what all life essentially consists of."¹⁹⁹ Freud repeats this theme in several places. "The picture which life presents to us is the result of the working of Eros and the death-instinct together and against each other."²⁰⁰ Referring to "the erotic instincts, which are always trying to collect living substance together into ever larger unities," and to the "death instincts which act against that tendency," Freud says that "The cooperation and opposition of these two forces produce the phenomena of life to which death puts an end."²⁰¹ And again, speaking of his decision "to assume the existence of only two basic instincts, Eros and the destructive instinct,"²⁰² Freud explains their respective

¹⁹⁸Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 134.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., p. 103.

²⁰⁰Sigmund Freud, An Autobiographical Study, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948), p. 105.

²⁰¹Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 147.

²⁰²Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, p. 20.



roles as well as their interactions and combined or fused functioning, and concludes that

This interaction of the two basic instincts with and against each other gives rise to the whole variegation of the phenomena of life.²⁰³

No wonder Ernest Jones observes that "Freud was an obstinate dualist" in his conception of the instincts.²⁰⁴ And when Jones gives an account of the "pleasure principle" in Freudian doctrine, typically he refers to "The two principles Freud here established, which he termed the 'pleasure-principle' and the 'reality-principle' respectively." Moreover, Jones suggests, again using twin concepts, that these two principles are really extensions of Freud's earlier distinction 'between the 'primary system' and the 'secondary system' of mental functioning."²⁰⁵

That these one-sided misinterpretations continue to be made is indeed remarkable. I shall return forthwith to the twin instincts, Eros and the destructive instinct in order to make a fundamental point in the understanding of Freud. But it will be instructive here to look briefly at the interpretations of the Freudian concept of sexuality. Fromm's interpretation is typically one-sided,

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁰⁴ Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. III, pp. 266-67.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 313.



and ignores Freud's dualism here, and consequently fails to perceive Freud's subtle insights into the dynamic and paradoxical complexities of human nature. "The cravings for sexual pleasure," Fromm states, is, in Freudian doctrine, one of two biologically rooted impulses by which man is driven. Accordingly Fromm attributes to Freud the view that the aim of man's sexual desire is "complete sexual freedom, that is, unlimited sexual access to all women he might find desirable."²⁰⁶ To document this contention Fromm quotes a well-known passage from the book that is often spoken of as Freud's most "pessimistic" book, "Civilization and Its Discontents":

. . . man, having found by experience that sexual (genital) love afforded him his greatest gratification, so that it became in effect a prototype of all happiness to him, must have been thereby impelled to seek his happiness further along the path of sexual relations, to make genital eroticism the central point of his life.²⁰⁷

One can quote numerous passages of the same sort, removed from the larger context of the work as a whole, with the same effect. I shall here cite two more, from the same book:

The bit of truth behind all this--one so eagerly denied--is that men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked, but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment. The result

²⁰⁶ Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 74, and supra, pp. 98-102.

²⁰⁷ Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 69.



is that their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo homini lupus*; who has the courage to dispute it in the face of all the evidence in his own life and in history?²⁰⁸

A few pages later, in the course of his scrutiny of the Communist theory that man is inherently good, but that the system of private property has corrupted his nature, Freud maintains that even if we supposed that "personal rights to material goods are done away with," no utopian social order would result automatically. Because, Freud points out,

there still remain prerogatives in sexual relationships, which must arouse the strongest rancor and most violent enmity among men and women who are otherwise equal.²⁰⁹

With this concentration on Freud's doctrine of sex and its aggressiveness, to the exclusion of other elements in the Freudian theory of human nature, we are back again at the accusation of pan-sexualism that was hurled at Freud by his contemporaries, and of which he often complained:

When I endeavored to obtain for the sexual function the recognition which had so long been withheld from it, psycho-analytic theory was branded as 'pan-sexualism.'²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

²¹⁰ Freud, An Autobiographical Study, p. 107. Cf. also Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, p. 39.



The distorted and one-sided character of Fromm's version of sex and love in Freud's doctrine of man becomes glaringly evident in Fromm's contention that for Freud love, being in its essence sexual desire, is by its very nature egotistical and antisocial, and that "the sense of solidarity and brotherly love are not primary feelings rooted in man's nature, but aim-inhibited sexual desires."²¹¹ But this version ignores the broader concept of "love," as incorporated into the Eros instinct, and its complex and paradoxical interplay with the sexual drive and with the aggressiveness of the destructive instinct.

Needless to say, the Eros instinct, and the destructive or death instinct, are largely speculative concepts, and an evaluation of their importance or of their grounding in empirical evidence, is beyond the scope of the present inquiry. But what is reflected in Freud's discussions of these two instincts is, once more, his realistic perception of man as a complex, dynamic being, within whom a multiplicity of forces constantly interplay and find expression. These forces do emphatically include, as Freud never tires of reminding us, powerful sexual desires which are selfish and egotistical. However, Freud insists, this "nucleus" of sexual love can not be separated from altruistic love which is a force for binding people

²¹¹Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 75.



together. That the two co-exist may appear paradoxical for Fromm and others. But for Freud, this paradox, with the subtle interrelationships within the unity of the individual, is part of the essence of being a person.

Let us therefore now look into what Freud calls the Eros instinct, and its relationship to man's sexuality on the one hand, and to the "destructive instinct" on the other. Whereas in his earlier days Freud began by "drawing a contrast between" the "libidinal instincts (love)," or the "sexual object-instincts," and on the other hand the "ego-instincts (the instinct of self-preservation),"²¹² there was a major transformation in his later views, in which "libido" or sexual instincts were seen not as separate from or opposed to, but rather as part of, a major instinct which includes also, the instincts for self-preservation, the instinct for the preservation of the species, and love for humanity in general.²¹³ To this major instinct he gave the name Eros, and "contrasted with it an instinct of death or destruction."²¹⁴ "The nucleus of what we mean by love," or Eros, says Freud, "naturally consists . . . in sexual

²¹²Freud, An Autobiographical Study, p. 104, and The Ego and the Id, p. 55.

²¹³Freud, An Autobiographical Study, p. 105, The Ego and the Id, ibid., and Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, p. 38.

²¹⁴Freud, An Autobiographical Study, p. 105.



love with sexual union as its aim."²¹⁵ But Eros, Freud points out in another place,

comprises not merely the uninhibited sexual instinct proper and the impulses of a sublimated or aim-inhibited nature derived from it, but also the self-preservative instinct . . .²¹⁶

And, to continue the earlier passage just quoted, Freud says,

But we do not separate from this [i. e., love or Eros] --what in any case has a share in the name 'love'-- on the one hand, self-love, and on the other, love for parents and children, friendship and love for humanity in general. . . . psycho-analytic research has taught us that all these tendencies are an expression of the same instinctive activities . . .²¹⁷

That Freud found it necessary to develop an hypothesis of the existence of a destructive or death instinct in juxtaposition to the Eros instinct,²¹⁸ perhaps out of his fascination with "this exquisite dualistic conception of the instinctive life,"²¹⁹ is of concern to us here only because the interrelationships between the Eros and death instincts are another example of Freud's insight into the interplay of many

²¹⁵Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, p. 37.

²¹⁶Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 55.

²¹⁷Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, p. 38.

²¹⁸Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. C. J. M. Hubback (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948), pp. 54ff., passim.

²¹⁹Ibid., p. 62.



forces within man, and because it furnishes additional refutation of the one-sided interpretation by our social psychologists who ascribe to Freud the view that man is exclusively or principally dominated by destructive, aggressively sexual, selfish and competitive drives and impulses.

To return to Eros, what for the earlier Freud was a "contrast" or even perhaps an opposition, namely,

. . . between the instincts of self-preservation and of the preservation of the species, as well as the contrast between ego-love and object love, . . .

become merged for the later Freud, and "fall within the bounds of Eros." And the aim of the Eros instinct "is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus-- in short, to bind together."²²⁰ As to the relationships between the Eros instincts and the death or destructive instinct, if we turn once more to Freud's "most pessimistic" book, we find that, far from maintaining that man is dominated by the destructive, aggressive, selfish death instinct, Freud tells us that

the phenomena of life would then [i. e., upon the recognition of the existence of 'a death instinct as well as Eros'] be explicable from the interplay of the two and their counteracting effects on each other.²²¹

²²⁰Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, p. 20.

²²¹Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 97.



And again, a few pages later, Freud explains this interplay and mutual counteraction at greater length: whereas

. . . the tendency to aggression is an innate, independent, instinctual disposition in man, and I come back now to the statement that it constitutes the most powerful obstacle to culture,

the process of culture proves to be in the service of Eros, and Eros

aims at binding together single human individuals, then families, then tribes, races, nations, into one great unity, that of humanity. Why this has to be done we do not know; it is simply the work of Eros. These masses of men must be bound to one another libidinally; necessity alone, the advantages of common work, would not hold them together. The natural instinct of aggressiveness in man, the hostility of each one against all and of all against one, opposes this programme of civilization. . . . This instinct of aggression . . . we have found alongside of Eros, sharing his rule over the earth. . . . the evolution of culture. . . . must present to us the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instincts of life and the instincts of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of. . . .²²²

What we have then is not a picture of human nature in which the destructive instincts "dominate." Rather it is a picture of man as the being within whom these two equally fundamental forces are interlocked in perennial struggle and interaction. Indeed, Ernest Jones' interpretation states this directly:

²²²Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 102-103. (Emphasis mine)



. . . Freud succeeded after all in establishing two opposing forces in the mind: he termed them Life Instincts and Death Instincts respectively, the former being entitled Eros. They were of equal validity and status and in constant struggle with each other. . . .²²³

But even Jones' interpretation, to say nothing of the interpretations by our social psychologists, fails to appreciate the subtlety of Freud's insights. For, while he proposes the hypothesis of the Eros Instincts and the Death Instincts as two kinds of instincts in mutual opposition, Freud sees that their interplay and interaction within the individual, within the unified personality, result in their intermingling and interpenetration, and therefore in the fusion of the two. Thus he reminds us that

according to our own hypothesis, the two kinds of instincts hardly ever appear in a pure form, unmixed with each other . . .²²⁴

It will not do to overstress the "dualism" in Freud's thought here, and run the risk of ending up with a dichotomized distortion of Freud's image of man. It inspires admiration to observe Freud's delicate balancing between the hypothesis of two basic instincts in opposition to each other, and his awareness of their intricate intermingling in the realities of human experience. On the one hand he speaks of

²²³Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. III, p. 273.

²²⁴Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 131.



two fundamentally different kinds of instincts, the sexual instincts in the widest sense of the word (Eros, if you prefer that name) and the aggressive instincts, whose aim is destruction.²²⁵

And on the other hand, in the same book, six pages later, he speaks of "the cooperation and opposition of these two forces [to] produce the phenomena of life."²²⁶ And in another book, as was pointed out earlier, he speaks of the picture which life presents to us "as a result of the working of eros and the death-instinct together and against each other."²²⁷

Freud goes on further to explicate the intermingling, combination, or fusion of these two instincts. In biological functions they "work against each other or combine with each other." Freud gives the following illustrations:

. . . the act of eating is a destruction of the object with the final aim of incorporating it, and the sexual act is an act of aggression having as its purpose the most intimate union.²²⁸

It is striking, though only in the light of the misinterpretations of Freud, that in the phenomena of Sadism and

²²⁵Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 141.

²²⁶Ibid., p. 147. (Emphasis mine) Cf. supra, p. 213.

²²⁷Freud, An Autobiographical Study, p. 105. (Emphasis mine) Cf. supra, p. 213.

²²⁸Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, p. 21.



