

THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN MOTIVE

THE value of the theories of Freud in dealing with juvenile delinquency (publicly debated recently) brings up the whole question of their assessment of the problem of abnormal moral behaviour. For Freud the story of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is something more than an allegory. It is also a code in which Mr Hyde figures with immense preponderance.¹ 'It is', says Jung, 'a detailed elaboration of man's shadow-side such as had never been carried out before. It is the most effective antidote imaginable to all idealistic illusions about the nature of man'. (*Integration of the Personality*. Jung.) The conservative estimate of the theories of Sigismund Freud is that they contain much that is true and much that is new, but that unfortunately that which is true is not new and that which is new is not true. When Freud tells us that the *media axiomata* of the psycho-analytic theory of the mind rests on the assumption that the cause of all mental processes is automatically regulated by the pleasure-principle (*Beyond the Pleasure-Principle*), he merely declares himself a disciple of Epicurus. He merely proclaims that the object to which all men are attracted is Pleasure and that when a pleasure is consciously rejected it is only in order to make room (albeit unconsciously) for a greater pleasure. In other words, if we take 'Pleasure' in its broadest sense and define the word as meaning conscious satisfaction (*not necessarily sensual, and often stimulated only by the prospect of benefit*) there are few who do not subscribe to the obviousness of such a limited Hedonism.²

But this roughly 'Hedonistic' conception of the motives behind human behaviour loses any acute definition and fades off into the shadow when we probe further and recognise the diverse classification to which the motivation of the human act is subject. Moreover, early in the Freudian thesis we learn that man must adjust the 'pleasure-principle' to the 'reality-principle'—not because he gives up the intention of ultimately attaining pleasure, but because he is forced to endure postponement of satisfaction. The latter because 'there are hosts of others desiring pleasures and perhaps the same ones, so his will comes into contact with theirs'. (*Catholic*

¹ Cf. *Catholic Thought and Modern Psychology*. Witcutt. p. 41. (Burns Oates & Washbourne; 5s.)

² Cf. Gregory Smith: 'Aristotle says that to abstain from things pleasant is easier than to endure pain. Probably much depends on the idiosyncrasy of the person. But in principle he is right. In enduring pain as in refraining from pleasure it is the will (Aristotle would say, the higher reason) which ratifies or cancels the logic of the understanding and the persuasive solicitations of the emotional elements in our being.'

Thought and Modern Psychology. W. P. Witcutt, Ll.B.) And, as often in following Freud's analyses, we are not surprised that the obvious can fall so flat. But Freud continues: 'The pleasure-principle is then a tendency which subserves a certain function—namely, that of rendering the psychic apparatus as a whole free from any excitation, or to keep the amount of excitation constant.' So that 'Freud defines pleasure as a relaxation of tension' (Witcutt). And not merely constant but 'as low as possible', and we could continue the above quotation by observing that according to Freud, pleasure is, or is subservient to, a death principle—the most universal tendency of all living matter—to return to the peace of the organic world'. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.)

Whether the latter is true, whether in fact only pleasure is to be regarded by the psycho-therapist as the accompaniment or the aim of the act is, at present, neither here nor there. For we are debating the problem of abnormal behaviour: and it is time to defile to my title. With this simple assertion of the obvious: that if we understand pleasure in its (a) anaesthetic, (b) compensating function, forensic as well as pastoral medicine will become far easier fields for the practitioner. The casuists' case-book becomes necessary fare here. We should perhaps apologise for quoting the age-old instance of the theory of compensation in the boss who bullies the executive who bullies the office boy who takes it out of the cat.

There are some clear instances in which the compensating function of pleasure is in fact part and parcel of its anaesthetic function. What of the economically unfortunate who compensate themselves by thieving? In the final analysis are they not as much seeking anaesthesia as the man who drowns his sorrows in the flowing bowl? In other words, rather than be patients to poverty or starvation they yield to the urge (the 'necessity') for a quick analgesic and proceed to pick a pocket. Compensation thus becomes no more than a species of self-analgesic or anaesthesia. Again, the student sitting next to me many years ago at a continental university at what, for a tender-foot, was a rather gruesome lecture, confided to me, 'I shall want an evening out after that'. He may have been illustrating Freud's 'most universal tendency of all living matter—to return to the peace of the organic world'. He would certainly have assured you that pleasure (in the shape of his projected evening out) was precisely the opposite of anything suggesting or 'subservient to the Death-principle'. On the other hand, it is very clear that he was about to appeal to the law of compensation and anaesthetise himself 'out of the willies'. Thus the obviousness of Freud, the obviousness of his truisms as much as his sophistic exaggeration.

I submit that the foregoing platitudes need possibly to be adverted to considerably more in confessional and pulpit and much more in the psychiatrist's parlour. Platitudes, yes. But so obvious that, like the air we breathe, we regularly fail to notice them.

I would emphasise that my criticisms are nowhere incursions into the domain of Moral Theology. They deal primarily with the problem of observable motivation which is admittedly a superficial one. For the last word will ever be the Christian definition of sin—viz. St Augustine, 'Any thought, word or deed against the law of God'. (A definition older than St Augustine and adopted by Aquinas and every theologian since.) Deep down at the root of all wrong-doing (where there is real wrong-doing) lies the fact of sin, of lawlessness, of pride, of rebellion against God's will. Upon atonement, upon the Christian answer to the problem of evil my trivial remarks do not impinge.

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NOTES

Freewill

'The will acts "in accordance with motive"; and to suppose that the will can "break loose from continuity and act without cause" is as absurd, it is added, as to suppose "a balance sometimes acting in the usual way, but also possessed of the faculty of turning by itself, without or against its weight".' (Tyler, *Primitive Culture*, I.3.)

'But we do not say that the will is "acting without cause"; for the will itself is an item in the causation; We do not say that the will is "breaking loose from continuity", for the will itself is a connecting link in the chain of continuity. With contending motives equal, as sometimes happens, a man would be as powerless to stir one way or the other as the ass between the two bundles of hay, but for the intervention of the will. Even with one motive, to all appearance and by all laws of experience out-weighting the other, the will, simply by its own adhesion, can reverse the balance.'

Self-love

'Aristotelianism and Christianity both promise happiness; the former proposes it as an end in itself; the latter proposes duty as the end of life, and happiness as a reward for those who do their duty for duty's sake and not from selfish motives. The Apostle enjoins the Christians to practise things that are "lovely and of good report", but it is in order that their Master may not be spoken against, and that their Father in Heaven may be glorified. With Aristotle honour is an end in itself.' (Lilly.)