

THE EGO AND THE
MECHANISMS OF
DEFENCE
(1936)

by

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CHAPTER 3

The Ego's Defensive Operations Considered as an Object of Analysis

THE RELATION OF THE EGO TO THE ANALYTIC METHOD

The tedious and detailed theoretical discussions contained in the last chapter may for practical purposes be summed up in a few simple sentences. It is the task of the analyst to bring into consciousness that which is unconscious, no matter to which psychic institution it belongs. He directs his attention equally and objectively to the unconscious elements in all three institutions. To put it in another way, when he sets about the work of enlightenment, he takes his stand at a point equidistant from the id, the ego, and the superego.

Unfortunately, however, the clear objectivity of this relation is clouded by various circumstances. The analyst's ab-

sence of bias is not reciprocated; the different institutions react to his efforts in different ways. We know that the id impulses have of themselves no inclination to remain unconscious. They naturally tend upward and are perpetually striving to make their way into consciousness and so to achieve gratification or at least to send up derivatives to the surface of consciousness. As I have shown, the analyst's work follows the same direction as, and reinforces, this upward tendency. Thus to the repressed elements in the id he appears in the light of a helper and liberator.

With the ego and the superego the case is different. Insofar as the ego institutions have endeavored to restrain the id impulses by methods of their own, the analyst comes on the scene as a disturber of the peace. In the course of his work he abolishes repressions which have been laboriously achieved and destroys compromise formations whose effect, indeed, was pathological but whose form was perfectly ego syntonic. The analyst's aim in bringing the unconscious into consciousness and the efforts of the ego institutions to master the instinctual life are contrary to one another. Hence, except insofar as the patient's insight into his illness determines matters otherwise, the ego institutions regard the analyst's purpose as a menace.

Following the lines of the exposition given in the last chapter, we shall describe the ego's relation to the work of analysis as threefold. In exercising the faculty of self-observation, of which I have given some account, the ego makes common cause with the analyst; its capacities in this direction are at his service and it transmits to him a picture of the other institutions, drawn from such of their derivatives as make their way into its territory. The ego is antagonistic to the analysis, in that it is unreliable and biased in its

self-observation and, while conscientiously registering and passing on certain facts, falsifies and rejects others and prevents them from coming to light—a procedure wholly contrary to the methods of analytic research, which insists on seeing everything that emerges, without discrimination. Finally, the ego is itself the object of analysis, in that the defensive operations in which it is perpetually engaged are carried on unconsciously and can be brought into consciousness only at a considerable expenditure of effort, very much like the unconscious activity of any of the prohibited instinctual impulses.

DEFENSE AGAINST INSTINCT, MANIFESTING ITSELF AS RESISTANCE

In the last chapter I tried for the purposes of this study to draw a theoretical distinction between the analysis of the id and that of the ego, which in our practical work are inseparably bound up with one another. The result of this attempt is simply to corroborate afresh the conclusion to which experience has led us: that in analysis all the material which assists us to analyze the ego makes its appearance in the form of resistance to the analysis of the id. The facts are so self-evident that explanation seems almost superfluous. The ego becomes active in the analysis whenever it desires by means of a counteraction to prevent an inroad by the id. Since it is the aim of the analytic method to enable ideational representatives of repressed instincts to enter consciousness, i.e., to encourage these inroads by the id, the ego's defensive operations against such representatives automatically assume the character of active resistance to analysis. And since, further, the analyst uses his personal influ-

ence to secure the observance of the fundamental rule which enables such ideas to emerge in the patient's free associations, the defense set up by the ego against the instincts takes the form of direct opposition to the analyst himself. Hostility to the analyst and a strengthening of the measures designed to prevent the id impulses from emerging coincide automatically. When, at certain moments in the analysis, the defense is withdrawn and instinctual representatives can make their appearance unhindered in the form of free associations, the relation of the ego to the analyst is relieved of disturbance from this quarter.

There are, of course, many possible forms of resistance in analysis besides this particular type. In addition to the so-called ego resistances there are, as we know, the transference resistances, which are differently constituted, and also those opposing forces, so hard to overcome in analysis, which have their source in the repetition compulsion. Thus we cannot say that every resistance is the result of a defensive measure on the part of the ego. But every such defense against the id, if set up during analysis, can be detected only in the form of resistance to the analyst's work. Analysis of ego resistances gives us a good opportunity of observing and bringing into consciousness the ego's unconscious defensive operations in full swing.

DEFENSE AGAINST AFFECTS

We have other opportunities besides those provided by the clashes between ego and instinct for a close observation of the activities of the former. The ego is in conflict not only with those id derivatives which try to make their way into its territory in order to gain access to consciousness and to

obtain gratification. It defends itself no less energetically and actively against the affects associated with these instinctual impulses. When repudiating the claims of instinct, its first task must always be to come to terms with these affects. Love, longing, jealousy, mortification, pain, and mourning accompany sexual wishes; hatred, anger, and rage accompany the impulses of aggression; if the instinctual demands with which they are associated are to be warded off, these affects must submit to all the various measures to which the ego resorts in its efforts to master them, i.e., they must undergo a metamorphosis. Whenever transformation of an affect occurs, whether in analysis or outside it, the ego has been at work and we have an opportunity of studying its operations. We know that the fate of the affect associated with an instinctual demand is not simply identical with that of its ideational representative. Obviously, however, one and the same ego can have at its disposal only a limited number of possible means of defense. At particular periods in life and according to its own specific structure, the individual ego selects now one defensive method, now another—it may be repression, displacement, reversal, etc.—and these it can employ both in its conflict with the instincts and in its defense against the liberation of affect. If we know how a particular patient seeks to defend himself against the emergence of his instinctual impulses, i.e., what is the nature of his habitual ego resistances, we can form an idea of his probable attitude toward his own unwelcome affects. If, in another patient, particular forms of affect transformation are strongly in evidence, such as complete suppression of emotion, denial, etc., we shall not be surprised if he adopts the same methods of defense against his instinctual impulses and his free associations. It is the same ego, and in all

its conflicts it is more or less consistent in using every means which it has at its command.

