American Handbook of Psychiatry

PSYCHIATRY & MORAL VALUES

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e-Book 2015 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *American Handbook of Psychiatry: Volume 1* edited by Silvano Arietti

Created in the United States of America

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Any investigation that would undertake to cover the entire field of problems posed by psychiatry with regard to ethics would unavoidably lose itself in generalities—not only because the problem and the schools of thought that claim to be part of psychiatry are innumerable, but also because the ethical implications themselves are of such a diverse nature that they are practically incomparable. This is why we have deliberately chosen to limit this chapter to one branch of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and to one author, Freud. There are two reasons for this: first, it is Freud's work that exercises the greatest influence on contemporary culture at the popular as well as the scientific level of discussion; second, his work permits us to pose the problem of the relations between psychiatry and ethics in the most radical terms. At first glance the Freudian analysis of morality appears to be a traumatic negation of traditional moral beliefs. But the real problems, those that surpass ordinary banality, only take shape beyond this first shock. When we no longer resist, when we no longer seek to justify ourselves, we discover what is essential—namely, that we must not ask psychiatry and psychoanalysis for an alternative answer to unchanged questions, but for a new manner of asking

moral questions.

A preliminary question is worth consideration: is psychiatry, and, above all, Freudian psychoanalysis, competent to deal with ethics? Someone might object that Freud's writings on art, morals, and religion constitute the extension of individual psychology to collective psychology and, beyond psychological phenomena, to a domain where psychiatry is no longer competent, the highest realm of human existence. Certainly it was during the last part of his life that Freud's great texts about culture accumulated: *The Future of an Illusion* (1927); *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930); *Moses and Monotheism* (1937-1939). But it is not a question of a belated extension from analytic experience to a general theory of culture. Already in 1908 Freud had written "Creative Writers and Daydreaming." *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's "Gradiva"* dates from 1907; *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* from 1910; *Totem and Taboo* from 1913; "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" from 1915; "The 'Uncanny' " from 1919; "A Childhood Recollection from *Dichtung und Wahrheit"* from 1917; "The Moses of Michelangelo" from 1914; *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* from 1921; "A Neurosis of Demonical Possession in the Seventeenth Century" from 1923; and "Dostoevsky and Parricide" from 1928. The great "intrusions" into the domains of aesthetics, sociology, morality, and religion are strictly contemporary with texts as important as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, The Ego and the Id,* and, above all, the "Papers on Metapsychology."

The truth of the matter is that these works are not just "applied" psychoanalysis, but psychoanalysis pure and simple.

How is this possible? What justifies psychoanalysis in speaking from its very beginning about art, ethics, and religion, not as a secondary extension of its task, but in conformity with its original intention?

The question is all the more legitimate in that the first intersection between psychoanalysis and a general theory of culture precedes all the works we have just cited and dates from the first interpretation of the Greek myth of Oedipus in a letter to Fliess of May 31, 1897: "Another presentiment tells me, as if I knew it already—although I do not know anything at all—that I am about to discover the source of morality." He clarifies this discovery in a second letter (October 15, 1897): "Only one idea of general value has occurred to me. I have found love of the mother and jealousy of the father in my own case, too, and now believe it to be a general phenomenon of early childhood. ... If that is the case, the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex,* in spite of all the rational objections to the inexorable fate that the story presupposes, becomes intelligible, and one can understand why later fate dramas were such failures. . . . but the Greek myth seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he has felt traces of it in himself. Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy, and this dream-fulfillment played out in reality causes everyone to recoil in horror, with the full measure

of repression which separates his infantile from his present state." In one fell swoop Freud claims to have found the interpretation for a private dream and a public myth. From its very beginning psychoanalysis is both a theory of neurosis and a theory of culture.

Once again, how is this possible?

The principal answer is as follows. The object of psychoanalysis is not human desire as such—by which we mean wishes, libido, instinct, and eros (all these words having a specific signification in their specific contexts)—but human desire as understood in a more or less conflictual relation with a cultural world, whether this world is represented by parents —especially by the father—or by authorities, by anonymous external or internal prohibitions, whether articulated in discourse or incorporated in works of art or social, political, and religious institutions. In one way or another the object of psychoanalysis is always *desire plus culture.* This is why Freud does not extend concepts that could have first been elaborated within a sort of neutralized cultural framework to cultural realities. Whether we consider *The Interpretation of Dreams* or the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* the instinctual level is confronted from the very beginning by something like censorship, "dams," prohibitions, ideals. The nuclear figure of the father is merely the system's center of gravity. And even when we claim to isolate a human instinct, or a genetic phase of that instinct, we reach it only in the

expressions of this instinct at the level of linguistic or prelinguistic signs and nowhere else. Analytic experience itself, insofar as it is an exchange of words and silences, of speaking and listening, belongs to what we can call the order of signs, and as such becomes part of that human communication on which culture reposes. There is a psychoanalytic institution in the proper sense of the word from the codification of the therapy session right up to the organization of psychoanalytic societies.

For these historical and systematic reasons psychoanalysis is the theory of *the dialectic between desire and culture.* Consequently no human phenomenon is foreign to it to the degree that all human experience implies this dialectic.

The result of the unified structure of psychoanalytic theory is that it does not approach ethics as an isolated problem, but as a particular aspect of *culture*, itself considered as a whole. Psychoanalysis is a global theory that touches culture itself as a totality. The originality of Freudianism consists entirely in this. And it is by way of a global theory of culture that psychoanalysis takes up the phenomenon of morality.

