

# **FREUD AND MARX**

**A DIALECTICAL STUDY**

by

**R. OSBORN**

with an introduction by

**JOHN STRACHEY**

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1937

To  
DORIS AND PHILIP

## INTRODUCTION

A comparative study of the doctrines of Marx and Freud has often been demanded by free-lance critics of Marxism. These critics have never shown any inclination to undertake the work, however, nor is this to be regretted, for the only qualification for the task which most of them have possessed has been a nicely balanced ignorance of both disciplines.

In the meanwhile Marxists have tended to dismiss psycho-analytic theory as unworthy of attention. It may be doubted, however, if the founders of Marxism would have adopted this attitude. Friedrich Engels in particular made it his business to pass in review every major scientific development which occurred during his lifetime. It may be that if he could have lived another twenty years he would not have omitted to consider the works of Freud. This is not to suggest that Engels would have accepted Freudian theory in its entirety. On the contrary, we can imagine the caustic and ironic sentences with which that greatest of all polemicists would have pointed out its one-sided character. But I cannot help believing that Engels would no more have neglected Freud's discoveries in the field of psychology than he neglected the discoveries of Darwin or of Morgan in the fields of biology or anthropology. That old eagle would have swooped upon this new material also, and would have digested it, criticised it, sifted it.

Nor, I am convinced, would Engels have failed to find in Freud's work data which he would have hailed as of the utmost importance for the development of Marxism. For Engels himself used concepts for which the data discovered by Freud were to provide the necessary scientific confirmation. Who, for example, wrote this description of the original form of human society? "But mutual tolerance of the grown males, freedom from jealousy, was the first condition for the formation of large and permanent groups." Is this a quotation from Freud's well-known work, *Totem and Tabu*? On the contrary, it is a quotation from Engels' *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1891. Or, again, it was Engels, not Freud, who explained a man's otherwise inexplicable opinions by saying that "the real motives impelling him remain unknown to him... hence he imagines false or apparent motives." And Engels goes on to describe these false and apparent motives for holding particular opinions, not indeed as rationalisations, but as "an ideology," which had been adopted, not indeed unconsciously, but with "a false consciousness."<sup>1</sup>

Can we doubt that anyone who had had the genius to arrive at such conceptions as these would have been profoundly interested when a wealth of scientifically observed data, exactly confirming them, was produced by Freud; when there appeared conclusive evidence to show that the "mutual tolerance of the grown males" had, in fact, been the key question in the earliest human societies; or when it was shown that it was possible actually to reveal those unknown, real motives which were unconsciously, or "false consciously," impelling men to hold particular opinions?

The relationship of Marxism to psycho-analytic theory is, however, a far bigger question than that of the anticipations, however striking, of Friedrich Engels. Nor is there the least doubt that these sciences are directly opposite. The question is, are they dialectical opposites? Do they, that is to say, by means of their very oppositeness, by means of their sharply contradictory character, provide, when taken together, just that unity of opposites in which, Marx and Engels believed, reality can alone be adequately described?

---

<sup>1</sup> Engels' letter to Mehring, *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, p 511 (Martin Lawrence)

In particular, do the purely empirical findings of the analysts both confirm the main generalisations of Marxism and at the same time supplement and make specific these generalisations in some important respects?

I believe that in this book Mr. Osborn has taken a first step towards showing that they do. He is able to show, for example, that psycho-analysis has, all unknown to itself, provided overwhelming evidence of the validity of the main principles of dialectical materialism. As has often been observed already, the purely empirical findings of the analysts *make* nonsense of, or alternatively *are* nonsense according to, the older, formally logistic, or, as Marx and Engels used to call it, metaphysical, way of thinking.

It is true that the analysts, never having heard of dialectical materialism,<sup>1</sup> continue to accept the metaphysical categories of thought. Hence their inability to deal with the, on their own premises, irrefutable objections to almost every concept of psycho-analysis, put forward by the academic philosophers. The concepts of analysis are, on the basis of formal, undialectical logic, flatly self-contradictory. The basic concept of the dynamic unconscious itself, upon which everything else rests, is, from the standpoint of formal logic, nonsense. For, the academic philosophers point out, either a man knows something or he does not; therefore it is nonsense to say, as Freud does, that a man both knows a thing and does not know it: that he knows it and yet is not conscious of it.

It is all very well for Freud simply to dismiss these objections as, in Mr. Osborn's phrase, "piffling." Piffling they are, for they are contrary to observed reality. Freud has observed, and has now taught us all to observe, the fact that a man often does both know and not know the same thing at the same time, that he knows it unconsciously, that he has the knowledge, and that this knowledge powerfully influences his thoughts and actions, but that he does not know that he has it. All this is now established by common observation a hundred times over. It was in order to describe these facts that Freud had to formulate the concept of the dynamic unconscious. But what Freud failed to observe was that in establishing and naming these facts he drove a coach and four through such first principles of formal logic as that of the exclusion of contradictions—the principle that a thing cannot both be and not be.

So much the worse for logic, Freud has implied, with a shrug of his empirical shoulders. But—and here Freud has shown himself a typical scientist of his class and generation—he has not seen that once one logic, one way of thinking, has shattered itself upon the rocks of observed reality, it is urgently incumbent upon us to replace it with another. For, unless we do so, we are compelled to go on using the old logic, which no longer fits the facts, and so to get ourselves into inextricable confusion. Moreover, before Freud began his work there existed a way of thinking which fully allowed for just those coexisting, interpenetrating contradictions which the analysts have found to abound in the structure of mental reality. In a word, dialectical materialism provides the only possible *rationale* of the findings of psycho-analysis; while these findings, more especially since they have been independently made, provide the most striking confirmation yet obtained of the validity of dialectical materialism. Mr. Osborn's tenth and eleventh chapters show how the whole of the findings of psycho-analysis are shot through and through with dialectical concepts. The truth is that the analysts have suffered M. Jourdain's misfortune: they have been talking dialectical materialism for years without knowing it. Is it not time that their attention was drawn to this fact—that the news was broken to them that there exists a method of thought which makes sense, instead of nonsense, of their findings; which can find room for every one

---

<sup>1</sup> This may not be true of the younger German analysts, but it is almost literally true of representative British analysts, and, for that matter, of Freud himself.

of their otherwise paradoxical and inexplicable conclusions?

The dialectical character of psycho-analytic theory is, perhaps, Mr. Osborn's most exciting theoretical discovery.<sup>1</sup> His most important suggestion is contained, however, in his two chapters on the Materialist Conception of History. His conception of the advisability of a shift of emphasis from the study of the character of our environment, to the study of the character of our reactions to that environment, is, I believe, of great significance. Mr. Osborn emphasises, in his introductory chapter, the necessity of building upon Marx's great discovery that man's consciousness is determined by his social existence. Scientific politicians, Mr. Osborn suggests, cannot rest supinely upon that discovery. They must not be content till they have discovered *how* in precise detail our social existence conditions our consciousness. For example, Marx predicted that the inevitable development of an objective environment ripe for Socialism would produce a consciousness of the need for Socialism in men's minds. Such an environment has now developed. Has it produced a general consciousness of the need for Socialism? Well, yes, it has, to a certain extent, in certain places, at certain times, and in certain ways. But to what extent, where, when, how? To us, the details, the actual mechanism of the process by which men's social existence determines their consciousness, are of the utmost importance. For upon an adequate knowledge of how this process works our very lives may depend.

Nor did Marx and Engels ever pretend to have investigated the detailed, particular, specific manner in which the interaction of environment and consciousness took place. Engels says this in the letter to Mehring from which I have just quoted.

"We all," he writes, "laid, and were bound to lay, the main emphasis at first on the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of the actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But in so doing we neglected the formal side—the way in which these notions come about—for the sake of the content."

The way in which our notions come about is, however, of vital importance now that the ever-accelerating development of our objective environment is forcing the issue of social change upon us. For our extraordinary notions, our irrational, childish, but formidable notions, bid fair to make the process of social change almost intolerably costly. And the way in which men's notions come about is precisely the subject matter of psychoanalysis.

We shall not be able effectively to influence or direct the process of social change unless we can learn to understand the particular way in which men's consciousness develops from their social existence. For not only psycho-analysis, but common experience, warns us that the way in which our consciousness arises from our social existence is neither simple nor direct. It is, on the contrary, an exceedingly involved, complex, and often baffling process. The psycho-analysts would not claim to have attained to anything like a complete comprehension of it. But they have made definite progress towards such a comprehension; hence their work must not be neglected by anyone who desires to see consciously willed social change.

The principal conclusion to be derived from the study of psycho-analytic theory is, it seems to me, that the emergence of a particular type of consciousness—a particular set of political, religious, scientific, and miscellaneous opinions, a particular ideology, that is to say—must not be conceived of as

---

<sup>1</sup> I cannot forbear to call attention to the beauty and brilliance of Mr. Osborn's suggestion that the dream forms the dialectical opposite of the waking thought process, or of his deduction that it is the explanation of the otherwise inexplicable fact that so much conscious thinking has been undialectical.

the passive reflection of a given social environment. It must be conceived of rather as the interaction of the social environment with certain dynamic, subjective urges within the man himself. This view, Mr. Osborn is able to show, is fully consonant with the outlook of Marx and Engels. Indeed, they would probably have severely characterised any other as mechanistic and undialectical. But it is a view to which it is not always easy for Marxists in their day-to-day political work to do full justice. It is difficult for the Marxist to avoid attributing almost exclusive importance to environmental influences, to avoid the tendency to neglect the dynamic, subjective factors.

But, if Marxists have not always been successful in the fight against a tendency to over-emphasise one factor to the exclusion of its dialectical opposite, psycho-analysts have scarcely been conscious, even, that such a danger existed. They have often naively written as if environmental influences did not exist, or, at any rate, could not change; as if the whole of men's social and economic environment, in particular, could be written off as a constant in the equation of human behaviour. Moreover we have to try, not merely to keep a correct balance of emphasis upon the two factors: what we have to learn is when to emphasise the one and when to emphasise the other. In the last century, for example, Marxists were bound, as Engels writes, "to lay the main emphasis on the objective, environmental factor in the determination of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of the actions arising through the medium of these notions." To-day, however, an increased emphasis should, surely, be laid on the subjective, dynamic factors innate in men, which the objective, environmental factors interpenetrate, to make man as we know him? For the environmental factors are all upon our side already: they cry aloud for social change. Our business is to see to it that we know how to interpret that inarticulate cry in such a way that men will heed it.

All this, no doubt, amounts to little more than the suggestion that Marxists need to be practical politicians, able to find that correct, psychological approach which will enable their audiences to grasp and to act upon their message. In countries like Great Britain and America, which possess a highly developed political life, there exists a long and rich tradition as to how men may be most effectively influenced. It is necessary that Marxists, if they wish to be men of action, should master this tradition; that they should master the traditional technique of political activity as practised in their own country. They must do so, not in order that they themselves should become demagogues, but just precisely because it is impossible to leave the formidable weapon of this technique to the demagogues. For in this matter, also, it is a great mistake to give the devil all the good tunes.

But Marxists are scientists. They possess the basic principles of a science capable both of explaining and effecting social change. Hence they must be scientific also upon the question of the detailed technique by which the all-important truths of their science can be brought to the attention of the whole population. Political propaganda, in other words, must be for the Marxist not only an art, but also a science. He must not be content when he has mastered the whole extensive folklore of effective political activity. He must not be satisfied until he has surpassed, and ultimately superseded, this body of traditional, instinctive, only semi-conscious knowledge by a technique of political activity consciously deduced from scientifically established generalisations. Such a new political technique can, however, arise only upon the basis of a genuinely scientific psychology. We shall never know how to influence men, in the sense of enabling them to apprehend the truth more perfectly, until we have a knowledge of the dynamics of mental processes. The psycho-analysts have taken the first difficult steps towards the establishment of such a scientific psychology.

In his final chapter Mr. Osborn makes some suggestions as to the kind of effect which a knowledge

of psycho-analytic theory might be expected to have upon Marxists' political work. I think that Mr. Osborn would agree that as yet we must regard such suggestions as stimulating and illustrative rather than as of great practical importance. Psycho-analytic theory is still so incomplete that it is as yet dangerous to attempt to make particular deductions for practice from it. (The psychoanalysts, thereby showing themselves to be genuine and serious scientists, are the first to issue such a warning.) It is certainly true, and will probably long remain true, that those who wish to know how to influence their fellow-men can learn far more from the example and conversation of working politicians, from observing Mr. Lloyd George or Mr. Baldwin, or by imitating, in times of acute social crisis, the methods of Lenin, than from the most perfect mastery of psycho-analytic theory. And yet I think that there is one thing which the study of psycho-analytic theory can teach us. Acquaintance with psycho-analytic teaching can help us to exhibit a certain temper of the mind, a certain attitude to our fellow-men, without which a political cause, however just and however true it may be, can hardly make its way. I cannot attempt to define this attitude except by saying that it appears to me to be well exemplified in Mr. Osborn's book. His pages are impassioned, and yet dispassionate; polemical and yet impersonal; acute and yet wise. It may be that he has best conveyed his essential contribution to the technique of Socialist propaganda, not in any one thing which he has said, but in his way of saying everything.

His particular recommendations for political practice may be questioned. Or, again, he may have made errors, which I am incompetent to detect, in his exposition of each doctrine. These will be pointed out, and can be corrected. But they do not affect Mr. Osborn's essential achievement. That achievement is not, indeed, to have answered the question of the relationship of Marxism to psycho-analytic theory. That enormous task will require the sustained efforts of many thinkers. No, what Mr. Osborn has done is to ask that question; and to ask it in so intelligent, fruitful, and well-instructed a way that no one who cares for the development of Marxism as a living science will in future be able to neglect it. And this is no mean achievement. Engels said that Hegel attempted to present "the whole natural, historical and spiritual world as a process.... That Hegel did not succeed in this task is here immaterial. His epoch-making service was that he propounded it." Without exaggeration we may say of Mr. Osborn that, though he has not solved the problem of the relationship of Marxism to psycho-analysis, his splendid service is that he has propounded it.

JOHN STRACHEY

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my gratitude to all those publishers who have given me permission to quote from books published by them, and especially to Messrs. Allen & Unwin, Messrs. Martin Lawrence and the Hogarth Press, from whose publications I have made numerous quotations.

R. O.



## CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
Introduction	
<i>Part I: PSYCHO-ANALYSIS</i>	
<i>Chapter I.</i> The Scope of the Enquiry	11
II. The Structure of the Mind	13
III. Dream-Interpretation and the Process of Analysis	18
IV. Normal and Abnormal Psychology 65	25
V. Sexual Development	31
<i>Part II: FREUD AND MARX</i>	
VI. Primitive Society	41
VII. The Materialist Conception of History	49
VIII. The Materialist Conception of History and the Individual Mind	58
IX. Religion	71
X. Dialectical Materialism	76
XI. Dialectical Materialism and Psycho-Analysis	86
XII. Some Applications	90

PART I  
PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

## CHAPTER I

### THE SCOPE OF THE ENQUIRY

This book is concerned in presenting a case for the closer study of psycho-analysis by Marxists, of Marxism by psycho-analysts, and of both by the general public. It attempts to illustrate the interrelationships between the subjective life of man, as described by Freud, and the objective world of economic processes, whose laws of development Marxism has investigated. To show that both these views are complementary, I have found it necessary to quote fully from both Marxian and Freudian sources, so that the reader may see for himself the dialectical unity between them.

There is a widespread misconception of the Marxian outlook to the effect that it excludes from consideration the subjective qualities which play a part in every instance of human behaviour. Actually, as far back as 1845, in his theses on Feuerbach, Marx combated the erroneous belief that men are purely products of circumstances, reacting automatically to changing conditions, and stressed the need for conceiving human behaviour from its active, subjective side. Thus he says: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism... is that... sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the object or contemplation but not as *human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively*" (my italics).

Freud has endeavoured to present a scientific account of the instincts, impulses, and general psychological dispositions which make up this subjective side, and has thus made possible a better understanding of the interaction between man and external nature which is manifested in all human activity. For this reason I believe that psychoanalysis should form part of the contemporary Marxian outlook, and in succeeding chapters I endeavour to show how its theories enrich the content of Marxism.

I am aware that there exists, in Marxist circles, a tendency to regard the theories of Freud as an expression of capitalist cultural decadence. D. Mirsky, in his book, *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain*, discussing the post-war "high-brows," says "Freud has been accepted as the consecration of all desires and lusts, a sort of free pass to every kind of freedom or looseness, a complete liberation from all discipline. He has become the Bible of this intelligentsia."<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly this sort of use is made of Freudian theory. But then it is often the fate of scientific theory to be perverted in use to the bolstering up of decadent and reactionary notions. Darwinism, for example, has been used to justify social and economic inequalities. "The Struggle for Existence" and the "Survival of the Fittest" were made to explain the existence of rich and poor.

In the same way, the tendency to morbid introspection, to minute analysis of mental states as a refuge from the urgent reality of social problems, which marks the cultural decadence of bourgeois intellectuals is one aspect of the growing interest in psychology. But there is another, more healthy aspect of great social significance.

Just as the development of physics by Newton may be related to the mechanical problems of the bourgeois world of his time, or the study of astronomy and geometry related to practical problems of navigation and agriculture, so the growth in psychological interest may be regarded as a reflection of the pressing need to understand man's interaction with his environment, from the subjective side.

Objective economic conditions are ripe for Socialism. The problem of production has been solved. The task now is to arouse a consciousness of the need for treading the revolutionary road. "What do I know," asks Dietzgen, "about the shoe industry, when I know that it produces shoes?" And we may ask,

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Intelligence of Great Britain*, p. 111 (Gollancz)

“What do we know of consciousness, when we know that it is determined by man’s social existence?” That man’s consciousness was so determined was the great discovery of Marx; but now we need to build on that discovery. At this stage of development, detailed study is needed of the psychological dispositions, which, in a variety of ways, interact with the economic environment; for the problem of Socialism is not only economic, but psychological. It may be formulated thus; “How can we, in a given set of circumstances, get the workers feeling and thinking in terms of revolutionary activity?” It is for this reason that the revolutionary is impelled towards a study of modern psychology.

Painstaking investigation into the fundamental psychological processes which interact with the world of economics is called for. Freud, courageous pioneer in this work, deserves place with Darwin and Marx in the revolutionary discoveries he has made concerning man. Whoever wishes to maintain a claim to being a revolutionary, in outlook and deed, must not only master the Marxist laws of social development, but must also embrace, as an essential part of Marxian outlook, the Freudian dynamics of psychological phenomena.

Now the field of study of the psychologist comprises the loves and hates, the credulities, prejudices, and loyalties of mankind.

Publicity men and politicians prevail upon people to buy articles they don’t need, or fight in wars that don’t concern them. With the means to a better society ready to hand, they are blinded into accepting the old society, with its discomforts and irrationalities. Why?

Those of us who see the need for social reconstruction cannot afford to ignore any attempt to answer this question scientifically. We feel that if we knew the inner movement of man’s life, the nature of those basic strivings which, in interaction with his environment, produce the varied pattern of his behaviour, we could direct man’s hopes and energies in the direction we desired.

Freud has, at least, attempted to supply a scientific answer, and, if only for that reason, deserves our attention.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE MIND

The basic conception of psycho-analysis is that underlying all conscious behaviour is a dynamic unconscious mind. Every conscious thought and action, it asserts, has its roots deep in the unconscious mind, and, consequently, to understand mental life the links between conscious behaviour and its unconscious sources must be traced. For this task, psycho-analysis has devised its own technique, which has been remarkably fruitful in bringing confirmation to this view of unconscious motivation. Psycho-analysis may be considered, first, as a technique for exploring the unconscious mind, and, secondly, as a theory of psychological life which has largely arisen from the results of this technique.

The unconscious mind must not be considered as a passive receptacle which receives the impressions of the outer world, retaining them until, by an act of memory, they are brought into consciousness. Nor must it be considered as the depository of faded memories. The unconscious is dynamic in character. Its contents constantly strive for conscious expression—are, indeed, the motivating factors behind conscious life. In relation to it, consciousness is just the ripples on the surface of mental life produced by deeper undercurrents. It is the source of instinctual life and the deposit of racial inheritance. Emotional experiences, generally of a sexual character and relating to childhood, in the shape of impulses and wishes which conflict with conscious standards of life, are here too. They have been thrust into the unconscious, because to recognise their existence would bring pain and discomfort to conscious life. Although repressed, they never cease to strive for satisfaction. Psycho-analysis is largely occupied with examining the means adopted and the paths taken by repressed material in its urge for gratification. Although the unconscious is inaccessible to conscious life, and therefore cannot directly be known, there are a number of convincing reasons for accepting its existence, of which the following are the main:

(1) By means of psycho-analytic technique, memories of childhood have been recovered which were unobtainable by the ordinary acts of memory. Patients have been made aware of the unconscious motives behind their symptoms, and the successes which psycho-analysis has had, resulting from this technique, indicate that the theory behind them cannot altogether be groundless.

(2) A striking evidence of the existence of unconscious processes is given in post-hypnotic phenomena. Most psychologists are familiar with the phenomena in question, and it is difficult to conceive of an alternative explanation to that of unconscious processes guiding conscious behaviour. During hypnosis, it is suggested to the patient that he performs an act some time after emerging from the hypnotic condition. He will, when performing the act, days and sometimes weeks after hypnosis, have forgotten what took place during hypnosis, yet faithfully obey the instructions. He will, for instance, open a window at a certain hour, under an inner compulsion. This compulsion is obviously unconscious, and, if pressed to give some reason for his act, he will look puzzled at first, and then give a rationalised answer to the effect that the room was stuffy, etc.

(3) Slips of the tongue, pen, and a multitude of everyday errors show an interference with conscious purpose which can only be due to unconscious causes. An amusing example of a speech-blunder is given by Freud in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, which abounds in intriguing instances of this character: “A wealthy but not very generous host invited his friends for an evening dance. Everything went well until about 11.30 pm., when there was an intermission, presumably for supper. To the great disappointment of most of the guests there was no supper; instead, they were regaled with thin

sandwiches and lemonade. As it was close to Election day the conversation centred on the different candidates; and as the discussion grew warmer, one of the guests, an ardent admirer of the Progressive Party candidate, remarked to the host. 'You may say what you please about Teddy, but there is one thing—he can always be relied upon; he always gives you a *square meal*,' wishing to say *square deal*. The assembled guests burst into a roar of laughter, to the great embarrassment of the speaker and the host, who fully understood each other."

(4) Sometimes a problem defies conscious solution and yet after a period of lapse when no conscious attention is given to it, as during sleep, the solution will appear in consciousness, suggesting that the work of solving it had been carried on unconsciously. Familiar, too, is the name "on the tip of the tongue" which defies all efforts at recall. Turning the attention elsewhere, the name appears in consciousness.

(5) The unconscious mind is also the source of artistic inspiration, giving the richness of its content to the poetic fancy. Examples exist of poems which have been formed in sleep, and emerged into wakened consciousness in a completed form. Coleridge, for example, declared that his beautiful poem, "Kubla Khan," was largely composed during sleep and written down on awakening.

(6) Finally, dreams, as will be shown in the succeeding chapter, provide a wealth of evidence of the existence of unconscious processes underlying the imagery of the dream.

Freud distinguishes the dynamic unconscious from those mental processes which, while unconscious, may be recalled to consciousness by a little effort. These latter belong to the pre-conscious and represent the ideas and thoughts which, once conscious, are no longer in the field of consciousness but remain ready to hand. I may illustrate this by referring to the contents of my consciousness as I write. I am conscious of the pressure of pen to paper, the whiteness of the paper, and towards the fringe of my consciousness I am aware of a piano being played in an adjoining room. I am interrupted by my wife who asks for a certain telephone number. It was not in my consciousness before, but an act of memory of no great effort brings it there. It existed in the pre-conscious.

But no act of memory of this kind can bring the contents of the dynamic unconscious to consciousness, for, as Freud discovered in attempting to revive childhood memories, there operates a system of repressions which protects conscious life from impulses out of harmony with it, forcing them into the unconscious, and resisting any attempt to bring them to consciousness. "The whole of psycho-analytic theory," says Freud, "is in fact built up on the perception of the resistance exerted by the patient when we try to make him conscious of his unconscious. The objective indication of resistance is that his associations stop short or wander far away from the theme that is being discussed." Though the repressive forces are unconscious, and we therefore have no knowledge of their existence, the fact of their existence alone accounts for the inaccessibility of much emotional experience to conscious life. This conception of an active process of repression throws a new light on forgotten experiences. A great deal of childhood life, said to be "forgotten" in the sense of having faded away with the passage of time, has really been repressed, and continues its existence in the unconscious mind, exerting an important influence on conscious behaviour.

The earliest formulations which Freud made of the repressive forces likened them to a censor. To understand this conception, we may consider the mind as a three-storied house. On the top floor dwells the highly respectable members of the conscious family. Below them are the pre-conscious people—quiet and decent people, who are permitted to visit their neighbours above without any trouble. True, a policeman stands on the stairs, but he is a kindly soul, rarely forbidding passage. But the denizens of the

ground floor are a tumultuous uncultured crowd, noisily clamouring to pass the over-worked policeman, between them and the pre-conscious folk, whose task it is to keep them from molesting the people above. Occasionally one slips past him, generally in disguise that represents him as a harmless and innocent person, and when night-time brings a relaxation of the officer's vigilance. These policemen are the famous censors, and correspond to the repressing forces described above.

Of recent years Freud has found it necessary to introduce other concepts to illustrate more adequately the dynamic character of mental processes. The mental divisions used above, namely, conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious, while useful as descriptive means, tend to present a static picture of the mind. Of them Freud says: "We have talked of *systems* of the pre-conscious and of the unconscious... so that the word 'unconscious' has more and more been made to mean a mental province rather than a quality which mental things have."<sup>1</sup>

These new concepts are the id, ego, and superego. The id refers to that part of the mind which, because of the irrational character of its contents, seems foreign to the conscious personality. Freud borrowed the term id from Nietzsche, because, derived from the Latin impersonal pronoun, it seemed well suited to express this incompatibility with conscious life. Although the id is wholly unconscious, it is not completely identified with the unconscious mind, for parts of the ego and superego are also unconscious. This fact played an important part in deciding Freud to introduce the concept of the id. He says: "At this point, the discovery, inconvenient at first sight, that parts of the super-ego and ego, too, are unconscious in the dynamic sense, has a facilitating effect and enables us to remove a complication. We evidently have no right to call that region of the mind which is neither ego nor super-ego the unconscious system, since the character of unconsciousness is not exclusive to it. Very well; we will no longer use the word 'unconscious' in the sense of a system, and to what we have hitherto called by that name we will give a better one, which will not give rise to misunderstandings... we will call it henceforward the 'id.'<sup>2</sup>

Within the id are the fundamental instincts, constantly striving for gratification, and all repressed material which ceaselessly seek conscious expression. Because the id seeks gratification for its contents without consideration for time or fitness, demanding immediate and unconditional satisfaction, Freud describes it as being ruled by the "pleasure principle."

We may tabulate its main characteristics, as follows:

- (1) It is unconscious.
- (2) It is irrational, being guided not by reality considerations, but demanding unconditional gratification.
- (3) It is the reservoir of the libido, the energy or driving force behind all instinctive impulses.
- (4) It contains all repressed material.
- (5) The inherited racial characteristics are contained within it.
- (6) It is a-moral, having no conceptions of "right" or "wrong" in its urges for gratification.

From the above it can be seen that an unrestricted id would soon land the organism into difficulties. Reality does not, very readily, grant the satisfaction of our desires. We have to learn, at the very least, to defer their satisfaction until favourable opportunities occur. In early childhood, a portion of the id becomes modified as a result of contact with outer reality. This modification of the id is called the ego.

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lecture on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 96 (Hogarth Press).

<sup>2</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 97 (Hogarth Press)

It restrains and controls the demands of the id, seeking satisfaction for them on a reality principle. It therefore adopts modes of gratification for id impulses which are in keeping with outer reality, deferring gratification, where necessary, until more opportune times. While the ego takes cognisance of the external situation, it does so as a means of serving the id. "On the whole," says Freud, "the ego has to carry out the intentions of the id; it fulfils its duty if it succeeds in creating the conditions under which these intentions can best be fulfilled. One might compare the relation of the ego to the id with that between a rider and his horse. The horse provides the locomotive energy, and the rider has the prerogative of determining the goal and of guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it. But all too often in the relations between the ego and the id we find a picture of the less ideal situation in which the rider is obliged to guide his horse in the direction in which it itself wants to go."<sup>1</sup>

The chief characteristics of the ego are as follows:

- (1) It is mainly conscious.
- (2) It is logical, being ruled by a "reality principle," as opposed to the "pleasure principle" of the id.
- (3) It maintains a dream censorship, to prevent repressed material disturbing consciousness.
- (4) It gives its contents verbalised form.

But the ego was born in the early years of life, when strong emotional bonds existed between the child and its parents. Being yet weak, the ego was unable to cope effectively with the id impulses, striving for satisfaction, and had to strengthen itself by identifying a portion of itself with the parents. The parents represented authority because they had the power to restrict and forbid infantile desires, brooking no opposition. Thus, in identifying a portion of itself with the parents, the role of stern parent was assumed within the mind, watching over the id impulses and compelling the ego to repress those which it deemed impermissible. This internalising of authority Freud calls the super-ego. It is the earliest form of moral code. It has been compared with the "conscience," but is much more severe, having developed in early childhood when parental authority was all powerful and trivial misdeeds assumed gigantic proportions. The tyranny which the super-ego exercises over conscious life is responsible for the inability of many people to shake themselves free from the religious and political traditions of their time. How these acquire the authority which they have over men's lives is discussed later. Here, I may say that this conception of Freud is invaluable in understanding the whole complexity of social phenomena and the authority upon which it depends.

Repression is performed by the ego at the behest of the super-ego, and, because this repression is unconscious in character, we can see that part of the ego must likewise be unconscious. Consequently, consciousness and the ego are not identical.

The ego, in contact with reality, has the difficult task of holding a balance between the urges of the id for gratification and the stern, unreasonable super-ego, whose intolerance, not only of deed but of the thought of a deed, causes intense anxiety in consciousness. To avoid this, the ego has to adopt various devices, described in later pages, which have the purpose of placating the super-ego while at the same time giving partial or indirect expression to the id urges. These devices sometimes betoken a retreat from reality, and the task of the psychoanalyst resolves itself, in such cases, to a readjustment of the relationships between the id, ego, and super-ego, often involving a relaxing of the severity of the super-ego in the light of later adult experience.