PERMANENT DEFENSE PHENOMENA

Another field in which the ego's defensive operations may be studied is that of the phenomena to which Wilhelm Reich (1933) refers in his remarks on "the consistent analysis of resistance." Bodily attitudes such as stiffness and rigidity, personal peculiarities such as a fixed smile, contemptuous, ironical, and arrogant behavior—all these are residues of very vigorous defensive processes in the past, which have become dissociated from their original situations (conflicts with instincts or affects) and have developed into permanent character traits, the "armor-plating of character" (*Charakterpanzerung*, as Reich calls it). When in analysis we succeed in tracing these residues to their historical source, they recover their mobility and cease to block by their fixation our access to the defensive operations upon which the ego is at the moment actively engaged. Since these modes of defense have become permanent, we cannot now bring their emergence and disappearance into relation with the emergence and disappearance of instinctual demands and affects from within or with the occurrence and cessation of situations of temptation and affective stimuli from without. Hence their analysis is a peculiarly laborious process. I am sure that we are justified in placing them in the foreground only when we can detect no trace at all of a present conflict between ego, instinct, and affect. And I am equally sure that there is no justification for restricting the term "analysis of resistance" to the analysis of these particular phenomena, for it should apply to that of all resistances.

SYMPTOM FORMATION

Analysis of the resistances of the ego, of its defensive measures against the instincts, and of the transformations undergone by the affects reveals and brings into consciousness in a living flow the same methods of defense as meet our eyes in a state of petrification when we analyze the permanent "armor-plating of character." We come across them, on a larger scale and again in a state of fixation, when we study the formation of neurotic symptoms. For the part played by the ego in the formation of those compromises which we call symptoms consists in the unvarying use of a special method of defense, when confronted with a particular instinctual demand, and the repetition of exactly the same procedure every time that demand recurs in its stereotyped form. We know¹ that there is a regular connection between particular neuroses and special modes of defense, as, for instance, between hysteria and repression or between obsessional neurosis and the processes of isolation and undoing. We find the same constant connection between neurosis and defense mechanism when we study the modes of defense which a patient employs against his affects and the form of resistance adopted by his ego. The attitude of a particular individual toward his free associations in analysis and the manner in which, when left to himself, he masters the demands of his instincts and wards off unwelcome affects enable us to deduce *a priori* the nature of his symptom formation. On the other hand, the study of the latter enables us to infer *a posteriori* what is the structure of his resistances and of his defense against his affects and in-

¹ This point is noted in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (Freud, 1926), see also p. 43, where this passage is quoted.

instincts. We are most familiar with this parallelism in the case of hysteria and obsessional neurosis, where it is especially apparent between the formation of the patient's symptoms and the form assumed by his resistances. The symptom formation of hysterical patients in their conflict with their instincts is based primarily on repression: they exclude from consciousness the ideational representatives of their sexual impulses. The form of their resistance to free association is analogous. Associations which put the ego on its defense are simply dismissed. All that the patient feels is a blank in consciousness. He becomes silent; that is to say, the same interruption occurs in the flow of his associations as took place in his instinctual processes during the formation of his symptoms. On the other hand, we learn that the mode of defense adopted in symptom formation by the ego of the obsessional neurotic is that of isolation. It simply removes the instinctual impulses from their context, while retaining them in consciousness. Accordingly, the resistance of such patients takes a different form. The obsessional patient does not fall silent; he speaks, even when in a state of resistance. But he severs the links between his associations and isolates ideas from affects when he is speaking, so that his associations seem as meaningless on a small scale as his obsessional symptoms on a large scale.

ANALYTIC TECHNIQUE AND THE DEFENSE AGAINST INSTINCTS AND AFFECTS

A young girl came to me to be analyzed on account of states of acute anxiety, which were interfering with her daily life and preventing her regular attendance at school. Although she came because her mother urged her to do so, she showed

no unwillingness to tell me about her life both in the past and in the present. Her attitude toward me was friendly and frank, but I noticed that in all her communications she carefully avoided making any allusion to her symptom. She never mentioned anxiety attacks which took place between the analytic sessions. If I myself insisted on bringing her symptom into the analysis or gave interpretations of her anxiety which were based on unmistakable indications in her associations, her friendly attitude changed. On every such occasion the result was a volley of contemptuous and mocking remarks. The attempt to find a connection between the patient's attitude and her relation to her mother was completely unsuccessful. Both in consciousness and in the unconscious that relation was entirely different. In these repeated outbursts of contempt and ridicule the analyst found herself at a loss and the patient was, for the time being, inaccessible to further analysis. As the analysis went deeper, however, we found that these affects did not represent a transference reaction in the true sense of the term and were not connected with the analytic situation at all. They indicated the patient's customary attitude toward herself whenever emotions of tenderness, longing, or anxiety were about to emerge in her affective life. The more powerfully the affect forced itself upon her, the more vehemently and scathingly did she ridicule herself. The analyst became the recipient of these defensive reactions only secondarily, because she was encouraging the demands of the patient's anxiety to be worked over in consciousness. The interpretation of the content of the anxiety, even when this could be correctly inferred from other communications, could have no result so long as every approach to the affect only intensified her defensive reaction. It was impossible to make that

content conscious until we had brought into consciousness and so rendered inoperative the patient's method of defending herself against her affects by contemptuous disparagement—a process which had become automatic in every department of her life. Historically this mode of defense by means of ridicule and scorn was explained by her identification of herself with her dead father, who used to try to train the little girl in self-control by making mocking remarks when she gave way to some emotional outburst. The method had become stereotyped through her memory of her father, whom she had loved dearly. The technique necessary in order to understand this case was to begin with the analysis of the patient's defense against her affects and to go on to the elucidation of her resistance in the transference. Then, and then only, was it possible to proceed to the analysis of her anxiety itself and of its antecedents.

