

WITHIN THE REALM OF THE DEATH INSTINCT

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This paper is intended as a basis for discussion of the subject of aggression and will deal with various aspects of the death instinct theory. My choice of this theory for discussion was influenced by the existence in our modern civilization of profound discontents, in spite of immense possibilities for happiness.

After a review of the theory I attempt to show that masochistic reactions are incompatible with the pleasure principle. Afterwards I defend the thesis that everybody loves or is aggressive against his neighbour as he loves or is aggressive against himself. I then investigate manifestations of the death instinct unrelated to guilt feelings and discuss psychoanalytic interpretations of sadism turned against the self. In conclusion I maintain that the theory of the death instinct, which answers to reality, is both sinister and optimistic.

LIFE AND DEATH INSTINCTS

Freud reformulated the instincts into two main groups: those of life and those of death. He postulated the death instinct on the basis of his speculations on the repetition compulsion and the tendency of the instincts to re-establish earlier situations, and also on the basis of clinical facts allegedly contrary to the pleasure principle, as for example: traumatic neuroses, fate neuroses, masochism, unconscious guilt feelings, the transference repetition of painful infantile experiences and negative therapeutic reactions.

Freud (1920, p. 38) thought that the instincts were the result of interaction between organic matter and environmental circumstances:

the phenomena of organic development must be attributed to external disturbing and diverting influences. . . . In the last resort, what has left its mark on the development of organisms must be the history of the earth we live in and of its relation to the sun.

Thus, for example, the latency period of human sexuality is attributed by Freud to the destructive influence of the Ice Ages:

the archaic heritage of human beings comprises not only dispositions but also subject-matter-memory traces of the experience of earlier generations (Freud, 1939, p. 99).

The above quotations show how for Freud, the characteristics of both the primary instincts and other human reactions are dependent on the individual's ancestral and personal circumstances. For instance, Freud, in his study on the genesis of the superego, emphasizes the importance of the influence of ancestral totemic society, and of the defusion of life and death instincts which comes from identification, desexualization and sublimation of the individual's relationship with his parents. The defusion increases the manifestations of the self-destructive instinct, because the ego struggles against the erotic instinct.

But since the ego's work of sublimation results in a defusion of the instincts and a liberation of the aggressive instincts in the superego, its struggle against the libido exposes it to the danger of maltreatment and death (1923, p. 56).

The theory of life and death instincts can also be applied on a national scale following the ideas put forward by Freud (1923, p. 38), and sometimes considered Lamarckian, that one individual may be regarded as composed of 'harboured residues of the existence of countless egos', with different ancestral experiences.

If we assume the survival of these memory-traces of the experience of our ancestors in the archaic heritage we have bridged the gulf between individual and group psychology: we can deal with peoples as we do with an individual neurotic (Freud, 1939, p. 100).

A nation, like an individual, has a beginning and an evolution. Present national characteristics are determined by past circumstances that continue to hold sway over the present through a kind of compulsion to repeat. According to Freud, for instance, present-day Judaeo-Christian ideology and rituals, such as belief in

immortality, communion and circumcision, repeat behaviour patterns originated in the social conditions of primitive totemic society and of the Egyptian empire.

Some of the reactions to ancient experiences which persist in the present compel a nation to seek progress and well-being; others are more destructive and cause suffering. This can be simplified by saying that in a nation we find progressive life tendencies together with other regressive, self-destructive death tendencies. These two opposed tendencies are present in every national activity. Their relative intensity is also determined by the strength of the influence that the pleasant or unpleasant, constructive or destructive characteristics of present environmental circumstances exercises upon them at any one moment.

When we know that a nation, because of its experience in the past, carries a heavy burden of inherited regressive, self-destructive death tendencies, we can better understand why such a nation tends to suffer more intensely than its present circumstances would seem to warrant. It also enables us to understand why, just as in the treatment of individual neuroses, attempts to relieve the suffering and destructive behaviour of a nation either fail or only partly succeed. Persistence of excessive suffering cannot be explained as incidental in a nation's search for happiness. It is significant, too, that empires have usually perished because of internal problems.