The difficulties of the ego are shown by Freud in the following passage: "The proverb tells us that

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 103 (Hogarth Press)



one cannot serve two masters at once. The poor ego has a still harder time of it; it has to serve three harsh masters, and has to do its best to reconcile the claims and demands of all three. These demands are always divergent and often seem quite incompatible; no wonder that the ego so frequently gives way under its task. The three tyrants are the external world, the super-ego and the id.... It feels itself hemmed in on three sides and threatened by three kinds of danger, towards which it reacts by developing anxiety when it is too hard pressed. Having originated in the experiences of the perceptual system, it is designed to represent the demands of the external world, but it also wishes to be a loyal servant of the id... On the other hand, its every movement is watched by the severe super-ego, which holds up certain norms of behaviour, without regard to any difficulties coming from the id and the external world; and if these norms are not acted up to, it punishes the ego with the feelings of tension which manifest themselves as a sense of inferiority and guilt. In this way, goaded on by the id, hemmed in by the super-ego, and rebuffed by reality, the ego struggles to cope with its economic task of reducing the forces and influences which work in it and upon it to some kind of harmony; and we may well understand how it is that we so often cannot repress the cry: 'Life is not easy'."<sup>1</sup>

The picture of the mind which Freud paints is one of a dynamic interplay of mental forces, some urging for gratification and others striving to prevent their gratification. The concepts he uses help us to understand how little conscious we are of our own inner, mental life, how much of it goes on in the depths of the unconscious. The most important events of our life—the emotional experiences of childhood—have passed beyond conscious reach, yet only by making them conscious can we understand the causes of much irrational anxiety, the frustrations which we experience in conscious purpose, our hesitations and unaccountable aversions; and only thus can we make the adjustments which enable us to live on a more rational plane.

Objections raised against the concept of a dynamic unconscious reduce themselves mainly to verbal and logical quibbles.

Freud, like any other scientist, has had to construct theories to cover facts not explicable in terms of existing theories. Until he made a science of the investigation of the unconscious mind, its existence was merely suspected. Orthodox psychologists had equated mind with consciousness and ridiculed the idea of unconscious mental processes, which, they said, involved a contradiction in terms. The accumulation of fact which psycho-analysis, in its short life, has already gathered, of which a few instances have been given above, overrides the sterile and piffling objections proffered by the verbal quibblers. To have made a science of psychology is Freud's great merit, a fact deeply resented by those who would restrict science to non-human spheres and preserve, as inviolable, the realms of man's mental life. ,

The causal links between the conscious and unconscious are best revealed in the study of dreams. To that subject we turn for an answer to many baffling problems.

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, pp. 103-4 (Hogarth Press)

## CHAPTER III

### DREAM-INTERPRETATION AND THE PROCESS OF ANALYSIS

Freud has brought dreams within the realms of scientific investigation. Previously dreams had been the province of fortune-tellers, soothsayers, and charlatans of every kind, and scientists had hardly considered it worth while to pay much attention to what seemed a happy hunting-ground for those who preyed on the superstitious and ignorant. If they did give the matter a thought, they declared dream- life to be the disordered product of a tired brain, and left it at that.

Freud describes this attitude in a passage telling how dreams became part of psycho-analytic technique. "One day the discovery was made that the symptoms of disease in certain nervous patients have meaning. It was upon this discovery that the psycho-analytic method of treatment was based. In this treatment it happened that patients in speaking of their symptoms also mentioned their dreams, whereupon the suspicion arose that these dreams too had meaning.... So dreams become the object of psycho-analytic research—another of these ordinary, underrated occurrences, apparently of no practical value, like 'errors,' and sharing with them the characteristic of occurring in healthy persons. But in other respects the conditions of work are rather less favourable. Errors had only been neglected by science; people had not troubled their heads much about them, but at least it was no disgrace to occupy oneself with them.... To occupy oneself with dreams, however, is not merely unpractical and superfluous, but positively scandalous; it carries with it the taint of the unscientific and arouses the suspicion of personal leanings towards mysticism. The idea of a medical student troubling himself about dreams when there is so much in neuropathology and psychiatry itself that is more serious!... No, dreams are far too unworthy and trivial to be objects of scientific research."<sup>1</sup>

Freud, however, was not dismayed by this kind of attitude. Dreams, he maintained, are a definite mental occurrence, and therefore demand the turning of scientific method to their study. So fruitful has been his investigations into the nature of the dream that the interpretation of dreams is one of the most important processes in his psycho-analytic technique. By its means he has been able to penetrate to the depths of the unconscious mind and uncover much of the repressed material behind his patients' troubles.

The general purpose of a dream is to ward off anything that would disturb sleep. Its method is to associate *any* disturbing stimulus, whether internal or external, with a repressed wish. It then imagines the wish as being fulfilled. A simple example is of the hungry man whose pangs of hunger, the internal stimuli, threatening to wake him, he dreams of partaking of a banquet, and thus, in the imagined gratification, preserves his sleep. Very few dreams are as straightforward and simple to analyse as that. While every dream, according to Freud, embodies a wish fulfilment denied by reality, analysis reveals that this gratification often takes a tortuously indirect path, demanding great skill and patience to elucidate it.

A distinction is made between the manifest and the latent content of the dream. The latent content is the real motive of the dream—the repressed mental processes which lead up to it. In order to gain expression in consciousness, these unconscious processes use other ideas, images, and symbols as disguises by which they are able to pass the censor (or repressing forces), whose vigilance is somewhat relaxed in sleep. "A dream is the disguised fulfilment of a repressed wish; it is a compromise between the demands of a repressed impulse and the resistance of a censoring force in the ego."

---

<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 68 (Allen & Unwin).

Thus the actual presentations in the dream are known as the manifest content, underlying which is the latent content with the real significance of the dream. The task of the psycho-analyst is to seek behind the dream, as recounted by the dreamer, for the underlying unconscious processes responsible for it.

Freud compares the dream-censorship which compels the distortion of the latent content into the manifest content to the Press-censorship which operated during the war. "Take up any political paper and you will find that here and there in the text something is omitted and in its place the blank white of the paper meets your eye: you know that this is the work of the Press censor. Where these blank spaces occur, there originally stood something of which the authorities at the censorship disapproved, and which has been deleted on that account. You probably think it a pity, for that must have been the most interesting part, the 'cream' of the news.

"On other occasions the censorship has not dealt with the sentence in its completed form: for the writer, foreseeing which passages were likely to be objected to by the censor, has forestalled him by softening them down, making some slight modification or contenting himself with hints and allusions to what he really wants to write. In this case there are no blanks, but from the roundabout and obscure mode of expression you can detect the fact that, at the time of writing, the author had the censorship in mind."<sup>1</sup>

The corresponding mental process whereby repressed material gains access to consciousness is known as dream-work. By its means, disturbing stimuli are worked into the dream and provide imagery in which the repressed material gains expression. Familiar examples of external conditions being used in dreams are the leaking hot-water bottle which gives rise to dreams connected with the sea, trips on the ocean, etc., and the raucous buzzing of the alarm clock which assumes, in a dream, the more soothing tinkle of church bells. Thus sleep is preserved while the disturbing stimuli have been incorporated in a dream.

Here is a dream, quoted by Freud, which well illustrates this process:

"I am going for a walk on a spring morning, and I saunter through fields just beginning to grow green, till I come to a neighbouring village, where I see the inhabitants, in holiday attire, making their way in large numbers to the church, their hymn-books in their hands. Of course! it is Sunday, and the morning service is just about to begin. I decide to take part in it, but first, as I am rather overheated, I think I will cool down in the churchyard which surrounds the church. Whilst reading some of the epitaphs there, I hear the bell-ringer go up into the tower, where I now notice, high up, the little village bell which will give the signal for the beginning of the service. For some time yet it remains motionless, then it begins to swing, and suddenly the strokes ring out, clear and piercing—so clear and piercing that they put an end to my sleep. But the sound of the bell comes from the alarum-clock."<sup>2</sup>

When a dream takes the form of a nightmare it is because it has failed in its function of protecting sleep. The latent content has not been successfully disguised, and it has become necessary for the wakened censor to prevent the unwelcome impulses penetrating consciousness. This may be illustrated, metaphorically, as follows: The relaxed censorship during sleep is represented by the sentry who is posted to challenge intruders. A repressed impulse attempting to creep by, in disguise, is recognised by the sentry, who immediately gives the alarm and turns out the guard. Thus an insufficiently disguised

---

<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 116 (Allen & Unwin).

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 75 (Allen & Unwin).

repressed impulse awakens all the repressing forces, which had been in abeyance during sleep.

We now consider some of the means adopted by the dream-work in transforming the latent into the manifest content of the dream.

By *condensation*, says Freud, “we mean to convey the fact that the content of the manifest dream is less rich than that of the latent thoughts—is, as it were, a kind of abbreviated translation of the latter.” It is a process whereby a number of elements in the latent content which have some common characteristics are fused together and represented in the manifest dream by one image or idea. A person, in a dream, may be constituted of a fusion of characteristics of several persons. We may dream, for example, of someone who looks like Mr. Brown, walks like Mr Green, and dresses like Mr. White. Or a place called Southpool, in our dream, may be a symbolic blending of two experiences—one at Southend, and the other at Blackpool. There is some associative bond between these people or places in the latent content which allows of their blending in the manifest.

The process is a very complex one, for not only may several repressed impulses be represented by one element in the manifest dream, but one repressed impulse may express itself through several manifest elements. There is what Freud describes as an “interlacing” between the manifest and latent content, so that the meaning of each element in the manifest dream often has to await the interpretation of the whole dream.

Possibly the most important process of dream-work is *displacement*. It is mainly responsible for the unintelligible nature of the manifest dream.

The emotional interest attaching to an important element in the latent content may be displaced on to another less important one so that the accent in the manifest dream is placed on unimportant elements. What, therefore, seems to be the central theme of the dream is really an insignificant factor, while the real meaning of the dream is vested in an inconspicuous element of the manifest dream. In a dream depicting a house, the ornate appearance of the doors and windows may draw attention from the really important element of the dream, namely a tiny chimney-pot. “Displacement,” says Freud, “is the chief method employed in the process of dream-distortion, which the dream thoughts have to undergo under the influence of the censorship.”

By means of *dramatisation* the thoughts, in a dream, are given visual form, abstract ideas being represented by concrete objects. This is closely connected with displacement, for one of the causes for the choice of an idea upon which to displace the emotional tone of an important element will be the extent it permits the visual representation of the important element. “The dream activity,” says Freud, “does not hesitate promptly to recast the inflexible thought into another verbal form, even if it is a more unusual one, as long as this form makes dramatisation possible, and thus puts an end to the psychological distress caused by cramped thinking.”

The dream is presented as action, dramatically; considerations of space and time being ignored in the play of manifest ideas.

Finally the process of *secondary elaboration* takes place at the moment of emerging from sleep and continues after. The dream is elaborated by the wakened censor, given coherence and a more logical form. Certain elements are more thoroughly disguised so that they will not disturb consciousness. The various elements in the manifest dream are related to one another so that the dream forms a whole, whereas, “in general, we must refrain from attempting to explain one part of the manifest dream by

another part, as though the dream were a coherent whole and a pragmatic representation.”<sup>1</sup>

The effect of secondary elaboration is consequently to give an almost completely new form to the dream and further increase the difficulties of interpretation.

Repressed mental processes gain expression in dream life by the use of symbols. One object comes to stand for another because of some property the two have in common, though the association between them may be so slight that the conscious mind would not notice it. Essentially, symbolisation is the transference of emotional interest from one object to another. It is a process general to mankind, discernible in myths and religious ceremonies. The use of bread and wine to symbolise the body and blood of Jesus; the representation of justice by a blindfolded female with scales, are familiar to everyone.

In one respect, symbolisation of this kind may be considered as a response to the need for more or less primitive mentalities, to have ideas expressed in concrete form, but, when regarded as expressing unconscious processes, the symbols are rather disguises, for the most remotely associated objects are selected to represent repressed urges.

Certain symbols used in dreams occur so frequently as to have become recognised as universal. So important a part does symbolisation play, that it is worth quoting rather fully some examples of the objects used as symbols, given by Freud.

“The number of things which are represented symbolically in dreams is not great. The human body as a whole, parents, children, brothers and sisters, birth, death, nakedness. The only typical... representation of the human form as a whole is that of a house... People have dreams of climbing down the front of a house with feelings, sometimes of pleasure and sometimes of dread. When the walls are quite smooth, the house means a man; when there are ledges and balconies which can be got hold of, a woman. Parents appear in dreams as emperor and empress, king and queen, or other exalted personages, in this respect the dream attitude is highly dutiful. Children, and brothers and sisters are less tenderly treated, being symbolised by little animals or vermin. Birth is almost invariably represented by some reference to water; either we are falling into water or clambering out of it, saving someone from it or being saved by them, i.e. the relation between mother and child is symbolised. For dying we have setting out upon a journey or travelling by train, while the state of death is indicated by various obscure and, as it were, timid allusions; clothes and uniforms stand for nakedness.... The male genital organ is symbolically represented in dreams in many different ways, with most of which the common idea underlying the comparison is easily apparent. In the first place the sacred number three is symbolic of the whole male genitalia. Its more conspicuous and, to both sexes, more interesting part, the penis, is symbolised primarily by objects which resemble it in form, being long and upstanding, such as sticks, umbrellas, poles, trees, and the like, also by objects which, like the thing symbolised, have the property of penetrating and consequently injuring the body—that is to say, pointed weapons of all sorts, knives, daggers, lances, sabres; pencils, penholders, nail files, hammers, and other implements are undoubtedly male sexual symbols, based on an idea of the male organ, which is equally easily perceived. The peculiar property of this member of being able to raise itself upright in defiance of the law of gravity, part of the phenomena of erection, leads to symbolic representation by means of balloons, aeroplanes, and Zeppelins. But dreams have another, much more impressive, way of symbolising erection; they make the organ of sex into the essential part of the whole person, so that the dreamer himself flies. Nor

---

<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 153 (Allen & Unwin).

must you think to object to this on the ground that women can also have dreams of flying; you should rather remind yourselves that the purpose of dreams is wish-fulfilment, and that the wish to be a man is frequently met with in women, whether they are conscious of it or not. The female genitalia are symbolically represented by all such objects as share -with them the property of enclosing a space or are capable of *acting* as receptacles; such as pits, hollows and caves, and also jars and bottles and boxes of all sorts and sizes, chests, coffer, pockets, and so forth. Many symbols refer rather to the uterus than to the other genital organs; thus cupboards, stoves, and, above all, rooms”.<sup>1</sup>

Many of these symbols will seem far-fetched to the reader, but Freud claims that experimental confirmation of dream symbolisation has been obtained. It has been discovered that when a deeply hypnotised person is ordered to dream of sexual activities his account of the dream, on emerging from hypnosis, shows the use of familiar symbols to represent those sexual activities.

The technique used in the process of psychoanalysis seems remarkably simple, but it demands skill and patience from the analyst, which only years of training can bring. It is known as “free-association,” and consists in the following: The patient recounts a dream, or an experience, or an idea, or a pet theory, and the analyst asks the patient to let his mind play freely round it. He must make no effort to guide his thoughts, saying what associations appear in his consciousness. As one association recalls another, so the patient brings to light buried memories which had been underlying his dream or experience, etc. In the quiet of the analyst’s room, the patient relaxes, and gives an account of himself and his dreams in his own manner. The analyst takes great care to avoid making suggestions by word or act, to the patient.

The analyst notes, as significant, pauses in the patient’s account which seem to indicate repressed material. Much resistance is met with, as if the patient fears the revelation of his unconscious impulses, and it takes often many months to complete the analysis—months of patient and understanding handling.

An emotional relationship develops between the analyst and the patient, known as transference, involving the transferring to the analyst of emotions and impulses of some unsatisfied earlier relationships. The patient thus relives the emotional situations responsible for his complaint, and the analyst comes to represent now one, now the other of the people towards whom the patient has had an emotional relationship. He may represent, for example, the patient’s father, and the infantile attitude is directed to him, with its contradictory emotions of love and hate. This double or ambivalent attitude, in which an object is both loved and hated as a result of conflicting impulses, makes the task of the analyst a very delicate one. As Freud says: “It is undeniable that in his endeavour to emerge victorious over the transference phenomenon the psycho-analyst is faced with the greatest difficulties, but it should not be forgotten that it is just these difficulties that render us the invaluable service of making the patient’s buried and forgotten love-excitations current and manifest, for in the last resort no one can be vanquished in *absentia* or in *effigie*.”

The final aim of the analyst is to make conscious the relationship of the transference, so that the patient recognises the role of the analyst and the nature of the conflicting emotions felt towards him. In so doing he is enabled to rid himself of dependence on the analyst and to recognise the root causes of his difficulties.

As an example of psycho-analytic technique the following dream analysis is of interest. It is given

---

<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, pp 128-31 (Allen & Unwin).

by Barbara Low, the dream being related by a female patient.

“I was a child of about nine, living in my old home with my family. It was mid-day; I was just returned from morning school to dinner, and standing on the doorstep waiting for my mother to open the door. I was full of dread and fear, it seemed, because the door was not opened, though I had no apparent reason for fear. Then my mother came to open the door, but she was dressed in a blue dress, the colour of your own of yesterday [i.e. of the analyst]. She was tall and commanding, and her hair had turned quite dark [in reality, she was short, and at that period her hair was light brown]. I remember rushing wildly past her, and that is all I know. Something else happened—I forget what; I think there seemed to be a pool of water in one of the rooms, but I ran by.’

“A full analysis is impossible, but it can be shown that here again condensation, displacement, dramatisation, secondary elaboration, are all at work.

“The dread and fear in front of the unopened door are elements derived from two childish experiences: one which came to light was the incident of her standing in agitation outside her own front door after morning school because she desired to urinate and was in fear of being unable to retain her water any longer (an ‘accident’ which her mother would regard as a great disgrace); the other experience, about a year or two later in her life, was that of having once met, on a dark evening, a drunken man near her home, who attempted to molest her (or so she believed), and from whom she rushed violently away to her own house and stood beating on the door to get in—but no one was in, and she hid in the garden shed. Condensation takes the two memories, both sexual in a wide sense of the word, and fuses them together into a memory of a fear and terror and humiliation connected with bodily organs and functions, associated with her own house and door. Condensation again is active in the picture of her mother, who also has traits, real or imaginary, of her analyst. Analysis revealed that the patient gave the analyst the role of mother in many aspects, and desired to substitute the analyst for her own mother. Hence by fusion of ideas and elements the real mother becomes in part the desired object, and wears her dress and hair. Displacement is easily seen in this dream. The emotions of fear and shame connected with the urination which she can no longer control, and with the assault on her by the drunken man, are transferred from those experiences to the waiting outside the door, and to the opening of the door, partly to conceal where the true effect lies. The ‘pool inside a room’ proved to be the memory of a childish accident in a passage, outside a door, at her school.

“Dramatisation is obvious throughout, especially in the incident of rushing wildly past her mother,’ which represents the extreme agitation and culmination of emotion she felt when the door had at last opened and she could obtain satisfaction for her physical need. Secondary elaboration is illustrated in her waking criticism: ‘Something else happened—I forget what.’ A deeper analysis brought to light that she had urinated then and there in the passage (to her mother’s great indignation and disgust) as soon as the door was open, and this memory was suppressed by the censor, the conscious mental result being that there was ‘something else’—nothing of importance worth remembering. Finally, analysis shows that there is a wish-fulfilment expressed in this dream—namely, the desire to be again the little child at home (and, in addition, to have the mother of one’s own choice), and to indulge in the forbidden bodily pleasures of such a period, primitive pleasures bearing with them interests and excitements which now, in her adult ‘civilised’ life, have become taboo, lost in the unconscious, yet remain still dynamic because never sufficiently gratified.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 62-4 (Allen & Unwin).

In estimating the use to which psycho-analytic technique can be put, Freud is extremely cautious. He frankly admits that the number of cures achieved in those cases treated therapeutically gives no ground for boasting. Indeed, he says: “I do not think our successes can compete with those of Lourdes. There are so many more people who believe in the miracles of the Blessed Virgin than in the existence of the unconscious.”<sup>1</sup>

Discounting the ironic tone of this statement, there seems to be an underlying recognition of the role of suggestion in achieving cures, so that it would be difficult to say how far the successes of his technique were really due to its intrinsic value as a method, rather than the confidence reposed in the analyst by the patient. Under present circumstances it is very unlikely that psychoanalysis will ever be used very widely. It conflicts too violently with established religious and moral convictions, and consequently its practice is likely to be restricted to the minority sufficiently enlightened and able to afford the unavoidably high fees.

Freud is not aware of this, for, in considering the question of education, he says: “The view that the majority of our children pass through a neurotic phase in the course of their development automatically raises a hygienic question. It may be asked whether it would not be advantageous to come to their aid with analysis even when there is no sign of a disturbance, as a precautionary measure in the interests of their health, just as nowadays one inoculates healthy children against diphtheria without waiting for them to fall ill of the disease, but the greater number of our contemporaries would regard the mere idea as nothing short of criminal... such a prophylactic against nervous disease, which would probably be very effective, *presupposes an entirely different structure of society*”.<sup>2</sup>

Thus psycho-analysis, like science in general, finds its fullest use impeded by the existing social structure, and the psycho-analyst, who is genuinely convinced of the advantages of the widespread use of his technique, must necessarily give consideration to the problem of social reconstruction. Such consideration, to be adequate, involves the study of the theories of Marx and Engels which give a scientific account of the laws of social development.

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 125 (Hogarth Press)

<sup>2</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 191 (Hogarth Press)



## CHAPTER IV

### NORMAL AND ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

An objection raised against psycho-analysis is that it bases its theories on observation made of abnormal or pathological cases. The fact is that the abnormal is removed from the normal by degrees only, and the tendencies in the one are but an exaggerated form of the tendencies in the other. The exaggerated quality of mental tendencies which the pathological cases present merely makes it easier to study them. A close observation of everyday behaviour reveals the same tendencies working, in a less pronounced fashion, in every human being. As, in this chapter, I intend to show some of the conscious modes of behaviour in which unconscious impulses gain expression, it would be helpful to begin with the abnormal cases.

In the neurotic, for example, a situation has arisen where conflicting impulses are setting up an intolerable state of tension. Repression is too weak to deal with these impulses, and a state of anxiety threatens. To avoid this the ego develops the neurotic symptoms, which either reinforce repression or give partial outlet to the unconscious impulses. These symptoms provide a means of escape, for the ego, from the unconscious impulses, whose conflict gives rise to extreme anxiety. Thus during the war many soldiers were prey to conflicting emotions and impulses. They would feel impelled to remove themselves as far as possible from the scene of battle, but were restrained by the feelings of shame that such impulses brought. To flee meant disgrace. To stay meant danger and possibly death. Here we see two conflicting mental trends. The ego has to face, on the one hand, the demands of the id to remove the individual from a dangerous situation, and, on the other, the stern morality of the super-ego, which holds up a code of behaviour which makes flight impossible. To escape from such a situation, the ego must somehow satisfy the id and yet placate the super-ego. A chance wound would provide a way out. The victim could develop a blindness or a paralysis which, of course, rendered him incapable of further active service. He was thereby enabled to satisfy the impulse to withdraw from the war and yet do so without evoking painful feelings of guilt. Some conscious suffering generally accompanied the neurotic symptom as a means of placating the super-ego. The blindness or paralysis was psycho-genic, i.e. of mental origin, for under hypnosis the sight or use of the affected part would be restored, to disappear on emerging from the hypnotic state. The whole process of adopting the symptom was unconscious and without deliberate deceit. Such means of escape from an unconscious conflict, by the adoption of a physical disability, in which the unfortunate ego can find refuge, are called, by Freud, conversion neuroses. The mental conflict is converted, as it were, into physical symptoms.

Another form of escape is provided by the compulsion neuroses. In this class are the obsessionals, who feel compelled to perform acts which in themselves are meaningless, but symbolise the repressed processes. Such acts as arranging, counting, touching things, have a protective value because they prevent the performing of other acts which might arouse an undesirable emotional association. Failure to perform them occasions mental discomfort. Thus the individual feels compelled to carry out an unconscious compulsion. The escape value is in the fact that these compulsive acts have no emotional tone in consciousness, so that the emotional impulses giving rise to them are isolated and cease to trouble consciousness. Familiar compulsive acts are the frequent washing of the hands, as if to remove a guilty stain, avoiding the cracks where paving stones meet, touching railings, counting stairs, etc. If the individual performing these acts is questioned, he can give no conscious reason for them. He merely replies that he feels that he must do them.

These examples show that the symptoms of the neurotic are purposive. The neurotic requires his

symptoms to escape from anxiety. He wishes to fall ill, as one psycho-analyst put it, as the only way open to him to avoid mental conflict.

Sometimes the neurosis takes an extreme form, when the victim can only find escape from his unconscious impulses by a complete distortion of his relationship to the external world. He is then said to be suffering from an insanity or psychosis.

The victim of the insanity known as paranoia suffers from the conscious belief that the whole world is involved in a plot against him. He believes he is being persecuted, and regards the most innocent act and word as menacing his welfare. Actually he is being persecuted, and in a sense he is justified in regarding the least act and word with deepest suspicion, but the persecution is within him, and the acts and words which he distrusts are his own which may be acting as vehicles for the repressed unconscious impulses which he fears. In other words, he is striving to escape from inner impulses by thrusting them on to the outer world as a means of disowning them. He then regards the outer world as menacing his welfare. The whole process is quite logical once the preliminary projection of the unwelcome impulses on to the external world has been accomplished. In fact, paranoids elaborate a remarkably coherent system of rationalisations in which they justify their suspicions. One such case which came to my personal notice had an involved method of establishing that most of the recent murderers had intended him for the victim. Every murder of recent years had an element in it which he had seized on and definitely related to himself. Either he had been in the neighbourhood, or his initials coincided with those of the victims—he met every objection with a fresh flood of evidence, complicatedly woven into a most convincing argument.

Another form of insanity is known as dementia praecox. The sufferer withdraws from the world of reality and retreats to a life of phantasy, in which the mental conflict seeks solution. This turning inwards for satisfaction with phantasy is termed “introversion.” The victim pays no attention to his surroundings, answers questions mechanically, and generally performs some obsessional act connected with his mental conflict. The ego is unable to cope with reality because of some emotional shock it has received, and seeks solace in a world of its own. Most of us have indulged in day-dreams in which we resolve the difficulties which confront us in reality. We may have met a situation in an inadequate fashion; in day-dream we compensate for that, going over the whole scene in a way which places us in a better light. Asking the boss for a raise in timid fashion in reality, and ferociously demanding it, in day-dream, for example. But day-dreams have to be relinquished, and the clerk resumes his timidity when he feels the reality of the stool beneath him, and sees the ledgers before him. The sufferer from dementia praecox does not, cannot, give up his day-dreams. Indeed they are no longer day-dreams, for his whole life becomes involved in them.

The neurotics and psychotics show in an extreme form the tendencies common to us all. The importance of their study lies in the fact that they show the possible means of reacting to situations fraught with danger and discomfort, which may, none the less, leave untouched the cause of the danger. If human beings can escape, by psychological devices, from discomfort caused often by external circumstances, how necessary is a study of those devices on the part of those who wish to encourage the removal of external difficulties. Religion, for example, is an important means of escape from reality; at a later stage I shall deal with it more fully, because of that importance. For the moment, we shall examine some of the common devices which the ego uses to cope with unconscious impulses. We pass, consequently, from the neuroses and psychoses to the everyday peculiarities of behaviour. At what stage an everyday peculiarity becomes a neurosis or psychosis, it is difficult to say. Whereas society considers

peculiarities of everyday behaviour as harmless, and the neurotic symptoms as harmful only to the victim, it regards the psychotic symptoms as a danger to society as well as the victim. A symptom, therefore, which passes through quantitative change from the everyday peculiarity through the intermediate stage of neurosis to become a fully developed psychosis, occasions a qualitatively different social attitude towards it, which may be borne in mind as an example of quantity-quality change, dealt with in the chapter on Dialectical Materialism.

The following are common psychological devices:

By means of *reaction-formation* attitudes or interests in conscious life are developed which are the antithesis of the repressed impulses. Attention is thereby distracted from them and repression consequently strengthened. A common reaction-formation is prudery of the militant kind. By active condemnation of anything connected with sex—nude postcards, dancing, courting couples, modern art, novels—a compromise is reached in which the unconscious sexual urges are given partial outlet in the pre-occupation in sexual matters, while at the same time are more effectively repressed because of the antithetical form of that pre-occupation. Another familiar example is of the housewife whose continual dusting, polishing, and cleaning make her the terror of those around her. Such excessive cleanliness is a reaction-formation to a strong impulse, in which dirt has a sexual significance. Projection is a means of escaping from unconscious wishes and ideas which are painful to consciousness. They are thrust (projected) on to the outer world, and the internal menace is thus treated as external. Attack or flight then becomes possible, as in the case of a real external menace. As already illustrated, in an extreme form, paranoid symptoms are exhibited.

By means of *projection* we tend to recognise in others, and to condemn, those impulses which we refuse to acknowledge in ourselves. An acute observer may often gauge the character of an individual's unconscious tendencies by a consideration of the things he most strongly condemns. In political life, those who call "traitor" the loudest, perhaps are condemning, by projection, their own unconscious treacherous impulses. The phrase, "Judge not, lest ye be judged," has a wealth of psychological meaning to it.

Further common examples of projection are: the dishonest man who is ever watchful for dishonesty in others; feelings of guilt which give rise to sharp criticality of other's faults; and the mistrustful lover whose suspicions proceed from the projection of his own unconscious tendency to faithlessness.

An important method of giving expression to the sexual instincts is *sublimation*. The impulses are given aim and interests which are no longer directly sexual. They are desexualised, and express themselves in a socially approved manner. Homo-sexual impulses, for example, are sublimated in friendships; sadistic impulses are transformed in the skill of the surgeon, and anal-eroticism into interest in music and painting. The process is unconscious, and is the work of the unconscious part of the ego. The sexual impulses are said to be "aim-inhibited."

The advantage of this method of expression is that it involves a minimum of repression, since it is not a defence mechanism erected by the ego against the demands of the id, but a method of cooperation between the ego and the id. In this respect it is the reverse of reaction-formation. Thus Ernest Jones comments: "In contradiction to sublimations, where the energy is not only derived from the repressed impulse, but flows in the same direction as it, that of reaction-formations is derived from the opposing ego forces, and is aimed in exactly the opposite direction. They might, indeed, be described by the more static metaphor of barriers erected as dams against the repressed impulses. The contrast between them and sublimations may be illustrated by a couple of examples. The primitive tendency to self-display (of

the person) may be sublimated into a taking pleasure in self-prominence, either physically or in oratory, or, more indirectly still, as in the many varieties of fame-seeking, or, on the other hand, it may lead to reaction of modesty, shame, and the like. The primitive pleasure all children take in dirt may be sublimated into painting, sculpture work, or cooking, or it may lead to the reaction of cleanliness, tidiness, and similar traits.<sup>1</sup>

Sublimation betokens the fact that the ego is sufficiently strong to utilise instinctive impulses for social purposes. Instead of flinching in the face of a reality which threatens to restrict the satisfaction of id impulses, the ego seeks in outer reality modes of expression which give adequate outlet to id impulses without conflicting with social standards. One might say that sublimation is the saving hope for social revolutionaries. This is no place to discuss the meaning of the term “social necessity,” but the tasks of those who desire to see society remoulded resolve themselves into the direction of id impulses along channels of sublimation which enable the performance of those acts necessary to free society from its present trammels.