Masochism, a study of which led Freud, as we pointed out earlier (supra, p. 209) to the hypothesis of the existence of the Destructive instinct, Freud finds "admirable examples of the fusion" of the two instincts. First he defines the words "sadism" and "masochism":

. . . we use the word 'sadism' when sexual satisfaction depends upon the sexual object suffering pain, ill-treatment and humiliation, and the word 'masochism' when the subject himself has to suffer such treatment.²²⁹

He then reminds us "that there is a certain admixture of these two tendencies (i. e., sadism and masochism) in normal sexual relations."²³⁰ Then follows his striking assertion about the fusion of Eros and destructiveness:

. . . we believe that in sadism and masochism we have two admirable examples of the fusion of the two kinds of instincts, Eros and aggressiveness, and we now put forward the hypothesis that this relationship is typical and that all the instinctual impulses that we can study are made up of such fusions or alloys of the two kinds of instincts.²³¹

Accordingly, when all is said and done, the Freudian theory of man does not fragmentize the individual. It leaves unimpaired the dynamic integrity of the human personality, without introducing into it sharply demarcated, absolute compartments. It is fully sensitive to the dynamic quality of the human personality, in which the various kinds

²²⁹Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 143.

²³⁰Ibid.

²³¹Ibid.



of processes and propensities, that are discernible when we study the nature of man, may shade off into one another, and combine or fuse in their endlessly variegated interplay. As Freud puts it in the form of another illustration from man's sexual behavior:

Modifications in the proportions of the fusion between the instincts have the most noticeable results. A surplus of sexual aggressiveness will change a lover into a sexual murderer, while a sharp diminution in the aggressive factor will lead to shyness or impotence.²³²

That there are no absolute divisions between the psychological processes which we discriminate and call by such names as propensities, or instincts (to adhere to Freud's terminology); that these processes interact, intermingle, and become combined or fused in a variety of ways; and that, as an example of such fusion, love can become hate and even lead to murder, or can lead to self-torture and impotence; these are not new or revolutionary insights. Poets, playwrights, and novelists have given us these insights before. However, the essential difference is that Freud has placed these insights into a broad theoretical framework about the nature of man, and has thus given them a new systematic plausibility. Reading these insights in their Freudian version leads us to say to ourselves, to quote Anthony Kenny again, "Yes, of course,

²³² Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, p. 21.



men often act like that."²³³ Or, to quote MacIntyre,

Freud was certainly a scientist: but to remember this is to expand one's conception of science. For his chief virtue resided in his power to see and write so that we can see too.²³⁴

The Freudian insight into the "impurity" and "fusion" of instincts raises the question about the ethical significance, if any, of psychological instincts or propensities, and this will be discussed below, in Chapter IX.

But the interpretations we have been examining of the alleged Freudian views on the destructive, selfish, competitive ingredients in man call for additional commentary in the light of some of the content of the closing pages in Freud's "most pessimistic book." As has been said repeatedly above, no one can gainsay Freud's relentlessness in discovering, and bringing into the open forum of psychological research and discussion, these destructive, aggressive, selfish propensities in human nature. In the closing pages of Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud again places great emphasis on the following:

a. The development of the individual person follows "the programme laid down by the pleasure-principle, namely, the attainment of happiness" (which in Freudian terminology means gratification

²³³ Kenny, Action, Emotion and Will, p. 95. See supra, p. 57.

²³⁴ MacIntyre, The Unconscious, p. 98.



of instinctual desires), "and to this main objective it holds firmly."

b. The most important problem of civilization is "how to dislodge [its] greatest obstacle, the constitutional tendency in men to aggressions against one another."

c. The superego's failure to "take into account sufficiently the difficulties in the way of obeying it--the strength of instinctual cravings in the id . . ."

d. That the normal person's power of "controlling the id cannot be increased beyond certain limits"; that it is an error to believe that a man's "ego has unlimited power over his id"; and that the command to love our neighbor as ourselves "is impossible to fulfill."

e. That "the fateful question of the human species seems . . . to be whether and to what extent the cultural process . . . will succeed in mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction."²³⁵

In stressing these aspects of the nature of man Freud displays no squeamishness, no "tender-mindedness," and no catering to the biases of the sanctimonious, the

²³⁵Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, pp. 134, 138, 139, 139-40, and 144.



prejudices of the multitudes, or the idols of the market place. However, to give the impression, which our social psychologists very often do, that these emphases constitute an exhaustive report of Freud's doctrine of man, is being a party to a major distortion of Freud's creative contribution in this all-important field of inquiry. For, on these same pages--the pattern is familiar by now--Freud said other things also, things that are most salient to Freud's doctrine of man.

First, let us recall once more that, in juxtaposition to the "evil" forces mentioned in these quotes from the concluding pages of Civilization and Its Discontents--the pleasure-principle, the tendency to sexual aggression, the instinctual cravings of the id, the instinct of aggression and self-destruction--Freud discovers and proclaims the other forces that oppose them and, of course, intermingle with them. Second, let us note that the forces referred to by Freud under the name Eros, aim to bind together individuals, families, tribes, races, nations, into the great unity of humanity, and that this is a binding "to one another libidinally," that is, a natural, instinctive binding to one another, and that, according to Freud, "necessity alone, the advantages of common work," would not in themselves hold people together.²³⁶

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 102.



And here follows a Freudian passage which, considering the misinterpretations of Freud that we have been examining, is quite striking. While the development of the individual, in Freudian theory, "holds firmly" to the objective of the pleasure-principle, i. e., the attainment of "happiness" (in the Freudian sense of satisfying instinctual desires), the "almost unavoidable condition which has to be filled" before a person can attain the objective of "happiness," according to Freud, is the person's incorporation in the membership of a community. In other words, the "almost unavoidable" condition required for the satisfaction of a person's instinctual desires, and this includes the aggressive, selfish, competitive id-impulses and desires, is the condition of fulfilling the "impulse towards merging with others in the community."²³⁷ There is a close and noteworthy similarity between this view of Freud's, and the view expressed by S. E. Asch, to which we had occasion to refer earlier, in connection with what we called "Freud's Myth of Primitive Man" (supra, p133). Asch there spoke critically of the popular view which ascribes to pre-social man "the qualities of savagery which society curbs or tames." This was followed by his profound insight that

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 134.



Brutality, hatred, envy, and servility are products of the social level of existence as much as public spirit and the search for truth; it is only in society that we can be inhuman.²³⁸

The similarity between Freud and Asch here should really occasion no surprise. For Freud's logic is quite simply this: the individual human being strives for the satisfaction of his instinctual desires and impulses; if he did not have to accommodate himself to living in society with other human beings, he would have no need to control or curb his instinctual desires; however, it is equally and importantly true that, if he did not live in a society with other human beings, he would also be unable to satisfy his instinctual desires (except of course for such purely biological desires as food and drink), since these desires, be they for sex, aggression, domination, exploitation, expropriation, humiliation, physical torture, or even killing of others, are essentially "social" in nature, in that they involve relationships with other human beings, even if the relationship were only that of master to victim. Social existence in a society or a community is thus the "almost unavoidable condition" both for the frustration and control of the instinctual desires, and also for their fulfillment. Indeed, frustration of the instinctual desires and impulses is in itself, paradoxically, a kind of fulfillment or at least expression for them, since, ex hypothesi, they express

²³⁸ Asch, Social Psychology, p. 137.



themselves in the human community with sufficient force to require substantial counterforces to frustrate and control them, and lead to their displacement and sublimation. Freud of course never indulges in illusions about human nature. For, immediately after making the point that being a member of a community is the necessary condition which has to be fulfilled before man can attain happiness (i. e., fulfill his instinctual desires), he adds as a kind of wistful and mordant afterthought that

if [the individual] could achieve it [i. e., happiness, or the satisfaction of his instinctual desires] without fulfilling his condition [i. e., of being part of a community] it would perhaps be better.²³⁹

In other words, since the development of some neuroses is the price man has to pay for frustrating and controlling some of his instinctual impulses and desires, Freud indulges in the wistful thought that, if we lived in a different kind of world and man were a different creature, and he were able to satisfy his instinctual desires without having to meet the condition of living in a community of other men in which these desires have to be curbed, "it would perhaps be better." However, the essential point remains the same: by virtue of man's being what he is, the necessary condition for man's satisfying his instinctual needs as well as for frustrating or curbing them is "the incorporation of the

²³⁹Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 134.



individual as a member of a community."

But, contrary to critiques like Asch's, who charges that "In general, Freud treated . . . of the impairments of social life and not of its positive, productive impulses."²⁴⁰ Freud goes further in his depiction of the dynamic reality that defines the conditions within which man, both as individual and as social being, develops and lives. For, "to express it differently," says Freud in further elucidation of the passage just quoted,

. . . individual development seems to us a product of the interplay of two trends, the striving for happiness, generally called 'egoistic,' and the impulse towards merging with others in the community, which we can 'altruistic'. . . . In individual development, as we have said, the main accent falls on the egoistic trend, the striving for happiness; while the other tendency, which may be called the 'cultural' one, usually contents itself with instituting restrictions. But things are different in the development of culture: here far the most important aim is that of creating a single unity out of individual men and women, while the objective of happiness, though still present, is pushed into the background . . .²⁴¹

In the Freudian image of man, the positive, productive, social, altruistic impulses are thus built into the person's development, and into the development of culture, though in each case there exist, in counterpoise with these social impulses, the "egoistic trends." It would seem, according to Freud, that in this counterpoise there are differences between

²⁴⁰Asch, Social Psychology, p. 348.

²⁴¹Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, pp. 134-35.



individual development and the development of culture, the egoistic trend appearing more prominent in individual development, and the altruistic trend being more important in the development of culture. The two processes therefore are not co-extensive, but only overlap. They coincide so far as both include "the aim of incorporation into the community," but the development of the individual "must be admitted to have its special features which are not repeated in the cultural evolution of humanity,"²⁴² namely, the egoistic elements in the individual. To repeat, that the egoistic trend remains as a potent, ineradicable factor in counterpoise with the social trend is part of Freud's realistic image of man, and Freud remarks, in a sober and wistful tone, that

. . . it almost seems as if humanity could be most successfully united into one great whole if there were no need to trouble about the happiness of individuals.²⁴³

This counterpoise within man, and its counterpart in the "struggle between the individual and society," irrespective of whether it is derived from the "antagonism of the primal instincts, Eros and Death," or from "a dissension in the camp of the libido itself," libidinal energy expressing itself both in the form of selfish sexual desires and in

²⁴² Ibid., p. 135.

²⁴³ Ibid.



the form of love for, and the desire for unity with, fellow human beings in a human community, this counterpoise is Freud's reminder and warning against any naive utopianism that bases its vision of a "sane society" on an unrealistic image of man. However, it is also a refutation of and a rebuke against the one-sided and distorted interpretation of the Freudian doctrine of man. To summarize Freud's dynamic image of man in his own words:

So in every individual two trends, one towards personal happiness and the other towards unity with the rest of humanity, must contend with each other; so must the two processes of individual and of cultural development oppose each other and dispute the ground against each other.²⁴⁴

N. Man Is Fundamentally Isolated

In the light of the preceding discussion it would seem unnecessary to make any additional comments on Fromm's charge that, in Freudian theory, men "remain basically isolated beings . . . [who] never transcend their fundamental separateness," and that man

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. (Supra, p. 98)

This charge is contradicted first by Fromm's own explanation of the phenomenon of repression. Repression is of crucial importance in the psychological processes described by Freud,

²⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 135-36.



and its discovery is certainly one of Freud's original contributions to the field. Fromm points out that repression is social in nature, and in saying this he is reflecting orthodox Freudian doctrine. It is therefore puzzling that he presents this with an air of novelty, as if it were his own discovery, and as if, in advancing this view, he were contradicting Freud rather than echoing him. Fromm says:

. . . the whole phenomenon of repression is a social phenomenon. The individual in any given society represses the awareness of those feelings and phantasies which are incompatible with the thought patterns of his society. The force effecting this repression is the fear of being isolated and of becoming an outcast through having thoughts and feelings which nobody would share . . .²⁴⁵

It is thus clear that the individual's primary need to be related to others, and to avoid or overcome isolation, is an inherent part of the Freudian doctrine of repression. And secondly, Fromm's charge is contradicted by Freud's numerous descriptions of the social aspects of the fundamental instinct of Eros, which aims at "binding together" individuals, families, tribes, races, nations into "one great unity, that of humanity."