An "Economic" Model of the Phenomenon of Culture

What is "culture"? Let us first say negatively that there is no question here of opposing civilization and culture to each other. This refusal to use a

distinction that seems likely to become classic is itself very enlightening. There is not, on the one hand, a utilitarian enterprise to dominate the forces of nature that would be civilization and, on the other hand, a disinterested, idealistic undertaking to realize values that would be culture. This distinction, which can make sense from a point of view other than that of psychoanalysis, no longer holds as soon as we decide to approach culture from the point of view of a balance sheet of libidinal investments and counterinvestments.

This economic interpretation dominates all Freudian considerations about culture.

From this point of view the first phenomenon to be considered is coercion, because of the *repression of instincts* that it implies. It is on this note that *The Future of an Illusion* opens. Culture, Freud notes, began with the prohibition of the oldest desires: incest, cannibalism, murder. And yet coercion does not constitute the whole of culture. *Illusion,* whose future Freud is examining, finds its place in a larger cultural task of which prohibition is merely the outer manifestation. Freud delineates the problem with three questions: To what point can we *diminish* the burden of the instinctual sacrifices imposed on man? How to *reconcile* them with those renouncements that are ineluctable? How, beyond this, to offer individuals satisfying *compensations* for these sacrifices? These questions are not, as we might first believe, about culture; rather they constitute culture itself. What is in

question in the conflict between prohibition and instinct is this triple problematic: the diminution of the instinctual burden; reconciliation with the ineluctable; and compensation for sacrifice.

But only an economic interpretation can make sense of this task. Here we reach the unitary point of view that not only holds together all Freud's essays on art, morality, and religion, but also connects "individual psychology" and "collective psychology," and roots them in "metapsychology."

This economic interpretation of culture is displayed in two moments, especially well- illustrated in *Civilization and Its Discontents.* First, there is everything that we can say without recourse to the death instinct. Then there is what we cannot say without making this instinct intervene. Short of this point of inflection that opens it to the tragic within culture, the essay advances with a calculated simplicity. Culture's economy appears to coincide with what we could call a general "erotics." The goals sought by the individual and those that animate culture appear as sometimes converging, sometimes diverging figures of the same Eros. It is the same "erotics" that binds group together and that brings an individual to look for pleasure and flee suffering —the triple suffering that the world, his body, and other men inflict upon him. Culture's development is, as is the growth of an individual from infancy to adulthood, the fruit of Eros and Ananke, of love and work. It is the fruit of love more than of work, however, because the necessity to be united in work to

exploit nature is insignificant compared to the libidinal tie that unites individuals into a single social body.

It seems then that it is the same Eros that animates the search for individual happiness and that wants to unite men into ever vaster groups. But the paradox quickly appears: as a struggle against nature, culture gives men power heretofore conferred on the gods, but this resemblance to the gods leaves man unsatisfied: the discontent of civilization. . . . Why is this? We could undoubtedly account for certain tensions between the individual and society solely on the basis of this general "erotics," but we cannot account for the grave conflict that makes culture tragic. It is easy, for example, to explain that family ties resist being expanded to larger groups. For every adolescent the passage from one circle to the other necessarily appears as rupturing the oldest and the narrowest tie. We understand, too, that something about feminine sexuality resists this transfer of the privately sexual to the libidinal energies of the social tie. We can go even further in the direction of conflicting situations without encountering radical contradictions. Culture, we know, imposes sacrifices of enjoyment on all sexuality—prohibition of incest, censorship of infantile sexuality, supercilious channeling of sexuality into the narrow ways of legitimacy and monogamy, imposition of the imperative to procreate, and so forth. But however painful these sacrifices may be and as inextricable as these conflicts may be, they still do not constitute true antagonism. We can even say that, on the one hand, the libido resists with all

its inertial force the task that culture imposes upon it to abandon all its previous positions, and, on the other hand, that the libidinal tie of society so feeds on the energy deducted from sexuality as to menace it with atrophy. But all this is so little "tragic" that we might even dream of a sort of truce or settlement between the individual libido and the social tie.

So the question arises again: why does man fail to be happy? Why is man unsatisfied insofar as he is a cultural being?

It is here that the analysis changes direction: consider what is laid down for man, an absurd commandment, love his neighbor as himself; an impossible demand, love his enemies; a dangerous order that squanders love, rewards the wicked, and leads to loss for anyone imprudent enough to apply it. But the truth that is hidden behind this *unreasonable imperative* is the unreasonableness of an instinct that escapes a simple erotics:

> The element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, 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,* [p. 111].

The instinct that so perturbs the relation of man to man and that

requires society to rise up as an implacable dispenser of justice is, as we have recognized, the death instinct, the primordial hostility of man for man.

With the introduction of the death instinct the whole economy of the essay is recast. While the "social erotic" could consistently appear to be the *extension* of the sexual erotic, either as a displacement of object or sublimation of goal, the division of Eros and death in two on the plane of culture can no longer appear as the extension of a conflict that could be better understood on the plane of the individual. On the contrary, it is the tragic in culture that serves as the privileged revelator of an antagonism that remains silent and ambiguous at the level of an individual life and psyche. Certainly Freud had forged his doctrine of the death instinct as early as 1920 *(Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), without accentuating the *social* aspect of aggressivity, and within an apparently *biological* framework, but it remained something of an adventurous speculation, despite experimental support for the theory (repetition neurosis, infantile play, the tendency to relive painful episodes, and so forth). In 1930 Freud saw more clearly that the death instinct remained a *silent* instinct "in" the living being and that it only became *manifest* in its social expression of aggressivity and destruction. It is in this sense that we said above that the interpretation of culture becomes the revelator of the antagonism of instincts.