Most widespread and easily recognisable of all mechanisms is *rationalisation*. It enables the performance of acts, which otherwise might occasion mental discomfort, by reconciling them to conscious standards. This is done through a process of finding reasons for the action. Having found a reason which seems to justify the act in the light of conscious standards, it can be then performed without qualms or guilt-feelings. Thus an armament manufacturer might excuse to himself the fact that his profits result from the blood and deaths of innocent people by “proving” that human nature demands war, and that war is necessary to progress, as it stimulates invention.

This rationalising tendency is a defence against the logic which might compel an alteration in our mode of behaviour. When a point of view has been adopted to accommodate the expression of unconscious impulses by reconciling it to conscious standards, any logical opposition will be greatly resented as threatening an adjustment made between the id and the ego. It points to the fact that people very often decide an issue first, whether on politics, religion, or some other subject, on emotional grounds, and then seek for reasons. Discussion between two people often resolves itself to a conflict between two sets of rationalisations adopted for emotional and individual ends. Each isn't so much listening to the other as thinking of “reasons” to strengthen his own defence mechanism. The “open-minded” individual, particularly if he is very fond of calling attention to that quality, generally is more prone to rationalise than his opponent who modestly makes no such claim. The fact that anyone insists on his open-mindedness or broad-mindedness is an indication that he feels a need to justify a particularly strongly emotionalised set of convictions. With this in mind, much fruitless discussion can be avoided, particularly with religious and political cranks, whose point of view, having derived from emotional sources, is not likely to be vanquished by logical argument. The strong need that some people feel for the convictions they hold leads them to tolerate all kinds of excesses against those who oppose them. The kindest and most sympathetic nature may be transformed into a bloodthirsty fiendish type if its mental stability is threatened by the assertion of views which, for emotional reasons, it cannot tolerate.

The above-mentioned devices are operative in everyday life, and with little difficulty one can discern them at work amongst one's acquaintances, and, with much greater difficulty, in oneself. But even more common are the slips of mind which reveal themselves in speech and writing, and which Freud calls the “psychopathology of everyday life.” He shows that everyday examples of forgetfulness are not

---

<sup>1</sup> *Papers on Psycho-Analysis* (Benn)

accidental, but are strictly determined by the interference of unconscious processes in conscious life.

When a person of usually good memory forgets an appointment, it is because he really had an unconscious reluctance to keep it. In the case of a young lady who forgets to meet her young man, it is clear that her feminine ardour is waning.

Freud quotes an example, given by Dr. W. Stekel, of a slip of the tongue which shows an underlying desire which was repugnant to conscious standards.

“An unpleasant trick of my unpleasant thoughts was revealed by the following example: to begin with, I may state that in my capacity as a physician I never consider my remuneration, but always keep in view the patient’s interest only—this goes without saying. I was visiting a patient who was convalescing from a serious illness. We had passed through hard days and nights. I was happy to find her improved, and I portrayed to her the pleasures of a sojourn in Abbazia, concluding with: ‘If, as I hope, you will *not* soon leave your bed.’ This obviously came from an unconscious selfish motive to be able to continue treating this wealthy patient, a wish which is entirely foreign to my waking consciousness, and which I would reject with indignation.”

By paying attention to such slips, we can form an idea of the unconscious tendencies behind our own and other people’s behaviour. There is a meaning to be found in most of these everyday errors, though some of them may be due to physiological causes. This is not denied by Freud, but he insists that in those cases involving forgetfulness, it is hardly likely that they can be explained in this way.

For example, to forget to write a certain letter and then when reminded of the necessity to write it, to forget to post it, would seem to show that the forgetfulness was serving an unconscious purpose.

Freud gives an instance of repeated forgetting. Dr. Ernest Jones neglected to post a letter for several days. When he did post it, he forgot to address it and received it back from the dead letter office. After addressing the letter and taking it to the post he discovered that he had forgotten to stamp it.

Further amusing errors are given by Freud as follows:

“The President of our Parliament once opened the session with the words, ‘Gentlemen, I declare a quorum present and herewith declare the session *closed*...’ The meaning and intention of the slip is that he wants to close the session.... He expects no good results from the session and would be glad to be able to disperse forthwith.... Or when a lady, appearing to compliment another, says, ‘I am sure you must have thrown this delightful hat together,’ instead of ‘sewn it together’ (*aufgepatzt* instead of *aufgeputzt*), no scientific theories in the world can prevent us from seeing in her slip the thought that the hat is an amateur production. Or when a lady who is well known for her determined character says, ‘My husband asked his doctor what sort of diet ought to be provided for him; but the doctor said he needed no special diet, he could eat and drink whatever *I* choose,’ the slip appears clearly as the unmistakable expression of a consistent scheme.”<sup>1</sup>

As a concluding example, I will cite a typographical error which found its way into a Socialist weekly. It needs no comment. “The Prime Minister addressed a Unionist demonstration at Dundee, and some of his remarks about the Labour Party are worth *nothing*” (instead of noting).<sup>2</sup>

What significance has the existence of these mental devices for the Marxist? I shall attempt to answer this question more fully in a later chapter. But we see at once that they show that the individual is responsive, not only to the demands of external reality, but to the demands of his own inner,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 27 (Allen & Unwin)

<sup>2</sup> *New Leader* (6th December, 1935).

instinctive life. They show, also, how easily the individual may escape from the world of harsh reality by seeking refuge in a world of illusion in which his wish is master. And how, on the other hand, he can deny his own unconscious impulses by thrusting them on to the outer world. Lenin was impatient of those Socialists who preferred to deal with human material of their own fantastic creation rather than with the infinitely more complex human being of real existence. “We can (and must),” said Lenin, “begin to build up Socialism, not with the fantastic human material especially created by our imagination, but with the material bequeathed us by Capitalism. This, no doubt, is very ‘difficult,’ but any other approach to this task is not serious enough to deserve discussion.”<sup>1</sup>

Freud has made possible a fuller knowledge of what human beings are in fact like, by a fearless, scientific enquiry into the nature of mental activities. If the Marxist desires to get the worker to grips with reality, to teach him that he can change it by his own efforts, he must combat those mental tendencies by which the worker seeks to escape from the world of reality. But, if he does not understand the nature of those tendencies, he will be fighting in the dark.

---

<sup>1</sup> “*Left-Wing*” *Communism* (Martin Lawrence)

## CHAPTER V

### SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

The ego has the difficult task of adapting instinctive impulses to the demands of reality. In this sense, conscious behaviour is the product of interaction between instinctive impulses and an outer reality which tends to restrict and to deny them expression.

At this stage it is not my intention to examine the nature of that reality which forms man's environment, but to outline the general theory of the instinctive life which psycho-analysis gives. If, therefore, the account seems to over-stress the part played by instinctive impulses, it does so necessarily, so that when we do examine the environmental situations in which they express themselves we shall not tend to minimise their importance

Definitions of instincts are varied. In general, they are considered to be fundamental innate impulses connected with the preservation of the individual and the species. "An instinct," says Freud, "may be described as having a source, an object, and an aim. The source is a state of excitation within the body, and its aim is to remove that excitation; in the course of its path from its source to the attainment of its aim the instinct becomes operative mentally. We picture it as a certain sum of energy forcing its way in a certain direction."<sup>1</sup>

Attempts have been made by psychologists to tabulate the instincts which seem to Freud to miss the real nature of the instinctive life. Thus he writes; "You know how popular thought deals with the instincts. It postulates as many different instincts as may be needed—an instinct of assertiveness, instincts of imitation and play, a social instinct, and a great many more besides. It takes them up, as it were, lets each do its particular work, and then drops them again. We have always suspected that behind this multitude of small occasional instincts there lies something much more serious and powerful, which must be approached with circumspection."<sup>2</sup>

In attempting to get behind the multiplicity of instinctive reactions to their fundamental sources, Freud has been led to formulate two main groups—Eros, or life, instincts, and Death, or destructive, instincts.

We shall consider this grouping towards the latter part of this chapter, but for the moment we shall deal with the sexual impulses included in the group of Eros, which, biologically, are very important, as they serve the needs of reproduction. Freud's views on the sexual instinct aroused violent opposition when first propounded. He could expect nothing else, for since he considers that the repressed material in the unconscious is largely, in character, infantile and sexual and out of harmony with conscious standards, his very suggestion outraged those standards and evoked every form of condemnation in their defence.

By sexual Freud means "the energy of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word 'love.' On the one hand, self-love, and, on the other hand, love for parents, children, and love for humanity in general, and also devotion to concrete objects and abstract ideas." The meaning that he attaches to the word is thus enormously wider than popular usage, which restricts it to the adult relationship leading to the sexual act, considering the other manifestations described by Freud as due to the working of some other instinct. Dr. McDougal, for instance, accounts for the love which parents have for their children as due to the operation of a "tender instinct."

---

<sup>1</sup> New Introductory Lectures, p. 125 (Hogarth Press).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Still further does Freud offend conventional belief when he imputes a sex life to children from the earliest days of life. He points to the possessiveness with which parents of the opposite sex are regarded, the desire to be petted, the blissful expression when taken in the arms, the contented sucking of the thumb, with angry cries when dispossessed, the pleasure that children show when bodily stimulated by tickling, and the interest they display in their sex organs, as evidence of early sex-life.

In early sex-life, what are known as component sexual instincts dominate. They have a more or less independent existence of each other, with their own modes of seeking gratification. In the course of sexual development they are all integrated, but sometimes a component instinct may dominate the sex-life of the adult, compelling him to seek ; sexual satisfaction which is infantile in character. Perversions are thus considered by Freud to be the retention, in adult life, of infantile modes of sexual behaviour.

In his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, Freud gives an account of the component instincts, of which the following are among the most important:

(1) *The Oral component instincts.* The mouth and associated regions form a zone of sexual excitability known as the oral-erotic zone. The component instincts associated with this zone seek gratification through the mouth, hence their name. The child finds pleasure in sucking his thumb, biting, swallowing, etc.

When this component instinct dominates in adult life, various forms of perversion connected with obtaining sexual satisfaction through sucking and biting exist. In kissing and various other intimacies connected with the mouth this instinct plays a part in normal sex-life, though subordinate to the final end of the sex act. It is only a perversion when its satisfaction is sought independently. In smoking and chewing we have examples of minor perversions.

(2) *Anal component instincts.* The stimulation of the zone in the neighbourhood of the anus, the anal-erotic zone, is the form of gratification sought by another group of component instincts. They are associated with the act of excretion, and the way they develop largely determines future character-formations. The child learns that its parents place a value on the performance of this function, and in its ability to retain or release at will a sense of power grows. Its excrement is the first thing a child has to offer the world, and its later attitudes to money, people, work, art, and life in general are greatly affected by its attitude, as an infant, to the process of excretion and excrement. This may sound a far-fetched claim, but it must be remembered that practically the whole of the second year of a baby's life is taken up with training by the parents of the control of excretion. The child is exhorted, praised, and threatened so that its early reactions to the excretory functions cannot fail to have an important effect in its later character-formation. It learns to express defiance to its mother by withholding the faeces, and also to increase eventual pleasure through the delay. In later life, this tendency to withhold may be a subjective factor leading to hoarding money, obstinacy, and miserliness, while willingness to perform the excretory function as a means of showing love for the parents, and because of the organic pleasure derived from the act, may be transformed into generosity, extravagance, or forms of productive activity such as writing, painting, and speaking. We are dealing here, as I mentioned at the commencement of this chapter, with the subjective impulses which contribute to conscious behaviour. Varying external circumstances will affect the way these impulses express themselves. Their energy may be displaced or sublimated along channels other than those directly related to their sexual aims. How these displacements and sublimations occur, we saw in the preceding chapter.

The integration of these and other component instincts takes place, in the normal adult, under the dominance of impulses associated with the genitals. The well-balanced adult exhibits impulses derived



from the component instincts, but these merely subserve the purposes of the sexual act. To arrive at that stage the sexual impulses undergo a developmental process which we shall now consider.

There are two main periods in sexual development, separated by a latency period, in which little or no development of the instincts takes place. The first period is the most important, for it lays down the lines along which the revival of sexual impulses later takes its course. This period is from infancy to five years, and has three main stages in which one of the component instincts plays a dominating part.

The first stage is known as the *auto-erotic stage*. It occurs in the earliest weeks of childhood, when the child has no awareness of itself as an individual. The various component instincts seek their gratification more or less independently, and the child's sexual life is confined to sensory pleasures derived from stimulating the body. Because of the importance of suckling at this stage, the oral component instinct is most evident. Towards the second year of his life the child's self-awareness grows. The sexual instincts become directed towards the self, as a love object. For this reason, Freud calls this stage narcissism, after the character in Greek mythology who fell in love with his own image.

The transition from the auto-erotic to this stage is probably largely helped by the insistence of mothers, who had previously tolerated the child's inability to control his excretions, that the child should be taught to be clean. It gives him a sense of power in which he revels by cruel and boisterous behaviour, loving to show off his body by running about naked.

The most critical period in development is the third stage, which we shall consider at some length.

The child seeks in the outer world for its love-objects, and it is inevitable that the first objects it looks to for the gratification of its sexual impulses are those nearest to it—the members of its own family. This gives rise to the Oedipus complex, so called after the play by Sophocles in which Oedipus, in fulfilment of a prophecy, unwittingly kills his own father and marries his mother. The infantile sexual strivings are for gratification with the parent of opposite sex, while antagonistic and death-wishes are entertained towards the parent of its own sex. So important is this complex for psycho-analysis that I shall give the words of two prominent psychoanalysts on the subject, rather fully, so that misunderstanding may be avoided.

Dr. Ernest Jones says "The child seeks in the outer world for objects not only of its affection but also of its conscious and unconscious sexual phantasies. It is inevitable that this should at first relate to those nearest to it, the members of its own family. Difficulties arise, however, when the phantasies indulged in with members of its own generation begin to be transferred to those of the older generation, principally the parents. This constitutes the famous Oedipus complex in which there is a sexual attitude on the part of the child towards the parent of the opposite sex, together with rivalry towards the one of its own; commonly enough there is also present an inverted Oedipus complex where the reverse of this holds. This complex Freud regards as the central one in the whole unconscious; and on the way in which the child deals with it depends, more than on anything else, its future character and temperament as well as any neurosis it may at any time develop. It is the most characteristic and important finding in all psycho-analysis, and against it is directed the whole strength of the individual's resistances as well as the external criticism of psycho-analysis. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that whatever manifold form this resistance may take, and whatever aspect of psychoanalysis is being criticised, it is the Oedipus complex that is finally responsible. All other conclusions of psycho-analytical theory are grouped around this complex, and by the truth of this finding psychoanalysis stands or falls."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Psycho-Analysts—an Introduction* (Benn)

Freud, in his *Introductory Lectures*, says:

“Distinct traces are probably to be found in most people of an early partiality on the part of a daughter for her father or on the part of a son for his mother; but it must be assumed to be more intense from the very first in the case of those children whose constitution marks them down for a neurosis, who develop prematurely and have a craving for love”; and, “We recognise a tendency for those of the same sex to become alienated, daughter from mother and father from son. The daughter sees in her mother the authority which imposes limits to her will, whose task it is to bring her to that renunciation of sexual freedom which society demands; in certain cases, too, the mother is still a rival, who objects to being set aside. The same thing is repeated still more blatantly between father and son. To the son the father is the embodiment of the social compulsion to which he so unwillingly subjects the person who stands in the way of his following his own will, of his early sexual pleasures, and, when there is family property, of his enjoyment of it. The relation between father and daughter or mother and son would seem less liable to disaster, the latter relation furnishes the purest examples of unchanging tenderness, undisturbed by any egoistic considerations.... There is nothing to wonder at, therefore, if the dreams of a great number of people bring to light the wish for the removal of the parent whose sex is the same as the dreamers’... It is rarely that hostility reigns alone—far more often it yields to more tender feelings which finally suppress it, when it has to wait in abeyance till a dream shows it, as it were in isolation.... We also find this death-wish where there is no basis for it in real life, and where the adult would never have to confess to entertaining it in his waking life. The reason for this is that the deepest and most common motive for estrangement, especially between parent and child of the same sex, came into play in the earliest years of childhood.

“I refer to that rivalry of affections in which sexual elements are plainly emphasised. The son, when quite a little child, already begins to develop a peculiar tenderness towards his mother, whom he looks upon as his own property, regarding his father in the light of a rival who disputes this sole possession of his; similarly the little daughter sees in her mother someone who disturbs her tender relation to her father and occupies a place which she feels she herself could very well fill.”

It must of course be remembered that these urges are unconscious. In consciousness the Oedipus complex expresses itself in desire for various forms of intimacy, caresses, and joyful expressions at the absence of the other parent.

The repression of the child’s feelings towards his parents associated with the Oedipus complex is necessary for the future adaptation of the child not only to the family circle but to society. In our study of the development of the human family we shall see how the repression of these tendencies, particularly those antagonistic to the father, is necessary for the formation of large and stable social groups. The child, in compensation for its loss of love-objects in the parents, identifies a part of its ego with them, forming thereby the super-ego. This process has already been described, but the role which the Oedipus complex plays in its formation needs emphasising. Freud describes this process thus: “When the Oedipus complex passes away the child must give up the intense object-cathexes<sup>1</sup> which it has formed towards its parents, and, to compensate for this loss of object, its identifications with its parents, which have probably long been present, become greatly intensified.” An important factor in compelling the destruction of the Oedipus complex is the fear of castration. This gives rise to a castration complex. The manner in which it originates is described by Freud in the following passage:

---

<sup>1</sup> When the sexual instincts turn to an object for satisfaction, that object is said to receive “cathexes.”

“It is not at all uncommon for a little boy, who is beginning to play with his penis and has not yet learned that he must conceal such activities, to be threatened by his parents or nurses that his member or his offending hand will be cut off. Parents will often admit the fact on being questioned... many people have a clear conscious recollection of this threat.... If the mother or some other woman makes the threat she usually shifts the execution of it to someone else, indicating that the father or the doctor will perform the deed. It is, however, highly improbable that the threat of castration has been delivered as often as would appear from the analysis of a neurotic. We are content to understand that the child concocts a threat of this kind out of its knowledge that auto-erotic satisfactions are forbidden, on the basis of hints and allusions.... Whence comes the necessity for these phantasies, and the material for them? I believe that these primal phantasies are a phylogenetic possession. It seems to me quite possible that castration itself was in prehistoric periods of the human family a reality. Of little girls we know that they feel themselves heavily handicapped... from this source springs the wish to be a man which is resumed again later in the neurosis.... For the great majority of womankind the ‘deprivation’ sense is resolved, at least tolerably, through the specially feminine functions, directly by child-bearing, more indirectly by child-tending, by home-making, or some kindred activity. In this way she becomes equal to the man and is vindicated.”

We may note here a difference in the role of the castration complex for the two sexes which Freud considers to be of great importance. Whereas the castration complex prepares the way, in the boy, for the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, almost the reverse takes place for the girl. The castration complex, in her case, precedes the formation of the Oedipus complex. The reason is that the girl, like the boy, finds her first love-object in the mother, because the latter attends to her physical needs, suckling her, etc. But with the realisation that she differs from the boy in the absence of a penis, she feels herself at a disadvantage, and tends to blame her mother for its absence. She consequently develops antagonistic feelings towards her mother, and finds in the Oedipus complex a refuge. On this Freud says: “The girl remains in the Oedipus situation for an indefinite period; she only abandons it late in life, and then incompletely. The formation of the super-ego must suffer in these circumstances; it cannot attain the strength and independence which give it its cultural importance, and feminists are not pleased if one points to the way in which this factor affects the development of the average feminine character.”

We have traced the development of the sexual impulses through the first, and most important, period of sexual development to the stage where the child seeks its love-objects in the outer world. From five to twelve years of age follows a latency period, characterised by the absence of crude sexual interests and the development of the ego in harmony with the environment when the ego becomes differentiated from the id as a restraining and controlling force, adapting the impulses from the id to the requirements of reality.

During the second period of sexual importance—from twelve to eighteen years—the infantile impulses are revived, and the new flood of sexual life takes a course laid down in earlier development. Thus it is extremely difficult to deal with abnormalities in this period without knowing the determining features of the first.

The normal development of the sexual instinct may be arrested for several reasons. One of the component impulses may develop in advance of the others, and, becoming unduly strong, prevent further development. Disappointment at one stage may lead to a turning back, known as regression, to an earlier, more satisfying, stage. A disappointed lover may return to his infantile mother attachment, or indulge in auto-erotic practices (e.g. masturbate). Fixation is the term used to describe the halting of the

sexual development at a particular stage.

Fixation between parent and child plays a determining part in the choice of future love-objects, according to its strength.

In the case where the fixation has been rather strong, there is a tendency for the adult to choose as husband (or wife) somebody similar to the parent—that is, who is identified with him. In cases where there has been a very strong fixation, the tendency is the reverse, because to contemplate intercourse with someone resembling the parent loved evokes the disgust associated with incestuous relations.

A consequence of strong fixation may be sexual impotency in either husband or wife, because the other one is identified with the parent of opposite sex and the thought of sexual intercourse arouses the disgust which social standards demand of incest.

Similarly the fear of incest may make it difficult for an individual to have sex relationship with any member of the opposite sex and he seeks sexual objects among his own sex. This may take the conscious form of homo-sexuality, or be sublimated in strong friendships with other members of one's own sex.

Homo-sexuality, of a kind, seems more widespread among women than men, possibly because society places more severe sexual restraint on them. Women delight to kiss and fondle each other, visit one another's bedrooms, and inspect each other's clothing, etc.

The following two examples, taken from Brill's *Psycho-Analysis: Its Theory and Practical Application*, show the effects of identification with the parent of the *same* sex.

A refined young woman of twenty-four suffered from psycho-sexual frigidity, but was sexually aroused whenever she saw a lame man. This was due to her identification with her mother, who had had an illicit love-affair with a man when the daughter was three or four years old. He sustained a fracture of his leg, and the mother found it necessary to make several journeys to see him. She took the daughter, to avoid gossip, and, although no conscious impression was made on the child at the time, she formed an unconscious association between lameness and sex.

In the other case, a young married woman exhibited a strong prostitution complex. While living with her husband she formed many illicit associations with men. She was an only daughter, and saw little of her father, whose affairs took him away frequently. As far back as she could remember, she recalled witnessing illicit love-affairs between her mother and other men. She herself married a man similar in type to her father and following the same occupation. She identified herself completely with her mother.

Love-objects determined by identifications of this character are called "anaclitic"—literally, "leaning up against"—because they usually show a dependence on the protectiveness of the father or the food-providing qualities of the mother.

There is another main class of love-objects known as narcissistic, depending on the following identifications:

- (1) Identification with one's present self.
- (2) Identification with one's past self.
- (3) Identification with a part of oneself.
- (4) Identification with what one would like to be.

In the first case, the love-object is sought amongst those who in some way, either physically or mentally, resemble oneself. Thus a tall man may have eyes for no one but tall women.

In the second case the sex instinct has become fixated on an earlier stage of one's existence, perhaps when one was more charming and attractive, and there is a tendency to choose a love-object from those

who remind one of that phase. Disparity of ages in marriages may be due to this tendency in one of the partners. The third stage represents the love that parents have for the children as part of themselves; and the fourth is a displacement of the libido or energy attaching to the super-ego, for the feeling of unworthiness which the super-ego arouses is compensated for by seeking love-objects representing what one ought to be—that is, with the qualities in which the lover feels deficient. The object of love is idealised and regarded worshipfully.

The Freudian theories of sexual development thus form a logical whole. From birth to puberty, one can trace the developmental tendencies and see the variety of possible expressions the sexual instinct may take. The child manifests all the germs of all perversions, and whether any actually develop depends largely on the situation in which his sex-life expands. Passing through that stage of development in which the component instincts become coordinated, and, under the dominance of the genitals, turn to the outer world for love-objects, a critical period ensues. The Oedipus complex operates involving sexual strivings towards the parent of the same sex, and antagonism towards parent of the opposite sex. The castration complex becomes the centre of this hostility. The Oedipus complex does not always manifest itself so simply. Analysis reveals, often, an ambivalent attitude of love and hate. The father may be hated as the rival to the mother's affections and loved as the protector. The future love-objects depend largely on the way these central complexes are dealt with, and, indeed, the whole psychic life of an individual is bound up with his Oedipus complex. The numerous perversions of the sexual instinct are infantile in character, and result from some fixation of the sexual instinct in its development. They are the evidence, also, of the fact of sex-life in children, because they involve acts familiar among children though not generally recognised as sexual.

Most opposition to the above account of sexual development is based on grounds of moral and religious disapproval. Particularly difficult is the acceptance of the Oedipus complex. It seems to violate all those conceits which man entertains about himself. But we have got used to considering man as a highly developed product of billions of years of evolutionary process from humble origins. In the same way, we shall, one day, get used to the acceptance of the Oedipus complex as an important determining factor in adult life. And, when we have done so, we shall find a way to give those crude, infantile urges, through social and educational influences, a direction in conformity with the best interests of society.

From a consideration of the development of the sexual impulses, we turn to the fundamental division which Freud makes in the instincts.

Freud at first divided instincts into two main groups; those serving the preservation of the species, described above, the sexual instincts, and those connected with the preservation of the individual, the ego instincts. These groups seemed to serve purposes independent of each other, and could not be reduced to a common source. In conflict, the ego impulses acted as the repressive force, while the sexual instincts were the repressed material.

This grouping has lately been supplanted by another, the life instincts (sometimes called Eros), and the destructive (or death) instincts. Freud was led to construct the hypothesis of the two groups by consideration of the phenomena of sadism and masochism. By sadism is meant the obtaining of sexual satisfaction through the infliction of pain on the sexual object, while masochism involves the suffering of pain to gain sexual satisfaction. These two tendencies seemed explainable best on the hypothesis of a fusion between two kinds of instincts, the sexual and the destructive. Freud now believes that all instinctive impulses are made up of fusions of these instincts in various proportions.

Masochism, if we abstract its sexual component, proves the existence of a tendency towards self-

destruction. Since the whole of the instincts originally were included within the personality, developing interest in outward objects later, masochism, the impulse to self-destruction, must be older, more fundamental, than sadism. In the latter case, the destructive impulses are no longer directed inwards towards the self, but outwards. They become aggressiveness. In the event of the aggressiveness meeting obstacles in the external world which it cannot overcome, it turns inwards once more. To avoid this, objects have to be found in the external world which may be destroyed. "We have to destroy other things and people, in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to protect ourselves from the tendencies to self-destruction."<sup>1</sup>

We cannot but admire the courage with which Freud enunciates the most unpopular of theories. Incidentally, we can perhaps trace in Freud's rude handling of our most cherished illusions his method of externalising his own masochistic impulses. We can detect this aggressiveness, for instance, in his defence of his theory of sex-life. He says: "Psychoanalysis, then, gives these love instincts the name of sexual instincts, *a potione*, and by reason of their origin. The majority of 'educated' people have regarded this nomenclature as an insult, and have taken their revenge by retorting upon psychoanalysis with the reproach of 'pan-sexualism.' Anyone who considers sex as something mortifying and humiliating to human nature is at liberty to make use of the more genteel expressions 'Eros' and 'erotic.' I might have done so myself from the first, and thus have spared myself much opposition. But I did not want to, for I like to avoid concessions to faint-heartedness."<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly he is right to make no such concessions to the "finer" feelings of his contemporaries, but the very ruthlessness with which he disregards those feelings seems to point to underlying emotional factors. What they are can only be adequately revealed by psychoanalytic technique, but there seems no doubt that the "educated" opinion of to-day has an emotional significance for him. Whether it represents a revolt against the authority of his early childhood, when parents and teachers used their claims to greater knowledge to thwart his desires, is a matter of conjecture. At any rate, it constitutes, in Freud, a driving force of revolt which I believe could only have been adequately satisfied in the channels of revolutionary struggle.

In his letters to Einstein,<sup>3</sup> he advances the view that war is the "diversion of the destructive impulse towards the external world," and finds in it a "biological justification." "We can but own," he writes, "that they [the tendencies towards war] are really more akin to nature than our stand against them which in fact remains to be accounted for." A recently published work by Dr. Glover, Director of Scientific Research of the London Institute of Psycho-Analysis, takes up the question of war in relation to pacifism. He contends that a "large part of the energy that drives a peace organisation has precisely the same source as the energy that lets loose war," and consequently pacifist measures tend to be uncertain because "under conditions of stress" they reveal themselves as aggressive impulses.<sup>4</sup>

In a later chapter we shall revert more fully to the question of war. Here I may say that, in considering what the psycho-analyst has to say, we must not be swayed by feelings of moral repugnance. If the psychic impulses which the psycho-analyst indicates do exist, then it is to his credit that he has revealed them. Man's history, after all, is replete with religious persecutions, tortures, and cruelties, so as to give considerable weight to the belief in the existence of both sadistic and masochistic impulses.

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 137 (Hogarth Press).

<sup>2</sup> *Group Psychology*, p. 39 (Hogarth Press)

<sup>3</sup> *Why War?* by Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud (Allen & Unwin).

<sup>4</sup> *War, Sadism, and Pacifism* (Allen & Unwin).

Freud believes that the self-destructive instincts are bound up with a tendency of all instincts to seek reinstatement of an earlier form of things. The moment one state of affairs is upset, an instinct attempts to bring the organism back to it. This process, he calls repetition-compulsion, a conservative quality in instincts.

We see now why Freud makes the grouping of life and death instincts, for the latter are ever striving to return to an earlier form of existence, the state of inanimate matter, while the erotic instincts strive, against this tendency, to preserve and build up the organism.

These concepts awaken many questions which psycho-analysis cannot yet answer. One question, in the nature of a paradox, is formulated by Freud thus: "The question whether all instincts without exception do not possess a conservative character, whether the erotic instincts also do not seek the reinstatement of an earlier state of things when they strive towards the synthesis of living substance into larger wholes.

This question is of particular interest to Marxists, who believe that the phenomena of life involve contradictory processes, and therefore find no great difficulty in understanding that the building-up process involved in the life instincts is, simultaneously, a reinstatement, though on a different level, of an earlier state of affairs. To it I return in the chapter on the unconsciously dialectical character of the fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis.

Our survey of the instinctive forces, which, according to psycho-analysis, lie behind conscious, everyday behaviour, is concluded. To many, Freud's theories may seem to border on the fantastic. I can only say that, viewed from a rational standpoint, much of man's behaviour which these theories seek to explain appears fantastic also. There is a Socialist periodical which is constantly bewailing the general lunacy of modern conditions. To emphasise their irrationality, those responsible for this periodical occasionally enlist the aid of a stranger from Mars, who obediently gapes open-mouthed at the stupidities and inconsistencies which he perceives on the earth. "Why," he asks, "do people build beautiful mansions for others, and live themselves in grimy hovels. Why are they ready to be blown to bits for the people who starve their wives and children? Why do they go hungry in a land of plenty?" Why—endless whys proceed from the perplexed Martian.