From the technical standpoint this parallelism between a patient's defense against his instincts and against his affects, his symptom formation and his resistance, is of great importance, especially in child analysis. The most obvious defect in our technique when analyzing children is the absence of free association. To do without this is very difficult and that not only because it is through the ideational representatives of a patient's instincts, emerging in his free associations, that we learned most about his id. After all, there are other means of obtaining information about the id impulses. The dreams and daydreams of children, the activity of their fantasy in play, their drawings, and so forth reveal their id tendencies in a more undisguised and accessible form than is usual in adults, and in analysis they can almost take the place of the emergence of id derivatives in free association. However, when we dispense

with the fundamental rule of analysis, the conflict over its observance also disappears, and it is from that conflict that we derive our knowledge of the ego resistances when we are analyzing adults—our knowledge, that is to say, of the ego's defensive operations against the id derivatives. There is therefore a risk that child analysis may yield a wealth of information about the id but a meager knowledge of the infantile ego.

In the play technique advocated by the English school for the analysis of little children (Melanie Klein, 1932), the lack of free association is made good in the most direct way. These analysts hold that a child's play is equivalent to the associations of adults and they make use of his games for purposes of interpretation in just the same way. The free flow of associations corresponds to the undisturbed progress of the games; interruptions and inhibitions in play are equated with the breaks in free association. It follows that, if we analyze the interruption to play, we discover that it represents a defensive measure on the part of the ego, comparable to resistance in free association.

If for theoretical reasons, as, for instance, because we feel some hesitation in pressing the interpretation of symbols to its extreme limits, we cannot accept this complete equation between free association and play, we must try to substitute some new technical methods in child analysis to assist us in our investigation of the ego. I believe that analysis of the transformations undergone by the child's affects may fill the gap. The affective life of children is less complicated and more transparent than that of adults; we can observe what it is which evokes the affects of the former, whether inside or outside the analytic situation. A child sees more attention paid to another than to himself; now,

we say, he will inevitably feel jealousy and mortification. A long-cherished wish is fulfilled: the fulfillment must certainly give him joy. He expects to be punished: he experiences anxiety. Some anticipated and promised pleasure is suddenly deferred or refused: the result is sure to be a sense of disappointment, etc. We expect children normally to react to these particular occurrences with these specific affects. But, contrary to expectation, observation may show us a very different picture. For instance, a child may exhibit indifference when we should have looked for disappointment, exuberant high spirits instead of mortification, excessive tenderness instead of jealousy. In all these cases something has happened to disturb the normal process; the ego has intervened and has caused the affect to be transformed. The analysis and the bringing into consciousness of the specific form of this defense against affect—whether it be reversal, displacement, or complete repression—teach us something of the particular technique adopted by the ego of the child in question and, just like the analysis of resistance, enable us to infer his attitude to his instincts and the nature of his symptom formation. It is therefore a fact of peculiar importance in child analysis that, in observing the affective processes, we are largely independent of the child's voluntary cooperation and his truthfulness or untruthfulness in what he tells us. His affects betray themselves against his will.

The following is an illustration of what I have just said. A certain little boy used to have fits of military enthusiasm whenever there was any occasion for castration anxiety: he would put on a uniform and equip himself with a toy sword and other weapons. After observing him on several such occasions I guessed that he was turning his anxiety into its

opposite, namely, into aggressiveness. From that time I had no difficulty in deducing that castration anxiety lay behind all his fits of aggressive behavior. Moreover, I was not surprised to discover that he was an obsessional neurotic, i.e., that there was in his instinctual life a tendency to turn unwelcome impulses into their opposite. One little girl appeared to have no reaction at all to situations of disappointment. All that could be observed was a quivering of one corner of her mouth. She thereby betrayed the capacity of her ego to get rid of unwelcome psychic processes and to replace them by physical ones. In this case we should not be surprised to find that the patient tended to react hysterically in the conflict with her instinctual life. Another girl, still in the latency period, had succeeded in so completely repressing her envy of her little brother's penis—an affect by which her life was entirely dominated—that even in analysis it was exceptionally difficult to detect any traces of it. All that the analyst could observe was that, whenever she had occasion to envy or be jealous of her brother, she began to play a curious imaginary game, in which she herself enacted the part of a magician, who had the power of transforming and otherwise influencing the whole world by his gestures. This child was converting envy into its opposite, into an overinsistence on her own magical powers, by means of which she avoided the painful insight into what she supposed to be her physical inferiority. Her ego made use of the defense mechanism of reversal, a kind of reaction formation against the affect, at the same time betraying its obsessional attitude toward the instinct. Once this was realized, it was easy for the analyst to deduce the presence of penis envy whenever the game of magic recurred. We see, then, that what we acquire by applying this principle is

simply a kind of technique for the translation of the defensive utterances of the ego, and this method corresponds almost exactly to the resolution of the ego resistances as they occur in free association. Our purpose is the same as in the analysis of resistance. The more completely we succeed in bringing both the resistance and the defense against affects into consciousness and so rendering them inoperative, the more rapidly shall we advance to an understanding of the id.