Thus in the second half of the essay we see a sort of rereading of the

theory of instincts beginning from their cultural expression. We understand better why the death instinct is, in the psychological scheme of things, both an unavoidable inference and an unassignable experience. We never grasp it but in conjunction with Eros. Eros utilizes it by diverting it from one person onto another. It is mingled with Eros when it takes the form of sadism, and we surprise it working against the individual himself through masochistic satisfaction. In short, it only betrays itself when mixed with Eros, sometimes doubling the object libido, sometimes overloading the narcissistic ego libido. It is unmasked and revealed as anticulture. Thus there is a progressive revelation of the death instinct across the three levels, biological, psychological, and cultural. Its antagonism becomes less and less silent to the extent that Eros serves first to unite the individual to himself, then the ego to its object, and finally individuals into ever larger groups. As it is repeated from level to level, the struggle between Eros and death becomes more and more manifest and attains its complete meaning only at the level of culture:

> This aggressive instinct is the derivative and the main representative of the death instinct which we have found alongside Eros and which shares world-dominion with it. And now, I think, the meaning of the evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species. And it is this battle of the giants that our nurse-maids try to appease with their lullaby about Heaven." [p. 122]

But this is not all, for in the last chapters of *Civilization and Its Discontents,* the relation between psychology and the theory of culture is completely inverted. At the beginning of this essay it was the libido's economy, borrowed from the metapsychology, that served as guide in the elucidation of the phenomenon of culture. Then with the introduction of the death instinct, the interpretation of culture and the dialectic of instincts were seen to refer to one another in a circular movement. The sense of guilt is introduced, in effect, as the "means" by which civilization holds aggressivity in check. The cultural interpretation is pushed so far that Freud can affirm that the express intention of his essay was "to represent the sense of guilt as the most important problem in the development of civilization" (p. 134) and to show, moreover, why the progress of civilization must be paid for by a loss of happiness due to the reinforcement of this feeling. He cites the famous words of Hamlet in support of this conception: "Thus Conscience does make cowards of us all . . ."

If, therefore, the sense of guilt is the specific means by which civilization holds aggressivity in check, it is not surprising that *Civilization and Its Discontents* should contain the most developed interpretation of this feeling, whose dynamics, however, are fundamentally psychological. But the psychology of this feeling is only possible if we begin with an "economic" interpretation of culture. From the point of view of individual psychology, the sense of guilt appears to be merely the effect of an internalized, introjected

aggressivity that the superego has taken over in the form of conscience and that it turns back against the ego. But its whole "economy" only appears when the need for punishment is placed within a cultural perspective: "Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city" (pp. 123—124).

Thus the economic, and, if we may say so, the structural interpretation of the sense of guilt depends upon a cultural perspective, and it is only within the framework of the structural interpretation that the diverse partial genetic interpretations elaborated during different periods by Freud concerning the murder of the primeval father and the instituting of remorse can be situated and understood. Considered by itself, this explanation remains somewhat problematic because of the contingency that it introduces into the history of a feeling that elsewhere is presented as having the characteristics of "fatal inevitability" (p. 132). However, the contingent character of this development, as it is reconstituted by the genetic explanation, is attenuated as soon as the genetic explanation itself is subordinated to the structural, economic interpretation:

> Whether one has killed one's father or has abstained from doing so is not the really decisive thing. One is bound to feel guilty in either case, for the sense of guilt is an expression of the conflict due to ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between Eros and the instinct of destruction or death. This conflict is set going as soon as men are faced with the task of living

> together. So long as the community assumes no other form than that of the family, the conflict is bound to express itself in the Oedipus complex, to establish the conscience and to create the first sense of guilt. When an attempt is made to widen the community, the same conflict is continued in forms which are dependent on the past; and it is strengthened and results in a further intensification of the sense of guilt. Since civilization obeys an internal erotic impulsion which causes human beings to unite in a closely-knit group, it can only achieve this aim through an ever-increasing reinforcement of the sense of guilt. What began in relation to the father is completed in relation to the group. If civilization is a necessary course of development from the family to humanity as a whole, then—as a result of the inborn conflict arising from ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between the trends of love and death—there is inextricably bound up with it an increase of the sense of guilt, which will perhaps reach heights that the individual finds hard to tolerate. [pp. 132-133]

Examining these two texts has not yet told us anything specific about ethics, but a framework has been assembled wherein the ethical problem can be placed in new terms drawn from the economic function of culture considered as a whole. We can say two contrary things about this theory of culture. On the one hand, to the degree that all processes of culture are viewed from the economic point of view, we can say that psychoanalysis is a reductive theory. We will consider this interpretation at the end of this essay. But we must also say in an inverse sense that the supremacy of the economic point of view could only be established by the intermediary of an interpretation of cultural phenomena that gives a voice, an expression, a language to those forces that by themselves are mute. The conflicts between instincts that are at the root of these cultural phenomena can only be approached, in effect, within the cultural sphere where they find an indirect

expression. The economics passes through a hermeneutic.

The Economy of Ethical Phenomena

It is now possible to deal directly with the interpretation of moral phenomena in Freudian theory. By understanding them in a new way, psychoanalysis can, in effect, change our very "lived" moral experience. But as we said at the beginning of this chapter, when psychoanalysis turns its gaze toward morality, it is received as trauma and aggression by the uninitiated. Let us therefore cross this wasteland in Freud's company.

We will consider successively the clinical- descriptive, the genetic-explanatory, and finally the economic-theoretical, where we will rejoin the level attained directly in the preceding analysis of the global phenomenon of culture.