Apparently, in Mars, people are not burdened with super-egos or repressed impulses which lead to irrationalities of behaviour. But things are different down here, and the convinced Socialist, instead of bewailing the irrationality of the workers, must take Lenin's words, already quoted, to heart, to see the problem of Socialism in terms of the human being as he really exists. To ignore Freud's discoveries about the unconscious sources of human behaviour is to show preference for dealing with "the fantastic human material especially created by our imagination." The serious Socialist will want to know everything possible about the unconscious processes which appear to determine so much of human behaviour; for the human material with which he hopes to make the Socialist revolution needs his fullest, his most sympathetic, understanding. Therefore, we cannot just dismiss Freud's theories, particularly those dealing with sex, as fantastic. They indicate the difficulties and complexities involved in any attempt to direct workers' thoughts and feelings in a particular direction, however natural and rational it may seem to be for them to take this direction and no other.

PART II  
FREUD AND MARX



## CHAPTER VI

### PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

The best point of departure for a study of the relationship between Freudian and Marxian theories is a consideration of primitive society, for here they have much in common.

Freud took over a speculation of Darwin as to the character of the first human groups and made it the basis of his theory of the primal horde. Darwin had conjectured that man “originally lived in small communities, each with a single wife, or, if powerful, with several, whom he jealously defended against all other men.”<sup>1</sup> This Freud developed into the theory that the primal horde was ruled over by a powerful male, who kept all the females for himself and compelled the younger males, under threat of castration, to restrain their sexual desires. From this theory, Freud was able to explain the elaborate system of taboos against incest which exists in primitive society, and the origin of totemism. In a very absorbing book, *Totem and Tabu*, Freud traces the relationship between the totem, as referring to an animal or plant venerated as an ancestor, and the code of restrictions which he considers reflects the self-imposed limitations on incestuous desires which primitive man observes in deference to the memory of the primal father.

A totem has been defined by J. G. Frazer as “a class of material objects which a savage regards with superstitious respect, believing that there exists between him and every member of the class an intimate and altogether special relationship. The connexion between a person and his totem is mutually beneficent; the totem protects the man and the man shows his respect for the totem in various ways, by not killing it if it be an animal, and not cutting or gathering it if it be a plant. As distinguished from a fetish, a totem is never an isolated individual but always a class of objects, generally a species of animals or of plants, more rarely a class of inanimate natural objects, very rarely a class of artificial objects”.<sup>2</sup> The members of a totem group take the name of their totem and believe that they are descended from it. Within a tribe there may be several totem groups, and a system of intermarriage exists, which precludes members of a totem marrying or having sexual relations with members of the same totem. This is a basic law of totemism. Members of a totem must marry outside their own totem group, violation of which is punished by the whole tribe, severely. Violation of the prohibition to eat or kill the totem animal or plant is likewise punished severely, though the punishment in this case takes place automatically. Thus an individual who discovered that he had accidentally eaten of a totem animal would sicken and die. Freud quotes the following instance of the severity of treatment meted out to violators of the marriage prohibition: “In the Ta-Ta-thi tribe. New South Wales, in the rare cases which occur, the man is killed, but the woman is only beaten or speared, or both, till she is nearly dead; the reason given for not actually killing her being that she was probably coerced. Even in casual amours the clan prohibitions are regarded with the utmost abhorrence and are punished by death.”<sup>3</sup>

Periodically, the prohibitions against killing and eating the totem are lifted in the ceremony known as the totem feast. Every member participates and eats a piece of the sacrificed animal, thereby establishing a community with each other and the totem. The totem animal is then mourned with great wailings, after which there follows a festival in which all the totem prohibitions are disregarded. Free rein is permitted to all the pent-up desires; the prototype of the “holiday spirit” prevails, in which all

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Origin of Man*, Vol. II, p. 603.

<sup>2</sup> *Totemism and Exogamy* (Hogarth Press)

<sup>3</sup> *Totem and Tabu*, p. 7 (Kegan Paul).

sorts of excesses are tolerated. Freud thinks that this gives an insight into the nature of the holiday of to-day, for it seems to be a recognised feature that the restraints of normal life should be thrown off and excesses indulged in which would be severely frowned upon at other times.

There are thus three main characteristics which Freud attempts to explain by means of his theory of the primal horde. Firstly, the members of a totem regard themselves as descended from a common ancestor. Secondly, sexual relations within the totem are severely forbidden. And, thirdly, periodical totem feasts permit the lifting of these restrictions and are accompanied by contradictory features of mourning and gaiety. His explanation takes the following form: "Psycho-analysis has revealed to us that the totem animal is really a substitute for the father, and this really explains the contradiction that it is usually forbidden to kill the totem animal, that the killing of it results in a holiday, and that the animal is killed and yet mourned. The ambivalent emotional attitude which to-day still marks the father-complex in our children, and so continues into adult life, also extended to the father substitute of the totem animal. But if we associate the translation of the totem as given by psycho-analysis with the totem feasts and the Darwinian hypothesis about the primal state of human society, a deeper understanding becomes possible, and a hypothesis is offered which may seem fantastic, but which has the advantage of establishing an unexpected unity among a series of hitherto separated phenomena.... By basing our argument upon the celebration of the totem we are in a position to give an answer: One day the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde. Together they dared and accomplished what would have remained impossible for them singly. Perhaps some advance in culture, like the use of a new weapon, had given them the feeling of superiority. Of course these cannibalistic savages ate their victim. This violent primal father had surely been the envied and feared model for each of the brothers. Now they accomplished their identification with him by devouring him, and each acquired a part of his strength. The totem feast, which is perhaps mankind's first celebration, would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began—social organisation, moral restrictions, and religion."<sup>1</sup> But after they had slain their father, and removed the obstacle from their sexual gratifications, the ambivalence of their attitude towards him asserted itself. They had also loved and admired him, and these feelings came to the fore with the satisfaction of their hate in his death. "This took place in the form of remorse, a sense of guilt was formed which coincided here with the remorse generally felt. The dead now became stronger than the living had been, even as we observe it to-day in the destinies of men. What the father's presence had formerly prevented they themselves now prohibited... They undid their deed by declaring that the killing of the father substitute was not allowed, and renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women."<sup>2</sup>

But the erection of the incest barrier was not performed, as Freud says, without difficulties, for each brother was the rival of the other. For a period a state of incestuous relationship probably occurred in which the fullest advantage of the freedom from the father was taken. Here we come to a point of contact with the view expounded by Engels in *The Origin of the Family*. The group marriage is the term he uses to indicate that all the 'women of one totem belong sexually to the men of another, a system of designation which Freud quotes approvingly from *Ancient Society*, by L. H. Morgan. L. H. Morgan spent the greater part of his life among the Iroquois Indians, and was adopted into one of their tribes, the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Totem and Tabu*, p. 235-6 (Kegan Paul).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Senecas. His main work, entitled *Ancient Society*, traces the development of human society from savagery, through barbarism to civilisation. As a result of his researches among the Indians, and his study of material from sources the world over, he proclaimed that the conception of exogamy which was held by many anthropologists was based upon misunderstanding. Exogamy described the form of marriage which took place when members of a tribe were compelled to seek for wives outside their own tribe, while marrying within the tribe was described as endogamy. It was assumed that there existed two sharply separated marriage relationships, the exogamous and endogamous, whose practice distinguished one tribe from another. But Morgan showed that the antithesis of exogamous and endogamous tribes had no existence in fact, but that within savage society the tribes were divided into a number of groups or “gentes.” The men of a certain gens chose their wives *within* the tribe, but outside their own gens. Thus while the tribe as a whole was endogamous, the gentes were exogamous. These gentes quite clearly correspond with the totem groups which we have been discussing in their essential prohibition of intermarriage within the gens.

In the earliest form of this marriage relationship, the men of a group exercised conjugal rights over all the women of another group. That is to say, the individual member of the group was not restricted to one woman, but was entitled to have sexual relations with any woman in the appropriate group. This constituted “group marriage.” The children of such marriage called all the men who were entitled to have sexual relations with their mother “father,” and all the women of their mothers’ group “mother.” Similarly, they called one another brother and sister. But this arrangement, while placing few restrictions on sexual life, was not, according to Engels, the earliest form of sexual relationships. He says: “All the forms of the group marriage known to us are accompanied by such peculiarly complicated circumstances that they of necessity point to a preceding form of sexual intercourse, and hence in the last instance to a period of unrestricted sexual intercourse corresponding to a transition from the animal to man.”<sup>1</sup> He asks: “What does the term ‘unrestricted sexual intercourse’ mean? Simply that the restrictions in force now were not observed formerly.... Unrestricted in the sense that the barriers drawn later on by custom did not yet exist.”<sup>2</sup>

What are the restrictions which later obtain in group marriage? Clearly they are the incest barriers by which intermarriage within the group is forbidden. If Freud’s theory of the origin of totemism and exogamy is correct—that they were due to the slaying of the primal father—we should expect a period to intervene between the slaying and the imposition of incest taboos, during which the triumphant sons would unrestrictedly indulge their sexual appetites. As Freud observes, these restrictions were not imposed without some difficulty, so that we can correlate Engels’ view of a period of “unrestricted sexual intercourse,” with Freud’s belief concerning the slaying of the primal father.

But perhaps more remarkable in similarity are the views of Engels and Freud on the conditions necessary for the formation of large social groups, which the mutual rivalry of the males prevented. Freud expresses himself thus “Though the brothers had joined forces in order to overcome the father, each was the other’s rival among women. Each one wanted to have them all to himself like the father, and in the fight of each against the other, the new organisation would have perished... Thus there was nothing left for the brothers, if they wanted to live together, but to erect the incest prohibition—perhaps after many difficult experiences—through which they all equally renounced the women whom they

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Origin of the Family*, p. 43 (Charles Kerr)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.

desired.”<sup>1</sup>

Engels, who could only hint speculatively where Freud could build on later and fuller anthropological research, nevertheless brilliantly anticipated the Freudian view of repression as a condition for stability in social life. Thus he says: “But the mutual tolerance of the grown males, freedom from jealousy, was the first condition for the formation of such large and permanent groups, within which alone the transformation from beast to man could be accomplished.” He goes on to indicate that the group marriage, which we have seen was the first form of exogamous marriage, was marked by an absence of jealousy, for it provided that the sexual satisfaction could be obtained from any woman in an appropriate group. “And, indeed, what do we find to be the most ancient and original form of the family, undeniably traceable by history, and even found to-day here and there? The group marriage, that form in which whole groups of men and whole groups of women mutually belong to one another, leaving small scope for jealousy.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus we can quite easily correlate the views of Engels and Freud. The period of “unrestricted sexual intercourse” to which the former refers is paralleled by the period succeeding the slaying of the primal father, wherein unrestricted satisfaction of sexual impulses became possible. And as Engels notes that “mutual tolerance of the young males” was necessary to stabilise society, so Freud remarks that the brothers, to live together, had to erect the incest barriers. And, finally, the group marriage is equivalent to the first totem grouping, wherein mutual antagonisms and jealousies are repressed and sexual desires satisfied outside the totem-group or gens.

Let us return to the theory of the primal father.

Its main merit is that it does enable the synthesising of much contradictory material. Freud is aware of its speculative character, and says of it, in a footnote “I am used to being misunderstood and therefore do not think it superfluous to state clearly that in giving these deductions I am by no means oblivious of the complex nature of the phenomena which give rise to them; the only claim made is that a new factor has been added to the already known or still unrecognised origins of religion, morality and society, which was furnished by psycho-analytic experience.”<sup>3</sup>

One objection which Freud considers in his above-mentioned book seems to me to have been overcome by his own subsequent discovery of those mental tendencies which he groups under the heading of the “super-ego.” He formulates the objection thus: “We let the sense of guilt for a deed survive for thousands of years, remaining effective in generations which could not have known anything of this deed. We allow an emotional process such as might have arisen among generations of sons that had been ill-treated by their fathers, to continue to new generations which had escaped such treatment by the very removal of the father.”<sup>4</sup> Freud appears to accept the possibility that this “sense of guilt” might be inherited, for he says: “A part of the task seems to be performed by the inheritance of psychic dispositions which, however, need certain incentives in the individual life in order to become effective.” By this he means that the child-parent relationship of the individual provides the incentive which arouses the inherited psychic state associated with the sense of guilt derived from slaying the primal father. However, since writing *Totem and Tabu*, Freud has developed his view regarding the relationship between child and parent so that his conception of the super-ego puts the matter in a clearer light. The

---

<sup>1</sup> *Totem and Tabu*, p. 238-9 (Kegan Paul).

<sup>2</sup> *The Origin of the Family*, p. 42 (Charles Kerr)

<sup>3</sup> *Totem and Tabu*, p. 261 (Kegan Paul).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

super-ego is based on identifications with the parent; the assumption within the mind of the stern, censorious father of childhood days. But the father's stern attitude to the child is dictated largely by his own super-ego, which was formed through identifications with his father. In this way the super-ego acts as the vehicle of tradition (a fact with which I shall deal with later in connection with political and cultural institutions), so that, through a series of identifications, the sense of guilt for the slaying of the primal father would reappear generations after the deed. In Christian doctrine, for example, the sense of guilt for an act of rebellion against the father (God) plays a central role. This sin is atoned for by the sacrifice of the son, who thereby, through the expiation of the crime, becomes as a god, with his father. In the Eucharist, the Christian totem feast, the body of the son is consumed, and those partaking are identified with the father, through the son, sharing in their holiness.

But as the super-ego is "the heir to the Oedipus complex," its operation would seem to be contradicted by the matriarchal character of primitive society. "It is obvious," says Engels, "that, as far as group marriage exists, descent can only be traced on the mother's side, and hence only female lineage be acknowledged. This is the case among all savage tribes and those in the lower stage of barbarism." This would seem to exclude the operation of the Oedipus complex, for to hate or love one's father demands that one knows who he is.

This objection is best answered by a consideration of the general situation giving rise to the Oedipus complex. It is one, as we have seen, in which the developing sexual impulses turn to the outer world for object satisfaction. In modern society, the monogamous type of family prevalent provides that the most immediately related people, the father and mother, become the objects of love and hate which form part of the Oedipus complex. Actually, however, analogous situations did exist in primitive society in spite of the group character of marriage. Thus Engels remarks: "This in no way necessarily implies, for practical purposes, an injudicious pell-mell intercourse. The separate existence of pairs for a limited time is not out of the question, and even comprises the majority of cases in the group marriage of our days."<sup>1</sup> Also; "A certain pairing for a longer or shorter term took place even during the group marriage or earlier. A man had his principal wife (one can hardly call it favourite wife as yet) among many women, and he was to her the principal husband among others."<sup>2</sup> We may justly conclude that in such cases the child would find in the relationship between pairing couples the intimate bond which evokes the attitudes associated with the Oedipus complex.

But even if we exclude any semblance to the monogamous form of marriage, there still remains the fact that the infantile sexual life undergoes modification and development and finally turns to the outer world for objects of gratification. Therefore, under any circumstances, since children must be fed, cared for, and loved, the helplessness of which these needs are expressive would tend to direct the developing sexual life of a child to those in its immediate environment who fulfilled those needs. It is extremely unlikely that the circle of those who ministered to its wants, and exerted authority over its demands, could not be narrowed to a few adults who would stand in the relationship of father and mother to it. And, in any case, where the child is collectively cared for by all the men and women of a group, it would only mean that its love-objects would tend to correspond with the group rather than with any particular individual.

We have seen that the Freudian view emphasises the basic role of sexual factors in social

---

<sup>1</sup> *Origin of the Family*, p. 44 (Charles Kerr)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p 56.

organisation. That Engels also recognised the sexual basis of society is clear from his commendatory remarks on Morgan, as follows: “Morgan deserves great credit for rediscovering and re-establishing in its main outlines this [sexual] foundation of our written history, and of finding in the sexual organisations of the North American Indians the key that opens all the unfathomable riddles of most ancient Greek, Roman, and German history.”<sup>1</sup>

But, while accepting the sexual basis of history, Engels insists that, “under this formation based on sexual ties, the productivity of labour is developed more and more,” so that economic relationships tend to become the dominant characteristics of social organisation. This does not controvert the basic role of sexual factors, for the instinctive energy involved in these factors is susceptible of displacement, sublimation, and other indirect forms of expression, as we saw in Chapter IV. The transference of sexual interest to the labour process is illustrated by Freud in regard to language, which, beginning as a means of summoning the sexual mate, later developed as a rhythmic stimulus to work. He says (quoting a philologist who arrived, independently of psycho-analysis, at these conclusions) “that the first sounds uttered were a means of communication, and of summoning the sexual partner, and that in the later development the elements of speech were used as an accompaniment to the different kinds of work carried on by primitive man. This work was performed by associated efforts, to the sound of rhythmically repeated utterances, the effect of which was to transfer a sexual interest to the work. Primitive man thus made his work agreeable, so to speak, by treating it as the equivalent of, and substitute for, sexual activities. The word uttered during the communal work had therefore two meanings, the one referring to the sexual act, the other to the labour which had come to be equivalent to it. In time the word was dissociated from its sexual significance and its application confined to the work.”<sup>2</sup> Thus the view of Engels may be correlated with that of Freud with the recognition that the labour process provides a channel for displaced sexual energy. Perhaps a consideration of the role of repression may make this clearer.

In the history of society, repression is of fundamental importance. It was a necessary means of stabilising society, as both Engels and Freud recognise. “We believe,” says Freud, “that civilisation has been built up, *under the pressure of the struggle for existence*, by sacrifices in gratification of the primitive impulses.”<sup>3</sup> But the repression of an impulse gives rise to a need for some conscious form of activity through which it can express itself, without disturbing the social organisation. The more society was dominated by sexual ties, the less need was there for displaced, or indirect, expression of sexual impulses, for they were not so repugnant to conscious standards. But Engels correlates the development of the labour process with the passing of the dominance of sexual ties. Engels naturally refers to the conscious, overt form of sexual life when he speaks of “sexual ties,” rather than the unconscious impulses behind it. These ties, the marriage customs, etc., are conscious socialised forms, we have seen, in which repressed incestuous desires find some gratification. The group marriage, for example, is nothing but a conscious form in which repressed sexual impulses are given expression. Thus the “unrestricted sexual intercourse,” which Engels considers characterised the earliest form of human society, is restricted, “mutual tolerance of the grown males” established, and given overt conscious form in the sexual ties of the group marriage. But if society passes from a form of organisation in which overt

---

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *The Origin of the Family* (Charles Kerr)

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 141 (Allen & Unwin).

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 17 (Allen & Unwin).

sexual ties are dominant to one wherein the labour process dominates, this is a transition from one conscious form of expressing repressed sexual impulses to another, in which the repressed impulses find displaced outlet in the channels of the labour process. Thus Engels' correlation between sexual ties and the labour process refers to a transformation of unconscious sexual impulses from the conscious, and more directly related, sexual ties, to the conscious, but less directly related, activities of the labour process. In other words, man becomes a working animal with the repression of his individual sexual strivings, for work involves social co-operation which is impossible without such repression. And here we come to the important question of the origin of repression. We have seen that it became necessary as a means of stabilising men's relationships within society, but the important point in connection with it is that it arises through the pressure of external circumstances. Thus J. C. Flugel says that the "particular manifestations of this inhibitory tendency are principally determined by suggestive influences from the environment."<sup>1</sup> And Freud, in speculating on the origin of repression, has considered it as possibly due to the compulsions of the ice-age, which drove human beings into more restricted territory, and made necessary the repression of antagonisms within the horde, in order that a more effective struggle might be waged against rival hordes for territory. Thus the inter-group antagonisms were diverted, through sheer economic necessity, towards other groups.

If, then, the external world plays a determining part in the repression of jealousies and antagonisms, no consideration of man's behaviour which omitted a study of his environment could be adequate. Indeed, so far as psycho-analysis is a study of man's behaviour and gives but passing consideration to the external environment, it tends to lead to harmful and reactionary conclusions. I give an example of this, after an examination of the economic factors in man's environment, so that the seriousness of the omission of these factors from the calculations of the psycho-analyst may be appreciated.

While, therefore, the contributions of psychoanalysis concerning the nature of man's inner mental life cannot be praised too highly, there still remains to consider the nature of the external forces which impede and restrict the expression of man's inner life, which, in a word, are responsible for repression. For example, psycho-analysis applied to the life of an individual may succeed in uncovering the particular situation or experiences responsible for his difficulties. It may reduce these difficulties to an early childhood emotional situation whose memory has been repressed but still disturbs conscious life. But the repression of the individual's instinctive life is necessary, says Freud, for without it "the instinct would break all bounds and the laboriously erected structure of civilisation would be swept away."<sup>2</sup>

Even more clearly does Freud indicate the fact that repression is a response to social and economic needs when he says: "At bottom society's motive [for restraining the instinctive life] is economic; since it has not means enough to support life for its members without work on their part, it must see to it that the number of these members is restricted and their energies directed away from sexual activities on to their work—the eternal primordial struggle for existence, therefore persisting to the present day."<sup>3</sup>

If, then, the behaviour of man is a product of the interaction between inner, instinctive impulses and the world of economic and social necessity, an understanding of this interaction demands a study of both factors involved. Our brief account of psychoanalytical theory gives some idea of the subjective life of man, of the urges and instincts without which man would feel no impulse to live, to reach out to the

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Psycho-Analytic Study of the Family*, p. 24 (Hogarth Press).

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 262 (Allen & Unwin)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 262

external world, transforming it in response to his inner need. But that inner need is at the same time a reflection of some objective factor which sets up an obstruction to its satisfaction. Repression, we have seen, is recognised by Freud to be a sort of inner recoil to difficulties existing in the outer world which compel the instinctive life to forgo immediate gratification of some of its impulses on pain of extermination of the organism.

The reality of the outer world needs no discussion, for Freud is a thoroughgoing and uncompromising materialist. "Scientific thought," he says, "is, in its essence, no different from the normal process of thinking, which we all, believers and unbelievers alike, make use of when we are going about our business in everyday life. It has merely taken a special form in certain respects.... Its aim is to arrive at correspondence with reality—that is to say, with what exists outside us and independently of us, *and as experience has taught us is decisive for the fulfilment or frustration of our desires*. This correspondence with the real external world we call truth."<sup>1</sup> The external world is "decisive for the fulfilment or frustration of our desires!" In this phrase Freud echoes the conviction of every Marxist. But the Marxist is not content to recognise the decisive importance of external reality. He studies that reality in particular detail, in order to discover what factors in man's environment immediately determine the nature and extent of the fulfilment and frustration of his desires.

While psycho-analysis may, in a general sense, be defined as the science dealing with the desires and urges characteristic of man, so, in similar terms, Marxism may be defined as the science dealing with the external conditions which either fulfil or frustrate those desires. To our account of psycho-analysis it is necessary to add an account of Marxism, for only in the unity of these two opposite studies will a full understanding of man be achieved.

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 218 (Hogarth Press)



## CHAPTER VII

### THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

If, as Freud says, the external world is “decisive for the fulfilment or frustration of our desires,” some detailed study is needed of the particular environment which constitutes, for man, the external world. By this, I do not merely mean a study of the varying geographical or climatic conditions under which men may live. These, it is true, are important factors, for they will largely determine the kind of objects with which men will satisfy their physical needs. George Plekhanov, famous as the father of Russian Marxism, expressed the importance of the geographical environment in the following terms: “The properties of the geographical environment determine the character, not only of the natural products with which man satisfies his wants, but also of the objects which man himself produces in order to satisfy these wants. Where there were no metals, aboriginal tribes could not, unaided, get beyond the limits of what is termed the Stone Age. In like manner, if primitive fishers and primitive hunters were to pass on to the stage of cattle-breeding and that of agriculture, suitable geographical conditions were requisite, a suitable flora and fauna. Lewis Morgan (in *Ancient Society*) has shown that the remarkable difference between the social evolution of the New World and that of the Old, is to be explained by the lack in the New World of animals capable of being domesticated, and the differences between the flora of the New World and the Old.”<sup>1</sup>

But man does not remain passive in relation to this geographical environment. To wrest his livelihood from it, he acts co-operatively, repressing, as we have seen, individual antagonistic tendencies which might endanger the existence of the co-operative efforts. He learns from his experience and his discoveries new and more efficient methods of organising his efforts; he learns to construct tools, to irrigate the soil, to gain from Nature more than Nature voluntarily offers. His environment ceases to be solely conditioned by the natural qualities of the soil, climate, etc. He has developed an economic environment which, while based upon the original, natural environment, reflects the way in which he has acted upon it. The economic environment, in other words, is the result of man’s ceaseless efforts to raise himself above the level permitted by natural necessity.

In a very primitive state, Nature rules man almost omnipotently. Man is at the mercy of her every whim. He has little beyond his bare hands to gather what she chooses to send. And if she chooses not to send, he perishes.

But man has never lived in this completely helpless condition in the face of Nature. He is the one animal that equips himself with some means of seeking his livelihood, additional to those provided by his physical characteristics. In short, he is a tool-using animal. It is true that among the higher primates the use of natural objects, such as branches and stones, has been observed, but man’s distinction is that he goes beyond the occasional character of this use, modifying the natural objects the better to serve his purposes. For example, he will fashion one branch of a tree into a bow, another into an arrow, thus transforming natural objects into tools which enhance his prospects of gaining a livelihood. “Men,” says Marx, “may be distinguished from animals by consciousness, religion, or anything else. They begin to differentiate themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of existence, men

---

<sup>1</sup> *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, G. Plekhanov (Martin Lawrence)

indirectly produce their material life itself.”<sup>1</sup>

In this way, a special relationship develops between man and his original, natural, geographical, environment, a relationship which expresses the fact that man wages a struggle for existence by means of a “productive process.” This latter term is used by Marxists to denote the methods used by man to gain his livelihood—the tools and implements; in short, the technique of wealth production. By its means, man takes up an active attitude towards the natural environment in which he lives. “All historical work must start on the basis of these natural conditions and their modification in the course of history through the action of men.... This mode of production... is rather in fact a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their lives, their definite mode of life.”<sup>2</sup>

In the process of struggle with the external world, men enter into relationships with one another which correspond with the necessities of that struggle. The method of struggle is the productive process by which man wrests wealth from nature. Any change in that method will give rise to a necessity for change in social relationships. A study of society, therefore, involves a study of the development of the material basis of social relations, the productive process.

A simple explanation of this is given in a Marxist text-book which was widely used by workers’ study circles during the Tsarist regime, and played an important part in spreading a Marxist outlook in Russia.

“In the process of production men, as a consequence of natural necessity, stand in certain relations with each other. The history of humanity does not know of a period in which men lived completely isolated from each other and individually secured their means of livelihood. Even in the most remote times the hunting of savage beasts, the transport of heavy weights, etc., demanded simple cooperation, the growing complexity of economic activity brought with it the division of labour among men by which, in the work of the community, one man earned out one piece of work necessary for all, another man another, etc. Both simple co-operation and division of labour place men in definite connection with each other and establish the first elementary productive relations.... This means that men in the process of struggle against external nature necessarily stand in such relations to each other as correspond to the methods of that struggle; hunting, for example, demands other methods of co-operation than the construction of great irrigation works in sparsely watered districts; modern machine production places the workers in mutual relations other than those in manufacture based on hand labour.”<sup>3</sup>

The emphasis on the role of the methods of production as determining the relationships within society entered into by men, received theoretical expression in *The Materialist Conception of History* of Marx and Engels. Its basic thought is that the way men get their living at any time largely determines their economic and social relationships, which, in turn, determine their mental outlooks. And, as experience and discovery change the mode of production, different productive relations are entered into by men, and a corresponding change in their consciousness takes place.

Thus Marx says: “Social relations are closely interconnected with the forces of production. When they acquire new forces of production, people change the method of production, and concomitantly with the change in the method of production, with the change in the way they gain their livelihood, there ensues a change in all their social relations. The hand-mill gives us a society with feudal lords; the

---

<sup>1</sup> *German Ideology*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Short Course of Economic Science*, Bogdanaov

steam-power mill gives us a society with industrial capitalists. But the very- same persons who model social relations in conformity with the prevailing material methods of production also model principles, ideas, categories, in accordance with the prevailing social relations. Thus we see that these ideas, these categories, are no more eternal than are the conditions, the relations they express. They are historical, transitory, fugitive products.”<sup>1</sup> A few pages later, he says: “If we ask ourselves why a given principle made its appearance in the eleventh century or in the eighteenth, and not in some other century, we shall find it necessary to study with close attention what people were like in the eleventh century or in the eighteenth, as the case may be: to ascertain what their special needs were in the century with which we are concerned, what were the productive forces at the time, the methods of production and the raw materials in general use; what, finally, were the relations between man and man, resulting from the before-mentioned conditions of existence. What does the study of all these questions mean but to write the actual and everyday history of the people of each century, to describe them as at one and the same time the authors and the actors in their own drama?”<sup>2</sup>

This Marxian view of consciousness as reflecting productive relations is quite in keeping with the Freudian view that, in conscious life, unconscious impulses find expression which conforms with social standards. We deal with the relation between Freudian and Marxian concepts in a later chapter, but here we may remind ourselves that the conscious ego is that part of the mind which is in contact with reality, which, in the words of Freud, “has to observe the external world and preserve a true picture of it.” It is only necessary for the psycho-analyst to recognise that the reality to which the ego responds, and which it reflects in consciousness, is the whole complexity of social relationships in which man exists, based on technical processes by which he gets his living. No one can deny that reality has changed immensely since the time of the Ancient Britons, and that these changes have been accompanied by changed religious, political, and cultural life. No one also would deny that natural conditions of existence, climatic and geographical, have remained relatively unchanged. The reality, then, whose changes are reflected in the conscious life of the individual, must be something other than the unchanging, natural environment. It is, therefore, predominantly to the changing social and economic environment which man has himself produced through the transformations which he has effected on Nature, to which the conscious ego responds. So far I have been concerned to describe, in a general way, the economic basis of society, to show, what is essential for the purpose of this book, that men are compelled, by the urgency of the struggle for existence, to repress their mutual antagonisms and collaborate in the production of the food, clothing, and shelter necessary for life.

Social life has its roots in the necessities of the productive process—that is to say, the pattern of social life is determined by the kind and extent of the productive powers in the possession of society. But history shows us a varying pattern of social organisation, so that the question arises as to the causative factors of this variation. In a famous passage of his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx sketches the dynamic of social change. “At a certain stage of their development the material productive forces of society came into contradiction with the existing productive relationships, or, what is but a legal expression for these, with the property relationships within which they moved before. From forms of development of the productive forces these relationships are transformed into their fetters. Then an epoch of social revolution opens. With the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 88 (Martin Lawrence).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

change in the economic foundation the whole vast superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such revolutions it is necessary always to distinguish between the material revolution in the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with scientific accuracy, and the juridical, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic—in a word, ideological forms wherein men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.” This view therefore ascribes the development of society to the outcome of conflict between the forces of production which strive to expand and the conditions of production which, at times, tend to limit this expansion. The conditions of production comprise all those relations existing between men and the ideological forms reflecting them. A particularly important relationship of the conditions of production—important because of the part it plays in the outcome of the above conflict—is the class division within society. Classes reflect the different roles played by individuals in the productive process and therefore have their origin in division of labour which appeared, at certain stage, in social development. This stage occurred when production brought forth a surplus beyond what was needed for the elementary requirements of life. Primitive society was classless in structure because its level of production was so low that barely enough for all was produced. Consequently all had to share equally in the task of obtaining the necessaries of life, and all shared equally in the results of collective effort. There was no room for a privileged class because there was no surplus to support it. To have such a class under those circumstances would have meant exposing the group to loss of man-power through starvation of some of its members. Poverty compelled equality. But experience, invention, and discovery, which were stimulated by growing social units and consequent growing needs, brought a measure of security and the possibility of a surplus. How this led to the formation of classes is described by Engels.