O. Animalistic View of Normal Adult Personality

To say that Freud saw the normal adult personality through an animalistic model is so wide of the mark, that one

²⁴⁵Fromm, Sigmund Freud's Mission, p. 110.



wonders what could have prompted such a distortion. That Freud did assign considerable importance to biological instincts or drives in the total constitution of the human being, there is no denying. It is also true, as was pointed out earlier (supra, p.158), that Freud never discarded the idea--he certainly never denied or rejected it--that proper research may eventually succeed in discovering the physiological bases of all human behavior. But this hardly adds up to the use of an animalistic model for the interpretation of normal adult personality. Moreover, man's conscious, purposive, goal-directed behavior; man's capacity to control and delay the satisfaction of at least some of his instinctual desires; and "man's capacity for neurosis,"²⁴⁶ each an integral and fundamental ingredient in the Freudian theory of human nature, are most un-animal-like, and hardly fit into the animalistic model ascribed to Freud. The charge can be effectively refuted by recalling only one of Freud's typical statements about the functioning of the ego:

. . . in relation to the id, it performs [its] task by gaining control over the demands of the instincts, by deciding whether they shall be allowed to obtain satisfaction, by postponing that satisfaction to times and circumstances favorable in the external world or by suppressing their excitations completely.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶Freud, A General Introduction, p. 359.

²⁴⁷Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, p. 15.



P. The Universal Oedipus Complex,
and Infancy as the Model for
the Study of Adults

The hypothesis of the existence of a universal "Oedipus Complex" is one of the most controversial in Freudian theory. A simple and helpful formulation of this hypothesis is given by Dr. Jacob A. Arlow, a well-known psychoanalyst:

In his current life the subject (or patient) is behaving in response to the sexual and aggressive wishes which he felt towards his parents during the ages of three to six, i. e., during the early oedipal phase. The subject is usually unaware of any such processes occurring in his mental life.²⁴⁸

However, this formulation is incomplete, and part of Fromm's formulation will be a helpful supplement. Fromm points out that Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex 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."²⁴⁹ (See supra, p.100).

Now, the most significant criticism of the theory of the Oedipus complex that has come to my attention is that by a philosopher, who raised the methodological problem about the "scientific" status of this theory. Proceeding from the principle that

²⁴⁸ Jacob A. Arlow, "Psychoanalysis and Scientific Method," Psychoanalysis, Scientific Method, and Philosophy: A Symposium, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 209.

²⁴⁹ Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 76.



a subject is usually regarded as unscientific if in principle no observable state of affairs could falsify its claims, so that by ad hoc modifications its assertions can be made compatible with any state of affairs whatsoever

Sidney Hook asked psychoanalysts

to describe what kind of evidence they were prepared to accept which would lead them to declare in any specific case that a child did not have any Oedipus complex.²⁵⁰

Strictly speaking, Professor Hook's question received no satisfactory answer in the form of any clear definition of the kind of empirical evidence, that, if it were available, would clearly falsify the claim that a specific child had gone through an oedipal phase. Naturally, this raises questions about the scientific character of the Oedipus theory, though it does not in itself refute the theory at the present time. For one thing, perhaps other psychoanalysts, gifted with more ingenuity, may succeed in formulating with precision the kind of empirical evidence that would in fact be acceptable as evidence that would falsify the contention in any given case that the person had experienced an oedipal phase. Second, on the affirmative side, there appears to be strong opinion that, apart from the available clinical evidence, certain phenomena noted in the "cultural" sciences lend support to the Oedipus hypothesis, though, of course, this in itself does not

²⁵⁰Hook, "Science and Mythology in Psychoanalysis," ibid., p. 214.



"confirm" the hypothesis. For example, Gail Kennedy observes that

On the universality of the Oedipus complex . . . Freud gets more support. Ethnologists believe that some form of 'nuclear family' exists in every human culture, and many would agree that an Oedipus complex, or some complex which would be an equivalent for that type of social organization, occurs as a result of the prolonged dependence of the human child upon the care of parents or parent surrogates.²⁵¹

Something of the same sort is said or implied by Else Frenkel-Brunswick, when she says that

In the verification of psychoanalytic hypotheses. . . . Psychoanalysis itself has provided confirmatory, though seldom rigorous, empirical evidence of overwhelming scope, ranging from the wealth of material accumulated from individual patients to . . . certain relevant features of folklore, myth, and other cultural phenomena.²⁵²

The concept of the Oedipus Complex is thus a controversial one, and its principal critic among our social psychologists is Erich Fromm. However, the phenomena to which Freud draws our attention, and which he tried to explain through the concept of the Oedipus Complex, are real and important even in Fromm's view, and clamor for explanation. In his first book Fromm emphasizes the importance of Freud's discovery in this area of psychology, though he disagrees with Freud's interpretation:

²⁵¹Gail Kennedy, "Psychoanalysis: Protoscience and Metapsychology," ibid., 277.

²⁵²Else Frenkel-Brunswick, "Confirmation of Psychoanalytic Theories," The Validation of Scientific Theories, ed. Philipp G. Frank, op. cit., p. 110.



The phenomenon of life-long dependency on an object outside of oneself has been seen by Freud. . . . As a matter of fact, the phenomenon has impressed him so much that he has asserted that the Oedipus complex is the nucleus of all neuroses. . . . In seeing the Oedipus complex as the central phenomenon of psychology Freud has made one of the most important discoveries in psychology. But he has failed in its adequate interpretation; for although the phenomenon of sexual attraction between parents and children does exist, and although conflicts arising from it sometimes constitute part of the neurotic development, neither the sexual attraction nor the resulting conflicts are the essential in the fixation of children on their parents.²⁵³

Later, in The Sane Society, Fromm again underscores the importance of the phenomena dealt with by Freud in his hypothesis of the Oedipus complex:

The fixation on the mother was recognized by Freud as the crucial problem of human development, both of the race and of the individual. [Freud's theory is related to] his observations of the son's opposition to the father. . . . He explained hostility to the father. . . . Freud saw the tremendous importance of the fixation to the mother . . .²⁵⁴

However, Fromm disagrees with Freud's explanation of these phenomena, and advances his own theory to explain these elements in human nature and human behavior. Fromm states Freud's explanation as follows:

In accordance with his system, [Freud] explained the intensity of the fixation to the mother as derived from the little boy's sexual attraction to her, as the expression of the incestuous striving inherent in man's nature. He assumed that the fixation's perpetuation in later life resulted from the continuing

²⁵³Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 177-78.

²⁵⁴Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 41. (Emphasis mine)



sexual desire. . . . He reconciled assumption and observation [of the son's opposition to the father] into a most ingenious explanation, that of the 'Oedipus complex.' He explained hostility to the father as a result of sexual rivalry with him. . . . But . . . Freud . . . emasculated his discovery by the peculiar interpretation he gave to it. He projects into the little boy the sexual feeling of the adult man. . . . only by the superior power of the rival in this triangle [i. e., the father], is he forced to give up his desire, without ever recovering fully from this frustration.²⁵⁵

Fromm's comment here is most interesting. He charges that Freud's theory here is "a curiously rationalistic interpretation of the observable facts." He claims that Freud's emphasis on "the sexual aspect of the incestuous desire," explains that desire "as something rational in itself."²⁵⁶ Fromm's own explanation of these phenomena takes the form of an elaborate theory with respect to man's alleged "need for rootedness" and his deep craving "not to sever his natural ties, to fight against being torn away from nature, from mother, blood and soil."²⁵⁷ Man's birth, according to Fromm, was "the beginning of . . . the severance of his natural ties." Therefore, Fromm continues:

²⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 41-42.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 42. With this comment Fromm takes us back to the question whether the behavior for which Freudian theory supplies sufficient or satisfactory explanations is rational or irrational. Cf. supra, pp. 156-187.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 38.



Is it surprising to find in the average adult a deep longing for the security and rootedness which the relationship to his mother once gave him? . . . In psychopathology we find ample evidence for this phenomenon of the refusal to leave the all-enveloping orbit of the mother. In the most extreme form we find the craving to return to the mother's womb.²⁵⁸

Within this theory Fromm sees "the real problem" which he claims is evaded by Freud, namely,

. . . the depth and intensity of the irrational affective tie to the mother, the wish to return into her orbit, to remain a part of her, the fear of emerging fully from her.²⁵⁹

Contrasting his own view with Freud's, Fromm says that whereas in Freud's theory the incestuous wish can not be fulfilled "because of the presence of the father-rival," in reality "the incestuous wish is in contrast to all the requirements of adult life."²⁶⁰ And finally, contrasting the two theories Fromm states:

Thus, the theory of the Oedipus complex is at the same time the acknowledgement and the denial of the crucial phenomenon: man's longing for mother's love. In giving the incestuous striving paramount significance, the importance of the tie with mother is recognized; by explaining it as sexual the emotional--and true--meaning of the tie is denied.²⁶¹

I have quoted thus at length from Erich Fromm's writing on this subject, in order to make clear that, on this

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.



rather important element in the Freudian theory of human nature, none of our social psychologists adduces any empirical evidence to refute Freud's hypothesis of the Oedipus complex. Philosophers can raise, and have raised, the question as to whether this hypothesis meets the criteria of a scientific hypothesis, or whether it is purely speculative. But so far as Fromm's theory is concerned, it is no more scientific and no less speculative than Freud's. Indeed, clinical and other evidence seems on the whole to indicate more of an empirical grounding for Freud's hypothesis than for Fromm's theory, which gives the appearance of being purely speculative. Moreover, Freud's hypothesis manifests a coherence and fittingness with other aspects of the Freudian theory of man, and thus takes its place in an explanatory scheme within which it contributes to the explanation of a broad range of the phenomena and behavior to be explained. This gives Freud's theory a methodological superiority over Fromm's which is a theory rather restricted in scope. In any event, whichever is the theory that we will be inclined to accept, the importance of Freud's contribution here resides in his uncovering before us the crucial fact of attachment to the mother, its persistence throughout life, and its multitudinous unconscious influences on adult human behavior.

It is significant, I believe, that Fromm, though he acknowledges the existence of the phenomenon of attachment

to the mother, which was one of Freud's discoveries, and though he recognizes the importance of this phenomenon as formative in human personality, felt compelled to reject Freud's Oedipus theory in which the sexual element in the explanation of the phenomenon plays an important part, and to offer a non-sexual theory to explain it. In Fromm's version of Freudian doctrine the concept of man is that of a "homo sexualis,"²⁶² and thus the charge of "pan-sexualism" against which Freud protested²⁶³ makes its appearance again in our own day. In this version, sex is exclusively evil, part of what Fromm calls "the secularized version of the concept of 'original sin.'"²⁶⁴

But Fromm approaches the study of human nature with the presupposition that man is inherently good. He must therefore reject Freud's Oedipus theory with its sexual explanation of the important phenomenon of attachment to the mother, and must propound a non-sexual explanation which is thus consistent with his presupposition concerning the inherent goodness of man. Fromm sets up a dichotomy between his own version of love and his interpretation of Freud's views on sex, and is therefore incapable of seeing the much

²⁶²Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 77.