1. If we limit ourselves to the properly descriptive, Freud's discovery about morality consists essentially in applying to ethical phenomena the instruments that had proved themselves in the description of pathological phenomena such as obsessional neurosis, melancholy, and masochism. This allows us to extend concepts forged in the clinic such as cathexis, repression, and defense mechanisms, to this new order of phenomena. Morality then appears as annexed to the pathological sphere. But to assure this extension of descriptive concepts forged in contact with dreams and neuroses, it was

necessary to extend the unconscious character of the sphere of the repressed to that sphere of repressing that Freud calls the *superego.* This is why Freud adds a new topography (id, ego, superego) to his first topography (unconscious, preconscious, conscious) that allows him to account for the fundamentally unconscious character of the processes by which the agency of repression itself is constituted. The new agencies required to take up the ethical phenomenon are not so much places as roles in a personology. Ego, id, and superego are expressions that denote the relation of the personal to the anonymous and suprapersonal in the founding of the ego. The very question of the *ego* is a new question with respect to the question of consciousness treated in *The Interpretation of Dreams.* To become an ego is different from becoming conscious, that is, lucid, present to oneself, and attentive to reality. Rather, becoming an ego concerns the alternative of being dependent or autonomous. This is no longer a phenomenon of perception (either internal or external perception), but of strength and weakness, that is, of mastery. According to the title of one of the chapters of *The Ego and the Id,* the second topography has its end in "The Ego's Relations of Dependence" (Chapter 5). These relations of dependence are master-slave relations: dependence of the ego on the id; dependence of the ego on the world; dependence of the ego on the superego. Through these alienated relations a personology is outlined. The role of the ego, carried by the personal pronoun, is constituted in relation to the anonymous, the sublime, and the real.

These new considerations, which are not contained in the trilogy unconscious-preconscious-conscious, may be introduced in a properly descriptive fashion. What in effect, from a properly clinical point of view, is the superego? Freud gives a very revealing synonym for it in the third chapter of *The Ego and the Id.* He says, "ego ideal *or* superego." *The New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* are more specific: "But let us return to the superego. We have alloted to it the functions of self-observation, of conscience and of [maintaining] the ideal" (p. 66).

From observation Freud designates this division of self experienced as a feeling of being observed, watched, criticized, condemned: the superego manifests itself as an eye and a regard.

Conscience, in turn, designates the strictness and cruelty of this experience. It resists our actions like Socrates' demon, which says "No," and condemns us after the action. Thus not only is the ego watched, but also it is mistreated by its inner and superior other. We need not emphasize that these two traits of observations and condemnation are in no way borrowed from a Kantian style of reflection on the condition of the good will and the *a priori* structure of obligation, but from clinical experience. This split between the observer and the rest of the ego is revealed in a greatly exaggerated way in the delusion of being observed, and melancholy declares its cruelty.

As for the ideal it is described as follows: the superego "is also the vehicle of the ego ideal by which the ego measures itself, which it emulates and whose demand for ever greater perfection it strives to fulfill" (pp. 64-65). At first glance it may seem that no pathological model presides over this analysis. Is it not a question here of moral aspiration, of the desire to conform to, of forming oneself in the image of, of having the same content as a model? The preceding text does permit such an analysis. But Freud is always more attentive to the character of constraint than to the spontaneity of the responses that the ego gives to the demands of the superego. Moreover, placed with the two preceding traits, this third characteristic takes on a coloration that we can readily call pathological in the clinical and the Kantian sense of the word. Kant spoke of the "pathology of desire"; Freud speaks of the "pathology of duty" and its modes of observation, condemnation, and idealization.

The pathological approach reveals the initial situation of morality as alienated and alienating. A "pathology of duty" is just as instructive as a pathology of desire. In the final analysis it is no more than a prolongation of the latter. In effect, the ego oppressed by the superego is in a situation vis-a-vis this internal stranger analogous to the ego confronted by the pressure of its desires. In terms of the superego we are "foreign" to ourselves. Thus Freud speaks of the superego as an "internal foreign territory" (p. 57).

We must not ask of psychoanalysis what it cannot give: the origin of the ethical problem, its founding principle; but what it can give: the source and the genesis of this problem. The difficult problem of identification has its roots here. The question is how can I become myself, beginning from another, such as the father? The advantage of a thought that begins by rejecting the primordial character of the ethical ego is that it displaces our attention to the process of interiorization by which the external becomes internal. That way not only the proximity with Nietzsche is discovered, but also the possibility of a confrontation with Hegel and his concept of the doubling of consciousness by which it becomes self-consciousness. Certainly by rejecting the primordial character of the ethical phenomenon, Freud can only encounter morality as the humiliation of desire, as prohibition and not as aspiration. But the limitation of his point of view is the counterpart of its coherence. If the ethical phenomenon first appears in a wounding of desire, it is justifiable by a general erotics, and the ego, prey to its diverse masters, again falls under an interpretation bound up with an economics.

Such is the clinical description of the moral phenomenon. This description, in turn, calls for an explanation that can only be genetic. If, in effect, moral reality presents characteristics so markedly inauthentic, it must be treated as derived and not as original. “Since [the superego] goes back to the influence of parents, educators and so on, we learn still more of its significance if we turn to those who are its sources” (p. 67). This declaration

from the *New Introductory Lectures* is a good expression of the function of genetic explanation in a system that does not recognize either the original character of the *cogito* or its ethical dimension. Genetic explanation takes the place of a transcendental foundation.