“As men first emerged from the animal world—in the narrower sense of the term—so they made their entry into history; still half animal, brutal, still helpless in face of the forces of Nature, still ignorant of their own; and consequently as poor as the animals and hardly more productive than these. There prevailed a certain equality in the conditions of existence, and for the heads of families also a kind of equality of social position—at least an absence of social classes—which continued among the natural agricultural communities of the civilised peoples of a later period.... The productive forces gradually increase; the increasing density of the population creates at one point a community of interests; at another, conflicting interests between the communes whose groupings into larger units bring about in turn a new division of labour, the setting up of organs to safeguard common interests and to guard against conflicting interests... These organs... in certain circumstances... soon make themselves even more independent, partly through heredity of functions... and partly because they become more and more indispensable owing to the increasing number of conflicts with the other groups.... Production had so far developed that the labour power of a man could now produce more than was necessary for its mere maintenance; the means of maintaining additional labour forces existed; likewise the means of employing them; labour power acquired a value. But within the community and the association to which it belonged there were no superfluous labour forces available. On the other hand, such forces were provided by war. Up to that time they had not known what to do with prisoners of war, and had therefore simply killed them; at an even earlier period, eaten them. But at the stage of the ‘economic order’ which had now been attained the prisoners acquired a value; their captors therefore let them live and made use of their labour. *Slavery* was invented. It soon became the predominant form of production among all peoples who were developing beyond the primitive community, but in the end was also one of the chief causes of the decay of that system. It was slavery that first made possible the division of labour between

agriculture and industry on a considerable scale, and along with this the flower of the ancient world, Hellenism Without slavery, no Greek State, no Greek art, science; without slavery, no Roman Empire. But, without Hellenism and the Roman Empire as a basis, also no modern Europe. We should never forget that our whole economic, political, and intellectual development has as its presupposition a state of things in which slavery was as necessary as it was universally recognised. In this sense we are entitled to say. Without the slavery of antiquity, no modern Socialism.”<sup>1</sup>

The division of society into classes, therefore, has historical justification. It corresponds with a definite stage of the development of the productive process, but since it inevitably establishes an inequality, expressed in different shares in the wealth produced, differences in privileges, it arouses antagonistic trends. So long as the class divisions correspond with the necessities of the productive process, so long, that is, as the productive process expands, this antagonism does not take open form. Indeed, says Engels, while “the mode of production is in the rising stage of its development, it is enthusiastically welcomed even by those who come off worst from its corresponding mode of distribution, but only when the mode of production has already a good part of its declining phase behind it, when it has half outlived its day. When the conditions of its existence have to a large extent disappeared, and its successor is already knocking at the door—it is only at this stage that the constantly increasing inequality of distribution appears as unjust.”<sup>2</sup>

We can now see why social development takes place through the conflict of the productive forces, the technical equipment which society possesses based on the geographical environment, with the conditions of production in which they exist. The conditions of production reflect the character of the division of labour within society, a division into ruling and subject classes. The whole pattern of social structure arising from this fundamental class division reflects the interests of the ruling class, for it is so arranged to conduce to the continuance of the social system which gives privileged position to the ruling classes. “The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class,” says Marx. “When people speak of ideas that revolutionise society, they do but express the fact that within the old society the elements of a new one have been created, and the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence.”<sup>3</sup> Thus Marx describes the history of society since the emergence of classes as a history of class struggles. “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open, fight; a fight that each time ended either in a revolution, reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”

The class struggle thus provides the dynamic of social evolution. The modern capitalist class in its struggle with landed property struck off the fetters which feudal institutions placed on the productive forces. “At a particular stage the new forces of production set in motion by the bourgeoisie—in the first place the division of labour and the combination of many workers, each producing a particular part in one complete manufacture—and the condition and requirements of exchange developed through these productive forces became incompatible with the existing order of production historically established and sanctified by law—that is to say, incompatible with the privileges of the guild and the numerous other

---

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, p. 206 (Martin Lawrence).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170

<sup>3</sup> *Communist Manifesto*

local and personal privileges (which were only so many fetters to the unprivileged) of the feudal social organisation. The forces of production represented by the bourgeoisie rebelled against the order of production represented by the feudal landlords and the guildmaster. The result is known: the feudal fetters were smashed gradually in England, at one blow in France.”<sup>1</sup>

In modern society, the main class division is between the capitalist and the working class. The former performed an important historical mission in bringing together, in centralising, the scattered instruments of production which previously existed. Prior to the present capitalist system, production was small-scale in character. The tools of production belonged to the producer, who, from his own raw material and by his own efforts, produced his commodities. The finished product was his by virtue of this fact. He owned the product of his labour. This petty form of industry became undermined towards the end of the fifteenth century, when trade and commerce received a mighty fillip from the discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, the opening of the East Indian and Chinese markets, which required a more extensive form of production. This necessitated the transformation of the scattered individual means of production into a form wherein they could be used by a number of workers co-operating in a productive process. “The spinning-wheel, the hand loom, and the blacksmith’s hammer were replaced by the spinning machine, the mechanical loom, and the steam hammer; and the factory, making the co-operation of hundreds and thousands of workers necessary, took the place of the individual workroom. And, like the means of production, production itself changed from a series of individual operations into a series of social acts, and the products from the products of individuals into social products. The yarn, the cloth, and the metal goods which now came from the factory were the common product of many workers, through whose hands it had to pass successively before it was ready. No individual can say of such products: I made it, that is my product.”<sup>2</sup>

In giving such a social character to production, capitalism performed a very important historical task, but it did so by depriving the greater part of society of any ownership in the means of production. The tools of the handicraftsmen were rendered worthless in competition with the factory organisation of the capitalists, and the small masters were soon squeezed out of existence. This process was particularly marked during the Industrial Revolution, in the second half of the eighteenth century, with the invention of the steam-engine, spinning machines, the power loom, etc. Consequently a class of individuals possessing no means of production, a class of proletarians, came into existence. “The lower strata of the middle class—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by the new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.”<sup>3</sup>

But while capitalist large-scale production introduces a social basis to production, and while it organises and plans production within the factory, it retains the individual character of ownership which marked the petty production which it supersedes.

The purpose of production, in early medieval times, was to satisfy the need of the producer and his family. He consumed his own product. Later an exchange took place between the artisan in the town and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Feuerbach*, p. 62 (Martin Lawrence).

<sup>2</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, p. 302 (Martin Lawrence).

<sup>3</sup> *Communist Manifesto*

the peasant in the country, the former selling his product to the latter and purchasing agricultural goods. This type of exchange arose in a spontaneous fashion from the division of labour, and had no plan of production guiding it. Each individual producer worked independently of the other producers, and was therefore in no position to gauge with any exactness how much of his product was needed.

This planless character of production was carried over, together with individual ownership of the means of production, to the capitalist mode of production, but in a greatly accentuated form, because the planned production in the factory enabled vast masses of commodities to be produced, which were thrown on the market, by each producing concern, independently of the other. “The contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation reproduces itself as the antagonism between the organisation of production in the individual factory and the anarchy of production in society as a whole.”<sup>1</sup>

This absence of plan in production as a whole, means that the individual capitalist does not know how much of the commodity which he is producing will be placed on the market by other producers. He dare not, consequently, allow his technical equipment to fall below the standard of his rivals, for this would prevent him producing as cheaply, efficiently, and with as great output as they, with the result that their products would oust his from the market. Thus a mad, competitive drive ensues, for advantage in output and cheapness of production, which drives to the wall those unable to stand the pace. The ranks of the proletariat become increased with these fresh recruits, erstwhile capitalists, victims of the anarchy of capitalist production.

The introduction of more and more efficient machinery, not only sweeps thousands of weaker capitalist concerns out of existence, but displaces thousands of workers, creating an “industrial reserve army” which enables the capitalists to keep the wages of those in employment down to the lowest required level. Marx, writing of the inevitable law of capitalism that the introduction of machinery adds to the “reserve army” of unemployed, says “This law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.”<sup>2</sup>

As the capitalists are driven to improve their technique, so the mass of commodities that they throw on the markets increases. But the expansion of production takes place at a far more rapid pace than does the expansion of markets. In dramatic terms, Engels describes the periodic results of this fact: “Trade comes to a standstill, the markets are glutted, the products lie in great masses, unsaleable, ready-money disappears, credit vanishes, the factories are idle, the working masses go short of food because they have produced too much food, bankruptcy follows upon bankruptcy, forced sale upon forced sale. The stagnation lasts for years, both productive forces and products are squandered and destroyed on a large scale, until the accumulated masses of commodities are at last disposed of at a more or less considerable depreciation, until production and exchange gradually begin to move again. By degrees the pace quickens; it becomes a trot; the industrial trot passes into a gallop, and the gallop in turn passes into the mad onrush of a complete industrial, commercial, credit, and speculative steeplechase, only to land

---

<sup>1</sup> Engels

<sup>2</sup> *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 709 (Allen & Unwin)

again in the end, after the most breakneck jumps, in the ditch of a crash.”<sup>1</sup>

These crises throw into relief the restrictive character of modern capitalist conditions of production, revealing the inability of the capitalists to control the vast social forces of production they have called into being.

The solution of the conflict between the social forces of production and the individual character of their ownership is only to be found in the conversion of the means of production into social property—that is, the bringing of their ownership into correspondence with their social nature.

How is this to be effected?

The contradiction between the conditions of production and the forces of production manifests itself in a growing inability of the capitalist class to provide even a meagre existence to the working class. It shows itself to be “unfit to rule, because it is incompetent to provide security for its slaves even within the confines of their slavish existence; because it has no option but to let them lapse into a condition in which it has to feed them instead of being fed by them. Society cannot continue to live under bourgeois rule. This means that the life of the bourgeoisie has become incompatible with the life of society.”<sup>2</sup>

The class antagonisms which were repressed while capitalism was compatible with the expansion of the forces of production begin to assert themselves. At first the workers’ struggles take isolated and unorganised form, but the very mechanism of capitalist production compels them to adopt more organised forms of struggle. Capitalism masses them together inside factories—thousands often under one roof—and, by the introduction of machinery, destroys any craft distinctions between them. They are reduced to an equality of servitude, and the organisation within the factory, which makes of them units of complicated mass-production methods, teaches them to struggle against this servitude in an organised fashion.

The direction of the workers’ struggles, which arise spontaneously from the very conditions of capitalism, so that they are aimed at the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, is the task of a political party, conscious of this necessary outcome of class struggle. Such a party must be armed with an understanding of the nature of capitalism, its origin and destination; it must therefore have an understanding of social development in general, of which capitalism is a particular stage.

*The Materialist Conception of History* gives such a theoretical outlook. It indicates the general trend of social evolution, and informs the workers who have grasped it to what tasks history has summoned them.

But is this knowledge alone sufficient for the difficult task of organising millions of workers in a struggle against capitalism?

*The Materialist Conception of History* is really a statement of the “common resultant,” as Engels termed it, of a host of conflicting wills, from which emerges what no one has willed. Engels expressed this as follows: “History makes itself in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each again has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant—the historical event. This again may itself be viewed as the product of a power which, taken as a whole, works unconsciously and without volition. For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed. Thus

---

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, p. 310 (Martin Lawrence).

<sup>2</sup> *Communist Manifesto*.



past history proceeds in the manner of a natural process, and is also essentially subject to the same laws of movement. But from the fact that individual wills—of which each desires what he is impelled by his physical constitution and external, in the last resort economic, circumstances (either his own personal circumstances or those of society in general)—do not attain what they want, but are merged into a collective mean, a common resultant, it must not be concluded that their value = 0. On the contrary, each contributes to the resultant and is to this degree involved in it.”<sup>1</sup>

To-day important historical events are in the shaping; the “common resultant” which is Socialism has yet to emerge, with the consequence that the field of history presents a maze of conflicting wills. *The Materialist Conception of History* gives the assurance that eventually, out of these conflicting wills, a common determination for Socialism will emerge. But the Marxist cannot afford to rest with this assurance; to await its automatic fulfilment. He has to play an active, guiding role in developing this common will. He must study, therefore, all the factors which contribute to it. At the moment, Marxists have equipped themselves with the knowledge of the economic factors involved, but they tend to overlook the psychological constitution which, in the determination of individual wills and so in the making of history, plays an important part. Each factor, says Engels, contributes to the final resultant. That the psychological factors are of supreme importance at the present time I shall show in the following chapter.

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter to J. Bloch, 21st September, 1890, *Marx-Engels Correspondence* (Martin Lawrence.)

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY AND THE INDIVIDUAL MIND

While the main emphasis is laid by Marxism on the role of economic factors in determining history, that does not mean that other factors are excluded. In a letter, Engels writes. “According to *The Materialist Conception of History*, the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If, therefore, somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract, and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its consequences—the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants; political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas... also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles, and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.... We make our own history, but in the first place under very definite presuppositions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are finally decisive.”<sup>1</sup>

Further he explains why the economic side is sometimes given more emphasis than is its due by “younger writers.” “Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame. We had to emphasise this main principle in opposition to our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place, or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights.” The need to allow “the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights” is greater now than when Engels penned those words. Marx and Engels lived in the days of the expansion of capitalism, when the economic foundations for Socialism were being laid. The era of capitalist decline had not yet set in. The line of development of capitalism was in the direction of increasing centralisation and concentration of capital, the formation of trusts and combines to replace the free competition which had been capitalism’s pride.

The economic factor was dominant, for social change was mainly characterised by quantitative economic features. Thus a polarisation was taking place, massing the ever-increasing proletarians at one pole, with the control over the growing productive forces being concentrated at the other, in fewer and fewer hands.

With prophetic vigour Marx describes this process in *Capital*: “The expropriation of the immediate producers was accomplished with merciless vandalism, and under the stimulus of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious. Self-earned private property, that is based, so to say, on the fusing together of the isolated, independent labouring individual with the conditions of his labour, is supplanted by capitalistic private property, which rests on exploitation of the nominally free labour of others, i.e. on wage- labour.... That which is now to be expropriated is now no longer the labourer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many labourers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralisation of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralisation, or this expropriation of many capitalists by the few, develop, on an ever-extending scale, the co-operative form of the labour process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour only usable in common, the economising of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialised

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter to J. Bloch, 21st September, 1890, *Marx-Engels Correspondence* (Martin Lawrence)

labour, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and, with this, the international character of the capitalistic regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this, too, grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in number, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under, it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.”<sup>1</sup> Thus in Marx’s and Engels’ day Socialism was not so much an immediate practical possibility, as the inevitable outcome of a process which was taking place before their eyes. “Marx and Engels,” says Stalin, “lived in a pre-revolutionary period, when Imperialism was still in an embryonic condition, when the workers were only preparing for the revolution, when the proletarian revolution had not yet become an immediate and practical necessity.”<sup>2</sup>

In such circumstances it was necessary to emphasise the economic necessity of Socialism—that is, the fact that all the existing economic tendencies within capitalism were flowing in a certain direction towards the “centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour” which “at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument.”

To-day the contradictions within capitalism, in confirmation of the predictions of Marx and Engels, have become so acute that the “integument” has been burst asunder at one point, viz. Russia. But in spite of the acuteness of these contradictions, in spite of the brutal repression of the working-class, which is found necessary in order to maintain the domination of capital, in spite of the *maturing of all the economic conditions for the establishment of Socialism*, their repercussion on the minds of men, so that they think and feel in terms of revolution, has only occurred for a small minority.

We may put it this way. Man, says Marx, makes his own history, but out of material conditions ready to hand. In so far as the making of history demands revolutionary action, not until the material conditions exist, can this take place. At the time when the conditions are in process of becoming, their development overshadows the role of man in the making of history. But, at the point where these conditions become so mature that revolutionary action becomes necessary, the figure of man looms large in the role of the maker of history. There is an exchange of significance. History, which is always a process of interchange between subjective and objective qualities; between, as Engels puts it, the constitution of the individual and the economic conditions, shifts its emphasis from one to the other in accordance with the necessities of the historical process. This exchange of significance is dialectical in character.

In a later section I deal with dialectical materialism, but here I may say that it involves a study of the reciprocal relationships which exist within any process. In this case, the historical process, there is an interaction between man and his economic environment, in which man contributes an active, striving side; he does not passively reflect the changes of the external world in his thought, for the ideas which spring from the external world he converts into weapons to conquer that world, Marx fully recognised this active, positive, striving element coming from within man. He says, in criticising the materialism

---

<sup>1</sup> *Capital*, Vol. I (Allen & Unwin)

<sup>2</sup> *Foundations of Leninism* (Allen & Unwin)

which excludes man as an active revolutionary factor in historical development: "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that circumstances are changed precisely by men and the educator must himself be educated.... The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can only be conceived and rationally understood as revolutionising practice."<sup>1</sup>

In Marx's time the historical process followed the path of the economic development of capitalism. To-day man is thrust into the centre of the historical stage to play his part. And man, poor bewildered creature, confronted with the magnificent role to which history has appointed him, stammers his lines, looking helplessly round for guidance.

If it is true that history proceeds on the basis of long-drawn-out processes of economic development, which then reach points where the active intervention of man is required for their further development; if it is true, that is, that the evolutionary process in the form of continuous development of man's economic environment is at times interrupted by revolutionary change, the better to allow the further development of the economic forces, then it is as essential to know the laws of man's inner mental life as those of his economic environment.

Consider what is involved in the creation of a Socialist society. Engels describes it as a leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom. This leap demands, as no social change before has demanded, the exertion of all man's powers to accomplish it. It involves the abolition of man's slavery to economic and social forces, the freeing of man's mind to soar to undreamt of heights. This prospect appealed to Marx and Engels as the beginning of human history proper, leaving behind the last stage of pre-history which linked man to the animal kingdom. Is it any wonder that, at such a moment, those faculties or qualities which distinguish man from the rest of natural existence should assume such preponderant importance? Is it any wonder that the *study* of man's mind should appear as an indispensable condition for the creation of a society which *frees* man's mind? Past social changes have occurred with but little consciousness in the minds of their authors of the historic mission they were fulfilling. It is true that they identified their task with the interests of humanity at large. But, says Marx, "just as we cannot judge an individual on the basis of his own opinion of himself, so such a revolutionary epoch cannot be judged from its own consciousness." Is that equally true of our epoch? No. For Marxism arms us with a revolutionary consciousness of our objective, based on an understanding of the historical process as a whole. Consciousness thus takes a new significance. It ceases to be the reflection of the partial immediate interests of people, who, in pursuing them, unconsciously fulfil an historical purpose. It is rather that the interests pursued by the revolutionary class coincide, at last, with the real interests of the whole of society. The capitalist class overthrew the tyranny of feudalism, but subjected the bulk of society to its own tyranny. Socialism, by establishing the dominance of the working class, abolishes tyranny for the whole of society, and does so with the conscious realisation of the historical purpose it fulfils.

This process is described by Engels in glowing terms:

"The seizure of the means of production by society puts an end to commodity production, and therewith to the domination of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by conscious organisation on a planned basis. The struggle for individual existence comes to an end.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Theses on Feuerbach*, p. 111 (Martin Lawrence)

And at this point, in a certain sense, man finally cuts himself off from the animal world, leaves the conditions of animal existence behind him, and enters conditions which are really human. The conditions of existence forming man's environment, which up to now have dominated man, at this point pass under the dominion and control of man, who now for the first time becomes the real conscious master of Nature, because, and in so far as, he has become master of his own social organisation. The laws of his own social activity, which have hitherto confronted him as external dominating laws of Nature, will then be applied by man with complete understanding, and hence will be dominated by man. Men's own social organisation, which has hitherto stood in opposition to them as if arbitrarily decreed by Nature and history, will then become the voluntary act of men themselves. The objective, external forces, which have hitherto dominated history, will then pass under the control of men themselves.

"It is only from this point that men, with full consciousness, will fashion history. It is only from this point that the social causes set in motion by men will have, predominantly and in constantly increasing measure, the effects willed by men. It is humanity's leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom."

"To carry through this world-emancipating act is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. And it is the task of scientific Socialism, the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, to establish the historical conditions, and, with these, the nature of this act, and thus to bring to the consciousness of the new oppressed class the conditions and nature of the act which it is its destiny to accomplish."<sup>1</sup>

What an eloquent testimony to the need to study those subjective qualities which man must exercise if he is to become the "real conscious master of Nature!" The conditions of existence which had previously dominated man pass, says Engels, under his dominion and control. Does not this mean, as we have insisted, that a point is being reached today when the significant factor in history is no longer man's economic conditions of existence "which up to now have dominated man" and thus history, but man himself? We pass to a consideration of the way man's subjective life interacts with his economic environment, to a further consideration of how the knowledge provided by psycho-analysis can assist Marxists, with a confidence that some such study was foreshadowed in the works of Marx and Engels.

A study of man's mental life, according to Freud, is essentially a study of his unconscious mind. The concept of the "unconscious" need give no qualms to Marxists. Marx and Engels were aware that behind the conscious professions of people were other motives, unconscious, but none the less the real mental causative factors. Says Engels: "Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives."<sup>2</sup>

True, Engels relates the ideological process to external economic facts, but, he confesses, "in doing so we neglected the formal side—the way in which these notions come about—for the sake of the content. This has given our adversaries a welcome opportunity for misunderstandings."

"The way in which these notions come about," we are convinced, is best explained in terms of the original instinctive dispositions of man in interaction with his economic environment. We can make this clearer by a consideration of the concepts used by Freud to show the dynamic character of mental

---

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, p. 318 (Martin Lawrence).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mehring, 14th July, 1893, *Marx-Engels Correspondence* (Martin Lawrence).

processes.

These are the id, ego, and super-ego, elsewhere explained in this book. They are concepts introduced by Freud as the best apparent working method of describing mental activities. Like all concepts, they suffer shortcomings; particularly they have the tendency to give a static and distinct form to mental activities which are, in reality, inseparably bound up together. Concepts such as these are the tools of thought with which every scientist works, and all are open to the charge that they do not correspond with actual, concrete reality. Marx, for example, defends the concepts he uses in his economic theories in the following manner: “The reproaches you make against the law of value apply to all concepts, regarded from the standpoint of reality. The identity of thought and being, to express myself in Hegelian fashion, everywhere coincides with your example of a circle, and the polygon. Or the two of them, the concept of a thing and its reality, run side by side like two asymptotes, always approaching each other yet never meeting. This difference between the two is the very difference which prevents the concept from being directly and immediately reality, and reality from being immediately its own concept. But although a concept has the essential nature of a concept, and cannot therefore *prima facie* directly coincide with reality, from which it must first be abstracted, it is still something more than a fiction, unless you are going to declare all the result of thought fictions, because reality has to go a long way round before it corresponds with them, and even then only corresponds to them with asymptotic approximation.”<sup>1</sup>

Freud, too, is keenly aware of the limitations of his concepts. After a rather involved exposition of the “anatomy of the mental personality,” he says, “I must add a warning. When you think of this dividing up of the personality into ego, super-ego, and id, you must not imagine sharp dividing lines such as are artificially drawn in the field of political geography. We cannot do justice to the characteristics of the mind by means of linear contours, such as occur in a drawing or in a primitive painting, but we need rather the areas of colour shading off into one another that are to be found in modern pictures. *After we have made our separations, we must allow what we have separated to merge again.* Do not judge too harshly of a first attempt at picturing a thing so elusive as the human mind.”<sup>2</sup>

So much for a justification of the basic Freudian concepts; now let us use them.

Of primary importance, as we saw, is the id. It is unconscious in character, and contains the instinctive drives which urge for immediate and unconditional gratification. Its needs are fundamentally sexual, so that in a primitive society, where less restraints are imposed on it, the sexual basis of that society is quite clear. Stubborn reality, economic necessity, as we have seen, compels the bridling of these impulses. A portion of the id becomes modified as a result, seeking gratification for its impulses in an indirect fashion. This refinement of the id in contact with reality, Freud calls the ego. It is mainly conscious, and gives an ideational form to id impulses which is not disturbing to consciousness. It is responsible for what Engels calls the “false consciousness” of the ideological process. We may regard the ego as expressing a relationship between the instinctive life which reaches out for satisfaction and the material conditions of life which limit that satisfaction. It mediates, as it were, between the id and reality, attempting to satisfy the claims of both.

The ego not only modifies the id impulses so that they do not conflict too violently in conscious expression with reality, but it also, in seeking gratification for id impulses, modifies reality. Because it is mainly conscious, it is that part of the mind which directly reflects the external world in ideas, concepts,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Marx-Engels Correspondance*, p. 527-8 (Martin Lawrence)

<sup>2</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 104 (Hogarth Press), my italics.

etc. It represents the external world to the id, which otherwise, because of its disregard for reality considerations, would soon bring the organism to destruction. But because its relationship is, on the one hand, with the external world, and, on the other, with the instinctive impulses of the id, any consideration of man's life exclusively in terms of either external reality or these instinctive impulses would be one-sided. The ego, conscious life, is the expression of the interaction between inner instinctive forces and the outer, obdurate, world of reality.

We can now see something of the relation between the id and the economic environment.

Men, we have seen, can only form large, stable social units on condition that they repress the mutual jealousies and antagonisms which spring from the irrational id impulses.

This view, we showed, was held by Engels, who regarded mutual tolerance of the grown males as the first condition for the formation of large social groups. Repression of id impulses can only mean that their gratification conflicts with reality. The repression is accomplished by the ego, which represents reality to the id, and which modifies the id in accordance with reality. In emphasising the role of reality in compelling the repression by the ego of id impulses, we are adhering strictly to psychoanalytic theory. "One can hardly go wrong in regarding the ego as that part of the id which has been modified by the proximity of the external world... The ego has taken over the task of representing the external world for the id, and so of saving it, for the id, blindly striving to gratify its instincts in complete disregard of the superior strength of outside forces, could not otherwise escape annihilation."<sup>1</sup>

Our account of the economic basis of society showed that the basis of life was provided through the process of wealth production, that therefore the reality which faces man is predominantly social and economic. Clearly, then, if the function of the ego is to prevent id impulses bringing the organism to destruction, if it has to give weight to objective factors while at the same time attempting to obtain gratification for id impulses, the necessities of the productive process, upon which the economic and social structure is built, must loom large as reality demands of first importance.

If id impulses were allowed to interfere with the provision of the necessary basis for life, if the antagonistic feelings, the demands for unconditional gratification for id impulses, were unrepressed, then co-operative efforts necessary for the production of wealth would be impossible. Therefore we can see that the necessities of economic life, to allow the unhampered use of the wealth-productive process, form the reality which impinges on the ego and compels the repression of id impulses.

But the relationship between the id and economic reality is not, we have said, one-sided. Just as economic reality compels the repression of id impulses, so id impulses, ever seeking gratification, compel the ego to overcome, in economic life, obstacles to their satisfaction. The elements of the superstructure, the political, religious, aesthetic, and other notions, says Engels, do not merely passively reflect the economic foundation upon which they are built, but actively strive to change it. That, in Marxian terminology, is the same as saying that repressed id impulses, which receive conscious, socialised expression in politics, religion, etc., do not remain inactive, but are constantly activating the ego to modify external reality, which has compelled their repression. They constantly strive, as it were, to mould the world "closer to the heart's desire." How else can we explain that, under the influence of ideas, men *do* strive to change their environment? There must, of necessity, be some active principle in man which interacts with the external world through consciousness, so that conscious life not only expresses the impressions of the outer world, but also the active principle which seizes hold of these

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 101 (Hogarth Press)

impressions for its own purposes. Engels, in fact, definitely accepts this view. “In one point, however, the history of society,” he writes, “proves to be essentially different from that of Nature.... In the history of society... the actors are all endowed with consciousness, are men acting with deliberation or passion working towards definite goals.”<sup>1</sup>

We may say, therefore, that consciousness expresses a relationship between the economic world and the instinctive life which can only be understood by a study of both factors involved. This method of study was used by Engels in relation to questions on political economy. “We analyse this relation. Being a relation already implies that it has two sides related to each other. Each of these sides is considered by itself, which brings us to the way they behave to each other, their reciprocal interaction.”<sup>2</sup>

That the “superstructure” expresses a relationship between unconscious instinctive impulses and objective reality, we shall see more clearly when we relate the Marxian view of religion to that of Freud. But we need first to consider another mental factor of importance, the super-ego.

We have simplified the relationship between the id and the ego and the ego and external reality the better to translate them into terms of economic necessity. But unfortunately, in reality, the picture is not so clear. To make clear how the super-ego is related to facts of economic importance, it will be necessary to remind ourselves of some of its essential characteristics. The first taste of reality which the child has, its first rebuffs and gratifications, come from those most closely related to it—its parents, relatives, etc. Helplessness for a long period is an important biological characteristic of human beings which exists, and will exist, under any social system. I am not concerned with the kind of treatment which children receive under varying social conditions, the traditions in which they are reared, but with the fact that the psychological reactions of all children to this helplessness has certain common elements as unavoidable as the helplessness itself.

The child comes to recognise some external authority as having the power to curtail the satisfaction of its instinctive needs. In a myriad of ways the tiny child is made to feel the essential difference between it and the adult, in the ability of the latter to satisfy, or to prevent satisfaction of, its needs. The role which the parents, or other authorities, have played in exacting from the child adjustment to the demands of external reality leaves its mark on the child. While the ego is yet weak, and unable to control the imperative demands of the id, a portion of the ego becomes identified with the parent, and, in the form of the super-ego, continues to watch over the id impulses, compelling the ego to repress those it considers impermissible. It is the super-ego which is responsible for the emotional attachment of people to religious movements wherein God and the Church and other authoritative forces represent the father; which is responsible for the obedience to the forces of authority which exist in any society. The super-ego is irrational in its compulsions; its morality is a stern one, for its origin was in childhood, when parental authority demanded unquestioning obedience. Its influence was seen during the Jubilee celebrations, when many people, who ordinarily manifest little interest in the doings of Royalty, were emotionally aroused, and proclaimed by flags and revelry their “love” for the king-father. It is noteworthy that the King’s annual addresses, on Christmas Day, to the Empire, were perfectly adapted to the emotional relationship between himself and millions of people. He spoke of the peoples of the Empire as one family of which he was the father. And it cannot be denied that for millions of people there is nothing incongruous in this, for the need for love and protection which preceded, in early

---

<sup>1</sup> *Feuerbach*, p. 58 (Martin Lawrence).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 99 (Martin Lawrence)



childhood, the formation of the super-ego, is active in adult life. This need for love was a determining factor in the child's early environment. The response he makes to the later economic and social environment is greatly influenced by the way the need for love and protection was answered in childhood days. Most people think of their childhood as a comparatively happy and care-free time when the love and protection of their parents sheltered them from the harshness of reality. Others, of course, were treated with resentment by parents, as intruding and imposing extra burdens upon them. Such resentment may have proceeded from economic causes such as poverty, which made the feeding of an extra mouth a great problem. From these two possible situations in which the child's love-needs may be more or less adequately met, or more or less disregarded, two later attitudes may spring. In the first case, the adult, in forming super-ego identifications, will tend to regard the authorities on whom he has displaced his emotional attitudes towards his parents with feelings of trust and love, rather than antagonism. In the other case, rebelliousness and hatred will dominate. Underlying the love is a latent antagonism, which, under circumstances to be discussed later, may be aroused and replace the love.