²⁶³See supra, p. 216.

²⁶⁴See supra, p. 99.

more subtle and at the same time much more realistic Freudian view which includes under Eros both sexual (or genital) love and the striving for unity with other human beings,²⁶⁵ and which recognizes, as was pointed out earlier, that "egoistic" love and "altruistic" love, love and hate, the creative and the destructive, often overlap, shade off into each other, merge or fuse, in ongoing dynamic processes within persons, rather than exist in rigid and static separation.²⁶⁶ And Fromm's utopian preconceptions about the nature of man also required his rejection of the elements of aggressiveness and sexual competition in the Freudian explanation of the "son's opposition to the father. . . . [his] hostility to the father," a phenomenon the existence of which Fromm acknowledges,²⁶⁷ but fails to explain in his theory.

The Freudian concept of the Oedipus complex is a specific exemplification of what is essentially a broader hypothesis within Freud's general theory of human nature, namely, that wishes, attitudes, feelings, and behavior of adult human beings are powerfully influenced by the residues of the person's experiences during infancy and

²⁶⁵ See supra, pp. 217-221.

²⁶⁶ See supra, pp. 221-225.

²⁶⁷ Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 41.



early childhood. Such influences are of course unconscious, since the infantile experiences that exercise the influence were repressed. Freud tells us that

. . . analytic experience has convinced us of the complete truth of the common assertion that the child is psychologically father of the man and that the events of his first years are of paramount importance for his whole subsequent life. . . a child's susceptibility is aroused by such experiences and . . . his own sexual impulses are thus forced into channels which they can never again leave. Since these impressions undergo repression, either immediately or as soon as they seek to return in the form of memories, they constitute a precondition for a neurotic compulsion . . .²⁶⁸

And again,

. . . the etiology of the life disturbances which we are studying is to be found in the developmental history of the individual, that is to say, in the early part of his life.²⁶⁹

But Freud also points out that the influence of infantile experiences is not limited only to neurotics, but is present also in the life of normal adults:

That which psychoanalysis reveals in the transference phenomena with neurotics can also be observed in the life of normal persons. It here gives the impression of a pursuing fate, a daemonic trait in their destiny, and psychoanalysis has from the outset regarded such a life history as in large measure self-imposed and determined by infantile influences.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, pp. 87-88.

²⁶⁹Ibid., p. 32.

²⁷⁰Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p. 22.



These infantile influences and wishes often manifest themselves, Freud tells us, in dreams:

From the indications contained in the psychoanalysis of the neuroses, I believe that these unconscious wishes are always active and ready to express themselves whenever they find an opportunity of allying themselves with an impulse from consciousness, and transferring their own greater intensity to the lesser intensity of the latter. . . . These wishes, existing in repression, are themselves of infantile origin. . . . the wish manifested in the dream must be an infantile wish. In the adult it originates in the Ucs., while in the child, in whom no division and censorship exist as yet between the Pcs. and Ucs., or in whom these are only in process of formation, it is an unfulfilled and unrepressed wish from the waking state.²⁷¹

This part of Freud's theory of man is interpreted by our social psychologists to mean that "the energies of adult personality are infantile or archaic in nature" (Allport, see supra, p. 106), and that "the child has become the 'original man' of modern psychology" (Asch, see supra, p. 109). Here again, Allport's and Asch's emphasis on the contemporaneity of a person's wishes, motives, hopes, plans, problems, leads them to imply that Freud denies these contemporaneous forces, or at least that these forces "are often under-estimated." (Asch, supra, ibid.) But this is once more the error we discussed earlier (supra, pp. 204-207), of attributing to Freud a static conception of human nature, and of assuming that if repressed infantile or childhood

²⁷¹Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, in The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, op. cit., p. 500.



experiences are ineradicable, persist unconsciously, and influence our wishes and behavior, it must follow that these wishes always function in an identical manner, and that their functioning is never modified by the situations and interactions into which they enter in a person's future experience. Certainly, as was argued earlier, Freud does not make this assumption, and neither does he deny or underestimate the person's contemporary wishes and plans. What Freud is arguing against is the ignoring or underestimating the infantile influences in human behavior, which he observed and described.

The unique and creative contribution of Freud here as also elsewhere, is his portrayal of man as a being in dynamic tension between his contemporary wishes, plans, and situational requirements, and on the other hand the unconscious influences of repressed infantile experiences. This perennial tension gets resolved in multiple ways, depending upon the total situational context and interactions that may come into play at any given time. The past and the present thus intermingle and interact to produce the person's future. And that the former is routinely identified by Freud as represented by the id and the superego, and the latter as represented by the ego, is only to be expected, and is consistent with the other elements in Freud's theory of man:



. . . the id and the superego have one thing in common: they both represent the influences of the past, . . . whereas the ego is principally determined by the individual's own experience, that is to say by accidental and current events.²⁷²

Q. Man Is a Quasi-mechanical Reactor

Allport's charge that in psychoanalytic doctrine "man is a quasi-mechanical reactor" (supra, p. 85.), can not be taken seriously. It must be taken largely as a metaphorical statement, a façon de parler. Its metaphorical character becomes evident when we attend to Allport's brief description of the way this allegedly Freudian quasi-mechanical reactor operates. It is "goaded," according to Allport, "by three tyrannical forces: the environment, the id, and the superego" (ibid.). It would seem to be a most grievous conceptual confusion to argue that if anything is effectively goaded by a superego, then it has to be a quasi-mechanical reactor. For certainly the processes Freud refers to in the concept of the superego are psychological processes that do not fit into any mechanical model. Moreover, this statement cavalierly neglects to take into account those processes in man's psychological make-up to which Freud refers in the concept of the ego, and these ego-processes are non-mechanical par excellence. But even of the id-processes one can not dogmatically maintain that

²⁷²Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, p. 17.



responses to them must be those of a quasi-mechanical reactor. That human experiences and behavior which are expressions or manifestations of unconscious id-impulses are often purposive, sensible, even "logically motivated," irrespective of whether the behavior is only one of the "slight functional disturbances in the daily life of healthy people," or must be classified as delusional, is maintained by Freud, and argued by many commentators (see the extensive discussion of this subject, supra, pp. 156-187).

Accordingly, to try to make a mechanist out of Freud is either extremely farfetched, or makes use of the word "mechanical" in some novel and unique sense. It may be that Allport, in his statement under discussion here, is alluding to the fact that a case may be made for the contention that Freud's analysis of human behavior shows him to be philosophically a determinist, in the sense that he assumes that for every instance of human behavior a reason or a cause may be found. But, if Freud is a determinist in this sense, this does not necessarily entail that he must hold that man is a quasi-mechanical reactor. On the other hand, Allport may be alluding to the fact that Freud never actively rejected the possibility that physiological, neural, or neuro-chemical explanations may ultimately be found for human behavior (see supra, p. 158). However, though the possibility of ultimate physiological explanations was acknowledged and perhaps even assumed by



Freud, so far as his own investigations and explanations were concerned, Freud said "I must conduct myself as if I had only the psychological before me (ibid.).

The difficulty here may be that Allport may be confusing the two levels of explanations we talked about earlier in the present chapter and in Chapter II, namely, explanations of individual human actions (in terms of reasons and purposes), and "higher order" explanations of why people have such reasons or purposes. Furthermore, it is possible that Allport, like Peters (see supra, p. 74), assumes that causal explanations are necessarily physiological-mechanical explanations, and since Freud's "higher order" explanations of reasons and purposes are causal, they are therefore taken to be physiological-mechanical.

However, the fact is that Freud's whole theory of human nature is a system of psychological explanations, at both levels of explanation. At the "lower level," Freud's explanations of individual actions are psychological, in terms of purposes or reasons, often unconscious ones. However, their teleological character does not rule out Freud's seeing them also as in a definite sense causal explanations, since he meant them to fit into a system of scientific, and in that sense deterministic, explanations. So far as "higher order" explanations are concerned, of why people have purposes, it is Freud's unique contribution that, while his explanations here are decidedly and of



necessity causal they are at the same time psychological. Freud gave a dynamic, causal account of of unconscious reasons and purposes in psychological terms, i. e., in terms of some basic psychological drives, early childhood experiences, early family environment, etc., which causally explained both normal and neurotic behavior. Freud gave not merely a descriptive account of what kinds of purposes or reasons men do as a matter of fact have for their actions, i. e., he was not simply reporting that "people have such and such purposes." Rather, he gave a dynamic, causal account of the psychological conditions under which such purposes arise or occur, and of the effects they have upon the individual and his behavior. Thus, if we may return to Peters for a moment, when he says that "causal explanations are otiose when we know the point of a person's action . . . [that] we no longer feel inclined to ask 'why'" once we have explained a piece of behavior in terms of purposes,²⁷³ Peters is only partially right, i. e., insofar as explanations of individual actions are concerned; but he is in error, because he makes the unwarranted assumption that causal explanations of behavior must be physiological explanations, and therefore that psychological (non-physiological) explanations cannot be causal, so far as "higher order" explanations are concerned. Far from being

²⁷³Peters, The Concept of Motivation, pp. 11-12.



"otiose," causal psychological explanations of purposes and reasons (not by or in terms of purposes) are a sine qua non for any theory of human nature and personality. Freud's psychological explanations in terms of, e. g., a person's early toilet training, are fundamental causal explanations in Freud's theory of human nature and personality.

Thus, to summarize, Freud's explanation of human behavior includes the following ingredients:

- (1) Basic drives are prime motivators of some behavior, and this is causal explanation.
- (2) People have unconscious motives, i. e., reasons and purposes; this part of Freudian theory is descriptive.
- (3) These unconscious reasons and purposes explain a large range of human actions previously unintelligible; they are psychological explanations.
- (4) How these motives become unconscious, how the unconscious reasons and purposes arise, and what their effects are on the ensuing behavior of the individual, these questions are answered in terms of a causal psycho-logical theory about man's psychological constituents, experiences during infancy, etc., etc.

It is by means of this psychological theory that Freud transformed the insights that are often found in the writings of his literary and philosophical predecessors, into systematic scientific knowledge. To say that this



psychological theory depicts man as a "quasi-mechanical reactor" is completely incongruous.

R. The Abnormal, Pathological Person Provides the Model for Freud's Study of Man

Freud's researches which led to the full development and formulation of psychoanalytic theory, and of its conception of human nature, arose out of his work as physician to whom patients suffering from neuroses and hysterical symptoms came for treatment.²⁷⁴ Many parts of the theory emerged as Freud undertook to study and reconstruct the pathogenic processes in his patients' disorders. And manifestly, whatever else psychoanalysis is, it was for Freud, and it is today, also a branch of medicine as a healing art, a therapeutic method to be employed in the treatment of certain emotional disturbances and illnesses. Much of the data of psychoanalytic doctrine is clinical in character, out of the observation and treatment of abnormal and pathological individuals. It is therefore quite understandable that, looked at superficially, through the prism of therapy which refracts human personality into the normal and abnormal, the healthy and the pathological, psychoanalysis leads some to the conclusion that its image of man is modelled on the abnormal, the sick, the pathological. When

²⁷⁴ Freud, An Autobiographical Study, Chapters II-IV, pp. 33-86.



this superficial conclusion is taken in conjunction with the rather important but at least questionable assumption that normal and abnormal behavior are generically different from each other, and that no common explanatory theory can be applied to both, the rationale behind this attack on Freud is laid clearly before us.