It would be fruitless to argue that Freudianism in its basic intention is anything other than a variety of evolutionism or moral geneticism. In every case, study of the texts allows us to affirm that beginning dogmatically, Freudianism does not cease to render its own explanation more problematic to itself to the extent that it carries it out.

For one thing the proposed genesis does not constitute an exhaustive explanation. The genetic explanation reveals a source of authority —the parents—that only transmits a prior force of constraint and aspiration. The text cited above continues, "A child's superego is in fact constructed on the model not of its parents but of its parents' sugerego; the contents which fill it are the same and it becomes the vehicle of tradition and all the time-resisting judgments of value which have propagated themselves in this manner from generation to generation." Therefore, it would be fruitless to seek a full justification for moral judgments within genetic explanation. Their source is somehow given in the world of culture. The genetic explanation only circumscribes the earliest phenomenon of authority without really exhausting it.

2. Genetic explanation depends on the convergence of ontogenesis and phylogenesis, in other words, on the convergence of the psychoanalysis of the infant and that of primitive societies.

One thing that strikes every reader of Freud's first writings is the lightning character of his discovery of the Oedipus complex, which was simultaneously recognized as being both an individual drama and the collective destiny of humanity, both a psychological fact and the source of morality, both the origin of neurosis and the origin of culture. The Oedipus complex receives its intimately personal character from the discovery that Freud made through his own self-analysis. But at the same time its general character is suddenly glimpsed in the background of this individual experience. If his self-analysis unveils the striking effect, the compulsive aspect of the Greek legend, the myth, in return, attests to the fatality that adheres to the individual experience. Perhaps it is within this global intuition of a coincidence between an individual experience and universal destiny that we must look for the real motivation (which no anthropological investigation could exhaust) of all the Freudian attempts to articulate the ontogenesis, the individual's secret, in terms of the phylogenesis, our universal destiny. The scope of this universal drama is apparent from the beginning. It is attested to by the extension of the interpretation of *Oedipus Rex* to the personage of Hamlet: if "the hysterical Hamlet" hesitates to kill his mother's lover, it is because within him lies "the obscure memory that he himself had meditated

the same deed against his father because of his passion for his mother" (p. 224). This is a brilliant and decisive comparison, for if Oedipus reveals the aspect of destiny, Hamlet reveals the aspect of guilt attached to this complex. It was not by accident that as early as 1897, Freud was citing Hamlet's words, "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all . . ." on which he remarks, "His conscience is his unconscious feeling of guilt."

Now what gives the individual's secret a universal destiny and an ethical character, if not the passage through institutions? The Oedipus complex is the dream of incest when "incest is antisocial and civilization consists in a progressive renunciation of it" (p. 210). Thus the repression that belongs to everyone's history of desire coincides with one of the most formidable cultural institutions, the prohibition of incest. The Oedipus complex poses the great conflict between civilization and instincts that Freud never stopped commenting on from " 'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness" (1908) and *Totem and Taboo* (1913), to *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) and *Why War?* (1933). Repression and culture, intrapsychical institution and social institution, coincide in this exemplary point.

Can phylogenesis be carried beyond ontogenesis? We might think so from reading *Totem and Taboo* (we are thinking of the section dealing with taboos: Chapter 1, "The Horror of Incest," and Chapter 2, "Taboo and

Emotional Ambivalence"). As is well known, the kernel of his explanation is constituted by putting together the prohibition of incest as established by anthropology and the Oedipus complex as it comes from clinical study of obsessional neurosis. But, in truth, *Totem and Taboo* only provides the occasion for a psychoanalytic interpretation of anthropology in which psychoanalysis rediscovers what it already knew, although now on the scale of human history.

The guiding thread of the analogy between the history of an individual and the history of the species is furnished by the structural kinship between taboo and neurotic obsessions. The former functions as a collective neurosis and the latter functions as an individual taboo. Four characteristics assure this parallel: "(1) the fact that the prohibitions lack any assignable motive; (2) the fact that they are maintained by an internal necessity; (3) the fact that they are easily displaceable and that there is a risk of infection from the prohibited object; and (4) the fact that they give rise to injunctions for the performance of ceremonial acts" (pp. 28-29). But the most important reason for putting these two together is constituted by the analysis of emotional ambivalence. The taboo is both attractive and repulsive. This double affectivity of desire and fear strikingly illumines the psychology of temptation and recalls Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Taboo puts us in a place where the forbidden is attractive because it is forbidden, where the law excites concupiscence: "the basis of taboo is a prohibited

action, for performing which a strong inclination exists in the unconscious" (p. 32). The primitive clearly presents the psychic life's ambivalence. What finally appears in fear is the force of desires and the "indestructibility and insusceptibility to correction which are attributes of unconscious process" (p. 70). Because he is like a child, the savage reveals in a fantastic exaggeration what only appears to us in the very dissimulated and attenuated figure of the moral imperative, or in the distortions of obsessional neurosis. Emotional ambivalence appears, then, as the common ground of taboo conscience (and its remorse), on the one hand, and the moral imperative as it has been formalized by Kant, on the other.

But if Freud was to derive conscience from emotional ambivalence, he had to assume the prior existence of some authoritative social figures or agencies. The father figure in the Oedipus complex and the passage from biological relations to "group kinship" in totemic organization require an already existing authority. *Totem and Taboo* clarifies the emotional expression of this authority more than its ultimate origin. The psychology of temptation to which the theme of emotional ambivalence belongs only makes more evident the lack of an original dialectic of desire and law. What is left unspoken in these two chapters is the existence of institutions as such.

In order to fill this gap Freud had to posit a real Oedipus complex at the beginning of mankind, an original parricide whose scar all subsequent history

bears.