From the above we can understand something of the irrationally conservative tendencies in mankind, the irrational resistance shown to any departure from the traditional mode of life. We can understand why social institutions continue to exist long after they have ceased to correspond with social necessity. The super-ego not only explains the irrational conservatism which compels the perpetuation of an outworn social system, but explains the irrational compulsive elements which form part of the emotional life of revolutionaries. How dangerous these irrational elements are in the revolutionary movement, and how necessary a knowledge of psycho-analysis is to guard against them, we shall see in the final chapter.

Social reformers and revolutionaries are well aware that their strongest opposition comes from the dead weight of tradition, the emotional bondage to existing institutions. But such institutions cannot be understood without knowledge of the part that the super-ego plays in their life. For, *while their character may be due to previous economic necessity, the authority which they acquire over man's actions, and which they often retain long after their raison d'être has disappeared, is due to the compulsions of the super-ego.*

Referring to the millions of ties which hold the people to old, decayed economic institutions, Lenin commented: "The power of habit, ingrained in millions and tens of millions, is a terrible power." Lenin knew that this was so. But we now know *why* it is so.

The super-ego is the means of handing down traditional modes of behaviour, for, "in general, parents and similar authorities follow the dictates of their own super-egos in the upbringing of their children. Whatever terms their ego may be on with their super-ego, in the education of the child, they are severe and exacting. They have forgotten the difficulties of their own childhood, and are glad to be able to identify themselves fully at last with their own parents who, in their day, subjected them to such severe restraints. The result is that the super-ego of the child is not really built up on the model of the parents, but on that of the parents' super-ego; it takes over the same content; it becomes the vehicle of tradition, and of all the age-long values which have been handed down in this way from generation to generation."<sup>1</sup> Freud goes on to say: "You may easily guess what great help is afforded by the recognition of the super-ego in understanding the social behaviour of man. It is probable that the so-called materialistic conceptions of history err in that they underestimate this factor. They brush it aside with the

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 90 (Hogarth Press)

remark that the 'ideologies' of mankind are nothing more than resultants of their economic situation at any given moment, or superstructures built upon it. That is the truth, but very probably it is not the whole truth. Mankind never completely lives in the present; the ideologies of the super-ego perpetuate the past, the traditions of the race and people, which yields but slowly to the influence of the present and to new developments of economic conditions."<sup>1</sup>

Marxism, of course, does not brush aside all other factors but the economic one, but it is Freud's merit that he has called attention to the role of the super-ego. And if our estimation that man must now consciously take over the historical process, carried on so far by economic development, is correct, then the factor of the super-ego assumes tremendous importance. Were it not for the compulsions of the super-ego, the task of social reform would be immeasurably easier. The ego would automatically compel the adjustments necessary for bringing social institutions into correspondence with the economic reality, once the necessity for them had been realised.

For this reason those psycho-analysts who turn their attention to social problems, and see the need for a social change, regard the essential task as the substitution of "ego morality" for "super-ego morality." Professor Flugel, in *Manifesto the book of the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals*,<sup>2</sup> sees the aims of "progressive sociology" as the strengthening of the ego as against the "crude and more unconscious control of the super-ego," which means freeing the individual from reliance on irrational authority and compulsion and enabling his rational side to gain greater control over his personality. He says; "The psycho-analytic process of strengthening the conscious ego of the individual is admittedly both lengthy and laborious. Other difficulties apart, it is clearly impossible to psychoanalyse more than a minute fraction of mankind. Is there, then, any substitutive process which will make psycho-analytic discoveries available for the general use of mankind in the same way as that in which the applications of physical discoveries are made available? This is a question that we cannot answer here. Indeed, psychologists themselves do not know the answer, and a certain pessimism is, perhaps, implied in the present non-committal attitude of most psycho-analytic writers. We can only repeat that there are signs of a more general spread of a psychological attitude in certain directions, and that progressives themselves must see to it that this attitude is fostered."

This is not a very hopeful outlook. Social change is made to depend on the fostering of a psychological attitude "in certain directions" by a miscellany of "progressives." Indeed, this outlook runs counter to a logical extension of psycho-analytic theory.

Psycho-analytic theory holds that the forces of authority, such as the State, have a psychological basis in the fact that they are identified with an externalised super-ego. The State is the infantile father "writ large." But it is necessary, say the "progressive" psycho-analysts, if progress is to be made, to defeat the irrational compulsions of the super-ego, thereby strengthening the ego, which will then be able to effect the necessary adjustments in the social order. To destroy the irrational compulsions of the super-ego is the task, but how do they manifest themselves if not in the continued allegiance to a State authority which is identified with the super-ego?

To overthrow the authority of the super-ego must therefore demand the overthrow of the ruling institutions which are summarised in the State.

Our account of the Materialist Conception of History traced the existence of classes, of which one,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Allen & Unwin

the ruling class, uses the State authority to preserve its privileged position. Between the ruling class and the subject class an antagonism exists whose objective basis is in the different roles each plays in the productive process, and the consequent difference in the share of wealth produced.

The State exacts obedience from the subject class, just as does the father from the child. Its authority is respected even though it involves deprivations and restrictions.

But implicit in the original attitude towards the father are antagonistic trends and death-wishes, which, we saw, were repressed in response to the need for social cohesion. This social cohesion we related to the necessity to permit the smooth working of the productive process. But the productive process continually expands, and requires, consequently, new forms of social cohesion. The social relations which suit one stage of the productive process hamper another stage, calling for adjustments in the whole social structure. But these adjustments do not occur automatically. The old social relationships continue to dominate long after their necessity has passed, because the irrational compulsions of the super-ego hold men in subjection to existing authoritative forces. *But the condition for holding in check the antagonistic trends was that the fact of struggle against external reality demanded it.* But when the ego, whose task it is to present a picture of reality to the id, becomes impressed with the changed character of the productive process and the incompatibility of social relations with it, its repressions of id impulses cease to have justification as being necessary to maintain social order. The id had been compelled to give up its gratifications for the sake of maintaining social cohesion. But now the existing form of social cohesion, the class relationships, the whole economic and social structure, no longer corresponds with the necessities of the productive process. The id, in consequence, becomes increasingly restless under restrictions which no longer have objective justification, and the ego finds it difficult to maintain its repressions in the face of changed economic necessity. The super-ego acquired its authority because the demands it made of the ego to repress id impulses largely coincided with the needs of external, economic reality. Repression, we must remember, originated in the need for large social groups to wage a more effective economic struggle, and the super-ego arose as a means of strengthening the ego in repressing the instinctive impulses. But, with the passing of the economic conditions which gave it justification, its continued demands force the ego to oppose it. Or, as Marxists would say, the authority of the ruling class has only justification while it is a necessary condition for the use and development of the productive forces. On this basis Engels, we saw, was prepared to justify the slavery of the ancient world as an historically necessary phase of human development.

When, therefore, a ruling class is no longer required for the further development of the productive forces and begins to hamper them by compelling obedience to outworn social conditions, its authority loses historical justification. The weakening of its authority, in terms of the super-ego, shows itself in the arousal of those antagonisms which had been repressed in response to economic necessity. The revolt of the id against the demands of a super-ego whose objective justification has vanished is expressed in class struggle, which, beginning in minor affrays, develops, with the increasing incompatibility of super-ego demands, to open revolution.

Returning to the “progressive” psycho-analysts, I would suggest to them that the struggle against the irrational authority of the super-ego finds its most rational expression in class struggle. The ruling class represents the conservative forces, and as, according to psycho-analysis, the roots of their authority are in the child-parent situation, the rational attitude is to identify ourselves with the repressed social classes, to give conscious direction to their aggressiveness, in the struggle against their rulers.

This is partly recognised by Professor Flugel, who says: “Such an [progressive] attitude is inevitably

a rebellious one. In demanding freedom to use our faculties to the full, we necessarily to a large extent side with the id rather than the superego; and, in so doing, we identify ourselves with the aspirations of the children rather than with the authority of the parents. Hence it has been possible for one psycho-analytic writer to describe the details of the struggle against authority in many different fields under the general title, ‘Father or Sons?’”

Such a formulation, translated in political action, can mean nothing else but siding with the working class in its struggle against the capitalist class.

But a doubt is expressed by Flugel as to whether the class struggle and Marxist theory would lead to anything more than excuses for id excesses. What is needed, he thinks, is not only the destruction of the more irrational compulsions of the super-ego, but the strengthening of the ego. The compulsions of the super-ego are expressed objectively in the continued authority of outworn social institutions—that is to say, which no longer correspond with their economic basis. What is demanded by the strengthening of the ego is not only the destruction of social institutions which hamper economic development, and therefore are irrational, but the development of other institutions which conform with economic necessity, and therefore are rational. Marxism fully realises that its task is more than the destruction of capitalist society. It is the conscious remoulding of society, planning production and distribution so that they fulfil the needs of society. It is idle to treat Marxism as merely a class-warfare theory, playing on the hostility of the poor against the rich, as does Freud. “The enthusiasm with which the mob follow the Bolshevik lead at present, so long as the new order is incomplete and threatened from outside, gives no guarantee for the future, when it will be fully established and no longer in danger. In exactly the same way as religion, Bolshevism is obliged to compensate its believers for the sufferings and deprivations of the present life by promising them a better life hereafter, in which there will be no unsatisfied needs. It is true that this paradise is to be in this world; it will be established on earth, and will be inaugurated within a measurable time. But let us remember that the Jews, whose religion knows nothing of a life beyond the grave, also expected the coming of the Messiah here on earth, and that the Christian Middle Ages constantly believed that the Kingdom of God was at hand.”<sup>1</sup>

But Freud fails to distinguish between the aspirations of a people which are rooted in the practical possibilities afforded by reality, and the illusory hopes of religion. What religion not only promises a better life hereafter, but also organises a series of five-year plans to realise that better life here now?

A little later, however, Freud seems directly to contradict the statement which I have just quoted.

“At a time when great nations are declaring that they expect to find their salvation solely from a steadfast adherence to Christianity, the upheaval in Russia—in spite of all its distressing features—seems to bring a promise of a better future.”<sup>2</sup>

The truth is that in the U.S.S.R. we have an example of the revolt against irrational authority of all kinds—against inhibitions connected with marriage and divorce, against sexual codes which reduce women to chattels; a revolt which is not accompanied (as Flugel imagines it must be) by uncontrolled id excesses, but by a more enlightened outlook—that is to say, a strengthening of the ego. Even bourgeois scientists such as Huxley and Haldane comment on the encouragement given to science in the U.S.S.R., the great spread of literacy and the predominance of scientific works among publications, showing that the Marxist outlook is essentially rational, and the only one likely to fulfil the aims of progressive

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 231 (Hogarth Press)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 232

psycho-analysts. And the leading social scientists, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, have recently devoted two large volumes to showing the superiority of Soviet economy to capitalist economy. They say: "Alike in directing industry so as to satisfy the needs and desires of the entire community, and in obtaining from the whole mass of manual workers the utmost useful participation in production, Soviet Communism bids fair actually to surpass the achievement of profit-making capitalism."<sup>1</sup>

The history of society, in its ideological aspects, has been a history of a progressive enlightenment, which from time to time has needed the impetus of revolutionary action to remove the threats of stultification and regression.

To-day those threats exist in the shape of an outworn economic system. The ruling class, feeling that the destruction of that system means the end of its privileges, is prepared to use the utmost brutality to suppress the forces of progress. In one sense, Fascism may be expressed as the threat of castration which the cruel father hurls at the rebellious sons.

As it grows more and more obvious that capitalism is affording less and less opportunity for the spread of progressive thought, the psycho-analysts will have to answer this question: Will they, as Professor Flugel expressed it, "identify themselves with the aspirations of the children, rather than with the authority of the parents"?

I shall close this chapter with an instance where psycho-analytic theory applied without reference to the economic facts giving rise to class struggle leads to absurd and even harmful conclusions.

In a book entitled, *War, Sadism, and Pacifism*,<sup>2</sup> Dr. Glover, Director of Scientific Research of the London Institute of Psycho-Analysis, attempts to tackle the problem of war in the light of psychoanalytic theory. To consider war a political or economic problem, he says, is a "light-hearted assumption." Instead we are recommended to consider "some of the more patently sexual factors." His main case is that sadistic urges operate of which we are completely unconscious, and which find external gratification in war. As Freud puts it, war is a "diversion of the destructive impulses towards the external world." Now, in the light of our study of instincts, we know that such destructive impulses do exist, so that it is not difficult to accept the view that the basic instincts appealed to in war are aggressive or sadistic. But whence comes the stimulation of these destructive impulses, and why do they take the direction they do, i.e. warfare against a particular nation or group of nations who, economically, are rivals? During the war of 1914-1918, from platform, pulpit, and Press poured a ceaseless stream of propaganda for war, skilfully accomplished so that the destructive impulses were directed along the channels required. Conscription was used to compel the unwilling to take up arms, particularly when the first waves of excitement subsided and the real facts began to filter through. In short, while we may admit the existence of sexual factors and destructive impulses which form the subjective content of warlike behaviour, the arousal of these impulses is brought about by hate propaganda subserving economic and political ends. We know that years before war "breaks out" the ruling classes of the bellicose countries have plans and alliances prepared, and even resort to "peace-tactics" to screen their preparations from the people. Thus, while it is true to say that war provides an objective situation for the expression of destructive impulses, such statement is of little value without a knowledge of the character of forces which make for war—a knowledge, that is, of the political and economic relationships whose

---

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Communism, A New Civilisation* (Longmans).

<sup>2</sup> Allen & Unwin

development leads from commercial rivalries to the acute stage when the decisiveness of war is necessary.

It is no wonder that an analysis of war, made without reference to the social conditions giving rise to it, and even scoffing at any suggestion that they should be considered as “light-hearted assumption,” should produce from Dr. Glover the following amazing proposals:

He thinks that “the most realistic course would be to sit down soberly (!) and draw up a thousand-years’ plan aimed at the resolution of unconscious conflicts without recourse to war.”<sup>1</sup>

He suggests, as an auxiliary measure of safeguard, the investigation into the number of dictators, foreign secretaries, diplomats, and peace delegates suffering from psycho-sexual impotence.

It is difficult to take these suggestions seriously. We would remind Dr. Glover of Freud’s observation that the widespread use of analysis in relation to education would presuppose an “entirely different structure of society” and ask him how much more true would this be for the purposes of his plans.

In contrast, the Marxist points to the political objectives involved in war. He points to the ferocity with which the ruling class maintains its power, at home and in the colonies, which gives little ground for hoping that one day the members of that class will voluntarily submit to having their unconscious conflicts resolved in the interests of peace. And if it is true that the struggle against the super-ego is objectively a struggle against outworn social institutions, a struggle of “sons” against “fathers,” then the class war is the only way which utilises aggressiveness for progressive purposes. The class war will sweep aside senseless restrictions on the satisfaction of man’s needs; it will involve the diversion of destructive impulses towards those things and persons who represent the irrational super-ego.

The class war releases id impulses, it is true, but in weakening the authority of the super-ego, and in the consciousness which guides it of its task to rehabilitate society, it will inevitably strengthen the ego. In the class war, the id and the ego stand side by side against the super-ego. The id because capitalism has meant restrictions of all the fundamental needs of man, and the ego because, to effect those restrictions, a harsh super-ego has imposed irrational modes of thought and behaviour against which the ego rebels.

If sublimation is the diversion of instinctive impulses into channels of social utility, then the class war is the highest form of sublimation, for it is the instrument whereby society is raised to a new and more rational level.

---

<sup>1</sup> *War, Sadism, and Pacifism*, p. 109 (Allen & Unwin)

## CHAPTER IX

### RELIGION

The psycho-analyst and the Marxist approach the same phenomena from different angles. The one lays stress on subjective factors, the other on the external situation. Yet both viewpoints are compatible with each other, and in unity enrich each other. This is well illustrated in their interpretations of religion.

The Marxist, who is intensely interested in man's environment, the economic conditions of his existence, sees religion, originally, as a reflection of the superior strength of natural forces, and, when man begins to conquer those forces, as a reflection of the dominance of economic and social forces.

This is expressed by Engels as follows:

“All religion, however, is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces... But it is not long before, side by side with the forces of Nature, social forces begin to be active, forces which present themselves to man as equally extraneous and at first equally inexplicable, dominating them with the same apparent necessity as the forces of Nature themselves. The fantastic personifications, which at first only reflected the mysterious forces of Nature, at this point acquire social attributes, become representatives of the forces of history. At a still further stage of evolution all the natural and social attributes of the innumerable gods are transferred to one god, who himself once more is only the reflex of the abstract man. Such was the origin of monotheism.... We have already seen, more than once, that in existing bourgeois society men are dominated by the economic conditions created by themselves, by the means of production which they themselves have produced, as if by an extraneous force. The actual basis of religious reflex action therefore continues to exist, and with it the religious reflex itself.”<sup>1</sup>

While we may accept the Marxian view that religion objectively is due to the dominating character of external reality, which, in contrast, makes man feel weak and helpless, there is still much to explain. Why, for example, man reacts to this helplessness by personifying external forces and then attempting to enlist the aid of the gods so created, by prayer and ceremony. Indeed the Marxian view over-emphasises the reflex character of religion, whereas man undoubtedly contributes an active side. Reality, said Marx, must not be conceived only as “object of contemplation,” but as “human sensuous activity.” If there were no active principle in man, if he just passively reflected the world, there would be no impulse within him to compensate for his weakness before natural and economic forces, by creating gods. His mind would merely reflect the terrors of reality without giving rise to the mental activity which produces religion. But if such activity exists, it must have laws of existence, it must deal with the material furnished by the impressions of the external world in a manner peculiar to it. It must therefore be studied, not merely taken for granted as a kind of inner camera which photographs reality, but as being the chief factor which distinguishes man from the rest of the animal world. Religion may not be a very high accomplishment on man's part, but, at least, it is evidential of mental processes which we have yet to find to any great extent in other forms of life.

If we turn to a consideration of the psychoanalytic view of religion we find that its existence is explained mainly in terms of subjective processes.

Freud distinguishes three factors common to all religions. Firstly, religion involves an account of the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 353-4 (Martin Lawrence).

origin of the universe which derives from the individual's picture of his own creation. Secondly, it acts as a consolation for the tribulations of this life with assurances of an eventual happier one. Thirdly, it gives precepts to guide the lives of men so that they may merit the reward of consolation and after-life. How, asks Freud, does religion come to combine these three characteristics? He traces the theories of the creation of the universe to the individual's picture of his own creation, in the following manner:

“The doctrine is that the universe was created by a being similar to man, but greater in every respect, in power, wisdom and strength of passion, in fact by an idealised superman.... It is interesting to notice that this creator of the universe is always a single god, even when many gods are believed in. Equally interesting is the fact that the creator is nearly always a male, although there is no lack of indication of the existence of female deities, and many mythologies make the creation of the world begin precisely with a male god triumphing over a female goddess, who is degraded into a monster.... The rest of our enquiry is made easy because this God-creator is openly called Father. Psycho-analysis concludes that he is really the father, clothed in the grandeur in which he once appeared to the small child. The religious man's picture of the creation of the universe is the same as his picture of his own creation.”<sup>1</sup>

The helplessness which, as the Marxist view emphasises, is objectively responsible for religion gives rise to a need for protection and guidance in face of the external world. This helplessness revives the infantile dependence on the father, for in childhood the father gave the protection and guidance which the child needed. But the adult no longer sees his own father in the same light as when he was a child. He has discovered that his father possesses the limitations and frailties common to mankind. To his earthly father, therefore, he cannot turn for protection. But he still retains, in his unconscious, the memory-image of the father of childhood, the omnipotent father who punished and rewarded him in accordance with the manner his commands and precepts were carried out by the child. To this memory-image the individual turns for protection and comfort when reality overwhelms him. This memory-image is projected into the outer world and looked to for protection. It is referred to as “almighty father.” The religious individual thus manifests, in exaggerated terms, all the attitudes which, as a child, he maintained to his own, earthly father. The heavenly father is all-powerful, all-knowing, and very stern, yet full of love. In religion we see, therefore, the important role of the super-ego which is identified with the external forces controlling man's life. The “fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces” leads men to project the super-ego and then to seek its protection.

Freud further shows the relation of the precepts of religion to the childhood situation. “The same father... who gave the child his life, and preserved it from the dangers which that life involves, also taught it what it may or may not do, made it accept certain limitations of its instinctual wishes, and told it what consideration it would be expected to show towards its parents and brothers and sisters, if it wanted to be tolerated and liked as a member of the family circle, and later on of more extensive groups. The child is brought up to know its social duties by means of a system of love-rewards and punishments, and in this way it is taught that its security in life depends on its parents (and, subsequently, other people) loving it and being able to believe in its love for them. The whole state of affairs is carried over by the grown man unaltered into his religion. The prohibitions and commands of his parents live on in his breast as his moral conscience; God rules the world of men with the help of the same system of rewards and punishments, and the degree of protection and happiness which each individual enjoys depends on his fulfilment of the demands of morality; the feeling of security with which he fortifies

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, pp. 207-8 (Hogarth Press)



himself against the dangers *both of the external world and of his human environment* is founded on his love of God and the consciousness of God's love for him. Finally, he has in prayer a direct influence on the divine will, and in that way ensures for himself a share in the divine omnipotence.<sup>1</sup>

If religion is essentially a revival of dependence on the infantile father, brought about by the dominance of natural and economic forces, there remains to be explained the polytheistic character of ancient religion.

The super-ego of a person has been formed primarily on the basis of the influence of the parents' authority and, secondarily, the influence of teachers—grown-ups of all sorts. Thus, while for the purpose of exposition we may refer to the father as the origin of the super-ego, there are a number of other persons who have played some part in its origin. Secondly, the identification of the super-ego with persons or objects in the external world may cover any number of them, if they are sufficiently associated with the role of authority in the unconscious mind. Thus the State, one's employers, besides one's religion, provide identifications for the super-ego. Thus, in polytheistic religions, the number of minor deities merely reflect the fact that in childhood there are always a number of minor authorities who can be identified with those deities. In the primitive group family, too, the child is subordinated to the authority of the group as a whole, or comes into contact with not merely one "father," but quite a number, who pair with its mother for longer or shorter periods. Thus parental authority is diffused and the religious reflex will be a tendency to form a multiplicity of super-ego identifications. But, as Freud points out, all religions have one supreme god, who is usually a male, and to whom the creation of the world is accredited.

But there was a stage in human history where religion did not exist. According to Frazer the belief in supernatural beings from whom protection might be obtained by appropriate ritual and prayers did not exist among very primitive people. In other words, the feelings of helplessness which give rise to the need for the protection of a god were not aroused. They apparently had supreme confidence in their own abilities to influence natural events, which is surprising when we reflect that, objectively, nature must have been more dominating than when religion appeared. Freud accounts for this by saying "that among primitive people thinking is still highly sexualised, and that this accounts for the belief in the omnipotence of thought, the unshaken confidence in the capacity to dominate the world and the inaccessibility to the obvious facts which could enlighten man as to his real place in the world."<sup>2</sup> It would seem that such people could hardly have progressed far beyond the beast stage which Engels says marked the transition from animal to man, and therefore the repressions which are necessary for large social groups could not have existed. They must have lived in circumstances of "unrestricted sexual intercourse," as Engels phrases it, which permitted free rein to their id impulses. Under such circumstances strong super-egos would not be formed because of the absence of the inhibitions from which they result. One can only assume that the absence of internal resistances to the satisfaction of their sexual impulses gave them a supreme confidence in the face of reality. They were largely dominated by id impulses, which recognise no limitations to their gratification, seeking to sweep all before them and taking no account of the superior forces of external nature. The magical devices by which they sought to bring nature under their sway are obvious symbolisms which seek to obtain an objective by first performing it symbolically. Our study of dreams has shown that symbols are a mode of expression of

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 210 (Hogarth Press), my italics

<sup>2</sup> *Totem and Tabu*, p. 149 (Kegan Paul)

unconscious impulses, so that the use of them by primitive people would indicate the dominance of id impulses.

These few instances show how the Marxist view of religion is enriched by Freudian theory. The inner impulses which make religion the mode of response to the dominating forces of the natural and, later, economic world are explained by it. All religions are based on the insecurity, in the face of external reality, which men feel. Psychoanalysis tells us how men respond to that feeling; it gives us the general psychological content of religion. But Marxism tells us more precisely what factors in the external world give rise to that feeling of insecurity which reawakens the early childhood dependence of adults. It also indicates how we may overcome that insecurity, how, in consequence, we may remove the objective factors which revive the early dependence on adults, and therefore destroy the objective basis for religion.

On this, Engels writes. “Bourgeois economics can neither prevent crises in general, nor protect the individual capitalists from losses, bad debts, and bankruptcy, nor secure the individual workers against unemployment and destitution. It is still true that man proposes and God (that is, the extraneous forces of the capitalist mode of production) disposes. Mere knowledge, even if it went further and deeper than that of bourgeois economic science, is not enough to bring social forces under the control of society. What is, above all, necessary for this, is a social act. And when this act has been accomplished—when society, by taking possession of all means of production and using them on a planned basis, has freed itself and all its members from the bondage in which they are now held by these means of production which they themselves have produced, but which now confront them as an irresistible extraneous force; when, therefore, man no longer merely proposes, but also disposes—only then will the last extraneous force which is still reflected in religion vanish, and with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that then there will be nothing left to reflect.”<sup>1</sup>

Religion, Freud likens to a neurosis through which man passes in the course of his evolution. It is “an attempt to get control over the sensory world, in which we are placed by means of the wish world... But it cannot achieve its end. Its doctrines carry with them the stamp of the times in which they originated, the ignorant childhood days of the human race. Its consolations deserve no trust. Experience teaches us that the world is not a nursery.”<sup>2</sup> Even more eloquently does Marx express himself on the illusory hopes which religion raises in people’s hearts. Religion, he says, “is the sigh of a heavy-laden creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a prerequisite for the attainment of real happiness of the people.”<sup>3</sup> Thus the Marxian and Freudian views on religion are complementary. They show how a study of both sides involved in a relationship—in this case between the subjective life and the external world—is necessary for any adequate understanding of social phenomena.

But perhaps the best indication of the essential unity of the Freudian and Marxian outlooks is in the use they both make of the dialectical approach to reality. Unfortunately the use of dialectics by psychoanalysts is largely unconscious. I hope to show that, none the less, the theories of Freud are rich in evidence of the dialectical character of mental life. Indeed, I believe that psycho-analytic theory, for the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, p 355 (Martin Lawrence)

<sup>2</sup> *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 215 (Hogarth Press)

<sup>3</sup> *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*

first time, offers us conclusive evidence that the mental processes of the individual do proceed in a dialectical manner.

## CHAPTER X

### DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

In the final chapter of his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, Freud raises the question of whether psycho-analysis tends towards any particular philosophical outlook. He uncompromisingly declares his belief in materialism, referring to the agnosticism and scepticism which deny the possibility of assured knowledge of the external world as a counterpart of political anarchism, an intellectual nihilism. "If there were no knowledge," he observes, "which was distinguished from among our opinions by the fact that it corresponds with reality, then we might just as well build our bridges of cardboard as of stone, or inject a tenth of a gramme of morphia into a patient instead of a hundredth, or take tear gas as a narcotic instead of ether. But the intellectual anarchists themselves would strongly repudiate such practical application of their theory."<sup>1</sup>

He concludes his examination of the question with the following words: "Let me, in conclusion, sum up what I have to say about the relation of psychoanalysis to the question of a *Weltanschauung*. Psychoanalysis is not, in my opinion, in a position to create a *Weltanschauung* of its own. It has no need to do so, for it is a branch of science and can subscribe to the scientific *Weltanschauung*. The latter, however, hardly merits such a high-sounding name, for it does not take everything into its scope, it is incomplete, and it makes no claim to being comprehensive or to constituting a system. Scientific thought is still in its infancy, there are very many of the great problems with which it has as yet been unable to cope. A *Weltanschauung* based upon science has, apart from the emphasis it lays upon the real world, essentially negative characteristics, such as that it limits itself to truth and rejects illusions. Those of our fellow-men who are dissatisfied with this state of things, and who desire something more for their momentary peace of mind, may look for it where they can find it. We shall not blame them for doing so; but we cannot help them, and cannot change our own way of thinking on their account."<sup>2</sup>

While we may readily agree that science combats religious and idealistic illusions and lays stress on the reality of the world, nevertheless the picture of reality resulting from the usual methods of thought employed by scientists has certain serious defects inherent in those methods.

From a given complexity of circumstances, the scientist abstracts, or isolates, certain factors which are relevant to his enquiry. He marks out a sphere of investigation from which is excluded everything which seems unrelated to his particular problems. Thus we have a number of individual sciences, each pursuing its enquiries in its particular field, and each abstracting from the general complexity of reality whatever it considers relevant to these enquiries. The economist, the biologist, the psychologist, etc., in studying man, are concerned only with those of his activities which fall within their sphere. In this way, out of the variety of relationships in which man exists, some are selected for specialised attention, and the general character of those abstracted relationships is expressed in scientific theory. A scientist studying racial variations might conclude that all people with straight, black hair, whether Chinese, Europeans, or Americans, were related racially; their national differences being 'accidental to this main fact. They might be workers, capitalists, or criminals—he would exclude these characteristics in his study. Consequently a host of diverse objects may be linked together by some general quality. Scientific theory, therefore, abstracts from a number of objects certain qualities which they have in common, and constructs a general idea, a concept, which, while coinciding with no particular object, yet expresses the

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p 226 (Hogarth Press)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 232-3

qualities general to them all.

This method of abstracting similar qualities from dissimilar objects was used by Marx in his enquiry into the nature of value. The general, common quality of being products of labour, he decided, was the important quality of commodities in relation to their exchange value. From a diversity of commodities he abstracted this common quality as the measure of their value, excluding, as irrelevant, the particular way that each commodity satisfied a human need. Similarly, the psychologist, interpreting human behaviour as unconscious motivation, necessarily isolates from the whole complexity involved the mental factors which particularly interest him—the physiological processes of brain, heart, lungs, glands, etc.; the external situation which enters into the production of the behaviour tends to be excluded from consideration.