CHAPTER 4

The Mechanisms of Defense

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY AND THE MECHANISMS OF DEFENSE

The term "defense," which I have used so freely in the three last chapters, is the earliest representative of the dynamic standpoint in psychoanalytic theory. It occurs for the first time in 1894, in Freud's study "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence," and is employed in this and several of his subsequent works ("The Aetiology of Hysteria," "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence") to describe the ego's struggle against painful or unendurable ideas or affects. Later, this term was abandoned and, as time went on, was replaced by that of "repression." The relation between the two concepts, however, remained undetermined. In an appendix to *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) Freud reverted to the old concept of defense, stating that he thought it would undoubtedly be an advantage to use it again, "provided we employ it explicitly as a gen-

eral designation for all the techniques which the ego makes use of in conflicts which may lead to a neurosis, while we retain the word 'repression' for the special method of defence which the line of approach taken by our investigations made us better acquainted with in the first instance" (p. 163). Here we have direct refutation of the notion that repression occupies a unique position among the psychic processes, and a place is made in psychoanalytic theory for others which serve the same purpose, namely, "the protection of the ego against instinctual demands." The significance of repression is reduced to that of a "special method of defence."

This new conception of the role of repression suggests an inquiry into the other specific modes of defense and a comparison of those so far discovered and described by psychoanalytic investigators.

The same appendix to *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* contains the conjecture to which I alluded in the last chapter, namely, that "further investigations may show that there is an intimate connection between special forms of defence and particular illnesses, as, for instance, between repression and hysteria" (p. 164). Regression and reactive alteration of the ego (reaction formation), isolation and "undoing" what has been done are all cited as defensive techniques employed in obsessional neurosis.

A lead having thus been given, it is not difficult to complete the enumeration of the ego's defensive methods as described in Freud's other writings. For instance, in "Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality" (1922), introjection, or identification, and projection are mentioned as important defensive methods employed by the ego in morbid affections of this type and are characterized as "neurotic

mechanisms." In his work on the theory of instinct (1915) he describes the processes of turning against the self and reversal, and these he designates as "vicissitudes of instinct." From the point of view of the ego these two latter mechanisms also must come under the heading of methods of defense, for every vicissitude to which the instincts are liable has its origin in some ego activity. Were it not for the intervention of the ego or of those external forces which the ego represents, every instinct would know only one fate—that of gratification. To these nine methods of defense, which are very familiar in the practice and have been exhaustively described in the theoretical writings of psychoanalysis (regression, repression, reaction formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self and reversal), we must add a tenth, which pertains rather to the study of the normal than to that of neurosis: sublimation, or displacement of instinctual aims.

So far as we know at present, the ego has these ten different methods at its disposal in its conflicts with instinctual representatives and affects. It is the task of the practicing analyst to discover how far these methods prove effective in the processes of ego resistance and symptom formation which he has the opportunity of observing in individuals.

A COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS ACHIEVED BY THE DIFFERENT MECHANISMS IN INDIVIDUAL CASES

I shall take as an illustration the case of a young woman employed in an institution for children. She was the middle child of several brothers and sisters. Throughout childhood

she suffered from passionate penis envy, relating to her elder and her younger brother, and from jealousy, which was repeatedly excited by her mother's successive pregnancies. Finally, envy and jealousy combined in a fierce hostility to her mother. But, since the child's love fixation was no less strong than her hatred, a violent defensive conflict with her negative impulses succeeded an initial period of uninhibited unruliness and naughtiness. She dreaded lest the manifestation of her hate should cause her to lose her mother's love, of which she could not bear to be deprived. She also dreaded that her mother would punish her and she criticized herself most severely for her prohibited longings for revenge. As she entered upon the period of latency, this anxiety situation and conflict of conscience became more and more acute and her ego tried to master her impulses in various ways. In order to solve the problem of ambivalence she displaced outward one side of her ambivalent feeling. Her mother continued to be a love object, but, from that time on, there was always in the girl's life a second important person of the female sex, whom she hated violently. This eased matters: her hatred of the more remote object was not visited with the sense of guilt so mercilessly as was her hatred of her mother. But even the displaced hatred was a source of much suffering. As time went on, it was plain that this first displacement was inadequate as a means of mastering the situation.

The little girl's ego now resorted to a second mechanism. It turned inward the hatred, which hitherto had related exclusively to other people. The child tortured herself with self-accusations and feelings of inferiority and, throughout childhood and adolescence right into adult life, she did everything she could to put herself at a disadvantage and

injure her interests, always surrendering her own wishes to the demands made on her by others. To all outward appearance she had become masochistic since adopting this method of defense.

But this measure, too, proved inadequate as a means of mastering the situation. The patient then entered on a process of projection. The hatred which she had felt for female love objects or their substitutes was transformed into the conviction that she herself was hated, slighted or persecuted by them. Her ego thus found relief from the sense of guilt. The naughty child, who cherished wicked feelings against the people around her, underwent a metamorphosis into the victim of cruelty, neglect, and persecution. But the use of this mechanism left upon her character a permanent paranoid imprint, which was a source of very great difficulty to her both in youth and adult years.

The patient was quite grown up when she came to be analyzed. She was not regarded as ill by those who knew her, but her sufferings were acute. In spite of all the energy which her ego had expended upon its defense she had not succeeded in really mastering her anxiety and sense of guilt. On any occasion when her envy, jealousy, and hatred were in danger of activation, she invariably had recourse to all her defense mechanisms. But her emotional conflicts never came to any issue which could set her ego at rest and, apart from this, the final result of all her struggles was meager in the extreme. She succeeded in maintaining the fiction that she loved her mother, but she felt herself to be full of hatred and on this account she despised and mistrusted herself. She did not succeed in preserving the sense of being loved; it had been destroyed by the mechanism of projection. Nor did she succeed in escaping the punishments which she had

feared in childhood; by turning her aggressive impulses inward she inflicted upon herself all the suffering which she had formerly anticipated in the form of punishment by her mother. The three mechanisms of which she had made use could not prevent her ego from being in a perpetual state of uneasy tension and vigilance, nor relieve it of the exaggerated demands made upon it and the sense of acute torment from which it suffered.