We will not consider here the details of the Freudian myth of the first murder of the father figure, which brings into play not only an old-fashioned anthropological apparatus but also a reconstruction of totemism itself that surpasses the phenomenon of taboo properly speaking. But at the completion of this reconstitution of origins, the problem of institutions reappears in all its force. In mythical terms how could the prohibition against "fratricide" arise from a "parricide"? In unmasking the father figure in the alleged totem, Freud has only made more acute the problem that he wanted to resolve, namely, the ego's adoption of external prohibitions. Certainly without the horde's jealousy of the father there is no prohibition, and without the "parricide" there would be no stopping of the jealousy. But these two ciphers of jealousy and parricide are still ciphers for violence. Parricide puts a stop to jealousy, but what prevents the repetition of the crime of parricide? This was already Aeschylus's problem in the *Oresteia,* as Freud is quick to acknowledge. Remorse and obedience in retrospect of the crime allow us to speak of a contract with the father, but this only explains at most the prohibition against killing, not the prohibition against incest. That requires another contract, a convenant between the brothers. By this pact they decide not to repeat their jealousy of the father; they renounce that violent possession that was the motive for the murder. "Thus the brothers had no alternative, if they were to live together, but—not, perhaps, until they had passed through many crises—

to institute the law against incest, by which they all alike renounced the women whom they desired and who had been their chief motive for dispatching their father" (p. 144). And a little further on: "In thus guaranteeing one another's lives the brothers were declaring that no one of them must be treated by another as their father was treated by them all jointly. They were precluding the possibility of a repetition of their father's fate. To the religiously-based prohibition against killing the totem was now added the socially-based prohibition against fratricide" (p. 146). With this renunciation of violence under the spur of discord, we are given all that is necessary for the birth of institutions. The true enigma of law is fratricide, not parricide. With the symbol of the pact among the brothers, Freud has met the true requirement for analytical explanation of the problem of Hobbes, Spinoza, Bousseau, and Hegel: the change from war to law. The question is whether that change still belongs to an economics of desire.

3. We are now ready to take the last step, that is, integrating the clinical description and the genetic explanation in an economic point of view such as we have presented at the beginning of this essay at the level of the global phenomenon of culture.

What is an economic explanation of morality? Its task is to account for what has until now remained external to desire as a "differentiation" of the instinctual substratum; in other words, to make the historical process of the

introjection of authority correspond to an economic process of distribution of cathexes. It is this differentiation, this modification of instincts, that Freud calls the "superego." In these terms this new economic theory is much more than a translation of a collection of clinical, psychological, and anthropological material into a conventional language. It is charged with resolving a hitherto insoluble problem on both the descriptive and the historical planes. The fact of authority has constantly appeared as the presupposition of the Oedipus complex as applied to either an individual or a collectivity. Authority and prohibition must be introduced in order to pass from individual or collective prehistory to the history of the adult and the civilized person. The entire effort of the new theory of agencies is to inscribe authority within the history of desire, to make it appear as a "difference" within desire. The institution of the *superego* is the response to this perplexity. The relationship between the genetic and economic points of view is therefore reciprocal. It is a question of putting the Oedipus event and the advent of the superego into relation and of stating this relation in economic terms.

One important concept plays a decisive role in accomplishing this: the concept of identification. We can follow its development from the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (more precisely the section added in 1915), where identification is compared to idealization; then in the article "Mourning and Melancholia," where identification is conceived as a reaction to the loss of the beloved object through internalization of the lost object; to *Group*

Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego where the intersubjective character of identification comes to the fore: "Identification is known to psychoanalysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person." This is how Chapter 7 entitled "Identification," begins. Not only the relation to another as a model is emphasized, but this relation itself divides into a wish *to he like* and a wish *to have* and *to possess.* "It is easy to state in a formula the distinction between an identification with the father and the choice of the father as an object. In the first case one's father is what one would like to *he,* and in the second he is what one would like to *have.* The distinction, that is, depends upon whether the tie attaches to the subject or to the object of the ego. The former kind of tie is therefore already possible before any sexual object-choice has been made. It is much more difficult to give a clear metapsychological representation of the distinction. We can only see that identification endeavours to mould a person's ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model" (p. 106). Freud never more vigorously expressed the problematic and the nonproblematic character of identification.

Freud puts these properly economic discoveries together in the synthesis of *The Ego and the Id.* The question that dominates its third chapter is: how can the superego, which from a historical point of view stems from parental authority, derive its energies from the id according to an economic point of view? How can the internalization of authority be a differentiation of

intrapsychical energies? The intersecting of these two processes, belonging to two different planes from a methodological point of view, explains how what is sublimation from the point of view of effects, and introjection from the point of view of method, can be likened to "regression" from an economic point of view. This is why the problem of "replacement of an object-cathexis" by an identification is taken in its most general sense as a kind of algebra of placements, displacements, and replacements. So presented, identification appears as a postulate in the strong sense of the term, a demand that we must accept from the beginning. Consider the following text:

> When it happens that a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego, as it occurs in melancholia; the exact nature of this substitution is as yet unknown to us. It may be that by this introjection, which is a kind of regression to the mechanism of the oral phase, the ego makes it easier for the object to be given up or renders that process possible. It may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects. At any rate the process, especially in the early phases of development, is a very frequent one, and it makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate (*Niederschlag)* of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices. [p. 29]

The abandonment of the object of desire, which initiates sublimation, coincides with something like a regression. This is a regression, if not in the sense of a temporal regression to a previous stage of organization of the libido, at least in the economic sense of a regression from object libido to the narcissistic libido, considered as a reservoir of energy. In effect, if the

transformation of an erotic object choice into an alteration of the ego is really a method of dominating the id, the price that must be paid is as follows. “When the ego assumes the features of the object, it is forcing itself, so to speak, upon the id as a love-object and is trying to make good the id’s loss by saying, ‘Look, you can love me too—I am so like the object!’ ” (p. 30).