The concept of death instincts (always bearing in mind that its genesis, evolution and present features must be considered in relation to past and present circumstances) furnishes us with a tentative understanding of how a nation or an individual suffers and destroys itself. I find that Freud's theory of the death instinct validates some of the earlier psychoanalytic explanations, maintains others unchanged, and re-examines yet others from a new viewpoint without discarding them. As Freud (1930, p. 119) wrote:

The assumption of the existence of an instinct of death or destruction . . . provides that simplification without either ignoring or doing violence to the facts for which we strive in scientific work.

The fact that there is no unconscious representation of one's own death does not imply that the death instinct does not exist. This can be understood if we consider that the very act of creating a mental representation implies the presence of life, which precludes one's own death.

One's own death can only be represented by a total lack of mental representations. But anyone trying to visualize this absence of representations must necessarily create a mental representation of the lack of them, which, of course, is not a state of total lack of mental representations.

If this is the case, then, when the individual is representing this lack of representations to himself he is representing himself as alive and not dead. Hence the possibility of imagining someone else's death but not one's own.

The mental representation of one's own death would be 'loss of consciousness', which implies an absence of mental representation. In Spanish and French this is literally described by 'loss of knowledge'. It is also significant that 'a dead faint' is a synonym for loss of consciousness. Perhaps Freud's exclamation, 'How sweet it must be to die' (Jones, 1953, p. 317), when he recovered from a dead faint in 1912, might be considered as lending support to this supposition.

DEATH INSTINCT OR INSTINCTUAL AGGRESSIVE DRIVE

Some analysts do not admit to the existence of destructive tendencies which are not brought about by frustration. Others accept that destructive instincts can exist independently, but have doubts regarding the death instinct. Thus, according to Loewenstein (1940, p. 388):

we must range ourselves with those [Fenichel, Hartmann] who prefer the older theory, though that theory will . . . have to undergo terminological modifications and, above all, completion.

Nevertheless in certain details in their writings, Hartmann *et al.* (1949) (who prefer to speak of 'instinctual drive' rather than instinct) would appear to admit to the existence of an instinct of self-destruction or death. This seems clear from the following quotations:

. . . the existence of a primary drive toward aggression or destruction. We . . . consider this assumption to be of immediate relevance in the formulation of psychoanalytic propositions [p. 11]. The vicissitudes of aggression resemble those of sexuality to such a degree that the assumption of a constant driving power comparable to that of libido seems appropriate [p. 28]. The unmodified aggressive impulse threatens the existence of the object . . . [p. 19]. . . since the 'full' discharge of aggressive energy would endanger the objects, whereas the full discharge of libido . . . does not threaten the existence of the object itself [p. 20]. . . We start from the assumption of an undifferentiated phase of psychic

structure. . . . During the undifferentiated phase one might assume aggression . . . to be centred in the self [p. 25].

To draw a conclusion from these quotations: if there is a primary aggressive drive, which 'threatens the existence of the object itself' and if in the beginning the object of the aggressive drive is the self, then it must be assumed that at least in the beginning the aggressive drive threatens the existence of the self. Which means that this primary drive attempts first of all to destroy the self, i.e. it amounts to a death instinct.

Anna Freud (1949, pp. 39–40) similarly admits to the existence of independent aggressive urges, which in the beginning are directed against the body, i.e. against the self. This would appear to be an admission of the existence of a primary self-destructive instinct.

The aggressive character of the infantile sex urges . . . later on recognized as the expression of the second group of instincts—the destructive urges. . . . In very early phases aggressive energy may find outlets on the child's own body, just as sexual energy (libido) may find outlets in auto-erotic activities. . . . From this stage of development onward it is essential for the child's normality that the aggressive urges should be directed away from the child's own body to the animate or inanimate objects in the environment.