Let us compare these processes with the corresponding relations in hysteria or obsessional neurosis. We will assume that the problem is the same in each case: how to master that hatred of the mother which springs from penis envy. Hysteria solves it by means of repression. The hatred of the mother is obliterated from consciousness and any possible derivatives which seek entry into the ego are vigorously warded off. The aggressive impulses associated with hatred and the sexual impulses associated with penis envy may be transformed into bodily symptoms, if the patient possesses the capacity for conversion and somatic conditions are favorable. In other cases the ego protects itself against the reactivation of the original conflict by developing a phobia and avoiding the occasions of trouble. It imposes restrictions upon its activity, thus evading any situation which might lead to a return of the repressed impulses.

In obsessional neurosis, as in hysteria, hatred of the mother and penis envy are in the first instance repressed. Subsequently the ego secures itself against their return by means of reaction formations. A child who has been aggressive toward her mother develops an excessive tenderness toward her and is worried about her safety; envy and jealousy are transformed into unselfishness and thoughtfulness for others. By instituting obsessional ceremonials and vari-

ous precautionary measures she protects the beloved persons from any outbreak of her aggressive impulses, while by means of a moral code of exaggerated strictness she checks the manifestation of her sexual impulses.

A child who masters her infantile conflicts in the hysterical or obsessional manner here described presents a more pathological picture than the patient whose case we first considered. The repression which has taken place has deprived such children of the control of part of their affective life. The original relation to the mother and brothers and the important relation to their own femininity have been withdrawn from further conscious assimilation and have become obsessively and irrevocably fixed in the reactive alteration undergone by the ego. A great part of their activity is consumed in maintaining the anticathexes which are designed subsequently to secure the repression, and this loss of energy is apparent in the inhibition and curtailment of other vital activities. But the ego of the child who has solved her conflicts by means of repression, with all its pathological sequels, is at peace. It suffers secondarily through the consequences of the neurosis which repression has brought upon it. But it has, at least within the limits of the conversion hysteria or obsessional neurosis, bound its anxiety, disposed of its sense of guilt, and gratified its ideas of punishment. The difference is that, if the ego employs repression, the formation of symptoms relieves it of the task of mastering its conflicts, while, if it employs the other defensive methods, it still has to deal with the problem.

In practice, the use of repression as distinct from other defensive methods is less common than a combination in one and the same individual of the two techniques. This

is well illustrated by the history of a patient who also suffered in very early childhood from acute penis envy, in her case in relation to her father. The sexual fantasies of this phase reached their climax in the wish to bite off her father's penis. At this point the ego set up its defense. The shocking idea was repressed. It was replaced by its opposite—a general disinclination to bite, which soon developed into a difficulty in eating, accompanied by hysterical feelings of disgust. One part of the prohibited impulse—that represented by the oral fantasy—had now been mastered. But the aggressive content, i.e., the wish to rob her father or a father substitute, remained in consciousness for a time, until, as the superego developed, the ego's moral sense repudiated this impulse. By means of a mechanism of displacement, which I shall discuss more fully later, the urge to rob was transformed into a peculiar kind of contentedness and unassumingness. We see that the two successive methods of defense produced a substratum of hysteria and, superimposed on this, a specific ego modification, not in itself of a pathological character.

The impression conveyed by these examples is confirmed when we examine in detail the effect of the different defense mechanisms in other cases. Theoretically, repression may be subsumed under the general concept of defense and placed side by side with the other specific methods. Nevertheless, from the point of view of efficacy it occupies a unique position in comparison with the rest. In terms of quantity it accomplishes more than they; that is to say, it is capable of mastering powerful instinctual impulses, in face of which the other defensive measures are quite ineffective. It acts once only, though the anticathexis, effected to secure the repression, is a permanent institution demand-

ing a constant expenditure of energy. The other mechanisms, on the contrary, have to be brought into operation again whenever there is an accession of instinctual energy. But repression is not only the most efficacious, it is also the most dangerous mechanism. The dissociation from the ego entailed by the withdrawal of consciousness from whole tracts of instinctual and affective life may destroy the integrity of the personality for good and all. Thus repression becomes the basis of compromise formation and neurosis. The consequences of the other defensive methods are not less serious but, even when they assume an acute form, they remain more within the limits of the normal. They manifest themselves in innumerable transformations, distortions, and deformities of the ego, which are in part the accompaniment of and in part substitutes for neurosis.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A CHRONOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION

Even when we have accorded to repression its exceptional position among the ego's methods of defense, we still feel with regard to the rest that we are including under a single heading a number of heterogeneous phenomena. Methods such as that of isolation and undoing stand side by side with genuine instinctual processes, such as regression, reversal, and turning against the self. Some of these serve to master large quantities of instinct or affect, others only small quantities. The considerations which determine the ego's choice of mechanism remain uncertain. Perhaps repression is pre-eminently of value in combating sexual wishes, while other methods can more readily be employed against instinctual forces of a different kind, in particular, against aggressive

impulses. Or it may be that these other methods have only to complete what repression has left undone or to deal with such prohibited ideas as return to consciousness when repression fails.¹ Or possibly each defense mechanism is first evolved in order to master some specific instinctual urge and so is associated with a particular phase of infantile development.²

The appendix to *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, from which I have already quoted more than once, contains a provisional answer to these suggestions. "It may well be that before its sharp cleavage into an ego and an id, and before the formation of a super-ego, the mental apparatus makes use of different methods of defence from those which it employs after it has reached these stages of organization" (p. 164). This may be expanded as follows. Repression consists in the withholding or expulsion of an idea or affect from the conscious ego. It is meaningless to speak of repression where the ego is still merged with the id. Similarly we might suppose that projection and introjection were methods which depended on the differentiation of the ego from the outside world. The expulsion of ideas or affects from the ego and their relegation to the outside world would be a relief to the ego only when it had learned to distinguish itself from that world. Or again, introjection from the outside world into the ego could not be said to have the effect of enriching the latter unless there were already a clear differentiation between that which belonged to the one and that which belonged to the other. But the situation is by no means so simple. In the case of

¹ I am following here a suggestion made by Jeanne Lampl-de Groot during a discussion by the Vienna Society.