We are now prepared for the generalization that will henceforth dominate the problem: “The transformation of object-libido into narcissistic libido which thus takes place obviously implies an abandonment of sexual aims, a desexualization—a kind of sublimation, therefore. Indeed, the question arises, and deserves careful consideration, whether this is not the universal road to sublimation, whether all sublimation does not take place through the mediation of the ego, which begins by changing sexual object-libido into narcissistic libido and then, perhaps, goes on to give it another aim” (p. 30) .

Freud’s whole effort from here on is to make the identification with the father of individual and collective prehistory a part of the theoretical schema of identification by abandoned object cathexes. We will not consider his theoretical elaboration of this since it no longer concerns the ethical incidences of psychoanalysis. It should suffice to have shown, on the plane of doctrine, the convergence among (1) a clinical description of morality, (2) a genetic explanation of this information, and (3) an economic explanation of

the processes implied by this genesis.

Ethics and Psychoanalysis

The preceding analyses lead us to the threshold of the crucial question: can we speak of a psychoanalytic ethics? The answer must be frankly and clearly negative if by ethics we mean a prescribing of duties, either old or new. But this negative response to a question that has not itself been affected by psychoanalysis does not exclude our asking whether its critique of morality does not imply a new way of thinking about ethics.

But first we must consider the negative response. That psychoanalysis prescribes nothing follows first from its theoretical status, then from its discoveries concerning morality, and finally from its character insofar as it is a therapeutic technique.

First, the theoretical status of psychoanalysis prevents it from becoming prescriptive. The Freudian interpretation of culture, taken overall, and of ethics considered in particular, implies a limitation of a certain kind. Psychoanalytic explanation, we have seen, is essentially an economic explanation of the moral phenomenon. Its limit results from its very project of understanding culture from the point of view of its emotional cost in pleasures and pains. Therefore, we cannot expect anything else from this enterprise than a *critique of authenticity.* Above all, we cannot ask it for what

we might call a *critique of foundations.* This is a task for another method, another philosophy. Psychoanalysis as such is limited to unmasking the falsifications of desire that inhabit the moral life. We have not founded a political ethic, or resolved the enigma of power, because we have discovered —as, for example, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*—that the tie to the chief mobilizes an entire libidinal cathexis with a homosexual characteristic. Nor have we resolved the enigma of the authority of values when we have discerned the father figure and identification with him as fantastic as it is real in the background of the moral and social phenomena. The legitimation of a phenomenon such as power or value is something else. So is what we make of the emotional cost of experience, the sum of pleasures and pains in our lives. Because psychoanalysis cannot pose the question of moral legitimation, it must limit itself to a sort of empty marking of the place of a phenomenon as important as that of sublimation, in which an axiological point of view is mixed with an economic one. In sublimation, in effect, an instinct is working on a higher level, although we must say that the energy invested in new objects is the same energy that was formerly invested in a sexual object. The economic point of view only accounts for this connection, not for the new value promoted by this process. One postpones the difficulty by speaking of socially acceptable goals and objects, for social utility is a cape of ignorance thrown over the problem of value raised by sublimation.

Thus psychoanalysis cannot deal with the problem of value,

legitimation, or radical origin, because its economic point of view is only economic. Its force is that of suspicion, not justification or legitimation, and still less that of prescription.

Second, the discoveries of psychoanalysis about morality prohibit it from moralizing. In a sense close to that of Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals,* the exploration of conscience's archaisms reveals that man is wrongly accused in the first place. This is why it is fruitless to ask psychoanalysis for an immediate ethic without conscience first having changed its position as regards itself. Hegel saw this before Nietzsche and Freud. In criticizing the "moral vision of the world" in Chapter 6 of *The Phenomenology of Mind,* he denounced the "judging conscience" as denigrating and hypocritical. It should recognize its own finitude, its equality with the judged conscience, so that the "forgiveness of sins" might be possible as knowledge of a reconciling self. But in distinction to Nietzsche and Hegel, Freud does not accuse accusation. He understands it and in understanding it he makes its structure and strategy public. An ethic where the cruelty of the superego would yield to the severity of love is possible in this direction, but first it would be necessary to learn in depth that the catharsis of desire is nothing without the catharsis of the judging conscience.

The fundamentally nonethical character of psychoanalysis results not only from its theoretical status, or even from its discoveries concerning

morality, but also from its *technique* in that it is therapeutic. This therapy implies in principle the neutralization of the moral point of view. In the essay entitled "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," Freud insists that psychoanalysis is not just, or not even principally, a purely intellectual interpretation, but *work* against resistances and a "handling of" the forces released by transference. Not only has psychoanalytic explanation an economic character, but also treatment itself is an economic operation. This economic work Freud calls *Durcharbeiten*: "This working-through of the resistances may in practice turn out to be an arduous task for the subject of the analysis and a trial of patience for the analyst. Nevertheless it is a part of the work which effects the greatest changes in the patient and which distinguishes analytic treatment from any kind of treatment by suggestion" (Pp. 155-156). In another essay, "On Beginning the Treatment," Freud rigorously attaches this handling of resistances to the handling of transference: the name "psychoanalysis" applies only "if the intensities of the transference have been used for the overcoming of resistances" (p. 143).