In this way science presents a number of pictures of the universe which, because of their abstract character, give a distinct and separate form to what are really related in a vast interconnection of things. Professor Levy uses a word which aptly describes the scientific picture of reality. He calls it an “isolate”—“something that has been dragged from its environment in space, time, and matter.” The scientist, he says, chips off his isolate from the rest of the universe, “and, of course, when he is finished, frequently forgets to replace it in its appropriate place in the universe, just as he forgets to return all apparatus and books he has borrowed. The consequence is a false philosophic interpretation.”<sup>1</sup>

This points to a need for some method of coordinating the discoveries of science in such a way that a picture of the universe is presented which reflects the essential interconnection of things. Such a method is dialectical materialism. Before giving an account of it, particularly in relation to psycho-analysis, we would instance how this stress on the *relational* quality of things has important application for science itself.

There is a tendency among scientists to regard science as a form of enquiry detached from any relationship to social or economic conditions, commencing as an impulse in the brains of scientists who are not in the least interested in practical problems. The fact that the discoveries of science have practical value is held to be rather due to the fortuitous coincidence of the discoveries with practical needs than being responses to those needs. According to Julian Huxley, “this knowledge can, of course, generally be applied to controlling nature, but most scientists, I think, would say that there definitely is something that can be called *pure science* which has a momentum of its own and goes on growing irrespective of its application.”<sup>2</sup> Here we have an expression of the artificial separation of science into pure and applied, without realisation of the interconnection between the two, a separation which derives from the abstract way in which scientists tend to regard their particular subject matter. Scientific theory takes the form of general statements about groups of phenomena. Accordingly the scientist who is making the necessary abstractions from actual concrete circumstances tends to overlook the fact that his generalisations had their origin in the outer world of reality, and gives them a “pure” independent existence.

It is true that he may be personally unconscious of any practical purpose which he may be serving in his work, but the problems which he is tackling are not invented by himself; they have a history and a background. The great notions of science which in their time have electrified the world are none the less not just flashes of genius. They are the response which exceptionally gifted individuals make to the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 18 (C. A. Watts)

<sup>2</sup> *Scientific Researches and Social Needs*, p. 16 (C. A. Watts)

problems thrown up by the needs of the objective world. A remarkable study by Hessen of the Moscow Institute of Physics, presented to the International Congress of the History of Science in 1931, showed how closely related were the theories of Newton to the practical needs of his time. The problems of mechanics which he set out to solve were conditioned by the technical development of machinery and armaments. The development in navigation made necessary the study of the planets and the moon, so that the problems of longitude and tidal variations could be solved. These studies in “pure” abstract theory gave an impetus to astronomy, physics, etc., but the stimulation of these abstract theories derived essentially from contemporary practical needs. Even that most abstract of all theories, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, had its origin in the practical needs thrown up by the Industrial Revolution to make the steam-engine more efficient. For Carnot was led to formulate it while seeking the general principle on which steam-engines worked.

Julian Huxley, whose book mentioned above was the result of a “survey of the country for the purpose of discovering the extent to which scientific advance is influencing everyday life,” at a later stage of his investigations to that already mentioned has to admit that his views regarding “pure” and “applied” science were at variance with the facts encountered in his investigations. Thus he says: “On the whole I have realised that it is harder to draw the line even than I thought it at first. And in one respect I have corrected my previous ideas. I used to imagine that important new discoveries always started as pure science, and gradually filtered down into practice, via applied science.... But I have been much interested to find that things do not always happen that way.”<sup>1</sup>

If, then, science tackles problems which are thrust forward for solution from an economic and social background, it is an invaluable aid to the scientist to be conscious of this. It means that he will be prepared to co-operate consciously with all the forces making for the solution of his problems. If, as to-day, there is an outworn economic system which hampers the development of science, then there emerges one major problem whose solution is the condition for the further advance of science, namely, the problem of the removal of that system. The scientist who finds that social conditions make difficult his researches, that he has to rely on the largesse of a ruling class which can find no other use for science than destruction of lives and property, must relate his scientific problems to their social and economic environment. To do this adequately an understanding of dialectical materialism is necessary. It is not a substitute for science, but rather the emphasis on the need to keep in touch with the interconnections of things within the universe—the need to see the wood as well as the trees.

Dialectical materialism gives an account of the general laws of change and development within the universe. Applied to society, it indicates the inevitable trend of things, and the scientist, conscious of the relation of science to social needs, with the background that dialectical materialism gives to his work, sees his particular problems as expressive of one general problem—the transformation of society. And he sees the role of a progressive class, the working class, as the deliverer of this new society from the womb of the old. He puts his scientific talents at the disposal of that class, conscious that in doing so he is furthering the interests of science.

The dialectical view of reality finds ample confirmation within the individual sciences. Particularly does psycho-analysis richly illustrate the dialectical nature of mental processes. In the next chapter I shall endeavour to show something of this richness. The fullest value of Freud’s work can only be realised when its essentially dialectical character is understood.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Scientific Researches and Social Needs*, p. 204 (C. A. Watts)

We now come to dialectical materialism proper.

Just as we distinguish between the real objective world and our ideas which reflect it, so we distinguish objective dialectical processes from those taking place in the mind—that is to say, subjective dialectical processes.

In considering objective dialectics first, we shall get a general idea of the laws of the development of reality, and, in our consideration of subjective dialectics, see how these laws relate specifically to man's mental life.

Dialectical materialism commences with the certainty of a real world existing independently of consciousness. It makes no concessions to idealistic belief, which ascribes to mind either whole or part responsibility for the objective world. It states explicitly that consciousness is the function of a material brain, and depends for its existence on material conditions. Matter it defines as the reality given to man in his sensations, perceptions, etc., which nevertheless exists independently of them. The researches of modern physics, which some people acclaim as providing overwhelming repudiation of the materialistic view, it declares, do not destroy the fact of the independent existence of a real world. Whether matter exists as electronic radiations, etheric vortexes, or what not, its independent existence remains unimpaired. That science is only possible on the basis of this belief is eloquently stated by one of the greatest of modern physicists, Max Planck. "Belief in some sort of reality outside us," he writes, "alone provides the necessary point of support in our aimless groping; and only it can uplift the spirit wearied by failure and urge it onwards to fresh efforts."<sup>1</sup>

The acceptance of a real world which exists independently of consciousness is not exclusive to dialectical materialism, for the old-fashioned materialism of the eighteenth century, which still lingers in various mechanistic interpretations of the world, also takes the independent existence of the world as its starting-point.

It is important to distinguish clearly between dialectical materialism and the mechanistic interpretations. These latter reduce the variety of the universe to the mechanical motion of atoms and electrons. Thought is a dance of electrons, and one day will be explained in terms of physics and chemistry. Differences between objects are differences in number and combination of the units of matter. Special biological or psychological laws are denied; the difference between living and non-living matter is solely in the quantity and arrangement of electrons.

This mechanistic materialism is generally selected by opponents as a butt for their arguments while completely ignoring the fact that modern materialism, dialectical materialism, rejects the viewpoint of the mechanist. "Man," they declare, "is degraded to the level of a machine. His higher qualities, his cultural life, are denied anything more than illusory existence by materialism."

Actually not only is this a distortion of the outlook of dialectical materialism, but it is only dialectical materialism which explains adequately how these higher qualities, distinguishing man from the rest of the universe, come to exist.

Engels explains the mechanistic outlook of the eighteenth century, "because at that time, of all natural sciences, mechanics, and indeed only the mechanics of solid bodies—celestial and terrestrial—in short, the mechanics of gravity, had come to any definite close. Chemistry at that time existed only in its infantile, phlogistic form. Biology still lay in swaddling clothes; vegetable and animal organisms had

---

<sup>1</sup> *Survey of Physics* (Methuen)

been only roughly examined, and were explained as the result of purely mechanical causes. As the animal was to Descartes, so was man a machine to the materialists of the eighteenth century.... The history of the development of the earth, geology, was still totally unknown, and the conception that the animate natural beings of to-day are the result of a long sequence of development from the simple to the complex could not at that time scientifically be put forward at all.”<sup>1</sup>

In its day, this materialism reflected the revolutionary aspirations of the rising middle class, and, as a criticism of religion and feudal morality, furnished, in the sphere of ideas, a keen weapon to combat the reactionary feudal interests. In opposition to the privileges of Church and Lord, the standards of liberty, fraternity, and equality based on human reason were raised, the faculty of reason being deified to the point of replacing God. Of the French materialists, Engels says; “The great men who in France were clearing the minds of men for the coming revolution themselves acted in an extremely revolutionary fashion. They recognised no external authority of any kind. Religion, conceptions of nature, society, political systems, everything was subjected to the most merciless criticism; everything had to justify its existence at the bar of reason or renounce all claim to existence. The reasoning intellect was applied to everything as the sole measure. It was the time when, as Hegel says, the world was stood upon its head; first, in the sense that the human head and the principles arrived at by its thought claimed to be the basis of all human action and association; and then later on, also in the wider sense, that the reality which was in contradiction with these principles was in fact turned upside down from top to bottom. All previous forms of society and government, all the old ideas handed down by tradition, were flung into the lumber-room as irrational, the world had hitherto allowed itself to be guided solely by prejudices; everything in the past deserved only pity and contempt. Now for the first time appeared the light of day; henceforth, superstition, injustice, privilege, and oppression were to be superseded by eternal truth, eternal justice, equality grounded in Nature and the inalienable rights of man.

“We know to-day that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealised kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that eternal justice found its realisation in bourgeois justice; that equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man, and that the government of reason, the Social Contract of Rousseau, came into existence and could only come into existence as a bourgeois democratic republic. No more than their predecessors could the great thinkers of the eighteenth century pass beyond the limits imposed on them by their own epoch.”<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to mechanical materialism, dialectical materialism emphasises that the world is in constant process of change and development. Nothing is fixed for all time. There is a ceaseless coming into existence and passing away. Even so “unchanging” objects as the pyramids are really changing. With the passage of centuries they will become dust. So we must think in terms of processes and movement, rather than rigid unchanging objects which all together constitute a development from simple forms to more complex, in an unending series.

We know that the earth to-day is vastly different from what it was many millions of years ago. From a fiery gaseous mass, the earth has passed through many stages, until it was possible for simple forms of life to exist. Living matter has undergone numerous transformations to reach the highly developed stage of human consciousness.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Feuerbach*, pp. 36-7 (Martin Lawrence).

<sup>2</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, pp 23-4 (Martin Lawrence)



Such a view of development as an essential characteristic of natural existence has scientific basis in the general theory of evolution. But dialectical materialism is more than a belief in evolution. Most people are familiar with, and accept the idea of an evolving universe. Dialectics shows this development in a more comprehensive way, for it indicates that a process of development is not merely a quantitative addition, but involves qualitative change. Thus in the developmental process various stages may be noted, where something qualitatively new comes into being, which, while it has resulted from what has gone before, cannot be entirely explained from it.

In this way life has developed from inanimate matter, and, although the laws of its existence include those of chemistry and physics, its qualitative difference from inanimate matter is expressed in special biological laws. Life cannot be reduced wholly to terms of physics and chemistry. It is something more than an aggregation of molecules and electrons, and it is in this “something more” that dialectical materialism is particularly interested because the study of the origin of new qualitative stages gives the key to all changes and transformations, particularly those taking place in society.

If at certain stages of a developmental process there are qualitative changes where something new comes into existence, until this stage is reached development is quantitative in character—that is to say, it takes the form of continual change in a certain direction, adding no new qualities to the process. But the emergence of new qualities is also a break in the continuity of the process. A transformation in the whole process takes place. Something new emerges, the quantitative change giving place to qualitative change.

Nature is full of examples of quantitative change suddenly being transformed into qualitative change. We may cite a familiar example given by Hegel, as follows:

“It has been said that there are no sudden leaps in Nature, and it is a common notion that things have their origin through gradual increase or decrease. But there is also such a thing as sudden transformation from quantity into quality. For example, water does not become gradually hard on cooling, becoming first pulpy, and ultimately attaining the rigidity of ice, but turns hard at once. If the temperature be lowered to a certain degree, the water is suddenly changed into ice, i.e. the quantity—the number of degrees of temperature is transformed into quality—a change in the nature of the thing.”

Plekhanov, polemising against a certain Tikhomirov, ironically disposes of the gradualist theory, which excludes sudden changes. “Now let us suppose that Tikhomirov puts a saucepan full of water on a stove. The water will remain water as long as its temperature is rising from 32 degrees to 212 degrees. He will have no occasion to be alarmed about any suddenness. Then will come a moment when the temperature reaches a critical point, and all of a sudden (what a terrible thing!) a catastrophe occurs, the water is changed into steam, just as if its imagination had been running on forcible revolutions.... Tikhomirov is watching the development of one of those insects which are subject to metamorphoses. The changes in the chrysalis go on slowly, and until the time arrives for a new order of things the chrysalis remains a chrysalis. The observer rubs his hands joyfully, saying: ‘Here everything is going on as it should. Neither the social organism nor the animal organism experiences any of those sudden upsets whose existence I have been forced to recognise in the inorganic world. At any rate, when devoting herself to the creating of living beings, Nature has recovered her sobriety.’ Soon, however, his happiness is dashed. One fine day the chrysalis undergoes a ‘forcible revolution,’ splits up the back, and makes a new entry into the world as a butterfly.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, G. Plekhanov, pp. 100-1 (Martin Lawrence)

In biology it has long been known that the transformation of species results from sudden changes, or mutations, as they are termed; the old idea of a gradual accumulation of variations which over billions of years produce new species being no longer acceptable. Accumulation of variations goes on, it is true, but the emergence of new species follows, as dialectical materialism indicates, the transformation of quantity into quality.

Modern physics, too, confirms this view. Thus Planck writes: “Recent discoveries have shown that the proposition [that Nature makes no jumps] is not in agreement with the principles of thermodynamics, and, unless appearances are deceptive, the days of its validity are numbered. Nature certainly seems to move in jerks, indeed of a very queer kind.... In any case the quantum hypothesis has given rise to the idea that in Nature changes occur which are not continuous but of an explosive character.”<sup>1</sup>

And society is no exception to this fact of violent, sudden changes. The work of Marx in the sphere of social development has established that social changes take place in an analogous way to those in Nature. Up to a point development is gradual and continuous. Then an explosion takes place, releasing vital social forces which transform the whole basis of society. Within the framework of capitalist society there goes on a continuous development of the productive forces. Concentration and centralisation of production, the growing proletarian army, and the decreasing number of capitalist-controllers—these are quantitative factors. But at last, within the framework of capitalism, “centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.” That this is no mere piece of wishful-thinking of Marx is proved by the fact that already in one-sixth of the world the workers have smashed the fetters of capitalist conditions of production.

If development is an essential characteristic of reality, the question arises as to the nature of the impulses giving rise to it. We have seen that the objects of the world are not rigidly distinct from each other. They are closely interrelated, and constantly revealing to science new sides, new relationships, which add to our knowledge of them.

Within these processes contradictory tendencies are united, whose struggle promotes development. The growth of a human being is a process of struggle between life and death forces. The chemical activities of the body reveal opposite processes. Digestion and excretion show how opposites are united, how they interpenetrate within a process.

Without contradiction there would be no development. Development is self-movement, produced by the inner conflict of opposites. Had there not developed within the fiery gaseous mass that once was the earth the contrary process of condensation, there would never have developed the conditions which made life possible.

While the unity of opposites is an essential characteristic of all processes, while, that is to say, processes combine with themselves opposing tendencies, it is from the struggle of these opposites that the inner impulse to development proceeds. Thus the opposing factors are in dynamic relationship; they must not be considered as in static juxtaposition, but as interpenetrating, the negative becoming positive and the positive negative, so that the line of development takes a spiral form, mounting higher and higher, moving from positive to negative, and then the negative passing over to positive—but to a new positive, expressing a higher stage in the developmental process.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Survey of Physics*, pp. 78-81 (Methuen).

This process is made clear by Engels in the following example: “All civilised peoples begin with the common ownership of the land. With all peoples who have passed a certain primitive stage in the course of the development of agriculture this common ownership becomes a fetter on production. It is abolished, negated, and, after a longer or shorter series of intermediate stages, is transformed into private property. But at a higher stage of agricultural development, brought about by private property in land itself, private property in turn becomes a fetter on production, as is the case to-day, both with small and large landownership. The demand that it also should be negated, that it should once again be transformed into common property, necessarily arises. But this demand does not mean the restoration of the old original common ownership, but the institution of a far higher and more developed form of possession in common which, far from being a hindrance to production, on the contrary for the first time frees production from all fetters and gives it the possibility of making full use of modern chemical discoveries and mechanical inventions.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus the original state of common ownership is negated by private property—a transformation, that is to say, of common ownership into its opposite, private property. But private property becoming a fetter on production in its turn, it becomes transformed into *its* opposite, common property— that is, a return to the original status, but on a higher level. Private property, the negation, itself suffers negation. This process is termed the “negation of the negation,” meaning not the mere cancelling of a state of affairs, but the realisation, through struggle, of a higher stage of development, for the first negation is such that it gives rise to the second. Thus argues Engels: “But someone may object; the negation that has taken place is not a real negation; I negate... an insect when I crush it underfoot, or the positive magnitude ‘a’ when I cancel it, and so on. Or I negate the sentence, ‘The rose is a rose,’ when I say, ‘The rose is not a rose’, and what do I get if I then negate the negation and say, ‘But, after all, the rose is a rose’? These objections are, in fact, the chief arguments put forward by the metaphysicians against dialectics, and they are eminently worthy of the narrow-mindedness of this mode of thought. Negation in dialectics does not mean simply saying no, or declaring that something does not exist, or destroying it in any way one likes. Long ago Spinoza said: ‘Omnis determination est negatio’—‘Every limitation or determination is at the same time a negation.’ And, further, the kind of negation is here determined in the first place by the general, and secondly by the particular, nature of the process. I must not only negate, but also in turn sublate, the negation. I must therefore so construct the first negation that the second remains or becomes possible. In what way? This depends on the particular nature of each individual case. If I... crush an insect, it is true I have carried out the first part of the action, but I have made the second part impossible. Each class of things therefore has its appropriate form of being negated in such a manner that it gives rise to a development, and it is just the same with each class of conceptions and ideas.”<sup>2</sup>

The dialectical view of reality received its main impetus in the nineteenth century, when the view that the world was the product of a long process of evolution was making its way. The old Greek logic which dealt with rigid, unchanging things was felt to be inadequate to deal with the changing rhythm of the universe. Aristotle had formulated three laws which gave a framework for reasoning about all things, and which had remained almost completely unchallenged to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The first of his laws established the identity of whatever was under consideration. It marked it out

---

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 156-7 (Martin Lawrence)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-1 (Martin Lawrence)

from the rest of the universe, stating that A was A, with its own distinct and peculiar properties. The second law, the law of contradiction, stated that A was *only* A and partook of no other qualities—that is, it was not B. In the third law, this was emphasised by stating that between A and B there was no middle term. Contradiction was thus excluded, and the objects of the world were treated as rigidly separate and created in a fixed pattern.

But in face of the growing knowledge that the higher and more complex forms of existence were related to the lower and more simple, that what had been considered the result of a divine act of creation was really the product of a lengthy process of evolution, there arose a need for a logic which expressed these facts.

In the nineteenth century Hegel elaborated a logic which was more in keeping with the evolutionary outlook then making its way.

He called his method of logic the dialectic, after the Greek expression, meaning the art of discussion, in which by refutation and clash of opinion a synthesis of the contradictory views takes place, which approaches the truth.

Hegel saw in the struggle of contradictory elements the cause of development. All things were in process of becoming, were in a state of flux, which made the logical categories of Aristotle inadequate to contain them. A was A, but it was also becoming not-A. It was not sharply divided from the rest of the universe, but closely related to it, partook of other things, and, in the development of contradictory processes (e.g. the cooling of the earth), passed into new forms of being.

The thing in which the contradiction was working, Hegel termed the positive. The contradiction, he termed the negative; and the reconciliation of the contradiction in a new synthesis, he termed the negation of the negation.

The whole process was conveniently represented as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, in which the latter denoted the raising of the whole process to a new stage of development.

Hegel, however, was an idealist. He saw the whole evolutionary process as the unfolding of the Idea, the Absolute Spirit, which had existed from all eternity. The material world was the creation of this idea, and the evolution of this world manifested the stages by which the idea revealed itself.

The process of struggle and contradiction in the real world revealed the absolute idea stage by stage, and as each stage became obsolete because of the maturity of contradictions, denoting the necessity of a new stage, it became unreal and thus unreasonable. For, said Hegel, “that which is real is reasonable, and that which is reasonable is real.”

Among the students of Hegel a group developed called the Young Hegelians, who opposed the conservative use to which Hegelian philosophy was being put. Using Hegel’s dictum that what was real was reasonable, the advocates of the Prussian government found justification for its existence. It was real, therefore reasonable. The best possible government for the time.

This, as Engels shows in his book on Feuerbach, was a distortion of Hegel, for it was not the actual existence of a thing which gave it reality, in the Hegelian sense, but the necessity for it. If it had become obsolete, and therefore unnecessary, then it had become unreal.

With the awakening of the German middle class, the Young Hegelians began to criticise religious dogma. Foremost among them was Ludwig Feuerbach. His *Essence of Christianity* submitted Christianity to a searching criticism. God, he declared, had not created man in his own image, rather had man created God in his image. But Feuerbach failed to see man as an active participant in his life process. He saw him rather as a passive sport of environmental pressure, without the capacity to react

on, and to change the conditions of, his existence.

It was the merit of Karl Marx, among the Young Hegelians, to turn the dialectical method to a study of history. He revealed that history was no exception to the dialectical process, that the development of society proceeded through the struggle of contradictory elements. In the contradiction between the technique of production, which ever strives to expand, and the conditions of production, the social, political, religious, etc., elements of the superstructure arising on the basis of the technique of production, he found the dynamic of social change.

But, in order to use the dialectic of Hegel to understand the real world, Marx had first of all to strip it of its mystical wrappings and give it a materialistic content. Marx describes the difference between his dialectic and Hegel's thus:

“My own dialectic method is not only fundamentally different from the Hegelian dialectic method, but is its direct opposite. For Hegel the thought process (which he actually transforms into an independent subject, giving to it the name of ‘idea’) is the creator of the real; and for him the real is only the outward manifestation of the idea. In my view, on the other hand, the idea is nothing other than the material when it has been transposed and translated inside the human head. Nearly thirty years ago, when Hegelianism was still fashionable, I criticised the mystifying aspect of the Hegelian dialectic. Although in Hegel's hands dialectic underwent a mystification, this does not obviate the fact that he was the first to expound the general forms of its movement in a comprehensive and fully conscious way. In Hegel's writings dialectic stands on its head. You must turn it right way up again if you want to discover the rational kernel that is hidden away with the wrappings of mystification. In its mystified form, dialectic became the fashion in Germany because it seemed to elucidate the existing state of affairs. In its rational form, it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen because, while supplying a positive understanding of the existing state of things, it at the same time furnishes an understanding of the negation of that state of things and enables us to recognise that that state of things will inevitably break up: it is an abomination to them because it regards every historically developed form as in fluid movement, as transient, because it lets nothing overawe it, but is, in its very nature, critical and revolutionary.”<sup>1</sup>

The main emphasis of the above account of dialectical materialism has been on the mutual interaction between mental processes and those of the economic world. To study either without reference to the other produces a one-sided view of human behaviour. This, we saw, was particularly true of psycho-analysis in regard to war.

The psycho-analyst, who approaches his problems dialectically, will want to relate the discoveries of his science to the social problems of to-day. He will see psycho-analysis as having its real significance in the contribution it makes to the task of freeing society from the trammels of capitalist conditions of production. He will understand the particular complaints of his patients as having reference to a general economic and social reality, besides reflecting unconscious impulses striving for conscious expression. He will therefore wish to acquaint himself with the nature of the environment which compels repressions, so that he may be able to help create that new social structure which, Freud says, is necessary for the widespread use of psychoanalysis.

Moreover, the best evidence of the validity of dialectical materialism can be found in psychoanalysis itself.

---

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Capital*, 2nd edition (Allen & Unwin)

## CHAPTER XI

### DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

“Dialectics,” says Engels, “is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of Nature, human society, and thought.” If that is true, we should expect to find that mental processes take place in a dialectical manner. And, when we turn to psycho-analytic theory, we find that, all unconscious to the psychoanalyst, it is rich in examples of mental behaviour which are almost incomprehensible when viewed from any other angle than that of dialectics.

Consider the unity of a thing and its opposite. How, asks the formal logician, can a thing be itself and its opposite? It must be exclusively either one or the other. But dialectical logic emphasises the fact that nothing remains eternally unchanging, but includes within itself its own negation. This, Engels expresses in the following manner: “To the metaphysician, things and their mental images, ideas, are isolated, to be considered one after the other apart from each other, rigid, fixed objects of investigation given once for all. He thinks in absolutely irreconcilable antitheses. For him a thing either exists or it does not exist; it is equally impossible for a thing to be itself and at the same time something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another.”<sup>1</sup>

But such a view is, or should be, quite impossible for a psycho-analyst.

Freud shows, with some interesting examples, how language originally reflected the close unity of opposites. “Many philologists,” he says, “have maintained that in the oldest languages opposites such as strong, weak—dark, light—large, small—were expressed by the same root word. In Latin such ambivalent words are: *altus*=high or deep; *sacer*=sacred or accursed.

“As examples of modifications of the original root, I quote: *clamare*=to shout, *clam*=quietly, silently, secretly; *siccus*=dry, *succus*=juice; and, in German, *Stimme*=voice; *stumm*=dumb.”<sup>2</sup>

Freud uses these examples as “a welcome analogy” to the use of opposites in dream-formation. We shall see later how important the mental processes involved in dream-formation are for dialectics. But let us first consider some other conceptions of psycho-analysis from the dialectical viewpoint.

Just as in the realms of Nature dialectics supersedes the view of objects as rigid and distinct, and emphasises their dynamic inter-relation, their passage from one form to another, so psycho-analysis, as a particular, though unconscious, application of dialectics to the study of the mind, discredits the static view of mind as a passive receptacle of impressions. Instead it offers a view of mental life as an interplay of urging and repressing forces, with conflict as central. The mind is seen as a unity of opposing factors, conscious and unconscious elements, which interpenetrate dynamically, so that out of their interaction are born the richness and variety of man’s thought and feelings. We can see the dialectical character of this interaction by a consideration of the relationship between the id, ego, and reality.

The id impulses, we saw, are transformed as a result of the rebuffs which reality offers to their gratification, and the ego is formed. In other words, reality, in conflict with the id, transforms part of the id into its opposite, for the ego is rational where the id is irrational, logical where the id is illogical, has a reality principle where the id seeks gratification on a pleasure principle, etc. This transformation through the conflict of two opposing factors, the id and reality, is therefore a dialectical process.

Further, the id itself combines two opposing instinctive groups—Eros, or life, instincts, and Death,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, p. 28 (Martin Lawrence)

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 150 (Allen & Unwin)

or destructive, instincts—whose fusion form part of every instinctive impulse. The death instincts seek the reinstatement of an inanimate state of affairs, while the life instincts strive to build up and to preserve the organism. That life, as a process, involves the struggle between life and death forces, that death enters the body together with life, are almost commonplaces of the dialectical outlook. “In the same way,” says Engels, “every organic being is at each moment the same and not the same; at each moment it is assimilating matter drawn from without, and excreting other matter; at each moment the cells of its body are dying and new ones are being formed.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus Freud’s grouping of the instincts should find ready acceptance among Marxists.

Another important dialectical conception of Freud is repression. It results from the conflict of reality demands with the urges of the id, and is the function of the unconscious ego. As a quantitative factor it gives rise to qualitative change, for it compels the transformation of unconscious impulses into conscious modes of behaviour. Conscious behaviour, in the form of displacements, sublimations, reaction-formations, is thus a qualitative transformation of the id impulses, which takes place when repression has reached a certain intensity. It is obvious that if the repression is light, if the instinctive impulses do not conflict greatly with the demands of reality, then the conscious expression will not differ very much from the unconscious impulses themselves. But where the unconscious impulses conflict violently with the demands of social reality, then the repression is quantitatively greater, and conscious expression tends to differ qualitatively from the repressed impulses. The quantitative factor in producing neurotic symptoms is described by Freud, thus: “You will have noticed... I have introduced a new factor into the concatenation of the aetiological chain—namely, the *quantity*, the magnitude of the energies concerned; we must always take this factor into account as well. A purely qualitative analysis of the aetiological conditions does not suffice... We have to realise that the conflict between the two forces in opposition does not break out until a certain intensity in the degree of investment is reached... No less important is this quantitative factor for the capacity to withstand neurotic illness; it depends upon the *amount* of undischarged libido that a person can hold freely suspended, and upon *how large* a portion of it he can deflect from the sexual to a non-sexual goal in sublimation.”<sup>2</sup>

To make this example of repression clear, I have merged the super-ego with the ego, to represent the objective forces opposing the instinctive strivings of the id. Actually the transformation of repressed impulses would not be so much in deference to the demands of reality, as to reality plus the infantile morality of the super-ego. Where repression is largely determined by reality, or a strong ego, the transformed impulses will be of a sublimated, social character. In the case where the morality of the super-ego dominates, we should expect to find, in conscious life, dependence on comforting illusions, such as religion, and subservience to the existing social system, which owes much of its emotional acceptance to the identifications made between its institutions and the super-ego. And now we turn to Freud’s theory of dream-life. In dreams, the repressed impulses gain a measure of satisfaction denied them in waking life. In this sense, dream-life is the opposite, the Hegelian “other” of waking life. Its form of mental presentation is the opposite to that of waking life. In the latter, thought is general, ideas being formed by combining like qualities together, which have been abstracted from concrete objects. The concrete is perceived in terms of the abstract, whereas, in dream- life, abstract ideas are presented in concrete form.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, p. 29 (Martin Lawrence)

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Lectures*, p. 313 (Allen & Unwin), Freud’s italics

This mode of dealing with experiences by abstracting general qualities, we saw, carries the tendency to render static what is really in motion. Dream-life, on the other hand, presents its contents in a form of highly dramatised action. In waking life, things are considered apart and distinct from one another, thus, in the main, undialectically. Strangely enough, dream-life seems to reflect more closely the dialectical character of thought processes, for it sees such a close interconnection between things that it quite readily uses one thing to symbolise another which, to waking life, had not the remotest connection. It can combine the most contradictory elements in one. As Freud says: "One of our most surprising discoveries is the manner in which *opposites* in the latent dream are dealt with by the dream-work... Now contraries are treated in just the same way as similarities, with a marked preference for expression by means of the *same* manifest element. An element in the manifest dream which admits of an opposite may stand simply for itself, or for its opposite, or for both together."<sup>1</sup>

From the above it seems to follow that, *just as dream-life reveals, through analysis, the fundamental nature of the impulses behind conscious behaviour, so, too, it shows the fundamentally dialectical nature of thought processes.*

Thus the conscious ego which reflects reality gives a picture which is largely undialectical, representing the processes in the external world as rigid and distinct. This was recognised by Engels, who wrote: "The recognition that these antagonisms and distinctions are in fact to be found in Nature, but only with relative validity, and that on the other hand their imagined rigidity and absoluteness have been introduced into Nature only by our minds—this recognition is the kernel of the dialectical conception of Nature."<sup>2</sup> Here, indeed, is a paradox for the dialectician: thought, which is dialectical, yet does not reflect the dialectical character of reality. But we have seen that the thought which is undialectical is that involved in consciousness, while the unconscious processes underlying it are dialectical. Only by recognising the unconscious substratum to conscious behaviour can the contradiction of the widespread undialectical character of thought, which itself is dialectical, be solved. But there still remains the question as to why conscious thought takes an undialectical form. To answer it we must reconsider the relation of the conscious ego both to the id and reality.