There is an important and knotty conceptual problem here, as to the meaning of the terms normal and abnormal, healthy and pathological. To what extent are these terms descriptive, and to what extent are they normative? If and when these terms function normatively, what are the assumed criteria or norms by which the healthy and normal are differentiated from the pathological and abnormal, whence are these criteria derived, and what are their logical foundations? These problems are raised especially by Fromm's and Maslow's writings in which rather sweeping and cavalier assumptions are made concerning the meaning and nature of mental health and illness, and will be discussed in a later chapter on "Fact and Value." However, when Maslow accuses Freud of tending "to pathologize everything" (supra, p. 90), and when Allport charges Freud with having "smudged the boundary lines between neurotic and normal mental functioning," and with having "neglected . . . the normal processes of growth and becoming" (supra, p. 104), their assumption of the discontinuity or dichotomy between the normal and abnormal shows through, as well as their assumption that there are absolute, objective criteria in terms of which they can be distinguished from each other.



However, the logic of Freud's position is that the assumption of such a dichotomy can not be supported, since in many instances the explanations of what is called neurotic behavior and of what is called normal behavior are the same or of the same kind. And indeed, much of the data for psychoanalytic theory comes from normal, everyday life, and many of the psychoanalytic concepts include within the range of their application both so-called normal and pathological phenomena. Such fundamental and seminal concepts as unconscious processes, repression, Oedipus complex and oedipal phase, id, ego, superego, defense mechanisms, infantile sexuality, etc., etc., are generic concepts that apply to all human personality, normal and abnormal, and have given us a new conception of the generic nature of man. Here again, the dynamic unity of the human being, which cannot be arbitrarily dichotomized, and within which the normal and abnormal, the healthy and the pathological, often co-exist, overlap, and shade off into each other, is made evident in Freudian theory.

The varieties and complexities of human experience and behavior do not admit of explanation by means of two different explanatory systems, one for the normal and another for the abnormal. So-called normal behavior can often be most clearly understood in the light of the abnormal; and certainly there could be no understanding of abnormal or pathological behavior without some conceptualized understanding of everyday, normal behavior. As a



matter of fact, reasoning by analogy from pathological behavior to normal behavior, and vice versa, is not at all unusual in psychological theory and investigation. Fromm, for example, does not think that he is doing anything unusual when he adduces, as support for his own explanation of the normal adults' attachment to the mother in terms of the longing for "the rootedness and security" which his mother once gave him, the evidence from psychopathology of persons "completely obsessed by . . . the craving to return to the mother's womb . . . , the refusal to leave the all-enveloping orbit of the mother."²⁷⁵ The same theory is employed by Fromm to try to explain both "psychopathology in the most extreme form," and psychological phenomena in the life of "the average adult." (Ibid.)

The fact is, of course, as has been pointed out before, that evidence for many of the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis comes from normal, adult, everyday life: from slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, lapses of memory, jokes, puns, dreams, daydreams, fantasies, etc., dealt with in such works as The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, The Interpretation of Dreams, and Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious. And the fact further is that Freudian explanations of the pathological and abnormal have illuminated in an incomparable way the nature of man in all its

²⁷⁵Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 39, and supra, pp. 239-242.



manifestations. MacIntyre comments that:

It is only in the light of Freud's description of the abnormal that we have acquired any adequate conception of the normal. Understanding how a purpose might be unconscious is a necessary step in understanding in anything but a fragmentary way what we mean by 'purpose' at all.²⁷⁶

But the most significant and revealing commentary on the relationship of psychoanalysis as an explanatory theory to both the normal and the abnormal in human nature and behavior, is Freud's own. In his An Autobiographical Study, after he reaches the point at which he explains that, in the same way in which psychoanalysis makes use of dream-interpretation, so it "also profits by the study of the numerous little slips and mistakes which people make," Freud makes reference to his book, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, in which he says he had

. . . pointed out that these phenomena are not accidental, that they require more than physiological explanations, that they have a meaning and can be interpreted, and that one is justified in inferring from them the presence of restrained or repressed impulses and intentions.²⁷⁷

What follows this passage is of the greatest importance, because here we have Freud's clear and concise statement of the application of psychoanalytic theory to psychological phenomena generally. For, as he says, "Previously psychoanalysis had only been concerned with solving

²⁷⁶ MacIntyre, The Unconscious, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

²⁷⁷ Freud, An Autobiographical Study, p. 85.



pathological phenomena . . .” However, the studies of dreams and of everyday slips and mistakes had a wider significance, since they showed the continuity and overlapping of the normal and the pathological:

But what constitutes the enormous importance of dream-interpretation, as well as of this latter study [i. e., The Psychopathology of Everyday Life], is not the assistance they give to the work of analysis but another of their attributes. . . . when it came to dreams, it [psychoanalysis] was no longer dealing with a pathological symptom, but with a phenomenon of normal mental life which might occur in any healthy person. If dreams turned out to be constructed like symptoms, if their explanation required the same assumptions--the repression of impulses, substitute-formation, compromise-formation, the dividing of the conscious and the unconscious into various psychical systems--then psychoanalysis was no longer a subsidiary science in the field of psychopathology, it was rather the foundation for a new and deeper science of the mind which would be equally indispensable for the understanding of the normal. Its postulates and findings could be carried over to other regions of mental happening . . . 278

The concepts which explain pathological phenomena also explain such normal phenomena as dreams and slips of the tongue and pen. Moreover, the discovery that there is nothing generically unique in the content of neuroses, only tended to confirm the generic psychological character of psychoanalytic theory:

It must be true . . . that neuroses have no peculiar content which belongs exclusively to them but that neurotics break down at the same difficulties that are successfully overcome by normal people. This discovery was far from being a disappointment. It

278. Ibid., pp. 85-86. (Emphasis mine)



was in complete harmony with another one: that the depth-psychology revealed by psychoanalysis was in fact the psychology of the normal mind.²⁷⁹

S. Man Is Fundamentally Antisocial; Ineradicable Conflict between Individual and Society; Society's Controls Cause Neuroses

Most of the commentary that is required by this cluster of criticisms, listed above under numbers 15-17, may be found in the discussion of man's "destructive id-impulses," "sexual drives," "aggressiveness," and "self-centeredness," and will not be repeated here. However, a number of additional observations are necessary at this point.

Freud uses the terms "civilization" and "culture" interchangeably to refer to the social order. He defines culture as

. . . the sum of achievements and institutions which differentiate our lives from those of our animal forebears and serve two purposes, namely, that of protecting humanity against nature and of regulating the relations of human beings among themselves.²⁸⁰

After sketching, in Civilization and Its Discontents, an inventory of the various components of culture, Freud comes to the consideration of "the last, and certainly by no means the least important, of its components. This component consists of

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 102. (Emphasis mine)

²⁸⁰ Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, pp. 49-50.



. . . the ways in which social relations, the relations of one man to another, are regulated, all that has to do with him as a neighbor, a source of help, a sexual object to others, a member of a family or state.²⁸¹

In the evolution of social relations, Freud says, the "substitution of the power of a united number for the power of a single man" is the decisive step toward the establishment of civilization:

The first requisite of culture, therefore, is justice--that is, the assurance that a law once made will not be broken in favor of any individual. . . . The further course of cultural development seems to tend towards ensuring that the law shall no longer represent the will of any small body--caste, tribe, section of the population--which may behave like a predatory individual toward other such groups . . .²⁸²

The individual, inclined to act in accordance with the pleasure-principle, seeking happiness (in the Freudian sense of sexual and other instinctual satisfactions), having a desire for aggression against and domination over other human beings, undergoes restrictions within civilization, is required to give up the freedom of pursuing his desires uninhibitedly, and must subordinate his liberty to the demands of culture. Freud notes here parenthetically that the individual's freedom was greatest "before any culture." But he also remarks that the individual's freedom had little

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁸² Ibid., pp. 59-60.



value for him at that time, "because the individual was hardly in a position to defend it."²⁸³ (Freud might also have pointed out, though as I stated earlier (supra, pp.229-232) this is implicit in the logic of Freud's position, that in the hypothetical, or fictitious, pre-cultural or pre-social world in which the individual lived entirely or largely in isolation, his liberty meant little because he had no associations with other human beings, and without them his instinctual desires could not be fulfilled.)

These propensities in man can be restricted, controlled, guided, channelled, caused to function in different ways, but they can not be changed:

It does not seem as if man could be brought by any sort of influence to change his nature into that of the ants; he will always, one imagines, defend his claim to individual freedom . . .²⁸⁴

Implicit here, according to Freud, is one of the fundamental problems of human existence:

A great part of the struggles of mankind centers round the single task of finding some expedient (i. e., satisfying) solution between these individual claims and those of the civilized community; it is one of the problems of man's fate whether this solution can be arrived at in some particular form of culture or whether the conflict will prove irreconcilable.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.



This then is Freud's realistic, tough-minded perception of the problem of man's existence in society. Now, while I believe Freud to be saying, or at least implying, that this conflict is not irreconcilable, it is of the greatest importance to understand that by such reconciliation Freud does not mean any kind of utopian state of affairs that will be reached, that will be free of these struggles and problems. These struggles are a perennial dimension of human existence. Man being what he is, he will always be in a relationship of a certain amount of tension with the social order, and the social order will always have the regulation and control of the relations between human beings as one of its major tasks. Reconciliation means, for Freud, the effective regulation and control of man's instinctual desires, together with the retention of sufficient freedom for gratification of those desires, so that extreme neuroses will be avoided, and the other elements in culture that Freud speaks of, beauty, art, science, philosophy, and other "higher mental activities" will flourish. His is not a vision of perfection, and perfectibility is not for him a realistic possibility. He warns against this misconception:

We have . . . guarded ourselves against accepting the misconception that civilization is synonymous with becoming perfect, is the path by which man is ordained to reach perfection. . . . The evolution of culture seems to us a peculiar kind of process. . . . We describe this process in terms of the modifications it effects on the known human instinctual dispositions. . . .286

286 Ibid., pp. 61-62.



It is important also not to forget, as part of Freud's realistic picture of the individual in society, some of Freud's characterizations of man already referred to earlier. Two more of his characterizations may be worth quoting:

Those who love fairy tales do not like it when people speak of the innate tendencies in mankind towards aggression, destruction, cruelty.²⁸⁷

. . . even in the blindest frenzy of destructiveness, one cannot ignore the fact that the satisfaction of it is accompanied by an extraordinarily intense narcissistic enjoyment, due to the fulfillment it brings to the ego of its oldest omnipotence-wishes.²⁸⁸

These are some of the wishes, tendencies, propensities, that must regulated and controlled in society. Now, if this were all our social psychologists were referring to when they say that in Freudian theory man is fundamentally antisocial, and that there is an ineradicable conflict between the individual and society, they would be, except for the excessive baggage packed into the words "fundamentally" and "conflict," in part right; but only in part. Because they would again be ignoring here the entire body of Freudian thought on the consequences of the fact that man lives in society and is a participant in culture. They would again be ignoring that part of the Freudian theory of man which stresses the Eros instinct and its aim at binding

²⁸⁷Ibid., p. 99.

²⁸⁸Ibid., p. 101.



human beings together; "the incorporation of the individual as a member of the community"; man's "altruistic" impulse, etc. This would also ignore Freud's important point that, within culture, some of the instincts

. . . become absorbed as it were, so that something appears in place of them which in an individual we call a character-trait.²⁸⁹

In other words, the development of the individual person in a culture witnesses the transmutation or modification of many of the instincts, so that their demand for gratification is reduced, or constructive, creative, and socially desirable outlets for the gratification of the instincts are devised. Says Freud,

[Some] instincts have to be induced to change the conditions of their gratification, to find it along other paths, a process which is usually identical with what we know so well as sublimation (of the instinct), but which can sometimes be differentiated from this.²⁹⁰

Moreover, using the illustration of the growth that takes place from the anal eroticism and primary interest in the excretory function on the part of very young children, into a group of traits--thriftiness, orderliness, and cleanliness--which are valuable in themselves, but are also cultural demands, Freud finds a striking similarity between the

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 63.