² According to a suggestion by Helene Deutsch.

projection and introjection the first beginnings are much more obscure.³ Sublimation, i.e., the displacement of the instinctual aim in conformity with higher social values, presupposes the acceptance or at least the knowledge of such values, that is to say, presupposes the existence of the superego. Accordingly, the defense mechanisms of repression and sublimation could not be employed until relatively late in the process of development, while the position in time which we shall assign to projection and introjection depends upon the theoretical standpoint which happens to be adopted. Such processes as regression, reversal, or turning round upon the self are probably independent of the stage which the psychic structure has reached and as old as the instincts themselves, or at least as old as the conflict between instinctual impulses and any hindrance which they may encounter on their way to gratification. We should not be surprised to find that these are the very earliest defense mechanisms employed by the ego.

But this suggested chronological classification does not accord with our experience that the earliest manifestations of neurosis which we observe in young children are hysterical symptoms, of whose connection with repression there can be no doubt; on the other hand, the genuine masochistic phenomena, which result from the turning round of the instinct upon the self, are very rarely met with in earliest childhood. According to the theory of the English school of analysis, introjection and projection, which in our view should be assigned to the period after the ego has been differentiated from the outside world, are the very processes by which the structure of the ego is developed and

³ Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (1913, p. 64). Compare also the view held by the English school, to which I refer on pages 52-53.

but for which differentiation would never have taken place. These differences of opinion bring home to us the fact that the chronology of psychic processes is still one of the most obscure fields of analytic theory. We have a good illustration of this in the disputed question of when the individual superego is actually formed. So a classification of the defense mechanisms according to position in time inevitably partakes of all the doubt and uncertainty which even today attach to chronological pronouncements in analysis. It will probably be best to abandon the attempt so to classify them and, instead, to study in detail the situations which call for the defensive reactions.

CHAPTER 5

Orientation of the Processes of Defense According to the Source of Anxiety and Danger

The instinctual dangers against which the ego defends itself are always the same, but its reasons for feeling a particular irruption of instinct to be dangerous may vary.

MOTIVES FOR THE DEFENSE AGAINST INSTINCTS

Superego Anxiety in the Neuroses of Adults

The defensive situation with which we have been longest familiar in analysis and of which our knowledge is most thorough is that which forms the basis of neurosis in adults. The position here is that some instinctual wish seeks to enter consciousness and with the help of the ego to attain

gratification. The latter would not be averse to admitting it, but the superego protests. The ego submits to the higher institution and obediently enters into a struggle against the instinctual impulse, with all the consequences which such a struggle entails. The characteristic point about this process is that the ego itself does not regard the impulse which it is fighting as in the least dangerous. The motive which prompts the defense is not originally its own. The instinct is regarded as dangerous because the superego prohibits its gratification and, if it achieves its aim, it will certainly stir up trouble between the ego and the superego. Hence the ego of the adult neurotic fears the instincts because it fears the superego. Its defense is motivated by superego anxiety.

So long as our attention is confined to the defense against instinct set up by adult neurotics we shall regard the superego as a redoubtable force. In this context it appears as the originator of all neuroses. It is the mischief-maker which prevents the ego's coming to a friendly understanding with the instincts. It sets up an ideal standard, according to which sexuality is prohibited and aggression pronounced to be antisocial. It demands a degree of sexual renunciation and restriction of aggression which is incompatible with psychic health. The ego is completely deprived of its independence and reduced to the status of an instrument for the execution of the superego's wishes; the result is that it becomes hostile to instinct and incapable of enjoyment. The study of the situation of defense as revealed in the neurosis of adults impels us to pay very special attention in our therapeutic work to the analysis of the superego. A diminution in its power, a modification of its severity or—as some will go the length of saying—its total abolition

is bound to relieve the ego and to lessen the neurotic conflict, at any rate in one direction. This notion of the superego as the root of all neurotic evil inspires high hopes of a prophylaxis of the neuroses. If neurosis is produced by the severity of the superego, then those who bring up children have only to avoid everything which may contribute to the formation of a superego of excessive strictness. They must see to it that their educational methods, which are later internalized by the superego, are always gentle; the parents' example, which the superego makes its own by the process of identification, must be the expression of their real human weaknesses and their tolerant attitude toward the instincts, instead of a pretense of an overstrict moral code which it is quite impossible to put into practice. Again, the child's aggressiveness must have an outlet in the outside world, so that it does not become dammed up and turned inward, for, if it does, it will endow the superego with cruel characteristics. If education succeeds in this, we should suppose that the human beings thus launched in life would be free from anxiety, exempt from neurosis, capable of enjoyment, and no longer torn by inner conflicts. But, in practice, the hope of extirpating neurosis from human life¹ is found by educators to be illusory, while from the theoretical point of view it is shattered as soon as we take our next step in analytic research.

Objective Anxiety in Infantile Neurosis

The study of defense in infantile neurosis (Freud, 1926, pp. 108-109) teaches us that the superego is by no means

¹ The most uncompromising exponent of this view is Wilhelm Reich, but there are many who share his opinion.

an indispensable factor in the formation of the neuroses. Adult neurotics seek to ward off their sexual and aggressive wishes in order not to come into conflict with the superego. Little children treat their instinctual impulses in the same way in order not to transgress their parents' prohibitions. The ego of a little child, like that of an adult, does not combat the instincts of its own accord; its defense is not prompted by its feelings in the matter. It regards the instincts as dangerous because those who bring the child up have forbidden their gratification and an irruption of instinct entails restrictions and the infliction or threat of punishment. Castration anxiety produces in young children the same result as that produced in adult neurotics by anxiety of conscience; the infantile ego fears the instincts because it fears the outside world. Its defense against them is motivated by dread of the outside world, i.e., by objective anxiety.