We have seen that repression of id impulses takes place to prevent them disturbing the conscious, socialised attitude of the ego. The repressions are performed by the unconscious ego, which transforms the repressed impulses into modes of conscious behaviour compatible with social standards. But these repressions are responses to an obdurate reality, which refuses to grant the wishes of unconscious impulses. The ego, therefore, is assailed, on the one hand by id impulses demanding unconditional gratification, and, on the other hand, is aware of the impossibility of their gratification in reality. As we have seen from our study of religion, the supremacy of natural, and, later, economic and social, forces gives rise to a helpless feeling in man. He feels that he cannot control those forces himself, and seeks the protection of the gods. Reality, when natural or economic forces are dominant, presents itself to the ego as something beyond its control—something, that is, that will not yield to its importunities on behalf of the id, but demands, instead, the repression of id impulses.

Confronted with the harshness of reality, the ego has to restrain id impulses, modifying their expression in conscious life. But the task of repression is no easy one. Indeed, in some cases, it can only be done by developing, in conscious life, opposite attitudes to those of the unconscious impulses, by

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p 150 (Allen & Unwin), Freud's italics

<sup>2</sup> *Anti-Dühring*, p. 19 (Martin Lawrence)



reaction-formations. These reaction-formations strengthen the repression of id impulses by exaggerating the incompatibility of certain mental tendencies with conscious standards. Here we have a clue to the undialectical representation which the ego gives reality. Because of the incompatibility of reality with id impulses the ego exaggerates the harshness of reality to the id. It represents reality as rigid and unchanging as a means of strengthening its repressions. The undialectical character of conscious representation is the product of reality distortion. We are familiar with the distortion of reality in the conscious mind, from our study of religion. "All religion," said Engels, "however, is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces."

The "imagined rigidity and absoluteness" which, says Engels, has been introduced into nature by our minds, is this not, too, a "fantastic reflection" of external forces? There seems to me no other answer to the question of why people think undialectically, when we know that thought is basically dialectical. And, indeed, we can relate the growing dialectical view of reality to the conquests man has made in his natural environment. Nature no longer seems so intractable, and consequently its representation by the ego tends to be less rigid. But this spread of a dialectical outlook is still very limited, for, although natural forces have been largely conquered, men still live under the dominance of economic forces. In such circumstances, men's social organisation appears "as if arbitrarily decreed by Nature and history"<sup>1</sup>; consequently there still exists that inexorable quality in external reality which produces a helpless feeling in the ego, leading it to reflect reality as stern and unchanging.

But in Communist society, men will be masters, not only of natural forces, but of their own social organisation. No longer will external reality appear as an obstinate, implacable enemy of mankind, but as its willing servant. And in the release from many irrational restrictions and compulsions which this will bring, man's mind will picture reality in all its rich variety.

We have seen (in Chapter VIII) how the role of subjective factors assume importance in the task of conquering the economic environment, and how the Freudian concepts of id, ego, and super-ego, which describe these subjective factors, are quite compatible with the Marxian view of history. In this chapter we have seen how the Freudian unconscious justifies the view that thought processes are dialectical, and that psycho-analysts, though all unconscious of the fact, make use of dialectical notions to explain the phenomena of mental life. The next step is to show how necessary a knowledge of psycho-analytic theory is for the revolutionary, who, in his everyday efforts to spread his revolutionary outlook, comes into contact with the many irrational inhibitions and compulsions which stand between the individual and his acceptance of rational policy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Engels

## CHAPTER XII

### SOME APPLICATIONS

The Marxist, in spite of his insistence on the inevitability of Socialism, is no fatalist. A leading British Marxist expresses himself thus. "It is the very heart of the revolutionary Marxist understanding of inevitability that it has nothing in common with the mechanical fatalism of which our opponents incorrectly accuse us. The inevitability of revolutionary Marxism is realised in practice through living human wills under given social conditions, consciously reacting to those conditions, and consciously choosing their line between alternative possibilities seen by them within the given conditions."<sup>1</sup>

This emphasis on the importance of "living human wills" is particularly expressed in the Communist conception of the role of a revolutionary party. It is composed of individuals who are conscious of the historical necessity of the revolutionary destruction of capitalism, and seek, by every possible means, to stimulate working-class struggle so that it eventually takes the road of direct challenge to the existing state of affairs. The spontaneous struggles of the workers against capitalist encroachments on hours and wages are given conscious direction and unified in a mass movement towards the abolition of the capitalist system. Such a party has to be well organised, disciplined, and theoretically equipped so that it can, as Lenin says, act as the brain of the workers' movement. The immediate fate of the revolution depends largely on the wisdom of its decisions. In times when action must be speedy, and decisions taken with a minimum of delay, tremendous responsibility is concentrated on leading circles of the party, so that a false or belated decision on the part of comparatively few individuals, may gravely endanger the revolution. In 1923, for example, in the estimation of the Communist International, a revolutionary situation existed in Germany. The failure of the revolution to mature was ascribed by the Communist International to the weakness of the German Communist leadership.<sup>2</sup> Now in 1935, twelve years later, the German working class is suffering the extreme vengeance of the capitalist class in the brutalities of Fascism.

If the Marxist general analysis of the direction of social development is correct, the eventual triumph of Socialism is assured. Subjective factors, such as the indecision of leaders, may seriously delay, but not prevent, the ultimate maturing of the revolution.

But the overcoming of these defects, which alone makes Socialism inevitable, demands more than a knowledge of the general features of social life—the class relationships, etc, more than a knowledge of the general direction of social development—these are necessary for a broad historical perspective. But the immediate task of guiding "living human wills" to choose the road to Socialism, to avoid placing the responsibility of leadership in the hands of people unsuited for it, surely demands a study of the inner psychological processes active in all human behaviour, from the indecision of leaders to the final revolutionary upsurge of the masses.

In fact, the existence of a Marxist party, which can only remain a minority of the class it represents, is a reflection of the tremendous importance of subjective factors. For the party, says Stalin, "is the rallying-point for the best elements of the working class"; best in the sense of political understanding, revolutionary determination, capacity for self-sacrifice, etc. In other words, the party comprises those who, subjectively, stand out from the rest of the working class in the above-mentioned respects. Therefore to deny the need for a close study of the subjective life, to satisfy oneself with general

---

<sup>1</sup> R. P Dutt, *Communist International*, Vol. XII, No 13

<sup>2</sup> See *Present Situation in Germany*, by O. Piatnitsky (Modern Books, Ltd)

statements that the mental life of an individual is a reflection of economic and social conditions, is to ignore the subjective differences which complicate the unfolding of the process of social development. It is a form of “mechanical fatalism” which assumes that the inevitability of Socialism makes it unnecessary to study the “living human wills” through which it must be achieved.

We may agree that over a period of years, an epoch, the general laws of social evolution will work themselves out through human action, and that the future historian will see the line of general development shaken here and there by defeats and difficulties, but clearly distinguishable in its direction.

But for us, now, these difficulties and defeats may mean set-backs of years, they may be due to circumstances which are accidental to the course of development, and in relation to it, *as a whole*, seem trivial. But the trivial deflection of a line of historical development in terms of human suffering and anxiety may assume tremendous proportions to those immediately concerned. We, who live in the future historian’s “revolutionary epoch,” cannot afford his generous perspective of the years, and if in any way we can lessen the birth-pangs of the new society, we must hasten to do so.

Thus Marx makes the following interesting comment on the effect of accidents in historical development: “It [world history] would have to be of a very mystical kind if accident played no role. These accidents naturally fall within the general path of development and are compensated for by other accidents. *But the acceleration and retardation of events are very largely dependent upon such accidents, among which must be reckoned the character of the people who stand at the head of the movement.*”<sup>1</sup> The German working class are paying in blood for the tragic accident of the leaders at the head of their revolutionary movement. They at least cannot afford another such accident. But “the character of the people who stand at the head of the movement” cannot be understood merely in terms of social or economic conditions. A scientific insight into the psychological processes which express themselves through the economic and social environment; a knowledge of the way the mind deals with the sense impressions received from the external world, the various *active* means it adopts to gain expression for unconscious impulses; the displacements, sublimations, reaction-formations, etc—all these must be studied if the Marxist is to accelerate consciously the historical process, and avoid unnecessary retardation. In his everyday work he is expected to modify his approach with different individuals; to use tact, understanding; to allow for subjective variations. In this way he uses an empirical form of psychology, but if he is a genuine Marxist he will not remain satisfied with a rule-of-thumb methodology, but will want to know something of the deeper mechanisms underlying conscious behaviour.

And, because psycho-analysis is essentially the study of the unconscious motivations of man’s behaviour, it is in its theories that the Marxist will find many answers to everyday problems arising from his contact with individuals.

But because the role of leadership is of such importance, it may be designated as the primary problem of revolutionary organisation. Let us, therefore, examine it in the light of psycho-analytic theory.

Our study of the super-ego tells us that the leader is the substitute for the infantile father, and is invested with the infantile conceptions of the father’s omnipotence. In his capacity of protector he is identified with the mother, and is loved accordingly; at his command the fiercest passions are unleashed

---

<sup>1</sup> *Letter to Kugelman* (Martin Lawrence), my italics

against whoever dares to threaten the sacredness of that love. The incestuous desires entertained towards the mother are thus projected on to rival groups and made the object of aggressive impulses. The emotional hold that people like Hitler and Mussolini have over masses of people becomes understood in the light of the psycho-analytical insistence on the role of the super-ego.

The black shirt, as a distinctive uniform, knits its wearers together as members of a family sharing a mutual love and hate for the leader. The Jew-baiting campaigns, and the harrying of Socialists and Communists, divert the aggressive hate impulses from the leader to other groups, expressing themselves in sadistic practices, often openly sexual. As the internal difficulties of Fascist countries grow, so the need to divert these aggressive tendencies increases. In Germany, a fresh Jew-baiting campaign commences, and in Italy, Mussolini fulminates against some foreign foe. Eventually the inability of these leaders to give the protection which they promise will recoil on their own heads. The sadistic impulses, no longer satisfied by Jewish and Communist persecutions, will turn inwards and destroy the leaders.

Whoever aims at leadership is striving to attract to himself the emotional attitudes of infantile life to the father. And any party aiming at the leadership of the working class must understand the psychological factors involved in leadership, for in its difficult role of leading humanity to a new era in history it cannot afford to overlook any shred of scientific discovery.

In considering the question of leadership, a revolutionary party must therefore formulate it somewhat in the following manner: "On the basis of the mental processes involved in leadership, how best can we develop our leadership of the working people?"

Like every question raised for scientific answer, its answer greatly depends on an examination of the phenomena in all their particular forms, wherever they may exist. That is to say that leaders of all kinds of movements, whether Fascist, religious, Socialist, and Communist, must be studied to discover the common elements which make the leader acceptable to his followers.

We have defined leadership, from the psychoanalytic standpoint, as the capacity to stand in the emotional relationship of the father of childhood days. Whether this definition is agreed with or not, there are certain emotional factors whose existence will raise no dispute. A need for protection, for someone to love, who will shoulder one's burdens and accept one's responsibilities—these are universal factors in leadership. It is irrelevant for the moment that some leaders deceive the people into believing that they can and will give this protection. The fact is that they are believed, and consequently attract the emotional allegiance of which I have spoken.

That the need for leadership is universal is hardly disputable. Sometimes it may be highly rationalised in allegiance to abstract ideas of love and truth, or admiration for a person because of the intellectual quality of his works, but most often the emotional nature of the need is very apparent.

What is also easily established is that the leaders of movements, groups, and religious bodies become endowed with qualities which mark them out from the common run of mankind. In some cases this belief is consciously nurtured. The theatrical displays which characterise Fascist leaders, the aloofness and mystery with which they surround themselves, the demand for unquestioning obedience to the point of death, are means of establishing themselves as super-beings qualified to fill the role of leaders. In other cases legendary stories are woven around the persons which magnify their personal qualities. Even Socialists and Communists often hotly combat any suggestion which seems to imply that Marx or Lenin suffered from the common frailties of mankind.

I feel that we are entitled to say, therefore:

1. That the need for leadership is universal.

2. That the emotional attitudes developed towards the leader support the psycho-analytic view that they are displacements of an original child-parent relationship which ascribes omnipotence to the parent.

We return to our question, “How can we consciously develop the leadership of the masses?” in the light of the above facts.

The first necessity would seem to be to crystallise the leadership in the shape of a leader—someone who may be referred to in such terms as will awaken the required emotional attitudes. In other words, we must idealise for the masses some one individual to whom they will turn for support, whom they will love and obey.

I anticipate the objection that this is an inverted form of Fascist demagogy, and would reply that the fact is that, for many, Fascism satisfies subjectively, the same needs as does Communism. The difference is that the one objectively has basis in the world of reality; the other, in the world of illusion. Much the same might be said of science and religion. Dimitrov’s report to the seventh world congress of the Communist International makes some interesting remarks on the weakness of the Communist response to Fascist demagogy, a weakness which follows from the fact that the Communists tend to scorn the psychological factors involved in the hold which the Fascists gain over masses of people. Thus Dimitrov said, “One of the weakest aspects of the anti-Fascist struggle of our parties lies in the fact that they *react inadequately and too slowly to the demagogy of Fascism*, and to this day continue to look with disdain upon the problems of the struggle against Fascist ideology... We must under no circumstances underrate this Fascist capacity for ideological infection. On the contrary, we must develop for our part an extensive ideological struggle on the basis of clear, popular argument and a correct, well-thought-out approach to the peculiarities of the national psychology of the masses of the people.

“The Fascists are rummaging through the entire history of every nation so as to be able to pose as the heirs and continuers of all that was exalted and heroic in its past, while all that was degrading or offensive to the national sentiments of the people they make use of as weapons against the enemies of Fascism. The new-baked National-Socialist historians try to depict the history of Germany as if for the last two thousand years, by virtue of some ‘historical law,’ a certain line of development had run through it like a red thread, which led to the appearance on the historical scene of a national ‘saviour,’ a ‘Messiah’ of the German people, a certain ‘corporal’ of Austrian extraction... Mussolini makes every effort to capitalise the heroic figure of Garibaldi. The French Fascists bring to the fore, as their heroine, Joan of Arc. The American Fascists appeal to the traditions of the American War of Independence, the traditions of Washington and Lincoln. The Bulgarian Fascists make use of the national liberation movement of the seventies, and its heroes beloved of the people—Vassil Levsky, Stephan Karaj, and others. Communists who suppose that all this has nothing to do with the cause of the working class... voluntarily relinquish to the Fascists falsifiers all that is valuable in the historical past of the nation, in order that the Fascists may bamboozle the masses.”<sup>1</sup>

But it is not only necessary for Communists to associate their present struggle with the heroic figures of past struggles; they must also identify those traditional figures who are loved and respected with someone in the present. That is part of the successful technique of the Fascist leaders, who have claimed to be the modern counterpart of the heroic figures in national history.

Not that the Communists do not realise the need for keeping some individual before the masses as

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Working Class against Fascism* (Modern Books, Ltd)

their leader, in whom they may trust, and who represents all the virtues of revolutionary leadership. In the Soviet Union, Lenin is loved and revered with all the emotion and feeling that deeply religious people accord their gods. His pictures have largely replaced the ikons, and thousands of people daily make a pilgrimage to his mausoleum. Stalin, his successor, is almost equally loved because, in his fulfilment of Lenin's plans and desires, as the "executor of Lenin's testament," he takes the place of the living Lenin in the hearts of the Russian people. If people have this capacity to love and to idealise individuals, it is better, after all, that they expend it on individuals whose lives and deeds have really deserved for them this love and reverence. And it is a psychologically sound measure to keep such people before the masses as an incentive and guide to the overcoming of difficulties on the road of social progress.

In this country, also, the Communist daily paper keeps its leader's face constantly before its readers, sends signed photographs to admirers, greeting-cards, etc., which undoubtedly are necessary means of gaining prestige for him in working-class circles.

If, then, the problem of leadership is important, it must be tackled in a consciously-thought-out manner which utilises all that modern psychology has to offer on the subjective characteristics involved. And if psychology tells us that no movement will win the support of the masses which does not offer a leader who adequately arouses the emotional attitudes which, we have seen, relate to the child-parent situation, then a movement which boasts of its scientific outlook must hasten to provide such a leader. If Hitler and Mussolini, by deliberate publicity and propaganda methods, can be presented as saviours of the people, so too can Communist leaders. The difference, of course, is that the reputation of Communist leaders will not be built upon deceitful promises and demagogic flourishes, but upon a genuine determination to lead the workers in revolutionary struggle.

It is "criminal," said Lenin, to forego the methods of the enemy in political struggle. "Everyone," he said, "will agree that an army which does not train itself to wield all arms, all means and methods of warfare that the enemy possesses or may possess, is behaving in an unwise or even in a criminal manner. This applies to politics to a greater degree than it does to war. In politics it is harder to forecast what methods of warfare will be applied and considered useful for us under certain future conditions. Unless we are able to master all methods of warfare, we stand the risk of suffering great and sometimes decisive defeat *if the changes in the position of the other classes, which we cannot determine, will bring to the front forms of activity in which we are particularly weak.*"<sup>1</sup>

Lenin was referring in particular to the need to master legal forms of struggle, but his remarks are equally applicable to the need to master the psychological technique by which millions of people may be bound in allegiance to a leadership.

The selection of a leader, it may be objected, may safely be left to history. History, says Engels, will furnish the right man at the right time. This is probably true in the long run, but we must remember that, before history presents the right man, it very often experiments disastrously with the wrong. To recall the weakness of the German leadership of the Communist Party in 1923 was the time right? In the sense of possessing sufficient revolutionary potentialities, yes. Unfortunately, history was unkind enough to equip the revolutionary movement with a faint-hearted leadership, so that the revolution failed to mature. For this reason, since it is essential for the revolution that a capable leadership exists, we cannot afford to await the pleasure of history. We must act scientifically, and do what hitherto has been left to

---

<sup>1</sup> *Left-wing Communism* (Martin Lawrence), my italics.

biological chance. History, after all, is a story of the growing intervention of man in those forces which mould his life-story, so that the use of scientific psychology to achieve what had hitherto been left to chance circumstances is but an expression of man's control of his own fate. If once it is realised that selection and training for leadership, campaigns to arouse popular enthusiasm and give prestige to the leader, are vital parts of the revolutionary struggle, a tremendous advance will have been made in revolutionary tactics. To show that I am not exaggerating the subjective factors involved in the task of constructing a Socialist society, some remarks of Stalin may be quoted: "These difficulties are difficulties of our organisational leadership... Reference to so-called objective factors cannot be justified. After the correctness of the political line of the Party has been confirmed by the experience of a number of years, and after the readiness of the workers and peasants to support this line no longer calls for any doubt, the role of so-called objective conditions has been reduced to a minimum, whereas the role of our organisations and of their leaders has become decisive, exceptional. What does that mean? It means that from now on one-tenths of the responsibility for the failure and defects in our work rests, not on 'objective' conditions, but on ourselves and ourselves alone."<sup>1</sup>

Stalin, of course, is concerned in his speech with the peculiar circumstances of the U.S.S.R. No one would suggest that in this country the readiness of the workers "to support this line no longer calls for any doubt," for we still have the tremendous task of winning the leadership of the workers. Thus the problem for British Communists is, not only how to apply that leadership as in the U.S.S.R., but the even more difficult one of gaining it.

And that is why psycho-analysis is of such importance to the Communists who have yet to make their revolutions. It gives them the beginnings of a technique for selecting and training the necessary leaders, who must be freed from irrational tendencies and compulsions which may interfere in important decisions. Just as psycho-analysis declares that no one is competent to practise as a psychoanalyst who has not been freed by psycho-analysis from irrational tendencies, so in the task of leading millions of workers must there be no danger that emotional preferences of individuals rather than the objective interests of the workers determine important decisions.

It might be replied that Communists are already urged to practise self-criticism as a means of safeguarding against the influence of subjective factors. But, in the light of modern knowledge of the nature of mental processes, is the mere turning of the conscious mind inwards adequate?

We know how consciousness tends to avoid recognising the unconscious sources of much of its content, so that the result of such introspection would mainly be defence-reactions to unconscious impulses.

Such a method is consequently crude and unhelpful. Marxists, I must repeat, cannot be satisfied with a rule-of-thumb methodology in dealing with important factors, and must understand the need to get behind conscious behaviour to its unconscious sources.

In fact, I would say that one of the causes of the weakness of the German Communist Party before the growth of Fascism was its lack of understanding of the psychological factors involved. There was a shallow intellectualism which regarded the culture and tradition of Germany as proof against the barbarities of Fascism. Such a viewpoint could not have persisted if the conscious behaviour had been understood as but a superficial reflection of deeper, unconscious processes. Instances of this are given in Dimitrov's excellent report to the Communist International, already mentioned. Since that report, there

---

<sup>1</sup> Report of the 1934 Congress, C.P.S.U

are signs of improvement in the tactics of Communist Parties the world over, which show that the bitter lesson of Germany has been learnt. The report shows how a psychologically blind leadership may hold back revolution for years. It shows the tragic fact that the tactics and programmes of revolutionary parties, which depend for their motive power on millions of working people, have been drawn up with scarcely a heed to the subjective qualities which these people possess. But let us have Dimitrov's discerning and disturbing remarks.

“In this connection, we cannot avoid referring also to a number of mistakes committed by the Communist Parties, mistakes that hampered our struggle against Fascism. In our ranks were people who intolerably underrated the Fascist danger, a tendency which has not everywhere been overcome to this day. Of this nature was the opinion formerly to be met with in our Parties to the effect that ‘Germany is not Italy,’ meaning that Fascism may have succeeded in Italy, but that its success in Germany was out of question, because the latter was an industrially and culturally highly developed country, with forty years of traditions of the working-class movement, in which Fascism was impossible... One might also cite a number of instances in which Communists were caught unawares by the Fascist coup. Remember Bulgaria, where the leadership of our Party took up a ‘neutral,’ but in fact opportunist, position with regard to the *coup d'état* of June 9, 1923; Poland, where, in May 1926, the leadership of the Communist Party, making a wrong estimate of the motive forces of the Polish revolution, did not realise the Fascist nature of Pilsudski's coup, and trailed in the rear of events; Finland, where our Party based itself on a false conception of slow and gradual Fascisation, and overlooked the Fascist coup.... Our comrades in Germany for a long time failed to reckon with the wounded national sentiments and indignation of the masses at the Versailles Treaty...”<sup>1</sup>

These mistakes are recognised now. They have cost the blood and lives of thousands of workers. But is a recognition of a mistake forced by subsequent events, itself a safeguard against the repetition of the mistake? The real source of the mistake needs uncovering, and the defeats inflicted by Fascism are primarily due to the almost total ignoring of the subjective factors in the calculations of revolutionary theoreticians. Fascism, after all, is not a necessary phase of Capitalism, in the same sense as Capitalism was a necessary stage of economic development. It is an “accident” of world history, but an “accident” which is occurring with the monotonous regularity of a law. It is the penalty which the whole working class pays for the subjective weaknesses of its leadership. It can be avoided. It was avoided in Russia under the leadership of Lenin. The experiences on the Continent have provided a lesson which shows signs of having been learned—a lesson which illustrates the fact that practical experience is often an expensive substitute for theoretical understanding.

Throughout the revolutionary movement is growing the recognition that unity above everything is necessary to defeat Fascism—unity with pacifistic and reformist individuals who, in spite of their illusions, show an amazing capacity for good, useful work: unity even with people who have no desire for Socialism, but wish to protect the remnants of bourgeois democracy: and, above all, a cessation of the abusive personal criticism which used to form the mainstay of “revolutionary” speeches and articles.

But these are only the most immediate and elementary steps which threatened sections of society take for mutual protection against the common enemy of Fascism. The revolutionary, besides taking the initiative in this direction, must recognise the need for theoretical understanding of those characteristics of human psychology the existence of which have largely been responsible for past defeats. If the

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Working Class against Fascism*, pp. 17-18 (Modern Books, Ltd).



united-front movements are to embrace masses of people, under the leadership of a revolutionary party, then the psychology of leadership must be studied, firstly, for the purpose of selecting suitable leaders, and, secondly, for the purpose of arousing the emotional attitudes which bind the masses to the leaders. Marx has said, and I have quoted before, that “The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism... is that sensuousness is conceived only in the form of object or contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively”. That defect has marred the political tactics of revolutionary parties, causing them to give too little consideration to the subjective side of human life. Psycho-analysis as a scientific approach to this subjective side is therefore of great importance if revolutionaries are to remove that defect. They must know something of the irrational trends which determine much of human behaviour if they are to influence human behaviour. A few examples of the way irrational tendencies operate and affect the work of the revolutionary may be given here.

The Marxist meets with many difficulties in his everyday work which point to the influence of unconscious trends on conscious behaviour. He has to overcome prejudice, jealousies, blindness to class interests, national, racial, and religious beliefs which yield very slowly to logical arguments. The fact is that the logic of a case will not gain its acceptance if there are underlying unconscious motives for rejecting it. And, conversely, a very logical case may conceal an emotional attitude which is using rationalisation to justify itself. An interesting example of this is contained in a book by Dr. Bernard Hart on *The Psychology of Insanity* which is worth giving:

“One of my patients, a former Sunday-school teacher, had become a convinced atheist. He insisted that he had reached this standpoint after a long and careful study of the literature of the subject, and, as a matter of fact, he really had acquired a remarkably wide knowledge of religious apologetics. He discoursed at length on the evidence of Genesis, marshalling his arguments with considerable skill, and producing a coherent and well-reasoned case. Subsequent psychological analysis, however, revealed the real complex responsible for his atheism: the girl to whom he had been engaged had eloped with the most enthusiastic of his fellow Sunday-school teachers. We see that in this patient the causal complex—resentment against his successful rival—had expressed itself by a repudiation of the beliefs which had formerly constituted the principal bond between them. The arguments, the study, and the quotations were merely an elaborate rationalisation.”

But perhaps most familiar to us all is the bourgeois mind which all the barbs of Socialist logic fail to pierce. The comfortable thought habits, underlying which are unconscious emotional trends, serve to protect the mind from disturbing ideas. The Socialist case permeates, as it were, through a medium of pre-existing emotional habits of thought, which distorts the significance of every idea expressed by the Socialist. And any detail which is really of little importance, if it seems to provide a peg upon which to hang objections, is seized upon eagerly and magnified beyond proportion. Thus we have those arguments, so exhaustive of the Socialist’s patience, regarding the difficulties of apportioning dirty work, the irreconcilability of human nature to Socialism, etc. The careful explanations of the Socialists never get beyond the most superficial layer of the bourgeois mind, which is busy seeking other defence-reactions in the place of those which Socialist logic is breaking down.

And among those bourgeois who do embrace Socialism too often are those who do so because it affords an excuse to indulge in some eccentricity symptomatic of repressed impulses, denied expression in polite bourgeois society and disguising itself as a burning desire to emancipate the working class. There are, of course, many exceptions to this. A well-developed ego enabling the individual to behave on a high level of rationality would tend to lead such bourgeois to identification with the working class,

as representing the forces of progress. None the less, other factors which are inevitably associated with a revolutionary movement—revolt against sexual standards, artistic and literary orthodoxy—attract exhibitionists of all kinds, cranks and faddists who find a comfortable home in the movement to display their peculiarities. A revolutionary movement is necessarily a movement of protest. It denounces vigorously the existing system of society, and all the possession of disgruntled souls, with their own private little grievances and indignations arising from some particular feature only of modern society, find, in the general revolutionary protest, some solace.

That is why we find so many “Marxists” who really are not interested in Marxism, who have never troubled to get beyond a few well-worn formulae: who delight to rant and rave, and, indeed, because of their excessive noise, impress their fellow members with their extreme “sincerity,” build a reputation of being good fighters in the class struggle, and become, even, leading figures.

I referred in an earlier chapter to the irrational compulsions which are part of the emotional life of revolutionaries. They are due to an unconscious revolt against the super-ego, and very often lead to action out of harmony with objective circumstances, but which enables an expression of super-ego revolt. Lenin described those revolutionaries whose main tactics consisted in fierce denunciations of Parliament and Labour leaders as suffering from an “infantile disorder” of “left-wing” Communism.

That description is particularly apt, because the childish tantrums and tempers by which the rebellious feelings towards the father are displayed are likewise indulged in towards the authoritative forces of society.

Facts of this kind show how important an insight into human psychology is. We must learn to free ourselves from such irrational compulsion if we wish to free the Socialist Movement from the influence of dangerous and undesirable elements. Psycho-analysis teaches us to recognise the fact that unconscious motives are at work in us all: that our conscious professions screen underlying mental processes. The curriculum of a Marxist should include, as of first importance, a study of the unconscious mind, if he wishes to bring his actions into line with reality, to recognise unconscious mechanisms at work in others, to prevent complexes of his own rather than the facts of the objective situation determining his behaviour.

Is it not necessary to understand the mental processes underlying the ease with which people are swept into wars, the stolid indifference they show to appeals for action on their own behalf, marked by sudden gusts of revolutionary zeal against the ruling class, the hold that demagogues can obtain over their emotions?

Psycho-analysis also teaches us to avoid hasty conclusions as to the motives of the people with whom we come in contact—not to dismiss contemptuously individuals who diverge from us politically as humbugs and opportunists, when a more understanding approach might obtain their cooperation.

A knowledge of psychological defence-mechanisms would teach that a wrongful imputation of conscious trickery and deception provokes the ego to adopt means of self-justification which, since there is no conscious intent to deceive, impels it to maintain and develop the attacked viewpoint.

The facts of both psycho-analysis and Marxism refer to man. The one describes the subjective, the other the objective life. The Marxist, without knowing something of the subjective side of man’s life, will remain one-sided, as will the Freudian who misconceives the nature of the objective situation in which man’s subjective life expresses itself. The two approaches form dialectical opposites, and, in unity, provide the fullest knowledge of man. The Marxist, as a realist, cannot afford to address his efforts to a mythical creature. He must know the real nature of the human beings among whom he is

attempting to spread the gospel of revolt. His whole propaganda must be devised with a knowledge of the emotional needs which lie behind conscious behaviour. His aim is to touch the mainsprings of human activity, but to do so he must get beneath the surface of conscious life to the deeper-lying instincts which, when aroused, will provide the motive force of revolution. The study of psycho-analysis is essential for Marxists. If reality is the guide by which Marxists shape their tactics and programmes, then psycho-analysis is a signpost of first importance.

THE END