MASOCHISM AND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

With his theory of the death instinct, Freud tried to explain human reactions which are opposed to the pleasure principle, such as masochistic perversion and moral masochism. The latter includes every form of behaviour which causes unnecessary conscious or unconscious suffering, such as neurotic, psychotic and organic illness.

The life instincts of both the perverse masochist and the moral masochist mitigate and restrict their search for pain. This might fundamentally lead to the conclusion that the masochist seeks pleasure.

In her analysis one of my patients became aware of the fact that, although her perverse masochistic behaviour caused her to seek pain and punishment, she accepted them because they attenuated other forms of behaviour unconsciously created by her imagination which were much worse, such as dying of hunger or being torn to pieces. Being whipped by her lover to the point of bleeding thus caused her to feel a manic triumph over her imaginary persecutors,

who would have made her suffer far more. In this way her superego deceived her (Garma, 1968) into submitting to totally unnecessary pain, the degree of which she controlled. Had she not been a masochist, she would not have fantasied with cruel imaginary persecutors which forced her towards painful, although controlled destructive forms of behaviour.

Symons (1927) divides masochistic behaviour into two types according to whether it is motivated by oedipal guilt feelings or not. He maintains that in the former case the behaviour is compatible with the pleasure principle because the subject rids himself of his guilt feelings by means of his masochistic suffering and can thus afterwards enjoy sexual pleasure.

To consider this type of masochistic behaviour compatible with the pleasure principle is to make the mistake of ignoring the clearly masochistic fact that oedipal guilt persists. Masochism motivated by guilt feelings consists of two stages: (1) the maintenance of an illogical and anachronistic state of guilt which already implies a desire for suffering, i.e. masochism, and (2) a further search for suffering under the pretence that this will provide liberation from guilt feelings. Since the maintenance of the guilt feelings is in itself contrary to the pleasure principle, then the same must apply to the pain provided by perverse practices, even though the apparent aim of these is the pleasurable one of getting rid of guilt feelings.

According to Symons, Freud's first theory of sadism turned against the self provides a better explanation of masochistic behaviour based on guilt feelings.

It is important to bear in mind that according to this first theory the search for pain took a masochistic form before it became sadistic. Freud (1905, pp. 128–9) is very clear about this. He also points out that enjoyment of sadism requires that the sadist identify himself with the sufferer, in other words that he adopt a masochistic position.

But even if we agree that the sadistic individual originally tried to inflict pain on his object, we are still unable to explain masochism as sadism turned against the self. For it to occur there must be 'something' in the individual which directs this turn against the self which forces towards it. If this 'something' is investigated we find that it was of a masochistic nature even before sadism became turned against the individual. This is the case, for instance, when sadism turned against the self

comes from submission to the superego, i.e. from guilt feelings and the need for punishment. From the very beginning this individual was far more masochistic than sadistic; had it been otherwise his sadism would have remained dominant and not been turned against the self.

Masochism is often illustrated by cases such as that of the angry child, full of sadistic feelings towards his mother who has given him an enema; since the mother forces him to repress these feelings, they are turned inward upon himself. In this type of case also, the child is subjected from the very beginning to a painful external aggression, far stronger than its own sadistic feelings. Subjection becomes permanent when the child internalizes maternal aggression into its superego and becomes definitely masochistic. When this happens, masochism is intensified by the child's sadism which has been turned against himself. But, when considering this process, we must keep in mind that the very sadism which is turned against the self is usually a consequence of the child's guilt feelings and need for punishment and that the purpose of its sadistic behaviour is to feel remorse and pain. Thus the objective of the child's sadism was masochistic from the beginning.

According to Symons, masochistic forms of behaviour unconnected with guilt feelings are pleasant rather than painful. This in itself does not deny the search for pain, which is contrary to the pleasure principle, and therefore Symons adds that the cause of this type of behaviour may be that the masochist has an exaggerated capacity for deriving pleasure from painful feelings. This is not a valid explanation because, as Freud (1905, p. 159) pointed out,

It has also been maintained that every pain contains in itself the possibility of a feeling of pleasure. All that need be said is that no satisfactory explanation of this perversion has been put forward. . .