"process of cultural development and that of the libidinal development in an individual."²⁹¹ In addition, however, our social psychologists find it difficult here once again to rid themselves of their ascription to Freud of a static conception of human nature, which ostensibly means that the human being always responds and reacts to situations and to other people in a rigid, uniform, unchanging way. They confuse the idea of man as a stable, determinate entity, which is Freudian doctrine, with the non sequitur that therefore man in Freudian doctrine must always respond identically in every situation, no matter what the situation is and the interactions within it. They assume that Freud must mean that, if man has strong, aggressive and selfish tendencies, then his behavior will always be antisocial, aggressive, and selfish, no matter what the social situation is. Freud, however, tells us that

Civilization . . . obtains the mastery over the dangerous love of aggression in individuals by enfeebling and disarming it and setting up an institution within their minds to keep watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.²⁹²

Sublimation is one type of response of the individual to the regulatory force of culture, and renunciation of the instinctual desire may be another type of response, among many.

But, our social psychologists ask, since the Freudian

²⁹¹Ibid., p. 62.

²⁹²Ibid., p. 105.



theory of man tells us that he is under the powerful influence of his instinctive, aggressive, destructive, self-centered, sexual, sadistic desires, doesn't the frustration or control of these desires, their sublimation or renunciation, in short, doesn't man's life in civilized society with its repression of our impulses, cause neuroses and mental illness? Freud's reply is, of course, yes!, but with some very important qualifications:

It was found that men become neurotic because they cannot tolerate the degree of privation that society imposes upon them in virtue of its cultural ideals . . . 293

It is one of Freud's major theses, extensively developed in Civilization and Its Discontents, that one of the problems of civilization is how to regulate, suppress, and control these instinctual desires and impulses without bringing about excessive and destructive mass neuroses. It is an unresolved problem in Freudian theory as to where the "right" line of demarcation is beyond which suppression of instinctual freedom, e. g., sexual freedom, would lead to dangerous neuroses. Freud did argue that late 19th century and early 20th century European culture and morality went too far in its sexual repressions, and at the same time did not develop effective ways for "mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction."²⁹⁴ However, Freud's view is clear that a

²⁹³Ibid., p. 46.

²⁹⁴Ibid., p. 144.



certain amount of neurosis is the price man has to pay for living in human society, in a culture, in a civilization. For, society and culture by definition mean a certain amount of suppression and regulation of individuals' instinctual desires and impulses, as well as their redirection and sublimation, and hence a certain amount of neurosis. And since organized society or culture provides the conditions for meaningful human life and self-fulfillment, it follows in a real sense that a certain amount of neurosis is the price human beings must pay for life itself.

Here, it seems to me, lies another of Freud's major contributions to our understanding of the nature of man. For Freud points out that one of the unique characteristics of man, one of the differentia that distinguishes him from the other animals, is precisely man's capacity for neurosis, i. e., his capacity to face the conflicts that arise between his desire for sexual freedom, and his desire for meaningful human associations within culture, to resolve the conflict sufficiently in the direction of suppression of instinctual impulses to make culture possible, and to pay the price in the form of a certain amount of neurosis:

. . . taken all in all, [man's] superiority over the other animals may come down to his capacity for neurosis. . . . his capacity for neurosis would merely be the obverse of his capacity for cultural development.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵Freud, General Introduction, p. 359.

These are very sensitive and subtle insights into the complexities of man's nature, insights in the light of which the accusing tone in which our social psychologists charge Freud with the sin of holding that society's controls and suppressions produce neuroses, appears quite beside the point.

T. Pessimistic View of Human Nature:
Man Is Fundamentally Evil

The charge that Freud took a pessimistic view of human nature, as a kind of broad, sweeping summary of many of the other charges, appears plausible, in part because of a tacit assumption that, in this kind of terminology, the two characterizations contained in the pair of terms "pessimistic - optimistic" are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. Accordingly, since it would probably be difficult to argue that Freud takes an "optimistic" view of human nature (he certainly rejects any utopian view), then it must appear to follow that his view is pessimistic. Our social psychologists, because of their own preconceptions about the nature of man, cheerfully fall into this elementary logical trap. However, even if we employ such vague and imprecise characterizations, it would be necessary to point out that the two terms "pessimistic - optimistic" do not exhaust all the possibilities. One would wish to think of including in addition at least one other possible characterizational pair of terms, namely "realistic - unrealistic." Moreover, the assertions that, for Freud, man



is fundamentally evil, and that "He excluded from observation all reference to the 'daylight' aspects of human action and experience" (Asch, cf. supra, p. 87 emphasis mine), bring us back to the matter of comparative emphases in Freudian doctrine and in the doctrine or doctrines of our social psychologists, and to the charge of "neglecting," "ignoring," or "excluding from observation" certain aspects of the nature of man. This has already been discussed earlier, and we shall have occasion to return to it again later.

However, before discussing these characterizations briefly, it may be worth making reference, in addition to all the material out of Freud quoted in the present chapter that may be used to support the charge that he took a pessimistic view of man, to two rather well-known quotations that are almost always interpreted to support this view. The first is from a letter dated December 28, 1914 (a few months after the outbreak of the first World War), which Freud wrote to Van Eeden, a Dutch psychopathologist:

Under the influence of this war I venture to remind you of two assertions psychoanalysis has put forward which have assuredly contributed to its unpopularity.

Psychoanalysis has concluded from the study of the dreams and mental slips of normal people, as well as from the symptoms of neurotics, that the primitive, savage and evil impulses of mankind have not vanished in any individual, but continue their existence, although in a repressed state--in the unconscious, as we call it in our language--and that they wait for opportunities to display their activity.



It has furthermore taught us that our intellect is a feeble and dependent thing, a plaything and tool of our impulses and emotions; that all of us are forced to behave cleverly or stupidly according as our attitudes and inner resistances obtain.²⁹⁶

The other passage is from A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, a book which consists of series of lectures delivered in the years 1915-17:

Perhaps, then, you will . . . fall back upon the argument that it is surely very improbable that we ought to concede so large a part in the human constitution to what is evil. But do your own experiences justify you in your statement? . . . have you met with so much goodwill in your superiors and rivals, so much chivalry in your enemies and so little envy amongst your acquaintances, that you feel it incumbent on you to protest against the idea of the part played by egoistic baseness in human nature? Do you not know how uncontrolled and unreliable the average human being is in all that concerns sexual life? Or are you ignorant of the fact that all the excesses and aberrations of which we dream at night are crimes actually committed every day by men who are wide awake? What does psychoanalysis do in this connection but confirm the old saying of Plato that the good are those who content themselves with dreaming what others, the wicked, actually do?

And now look away from individuals to the great war still devastating Europe: think of the colossal brutality, cruelty and mendacity which is now allowed to spread itself over the civilized world. Do you really believe that a handful of unprincipled place-hunters and corrupters of men would have succeeded in letting loose all this latent evil, if the millions of their followers were not also guilty? Will you venture, even in these circumstances, to break a lance for the exclusion of evil from the mental constitution of humanity?²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Vol. II, pp. 368-69.

²⁹⁷ Freud, A General Introduction, pp. 130-131. Freud's



Having thus quoted at length Freud's strong statements on the "evil" ingredients in human nature, it becomes necessary once more to place them in their proper perspective within Freudian doctrine, and once more to correct the distortions by our social psychologists. In the interest of brevity I shall state these corrections in the form of five assertions:

1. Freud tells us that he dwelled "upon the evil in human beings with the greater emphasis only because others deny it."²⁹⁸

reference to Plato is to the following passage in The Republic:

Some of the unnecessary pleasures and appetites are, if I mistake not, unlawful; and these would appear to form an original part of every man; though in the case of some persons, under the correction of the laws and the higher appetites aided by reason, they either wholly disappear, or only a few weak ones remain; while, in the case of others, they continue strong and numerous. . . .

I refer to those appetites which bestir themselves in sleep; when, during the slumbers of that other part of the soul, which is rational and tamed and master of the former, the wild animal part . . . becomes rampant, and pushing sleep away, endeavors to set out after the gratification of its own proper character. You know that in such moments there is nothing that it dares not do, released and delivered as it is from any sense of shame and reflection. It does not shrink from attempting in fancy unholy intercourse with a mother, or with any man or deity or animal whatever; and it does not hesitate to commit the foulest murder. . . . In one word, there is no limit either to its folly or its audacity. . . .

What we wish to recognize is, that apparently a terrible species of wild and lawless appetites resides in every one of us, even when in some cases we have the appearance of being perfectly self-restrained. And this fact, it seems, becomes evident in sleep." The Republic, Book IX, 571c - 572b, trans. John Llewelyn Davies and David James Vaughan (London: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 305-306.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 131.

2. A half century after Freud's book, our social psychologists still persist in doing what Freud pointed to in his contemporaries, i. e., they deny the aggressive, destructive, "evil" elements in the constitution of man, not on the basis of any empirical evidence to the contrary, but on the basis of their own preconceptions as to the nature of man.

3. Our social psychologists do for their preconceptions about human nature precisely what they accuse Freud of doing for those aspects of human nature that his researches disclosed to him and that others denied; our social psychologists emphasize strongly their contention that man is inherently "good," and propound a utopian theory of man's nature.

4. It is simply not true that Freud "excluded from observation all references to the 'daylight' aspects of human action and experience." Freud emphatically asserts that it is no part of his intention "to deny the nobility in human nature" or to "disparage its value." He points out that he shows not only the "evil wishes which are censored but also the censorship which suppresses them and makes them unrecognizable."²⁹⁹ Freud's emphasis on the Eros instinct, on the desire for community with other human beings, on the "altruistic trend" in man, on the Ego processes, the

²⁹⁹ Ibid.



superego, the guidance of reason, must again be pointed to as directly refuting the charge.

5. Finally, it seems reasonable to say that Freud's portrait of man is neither "optimistic" nor "pessimistic." Rather, if such vague categories are to be employed, Freud's may be said to be a "realistic" portrait of man, one which is the product of Freud's efforts "to find the truer formula for the relation of evil to good in human nature."³⁰⁰ It is this important contribution of psychoanalytic theory to the understanding of man that our social psychologists chronically fail to appreciate, namely, the interplay of such apparently contradictory forces within man as the noble and the ignoble, the creative and the destructive, the altruistic and the egoistic, love and hate, "good" and "evil." They sadly fail to appreciate the insight of Freud's comments on the dynamic interactions within the individual, in connection with the contradictions between the unconscious and evil "wish=tendencies" disclosed in the interpretations of a person's dreams, and on the other hand the emphatic repudiation of these interpretations by the dreamers, or the conscious wishes and intentions avowed by the dreamer. What Freud says in this connection exhibits his realistic and subtle understanding of the complex

³⁰⁰ Ibid.



interplay of forces that largely eludes our social
psychologists:

Assuming that unconscious tendencies do exist in mental life, the fact that the opposite tendencies predominate in conscious life goes to prove nothing. Perhaps there is room in the mind for opposite tendencies, for contradictions, existing side by side; indeed, possibly the very predominance of the one tendency conditions the unconscious nature of the opposite.³⁰¹

U. Man's Superego Is Authoritarian
Rather Than Innate Ought-Conscience

The problem of the existence within man of an inner or innate moral conscience, and whether such a conscience can be a dependable moral guide, is neither new in the history of philosophy nor free of many difficulties and complexities. This will be discussed extensively in Chapter VIII below. That there is such an innate conscience within human beings, and that it can serve as a dependable moral guide, is claimed by our social psychologists, but it is never demonstrated or persuasively shown to be the case. Asch does make an effort to do this, employing the concepts of Gestalt Psychology, and more especially Wolfgang Köhler's concept of "requiredness."³⁰² Asch's effort will also be examined in Chapter VIII. Properly speaking, however, rather than show that man does in fact possess an innate

³⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 129-30. (Emphasis mine)

³⁰² Asch, Social Psychology, pp. 353-63. See also infra, Chapter VII, pp. 562-571.



conscience which is a dependable moral guide, our social psychologists only succeed in arguing that man ought to have such a conscience. They make the assumption that, if man possessed an inner conscience, it would be superior to the superego's must-conscience as a moral guide. Since this is their normative assumption, they try to attribute to man the possession of this superior kind of conscience, and they deplore Freud's alleged doctrine that only the authoritarian or must-conscience of the Superego is part of man's psychological constitution.