This struggle against resistances and by means of transferences leads us to the decisive insight that the sole ethical value that is thereby brought into play is *veracity.* If psychoanalysis is a technique, it is not included in the cycle of techniques of domination; it is a technique of veracity. What is at stake is self-recognition and our itinerary runs from misunderstanding to recognition. In this regard it has its model in the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex.* The fate of

Oedipus is to have already killed his father and married his mother. But the drama of recognition begins beyond this point, and this drama consists entirely in his recognition of the man whom earlier he had cursed: “I am that man. In a sense I always knew it, but in another sense I didn’t; now I know who I am.”

Beyond this what can the expression “technique of veracity” signify? First, that it takes place entirely on the plane of speech. Therefore, we are faced with a strange technique. It is a technique according to its work character and its commerce with emotional energies and mechanisms belonging to the economy of desire. But it is a unique technique in the sense that it only attains or handles these energies through and across the effects of meaning, across a work of speech. From then on what is in question in analysis is the access to true discourse, which is certainly something different from social adaptation, talk of which hastens to overthrow the scandal of psychoanalysis and make it socially acceptable. For who knows where a true discourse may lead as regards the established order, that is, for the established disorder?

If, therefore, veracity is the sole ethical value implied by its analytic technique, psychoanalysis is bound to practice, as regards every other ethical value, what we could call a “suspension” of ethics. But an ethic reduced to veracity is still something. It contains the seed for new attitudes issuing from

the end of dissimulation.

Certainly the vulgarization of psychoanalysis tends to draw a sort of babble about everybody's libido from this disoccultation, which has nothing to do with *working through,* with the *work* of truth. The vulgarization of the results of psychoanalysis, apart from its technique and its work, even tends to induce reductive schemes and to authorize saying the first thing to come to mind about all the eminent expressions of culture: "Now we know that all the works of culture are nothing but, or nothing other than. . . Psychoanalysis in this sense reinforces what Max Weber called "disenchantment" *(Entzciuherung).* But this is the price modern culture must pay to have a better understanding of itself. Whether we like it or not, psychoanalysis has become one of the media through which our culture seeks to understand itself. And it is unavoidable that we should only become aware of its signification through the truncated representations that are allowed by the narcissism of our resistances. Misunderstanding is the necessary path to understanding.

This same misunderstanding inclines popular consciousness to look for a system of justifications for moral positions in vulgarized psychoanalysis, positions that have not undergone its questioning in their depths, even though psychoanalysis wanted to be precisely a tactic for unmasking every justification. Thus some want it to ratify education without restraints—

because neurosis comes from repression—and see in Freud a discreet apologetic for and camouflaging of a new epicureanism; others, taking their stand on the theory of stages of maturation and integration, and on the theory of perversions and regressions, utilize it to the profit of traditional morality—did not Freud define culture as the sacrificing of instincts? Once set off on this way, nothing stops us from psychoanalyzing psychoanalysis itself: did not Freud publicly provide a "bourgeois" justification for the discipline of monogamy, while secretly providing the "revolutionary" justification for orgasm? But the conscience that poses this question, and that attempts to enclose Freud within this ethical either-or, is a conscience that has not undergone the critical test of psychoanalysis.

The Freudian revolution is its diagnostic technique, its cold lucidity, its laborious search for truth. It is a mistake to attempt to change its science into moralizing; a mistake to ask ourselves whether it is the scientist or the Viennese "bourgeois" trying to justify himself who speaks of perversion and regression; a mistake to suspect it—in order to blame it or commend it—of sliding under the diagnosis of the libido to approval of an unacknowledged epicureanism, when it really only turns the unpitying gaze of science on the sly conduct of moral man. Here is our misunderstanding: we listen to Freud as if he were a prophet, although he speaks like an unprophetic thinker. He does not bring us a new ethic, but he changes the conscience of those for whom the ethical question remains open. He changes our conscience by

changing our knowledge of it and by giving us the key to some of its ruses. Freud can indirectly change our ethics because he is not directly a moralist.

For my part I would say that Freud is too *tragic* a thinker to be a moralist. Tragic in the sense of the Greeks. Instead of turning us toward heartrending options, he makes us look at what he himself calls the "hardness of life," following the German poet Heine. He teaches us that it is difficult to be human. If from time to time he seems to be pleading for the diminution of instinctual sacrifice through an easing of social prohibitions or for an acceptance of this sacrifice in the name of the reality principle, it is not because he believes that some sort of immediate diplomatic action is possible between the clashing agencies. Rather he waits for a total change of consciousness that will proceed from a wider and better articulated understanding of the human tragedy, without worrying about drawing its ethical consequences too soon. Freud is a tragic thinker because human situations for him are unavoidably conflictual situations. Lucid understanding of the necessary character of these conflicts constitutes, if not the last word, at least the first word of a wisdom that would incorporate the instruction of psychoanalysis. It is not by accident that Freud—naturalist, determinist, scientist, child of the Enlightenment—kept returning to the language of tragic myths: Oedipus and Narcissus, Eros, Ananke, Thanatos. We must assimilate this tragic knowledge to reach the threshold of a new ethic, which we should stop trying to derive directly from Freud's works, an ethic that would be

prepared slowly and at length by the fundamentally nonethical instruction of psychoanalysis. The self-awareness that psychoanalysis offers modern man is difficult and painful because of the narcissistic humiliation it inflicts on us—but at this price, it rejoins that reconciliation whose law was pronounced by Aeschylus: "wisdom comes only through suffering."

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