When we discover that objective anxiety causes the infantile ego to develop the same phobias, obsessional neuroses, hysterical symptoms, and neurotic traits as occur in adults in consequence of their superego anxiety, the power of that institution naturally sinks in our estimation. We realize that what we ascribed to it should really have been put down simply to the anxiety itself. In the formation of neurosis it seems to be a matter of indifference to what that anxiety relates. The crucial point is that, whether it be dread of the outside world or dread of the superego, it is the anxiety which sets the defensive process going. The symptoms which enter consciousness as the ultimate result of this process do not enable us to determine which type of anxiety in the ego has produced them.

If we study this second defense situation—defense against

the instincts from the motive of objective anxiety—we shall form a high estimate of the influence which the outside world exerts on children and accordingly we shall once more conceive hopes of an effective prophylaxis of neurosis. It is pointed out that little children nowadays suffer from a degree of objective anxiety which is quite unnecessary. The punishments which they fear may be inflicted upon them, if they gratify their instincts, are for the most part altogether obsolete in our present stage of civilization. Castration is no longer practiced in retribution for prohibited sexual indulgence, nor are acts of aggression punished by mutilation. But, all the same, there is still in our educational methods a faint resemblance to the barbaric punishments of earlier times, just enough to arouse some dim apprehensions and fears, residues handed on by inheritance. Optimists take the point of view that it should be possible to avoid these remote suggestions of threats of castration and measures of violence, even now adumbrated, if not in the disciplinary methods actually employed, at least in the manner and voice of adults. Those who hold this view hope that the connection between modern education and these age-old fears of punishment may be finally severed. Surely, they say, the child's objective anxiety would then diminish and a radical change would take place in the relation between his ego and his instincts, which would mean the final cutting away of much of the ground from under infantile neurosis.

Instinctual Anxiety (Dread of the Strength of the Instincts)

As before, however, psychoanalytic experience destroys the prospect of an effective prophylaxis. The human ego by its

very nature is never a promising soil for the unhampered gratification of instinct. I mean by this that the ego is friendly to the instincts only so long as it is itself but little differentiated from the id. When it has evolved from the primary to the secondary process, from the pleasure principle to the reality principle, it has become, as I have already shown, alien territory to the instincts. Its mistrust of their demands is always present but, under normal conditions, hardly noticeable. It is lost sight of in the much more tumultuous warfare waged within its domain by the superego and the outside world against the impulses of the id. However, if the ego feels itself abandoned by these protective higher powers or if the demands of the instinctual impulses become excessive, its mute hostility to instinct is intensified to the point of anxiety. "What it is that the ego fears from the external and from the libidinal danger cannot be specified; we know that the fear is of being overwhelmed or annihilated, but it cannot be grasped analytically" (Freud, 1923, p. 57).² Robert Waelder (1930) describes it as the danger that the ego's whole organization may be destroyed or submerged (p. 48). The effect of the anxiety experienced by the ego because of the strength of the instincts is the same as that produced by the superego anxiety or the objective anxiety which so far we have been studying. Defense mechanisms are brought into operation against the instincts, with all the familiar results in the formation of neuroses and neurotic characteristics. In children the

² See also *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926, p. 94), where we are warned of the danger of overestimating the part played in repression by the superego and stress is laid on the importance of quantitative factors, such as an excessive degree of stimulation.

defense thus prompted can best be studied in cases where great pains have been taken by means of education on analytic lines and by therapeutic analysis to remove those occasions for objective anxiety and anxiety of conscience which otherwise tend to conceal it. In later life we can see it in full force whenever a sudden accession of instinctual energy threatens to upset the balance of the psychic institutions, as is normally the case, owing to physiological changes, at puberty and the climacteric, and occurs for pathological reasons at the beginning of one of the periodic advances which occur in psychosis.

FURTHER MOTIVES FOR THE DEFENSE AGAINST INSTINCT

To these three powerful motives for the defense against instinct (superego anxiety, objective anxiety, anxiety due to the strength of the instincts) must be added those which in later life spring from the ego's need for synthesis. The adult ego requires some sort of harmony between its impulses, and so there arises a series of conflicts of which Alexander (1933) has given a full account. They are conflicts between opposite tendencies, such as homosexuality and heterosexuality, passivity and activity, etc. Which of two opposing impulses is warded off or admitted or what compromise is arrived at between them is again determined in the individual case by the amount of energy with which each is cathected.

The first two of the motives for defense which we have so far studied (superego anxiety and objective anxiety) have, besides, a source in common. If the instinct could achieve gratification in spite of opposition by the superego

or the outside world, the result would, indeed, be primarily pleasure but secondarily unpleasure, either as a consequence of the sense of guilt emanating from the unconscious or of the punishments inflicted by the outside world. Hence, when instinctual gratification is warded off from one or the other of these two motives, the defense is undertaken in accordance with the reality principle. Its main purpose is to avoid this secondary pain.

MOTIVES FOR THE DEFENSE AGAINST AFFECTS

Precisely the same reasons as prompt the ego's defense against the instincts underlie its defense against affects. Whenever it seeks to defend itself against instinctual impulses from one of the motives which I have indicated, it is obliged to ward off also the affects associated with the instinctual process. The nature of the affects in question is immaterial: they may be pleasurable, painful or dangerous to the ego. It makes no difference, for the ego is never allowed to experience them exactly as they are. If an affect is associated with a prohibited instinctual process, its fate is decided in advance. The fact that it is so associated suffices to put the ego on guard against it.