Suicide can also be considered a masochistic form of behaviour. For reasons of space, I am obliged merely to refer to my paper published in 1937, in which I describe four main motivations for suicide: identification of the suicide with a lost libidinous object; the attempt to recover that lost object through death; aggression against certain objects by means of suicide, and the turning of aggressive wishes against the self.

Today, 35 years later, I would say that aggressive wishes turned against the self are of only secondary importance in spite of what

Freud (1917, p. 252) wrote before stating his theory of the death instinct:

no neurotic harbours thoughts of suicide which he has not turned back on himself from murderous impulses against others . . .

I would instead place prime importance on something which I did not mention explicitly at the time, although I referred to it quite clearly in my description of the suicide's masochistic personality deformation: the internalization of external aggressions, which become highly intensified following infantile submissions to real and fantasied objects and as a consequence of the sadistic behaviour of the superego, which thus reinforces the masochism of the ego.

In short, this brief study of some aspects of masochistic behaviours would seem to indicate that there is 'something' in the individual which is not derived from the erotic or life instinct and which is therefore contrary to the pleasure principle. This 'something' would appear to come from tendencies which seek out pain and self destruction from the very beginning, and which according to Freud come from an instinct of death.

INWARD- AND OUTWARD-DIRECTED DESTRUCTIVENESS

According to Freud, the self-destructive activity of the death instinct is kept under control by its fusion with the life instinct and by its being directed against external objects. The more an individual controls his aggressiveness towards objects the more aggressive he becomes towards himself (Freud, 1923, p. 54; 1924*b*; p. 170). In support of this idea Freud (1933, p. 105) went so far as to say that

Impeded aggressiveness seems to involve a grave injury. It really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other thing or person in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to guard against the impulsion to self-destruction.

This theory has not found acceptance. Hartmann *et al.* (1949, p. 22) are not 'satisfied with the dichotomy of self-destructive and externalized aggression'. Nor is this confirmed by the results of analytic treatment, in which both kinds of destructiveness diminish.

Freud often counterbalances an individual's behaviour towards others with his behaviour towards himself. For example, he says that increased object libido brings about a decrease in ego libido. He compares this oscillation to

the quantities of protoplasm in the pseudopodia and body of the amoeba (Freud, 1914, p. 75).

He also weighs outward-directed destructive behaviour against inward-directed destructiveness in his description of the differences between neurotic and psychotic behaviour. According to Freud (1924*a*, 1924*c*), in neurosis the individual submits to the aggression of external reality and in doing so attacks himself by rejecting an aspect of his id, while in psychosis he attacks an aspect of external reality, thus defending his id.

It seems improbable that the psychotic should sever his ties with external reality in this way (Garma, 1932). It seems more probable that the break with reality is caused by the fact that the psychotic rejects vital instinctual aspects of his id to a greater extent than the neurotic. With this comes an increased rejection of pleasant external objects which extends itself to many other aspects of external reality. The psychotic's inward-directed destructive behaviour cannot therefore be weighed against his outward-directed destructiveness.

It follows that psychotic and neurotic forms of behaviour are not really opposites, as Freud has maintained. The psychotic superego is more persecutory than the neurotic, and by submitting to it masochistically the psychotic destroys his links with pleasant reality and accepts unpleasant reality; he destroys his vital instincts and cultivates his self-destructive ones to a far greater extent than the neurotic. It is true that the psychotic sometimes creates for himself a fantasied reality which is pleasant, but this is a secondary development with implications of an attempted recovery.