But there is serious doubt as to whether an innate moral conscience is in fact, or can be, an infallible moral guide, i. e., whether from the alleged psychological fact that there is in each of us an innate moral conscience, and, in addition, from the psychological fact that my conscience tells me that such and such an act is moral or good, one may infer that the act is in fact good. It is even more doubtful whether the genesis, the origin, of man's conscience, i. e.--whether conscience is innate or is the internalization of external norms and commands gotten from parents, teachers, other authority figures, or from society broadly speaking--provides any kind of criterion by which to judge whether the moral judgments made by that conscience are justified or veridical. That there is reason for strong doubt here may be seen in Fromm's treatment of the subject of conscience. He distinguishes between Humanistic conscience (ought-conscience) and Authoritarian conscience (fear-inspired must-



conscience), but at the same time acknowledges that the identical ethical commands, e. g., "not to kill, not to hate, not to be envious, and to love one's neighbors,"³⁰³ are commands of both Authoritarian and Humanistic conscience. If the ethical judgments here are justified or veridical, then it is obvious that their correctness is not determined by whether they are the commands of an Authoritarian or a Humanistic conscience, but rather by some other criteria. This will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter VIII below. It will suffice to conclude the remarks at this point by noting again that

(a) from the point of view of psychology as a descriptive discipline, our social psychologists have produced no empirical evidence to lend greater support to their hypothesis of the existence within man of an innate moral conscience, than the evidence for Freud's hypothesis of a superego the commands of which are internalized from external authority figures;

(b) from the point of view of the normative and moral preoccupations of our social psychologists, the question whether man possesses an innate ought-conscience or a superego must-conscience is of no substantial significance, since whether an action is moral or immoral

³⁰³Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 167, and infra, Chapter VIII, p. 559.



is not a function of its origin in one rather than another of these two kinds of conscience, but rather a function of the nature of the action itself, of the total context and situation in which the action occurs, and of the action's consequences.

V. Morality Is a Reaction-formation
Against the Evil Inherent in Man

Fromm's statement that it was "his [Freud's] view that morality is essentially a reaction formation against the evil inherent in man,"³⁰⁴ is quite puzzling. In the first place, I have not been able to find this statement or any statement equivalent to it, in any of Freud's writings which I have read. Secondly, in attributing this view to Freud, Fromm was guilty either of a serious conceptual confusion, or of simply dashing off a sloppy, irresponsible sentence without subsequently correcting it, or of using the term "reaction formation" in a vague, metaphorical sense rather than in the precise technical sense that the term has in Freudian doctrine.

By way of explaining and elaborating on his attribution to Freud of the view that morality is a "reaction-formation" against the evil in man, Fromm continues as follows:

³⁰⁴Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 34-35, and supra, p. 99.



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. . . . in . . . systems of ethics man established norms of social behavior in order to protect the individual and the group from the dangers of these impulses.³⁰⁵

But the view as to the nature and functions of ethical norms and ethical systems which Fromm attributes to Freud in this quotation, simply do not fit the Freudian conception of "Reaction-Formation."

Among the distinguishing features of Reaction-Formations are the following: (a) they are delusive; (b) they are exaggerated, overdone reactions; (c) they serve as a means of repressing (in the technical Freudian sense) that against which they react; and (d) they manifest themselves most often in obsessional neuroses. Reaction-Formations are among man's defense mechanisms. They are manifestations of a person's repression of instinctual desires or other wishes which cause him anxiety or fear. Let us look at one commentator's description of this phenomenon:

When one of the instincts produces anxiety by exerting pressure upon the ego either directly or by way of the superego, the ego may try to sidetrack the offensive impulse by concentrating upon its opposite. For example, if feelings of hate toward another person make one anxious, the ego can facilitate the flow of love in order to conceal the hostility. We might say that love is substituted for hate, but this is not true because the aggressive feelings still exist under the

³⁰⁵ Ibid.



affectionate exterior. It would be more appropriate to say that love is a mask which hides hate. This mechanism whereby one instinct is hidden from awareness by its opposite is called reaction formation. . . . what distinguishes love as a reaction formation from 'true' love? The principal distinguishing feature of reactive love is that of exaggeration. Reactive love protests too much; it is overdone, extravagant, showy, and affected. It is counterfeit, and . . . is usually easily detected. A person who is defending himself against anxiety by means of a reaction formation cannot deviate from expressing the opposite of what he really feels. His love, for instance, is not flexible. . . . it must be constantly on display as if any failure to exhibit it would cause the contrary feeling to come to the surface.

A phobia is an example of a reaction formation. The person wants what he fears. He is not afraid of the object; he is afraid of the wish for the object. The reactive fear prevents the dreaded wish from being fulfilled. . . . High ideals of virtue and goodness may be reaction formations against primitive object-cathexes rather than realistic values which are capable of being lived up to. Romantic notions of chastity and purity may mask crude sexual desires, altruism may hide selfishness, and piety may conceal sinfulness.³⁰⁶

Sometimes a reaction formation will satisfy the original wish which is being defended against. A mother who is afraid to admit that she resents her children may interfere so much in their lives, under the pretext of being concerned about their welfare and safety, that her overprotection is really a form of punishment.

Reaction formations are irrational adjustments to anxiety. They expend energy for deceptive and hypocritical purposes. They distort reality and they make the personality rigid and inflexible.³⁰⁷

It will also be instructive to look at one or two examples of what Freud himself says about Reaction Formations:

³⁰⁶ Calvin S. Hall, A Primer of Freudian Psychology, pp. 94-95. (Emphasis mine)

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 96. (Emphasis mine)



The 'counter-charges' from the ego against the demands made by instincts for satisfaction, mentioned already in connection with hysteria, are more strongly marked in the obsessional neurosis and govern the clinical picture in the form of what we call 'reaction-formations.'³⁰⁸

. . . the phantasies which are transformed into the symptoms are nowhere so manifest as in hysteria; the 'counter-charges' (anti-cathexes) or reaction-formations of the ego dominate the picture in the obsessional neurosis . . .³⁰⁹

These, then, are the phenomena Freud called Reaction-Formations. They are compulsive, delusive, self-deceptive, and their aim is to repress (not suppress or control), i. e., to mask, hide, conceal, prevent from reaching awareness, by driving into or keeping in the unconscious those instinctual or other desires and impulses which give one anxiety, or cause fear or shame. It is rather taxing to try and understand how these attributes could possibly be predicated of "ethical norms," "systems of ethics," or "norms of social behavior." The very essence of systems of ethics and norms of social behavior is to provide for individuals and groups affirmative moral imperatives, as well as negative moral imperatives, i. e., specifications as to the kinds of impulses, wishes, or actions one must control or suppress. Manifestly, therefore, to try to suggest that systems of

³⁰⁸ Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, p. 327.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 332.



ethics and norms of social behavior are really designed to repress, remove from the reach of awareness, the proscribed, anxiety-producing wish, is conceptual confusion indeed.

It may be interesting to speculate on the source of this confusion. It may arise out of the fact that, as Calvin Hall pointed out above, the instinctual and other anxiety-producing wishes that are repressed, so often are selfish, aggressive, destructive, antisocial, and the Reaction-Formations that are employed as the means through which to carry out the repression are the opposites of the repressed wishes. It is therefore natural that the Reaction-Formation often coincides with prevailing ethical norms. Thus, the Reaction-Formation to one's hostility toward someone will concentrate on exaggerated, compulsive love toward him. Rigid, puritanical attitudes on sex will be used to repress and remove from one's awareness one's acute sexual desires; exaggerated, showy charitableness will mask one's selfishness; ostentatious and sanctimonious piety will be used to cover up from oneself and others one's own unprincipled impulses. Now, in these instances, the attitudes and acts of love, chastity, charity, or piety do coincide with the prevalent ethical norms of our society. It is therefore the case that some Reaction-Formations, if we ignore the self-deception, distortion, overaction, compulsiveness, and unconscious hypocrisy built into them and look only at the actions themselves and their immediate results, do in fact turn out to be correctly judged as moral

or ethical actions. In other words, some, perhaps many, moral acts and attitudes, or acts and attitudes that in the eyes of the actor and of society have every appearance of being moral (though sometimes their exaggerated, rigid, showy, moralistic character shows through), are in fact Reaction-Formations, even as other types of act or attitude may be employed by the person (or his ego) as Reaction-Formations. And doubtless this is what Freud meant when he said that after the child's fourth or fifth year, when the early sexual impulses have been "overcome by repression," a period of latency follows,

which lasts until puberty and during which the reaction-formations of morality, shame, and disgust are built up.³¹⁰

The empirical facts therefore seem to be that some moral attitudes and acts, or some morality, are Reaction-Formations, and are among the defense mechanisms that are structured into the nature and behavior of man. It would therefore appear that using as a premise the empirical fact that some cases of morality are Reaction-Formations against "the evil" within certain individuals, Fromm proceeds to the non sequitur conclusion that it must follow that all morality "is a Reaction-Formation against the evil inherent in man," and charges this non-sequitur to Freud.

³¹⁰Freud, An Autobiographical Study, p. 66.



It seems clear that whereas Freud, always sensitive to subtle nuances and shadings in human nature and human behavior and never willing to simplify or to overlook complexities, pointed out that some individual acts and attitudes which appear to conform to the ethical norms of society are in fact Reaction-Formations, he never believed or maintained that all morality, in the sense of "ethical norms," "systems of ethics," or "norms of social behavior," is a Reaction-Formation. I believe we come more closely to the heart of Freud's view of the nature of ethics when we attend to his statements that "Ethics must be regarded as a therapeutic effort." The context in which this statement appears is Freud's discussion of the "cultural super-ego." To explain this idea, Freud develops the analogy between the process of cultural evolution and the path of individual development, and says that

It can be maintained that the community, too, develops a superego, under whose influence cultural evolution proceeds. . . . the cultural superego, just like that of an individual, sets up high ideals and standards. . . . Those of its demands which deal with the relations of human beings to one another are comprised under the name of ethics.³¹¹

Dealing as it does with the relations between human beings, ethics deals, as Freud notes, with the most difficult problem in civilization. Human nature being what it is, man often

³¹¹Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, pp. 136-138.

cannot live up to the "Ethical standards of the cultural superego."³¹² Man's ego does not have "unlimited power over his id," and the power of controlling the id "cannot be increased beyond certain limits" even in "so-called normal people." If one asks of men more than they are capable of, "one produces revolt or neurosis in individuals or makes them unhappy."³¹³ The demand to love our neighbor as ourselves is, according to Freud, such an excessive demand, and is a very weak defense against aggression. When such unreasonable demands go too far, ethics becomes ineffective. Under such conditions

'Natural' ethics, as it has been called, has nothing to offer here beyond the narcissistic satisfaction of thinking oneself better than others.³¹⁴

In the light of his realistic depiction of human nature and of the inherent limitations on the effectiveness of ethics, how much more meaningful is Freud's view of ethics as therapy (with limitations on its effectiveness), the goal of which is always uncovering rather than repression and concealment, self-knowledge rather than self-deception, etc.:

³¹² Ibid., p. 139.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 139-40.