So far, the reasons for the defense against affect lie quite simply in the conflict between ego and instinct. There is, however, another and more primitive relation between the ego and the affects which has no counterpart in that of the ego to the instincts. Instinctual gratification is always primarily something pleasurable. But an affect may be primarily pleasurable or painful, according to its nature. If the ego has nothing to object to in a particular instinctual

process and so does not ward off an affect on that ground, its attitude toward it will be determined entirely by the pleasure principle: it will welcome pleasurable affects and defend itself against painful ones. Indeed, even if owing to the repression of an instinct the ego is impelled by anxiety and a sense of guilt to defend itself against the accompanying affect, we can still see traces of selection in accordance with the pleasure principle. It is all the more ready to ward off affects associated with prohibited sexual impulses if these affects happen to be distressing, e.g., pain, longing, mourning. On the other hand, it may resist a prohibition somewhat longer in the case of positive affects, simply because they are pleasurable, or may sometimes be persuaded to tolerate them for a short time when they make a sudden irruption into consciousness.

This simple defense against primarily painful affects corresponds to the defense against the primarily painful stimuli which impinge upon the ego from the outside world. We shall see later that the methods employed by children in these primitive forms of defense, which are governed simply by the pleasure principle, are themselves more primitive in character.

VERIFICATION OF OUR CONCLUSIONS IN ANALYTIC PRACTICE

The facts which have to be laboriously assembled and related in a theoretical exposition can fortunately be brought to light and demonstrated without further difficulty in the analyses of our patients. Whenever by means of analysis we reverse a defensive process, we discover the different factors which have contributed to produce it. We can esti-

mate the amount of energy expended in establishing repressions by the strength of the resistance which we encounter when we seek to lift them. Similarly, we can deduce the motive which prompted a patient's defense against an instinctual impulse from his frame of mind when we reintroduce that impulse into consciousness. If we undo a neurotic defense set up at the instance of the superego, the analysand has a sense of guilt, i.e., he experiences superego anxiety. If, on the other hand, the defense was set up under pressure from the outside world, he experiences objective anxiety. If, when analyzing a child, we revive painful affects which he had warded off, he feels the same intense unpleasure as forced his ego to resort to defensive measures. Finally, if we intervene in a defensive process which was motivated by the patient's dread of the strength of his instincts, precisely that occurs which his ego sought to avoid: the id derivatives, hitherto suppressed, make their way into the territory of the ego and meet with but little opposition.

CONSIDERATIONS BEARING UPON PSYCHOANALYTIC THERAPY

This survey of the defensive processes gives us a very clear idea of the possible points of attack for analytic therapy. In analysis the defensive processes are reversed, a passage back into consciousness is forced for the instinctual impulses or affects which have been warded off, and it is then left to the ego and the superego to come to terms with them on a better basis. The prognosis for the solution of the psychic conflicts is most favorable when the motive for the defense against instinct has been that of superego anxiety. Here the conflict is genuinely endopsychic and a settle-

ment can be arrived at between the different institutions, especially if the superego has become more accessible to reason through the analysis of the identifications upon which it is based and of the aggressiveness which it has made its own. Its dread of the superego having thus been reduced, there is no longer any need for it to resort to defensive methods, with pathological consequences.

But, even when the defense in infantile neurosis has been motivated by objective anxiety, analytic therapy has a good prospect of success. The simplest method—and that least in accordance with the principles of analysis—is for the analyst, when once he has reversed the defensive process in the child's own mind, to try so to influence reality, i.e., those responsible for the child's upbringing, that objective anxiety is reduced, with the result that the ego adopts a less severe attitude toward the instincts and has not to make such great efforts to ward them off. In other cases analysis shows that the various anxieties which have led to the defense belong to an actual situation now long past. The ego recognizes that there is no longer any need to fear it. Or again, what appears to be objective anxiety proves to have its source in exaggerated, crude, and distorted notions of reality, based on primeval situations once actual but now no longer existing. Analysis unmasks this "objective anxiety" and shows that it is a product of fantasy against which it is not worthwhile to assume defensive operations.

When the ego has taken its defensive measures against an affect for the purpose of avoiding unpleasure, something more besides analysis is required to undo them, if the result is to be permanent. The child must learn to tolerate larger and larger quantities of unpleasure without immediately having recourse to his defense mechanisms. It must, how-

ever, be admitted that theoretically it is the business of education rather than of analysis to teach him this lesson.

The only pathological states which fail to react favorably to analysis are those based on a defense prompted by the patient's dread of the strength of his instincts. In such a case there is a danger that we may undo the defensive measures of the ego without being able immediately to come to its assistance. In analysis we always reassure the patient who is afraid of admitting his id impulses into consciousness by telling him that, once they are conscious, they are less dangerous and more amenable to control than when unconscious. The only situation in which this promise may prove illusory is that in which the defense has been undertaken because the patient dreads the strength of his instincts. This most deadly struggle of the ego to prevent itself from being submerged by the id, as, for instance, when psychosis is taking one of its periodic turns for the worse, is essentially a matter of quantitative relations. All that the ego asks for in such a conflict is to be reinforced. Insofar as analysis can strengthen it by bringing the unconscious id contents into consciousness, it has a therapeutic effect here also. But, insofar as the bringing of the unconscious activities of the ego into consciousness has the effect of disclosing the defensive processes and rendering them inoperative, the result of analysis is to weaken the ego still further and to advance the pathological process.

defense has miscarried and the ego has suffered a defeat. But the ego is victorious when its defensive measures effect their purpose, i.e., when they enable it to restrict the development of anxiety and unpleasure and so to transform the instincts that, even in difficult circumstances, some measure of gratification is secured, thereby establishing the most harmonious relations possible between the id, the superego, and the forces of the outside world.

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* See footnote †.

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