Nor does Freud's (1914, p. 74-5) counterbalance of object libido and ego libido explain the psychotic's megalomania. According to Freud, the psychotic has disconnected himself from his external objects, and some of his object libido has become ego libido. The ego feels grandiose as it fills up with libido. But a more probable explanation of the psychotic's megalomania seems to be that he is self-destructively submitted to a persecutory object, like Schreber and his castratory god (Garma, 1932, p. 194). It is this mechanism and not displacement of object libido to the ego that Freud describes in 'Moses and Monotheism' (1939, p. 117):

When the ego has brought the superego the sacrifice of an instinctual renunciation, it expects to be rewarded by receiving more love from it. The

consciousness of deserving this love is felt by it as pride.

This 'pride', which may be thought of as the beginning of megalomania, is therefore the result of submission to an anti-erotic object.

Federn (1956, p. 266), while following Freud in balancing inward- and outward-directed destructiveness against each other, makes a distinction between melancholic and manic forms of behaviour. He maintains that in the manic phase the destructive instinct is outwardly directed and in the melancholic phase it is inwardly directed. The self-destructive behaviour of many manic people, such as gamblers, does not bear this out. Nor does analysis of the manic phases of patients suffering from melancholia confirm Freud's thesis (1921, p. 132) that

their ego ideal might be temporarily resolved into their ego after having previously ruled it with special strictness.

The manic's superego is at least as self-destructive as that of the melancholic. However, it is a deceptive superego which, while appearing to supply erotic or outward-destructive satisfactions, causes the submitted masochistic ego of the manic to behave in a fundamentally self-destructive way. The paradox is that the manic's increased self-esteem is in great part caused by his allowing himself to be deceived in a painful way.

In manic reactions there is a denigrating triumph over objects and a denial of reality, both external and psychic. Contrary to some affirmations of psychoanalytic literature, it is the libidinal objects and instincts that are denied or triumphed over by the ego in obedience to the orders of its superego, and in submission to the death instinct (Garma, 1968, p. 78).

Collective behaviour patterns also fail to confirm that outward-directed destructiveness is in opposition to inward-directed destructiveness. We tend to find that they often go hand in hand.

According to Freud (1930, p. 143):

The commandment 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', is the strongest defence against human aggressiveness . . . The commandment is impossible to fulfil. . .

Is this really true? Only if we presume that self-love is not ambivalent. In a study of that very destructive form of behaviour, anti-judaism (anti-semitism) (Garma, 1963), one of the points

I made was that the self-love of anti-Jewish religious people was negative and therefore caused them to seek suffering, motivated by such beliefs as that they were bad and were born in mortal sin. They must make intense libidinous renunciations while living in this 'valley of tears' and will only find true happiness after death. By making the Jews suffer they are strictly obeying the commandment to 'love thy neighbour as thy self'. Their negative love, i.e. hatred for themselves, causes them to believe that they are fundamentally bad and can only find redemption after death if they suffer and deprive themselves of libidinous objects during life; they therefore ill-treat and persecute themselves and also other people who represent themselves or parts of themselves, i.e. sent to another world where they will find 'happiness'. Other types of genocide can be understood in the same way, i.e. by understanding that the individual loves or attacks his neighbour as himself.

THE DEATH INSTINCT IN THE FINAL STAGES OF PSYCHOANALYTIC TREATMENT

During analysis the death instinct manifests itself as an obstacle in the path of a cure:

during the work of analysis . . . a force which is . . . absolutely resolved to hold on to illness and suffering. One portion of this force has been recognized . . . as a sense of guilt and need for punishment and has been localized . . . in the ego's relation to the super-ego . . . other quotas of the same force . . . may be at work in other, unspecified places (Freud, 1937, p. 242-3).

In the final stages of analysis we come across one of those 'unspecified places' where the death instinct acts independently of guilt feelings, which have become greatly reduced by analysis.