. . . ethics does in fact deal predominantly with the point which is easily seen to be the sorest of all in any scheme of civilization. Ethics must be regarded therefore as a therapeutic effort: as an endeavor to achieve something through the standards imposed by the superego which had not been attained by the work of civilization in other ways. We already know . . . that the question is how to dislodge the greatest obstacle to civilization, the constitutional tendency in men to aggression against one another . . .³¹⁵

W. Culture Is Only the Sublimation of Suppressed Id Impulses

The force of this criticism is not at all clear to me. On the one hand it seems to be saying that, since in Freudian theory the genesis of culture ("the highest cultural, artistic, and social achievements of the human mind"--General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, p. 23; "the higher mental operations, scientific, artistic, ideological activities"--Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 63) is in the sublimation of sexual impulses, id-impulses, or more generally instincts, and in their being displacement by these higher goals; and since the instinctual, sexual and id-impulses are lower, more primitive, "animalistic" (Allport, see supra, p. 104); this throws a disparaging shadow on the whole phenomenon of culture, and raises doubts about the value of culture and its significance in the life of individual human beings and of mankind. This is a rather egregious example of the so-called "genetic fallacy," that

³¹⁵Ibid., p. 138.

is, the fallacy of judging the nature and value of a given phenomenon by evaluating its antecedents or the circumstances of its genesis, and I shall comment on this no further.

On the other hand this criticism seems to say, in S. E. Asch's words, that Freud's "genetic emphasis . . . virtually denied the possibility of significant development after the first few years of life."³¹⁶ Or it seems to say, in Allport's formulation, that since "man can never escape the ferocity and passion of his nature," and since "sublimation is the best we can hope for," therefore in Freudian doctrine "there is no genuine transformation of motives."³¹⁷ What is implied here is that the doctrine of sublimation denies any independent, autonomous existence to culture and its manifestations, and that their status is most precarious. Or, to put it in another way, since according to Freud the manifestations of culture are "object-substitutes" or "energy-displacements" of the sexual or other instinctual impulses, it therefore follows that the sexual impulses are the "reality," and the manifestations of culture are "secondary in character" (Allport), a kind of shadowy epiphenomenon which has no autonomous existence.

³¹⁶Asch, Social Psychology, p. 19.

³¹⁷Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 552, and supra, p. 86.



But this again is to misread Freud, and to misunderstand his developmental theory and thus an important part of his theory of human nature. With his consistent appreciation of the endless complexity of man Freud described psychoanalysis as

. . . a dynamic conception which reduces mental life to the interplay of reciprocally urging and checking forces.³¹⁸

The urging forces Freud called the "cathexes," and the inner checking forces, or the forces of inner frustration (as distinguished from external frustration) Freud called the "anti-cathexes." For every cathexis there is a natural cathexis-object. However, it is part of Freudian theory that when the natural cathexis-object is not available, the cathexis can shift to another object that is available. In other words, the psychological energy in instinctual impulses is a floating energy, and is displaceable from one object to others. For example, in the case of oral gratification, the energy behind this impulse will undergo displacements in the course of a person's development, from sucking the nipple of mother's breast, to sucking one's thumb, to sucking a candy sucker, to chewing gum, smoking, kissing, drinking, singing, whistling, talking, and other adult oral activities. Now, as Calvin Hall points out,

³¹⁸ Quoted by Calvin S. Hall, A Primer of Freudian Psychology, p. 46.



The causes of displacement are the same as those that produce all personality development, namely, maturation, frustration, conflict, inadequacy, and anxiety.³¹⁹

Thus, in much of human life the substitute objects that displace the cathexes-objects of sexual impulses in particular, are the "higher" cultural goals of the type listed by Freud in the quotations immediately above, or the "adult acquisitions" mentioned by Allport, such as altruism, idealism, mature tastes, etc.³²⁰ This type of displacement is what Freud calls "sublimation." Let us look at Freud's own words:

. . . these sexual impulses have contributed invaluablely to the highest cultural, artistic, and social achievements of the human mind. . . .

We believe that civilization has been built up, under the pressure of the struggle for existence, by sacrifices in gratification of the primitive impulses, and that it is to a great extent for ever being recreated, as each individual, successively joining the community, repeats the sacrifice of his instinctive pleasures for the common good. The sexual are among the most important of the instinctive forces thus utilized: they are in this way sublimated, that is to say, their energy is turned aside from its sexual goal and diverted towards other ends, no longer sexual and socially more valuable.³²¹

Displacement, sublimation, and the substitute-objects and attitudes toward them are thus not a minor or

³¹⁹Hall, A Primer of Freudian Psychology, p. 80.

³²⁰Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 148; supra, p. 86.

³²¹Freud, General Introduction, pp. 23-24.



incidental part of human nature and human life; indeed, they are of its very essence. This process continues throughout a person's life. Hall summarizes this in the following passage:

The ability to displace energy from one object to another is the most powerful instrumentality for the development of personality. . . . The whole complex network of adult interests, preferences, values, attitudes, and attachments, and the acquisition and abandonment of them throughout life, are made possible by displacement. If psychological energy were not displaceable . . . there could be no development of personality.³²²

Sublimation and the possibility of culture are thus predicated on two capacities within man:

- 1) Civilization is built on renunciation of instinctual gratifications . . . the existence of civilization presupposes the non-gratification . . . of powerful instinctual urgencies.³²³
- 2) Instincts have to be induced to change the conditions of their gratification, to find it along other paths . . .³²⁴

Displacement and sublimation and their products are thus an integral and natural part of the growth and life of personality, and of the growth and life of society. In view of all the many continuing and successive displacements throughout a person's life, and in view of the cumulative

³²²Hall, A Primer of Freudian Psychology, pp. 86-87.

³²³Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 63.

³²⁴Ibid.



cultural creations attributed by Freud to the process of sublimation, it seems hard to understand Allport's and Asch's charge that in the Freudian theory of human nature there is no "transformation of motives," or that there is no "possibility of significant development after the first few years of life." While Freud leaves no doubt that the energy is that of the original instinctual impulse; and while after displacement occurs there still continues to exist a tension between the original, non-gratified impulse and its contemporary, sublimated displacement, because the sublimated object-choice does not yield the complete gratification that the original impulse sought; nevertheless, Freud would insist that the displaced, sublimated cathexis is contemporary and in a real sense autonomous. It seems to me that Freud's own words point to this conclusion. He says that the displacement process

. . . consists in the abandonment, on the part of the sexual impulse, of an aim previously found either in the gratification of a component-impulse or in the gratification incidental to reproduction, and the adoption of a new aim--which new aim, though genetically related to the first, can no longer be regarded as sexual, but must be called social in character. We call this process sublimation, by which we subscribe to the general standard which estimates social aims above sexual (ultimately selfish) aims.³²⁵

It thus seems that for Freud the transformation of motives is genuine. Part of the psychological constitution of any

³²⁵Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, p. 302. (Emphasis mine)



human being, in addition to the many other ingredients and propensities discussed in the present chapter, are the cathexes, the wishes, the strivings, the hopes, the ambitions, the plans, the intentions which have become part of him in the process of growth and development with the thousand and one displacements and sublimations that it entails. It is rather strange that Allport, with his own elaborately developed and argued theory of the "functional autonomy of motives" lacked the insight into Freudian theory to appreciate this part of it.

X. Conclusion

It has not been the purpose of this long chapter to present a systematic exposition of Freud's theory of human nature, or a critique of it. Rather, its purpose has been to examine in some detail the major lines of attack directed against Freudian theory by our social psychologists. As part of such an examination, it has been our hope to exhibit some of the presuppositions concerning human nature held by our social psychologists, as well as some of their methodological inadequacies, logical defects, and conceptual confusions, and thus to show how these presuppositions and the other shortcomings result in their misinterpretations and distortions of Freudian doctrine. Inevitably, in the course of such an examination, the demands of clarity made it necessary to juxtapose and contrast the Freudian position against the position of one or more of our group of social



psychologists. Such juxtapositions and contrasts of the two respective positions in turn entail the passing of a judgment, directly or by implication, on these two positions. This could hardly have been done with any degree of adequacy without supplying extensive documentation out of Freud's writings, and unless we provided extended sketching and interpretation of some of Freud's fundamental concepts and theories.

Accordingly, if out of this examination a reasonably faithful portrait has emerged of some of the principal features of man in Freudian psychology, this is all to the good. It will provide some of the background against which to perceive more sharply the foreground image of man in the theories of our social psychologists, when this image is more fully developed in Chapter V. However, as a result of this examination of Freud's theory of human nature, we can now begin to see adumbrated the outlines of our social psychologists' portrait of man. This should facilitate the completion of this full portrait, and thus help advance further our inquiry into, and philosophical analysis of, their concept of human nature.

It will be instructive, however, by way of summarizing our discussion of some of Freud's major contributions to the understanding of man, to reproduce here two quotations, one from the work of a philosopher, and the other from the pen of an empirical psychologist. We begin



with the philosopher, Max Scheler, whose statements on the nature of man, and on Freud's theory of human nature, are particularly germane as a sequel to our discussion above of sublimation, ethics, and conscience in the last three sections of the present chapter, as well as to other discussions in this chapter. In his book, Man's Place in Nature, Scheler concludes his chapter entitled "The Essence of Spirit" as follows:

Man is the kind of being who, by means of the spirit, can take an ascetic attitude toward life. He can suppress and repress his own vital drives and deny them the nourishment of perceptual images and representations. Compared with the animal that always says 'Yes,' to reality, even when it avoids it and flees from it, man is the being who can say 'No,' the 'ascetic of life,' the protestant par excellence, against mere reality

For Freud, too, man is the being who represses his instincts. Only because man has this capacity for repression, not now and then, but as a permanent capacity, does he accomplish two things. First, he erects a superstructure of ideas above the world of sensory experience. Secondly, by this very means, he makes accessible to his spirit the latent energy of the repressed drives. In other words, man is capable of sublimating his instinctual energy into spiritual activity.³²⁶

The empirical psychologist is Jerome S. Bruner,

³²⁶Max Scheler, Man's Place in Nature, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962), pp. 54-55. Scheler fails to distinguish clearly here between "suppression" and "repression" (in its Freudian meaning) of instincts, drives, etc. Since he uses both terms--"he can suppress and repress"--it is to be presumed that he was aware of some distinction between the two. However, his failure to make the distinction clear does not affect adversely the main thrust of his statements in this quotation.



whose special fields of research are cognition and learning. In his paper "Freud and the Image of Man," we find a brilliant and eloquent summary of Freud's theory of human nature:

It remained for Freud to present the image of man as the unfinished product of nature: struggling against unreason, impelled by driving inner vicissitudes and urges that had to be contained if man were to live in society, host alike to seeds of madness and majesty, never fully free from an infancy anything but innocent. What Freud was proposing was that man at his best and man at his worst is subject to a common set of explanations: that good and evil grow from a common process.³²⁷

³²⁷Jerome S. Bruner, "Freud and the Image of Man," *Freud and the 20th Century*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 279-280.