This situation shows up more clearly in the termination of a training analysis when this is extended beyond the basic time stipulated by the psychoanalytic institute. This type of analysis tends to be both long and successful because of the trainee's high psychological ability. Towards the end of training analysis, trainees, who by now have several years of experience as analysts themselves, attain a satisfactory high level of well-being and ability. One frequently feels in identification with the patient's unconscious material that appears in the sessions that it would not be difficult for them to reach a higher level, but a resistance to this becomes

manifest, which, however, does not contain guilt feelings or a wish for punishment.

Towards the end of these analyses we often find phobic attitudes to the idea of new progress which would signify vital achievement. These phobic attitudes are sometimes disguised as achievements and sometimes as apparent mourning at the fantasied separation from the analyst (Garma, 1967). In psychoanalytic descriptions of mourning for the termination of analysis much greater emphasis has been placed on the difficulty of separating from the analyst than on the trainee's phobic attitudes against the possibility of attaining greater vital achievements through his treatment. I feel the phobic attitude is most important.

Towards the end of training analysis, when the trainee has worked through his idealization of the analyst, the resistance to further improvement manifests itself during sessions in a *renewed* attempt to reduce his own analyst's rank. This frequently appears in the trainee's fantasies in the form of a comparison of his own analyst with other analysts or with other professionals who, as can be discovered in the same or other sessions, are also devalued.

It is as though something within the trainee prevented him from forming a positive psychic image of his own analyst, other analysts and other professionals. The trainee's guilt feelings are not the predominating factors in this type of psychological reaction, which increases as the end of treatment approaches, nor is the analyst imbued with the significance of a superego. Rather he is the trainee's double. The denigration of the training analyst in these fantasies in the final stages shows the way the trainee unconsciously harms himself and how he will go on harming himself after his analysis is completed, and with himself others.

It does not appear as though it would be difficult to modify these reactions which seek to degrade both the analyst and the trainee, and yet the final stages of treatment prove the contrary. It is as though this were the inevitable result of a merger of two opposing forces, life and death, with a not altogether satisfactory result. Perhaps this is why, as Freud wrote (1937, pp. 228, 247):

the difference between a person who has not been analysed and the behaviour of a person after he has been analysed is not so thoroughgoing as we aim at making it; . . . analysts, in their own personalities, have not invariably come up to the standard

of psychical normality to which they wish to educate their patients.

This is manifest in several aspects of the rivalries between analysts (Garma, 1970).

Freud, (1937, p. 252) said, with reference to the difficulties of terminating analysis:

it is not important in what form resistance appears, whether as a transference or not. The decisive thing remains that the resistance prevents any change from taking place—that everything stays as it was. We often have the impression that . . . we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached bedrock, and that thus our activities are at an end. This is probably true, since, for the psychical field, the biological field does in fact play the part of the underlying bedrock.

Freud connects this 'bedrock', this 'biological field', with woman's desire for a penis and with man's masculine protest. To differ slightly, while still following Freud's line of reasoning, might it not be possible to suppose that this 'biological field' derives from archaic events which were detrimental to human development and the consequences of which are too deeply imprinted biologically on the human psychosomatic unit for the self-destructive or death urge to be modified by psychoanalysis beyond a certain limit? I refer, for instance, to the archaic events which gave rise to the latency period of sexuality, and to the genitally destructive aspects of the superego.

Even though training analysis does not cure him completely, the young analyst, by discovering the way in which his death instinct works (both when guilt feelings and the need for punishment are involved and when they are not), is also enabled to understand much more clearly the self-destructive behaviour of his patients. In view of this, I pointed out in 1962 that among the curative factors of analysis there is

(a) a decrease of the submission to the superego; consequently (b) a better acceptance of the [vital] instincts, (c) the acceptance [awareness] of the death instinct, and (d) a diminution of the cleavage or splitting between mind and body brought about by the ego's defence mechanisms (1962, p. 224).

THEORY OF THE DEATH INSTINCT AND INTERPRETATIVE TECHNIQUE

The psychoanalytic considerations which led to the formulation of the concept of the death instinct appear to show, as Freud (1933, p. 105) said synthetically,

that masochism is older than sadism and that sadism is the destructive instinct directed outwards, thus acquiring the characteristic of aggressiveness.

If this is so, then the patients' masochistic self-destructive behaviour in connection with their real or fantasied objects, both actual infantile and hereditary, must be interpreted analytically (in the transference situation) as being fundamental to the genesis of their neurosis. Their sadistic forms of behaviour are secondary to the masochistic ones because, as I have already shown, everyone treats his objects in the same way as he treats himself or has himself been treated. Also, the patient's sadistic behaviour towards his objects has a masochistic aim, since his sadism destroys his own erotic possibilities with them. To this must be added the fact that, as a consequence of guilt feelings and the need for punishment, both of which are masochistic, sadism derived from masochism also turns from the object to the subject and thus strengthens the original masochism. Freud (1916, p. 332) follows this type of interpretation in his study of 'Criminals from a Sense of Guilt'. All neurotics are aggressive, i.e. criminal, up to a point, in their relations with others and above all towards themselves, on account of their guilt feelings; in other words, on account of the masochism of their ego before a sadistic superego. The presence of this sadistic superego shows the masochistic behaviour of the neurotic.

Interpretations in analytic sessions should tend to express the urgent unconscious transference fantasy. I have frequently observed during supervisions that trainees tend to emphasize the sadistic aspects of their patients' material while ignoring the underlying masochistic aspects. This is also to be seen occasionally in psychoanalytic clinical histories.

In the case of Oedipus (Rascovsky & Rascovsky, 1968) Freud emphasizes the incestual parricidal tendencies but neglects the influence on Oedipus of his parents' cruelty in piercing his feet and exposing him to die when he was three days old.

In my opinion, the Oedipus story seems to be a sort of 'family romance'. The piercing of Oedipus' feet may be an equivalent of circumcision, and being exposed and left to die soon after birth could symbolize being taken away from his mother and being cared for by others, as happens in modern times when the newborn is left in the nursery and is no longer suckled by its mother, whose flow of milk is suppressed by

medication. Reasoning thus, and drawing on our observations of neurotic patients, one could interpret that the acts which Oedipus thought of as parricide and incest were in reality much more innocent. They seemed terrible to him because he was still subjugated to his cruel superego, not having worked through his traumatic infantile experiences. Audiences are deeply moved by Oedipus' tragedy because of their deep guilt feelings rather than because of the intensity of their parricidal or incestuous tendencies. There is an analogy here with individuals who believe they were 'born in mortal sin', in whom masochistic guilt connected with genitality predominates over parricidal tendencies.

It is detrimental to analytic progress to place emphasis, in interpreting their Oedipus complex to neurotic patients, on their sadism towards both parents and the corresponding fantasied images, without showing that these sadistic reactions are to a large extent caused by masochistic submission to them and other fantasied images. The interpretations of sadism—which Fenichel (1941, pp. 38, 57) also criticized—lead to conclusions of a religious type (as in the religious concept of original mortal sin, which according to Freud signifies parricide); they imply that neurosis, i.e. people's internal sufferings, depend on their aggressive drives against parents or parental substitutes, i.e. against other men or God.

In several analytic studies of headaches, I have found a tendency towards a technically erroneous unilateral type of interpretation of sadism. Until 15 years ago it was customary to interpret headaches as being caused by hostile, i.e. sadistic, urges against other people, in particular against their heads. When these urges were repressed they were turned against the self. This pathogenic concept of headaches was first formulated by Graven in 1924, but is usually attributed to Fromm-Reichmann (1937).

These interpretations have been made so frequently that an analyst once said that the sadistic genesis of headaches is so obvious that it seems a platitude to mention it. These interpretations have even been applied to such cases as that of a woman who used to have headaches after beating her daughter so violently that she stunned and bruised her. One is tempted to wonder what would have happened to the girl if, in accordance with the above concept of the genesis of headaches, the mother had given free rein to her hostility and thus avoided a headache.

It is of interest that the authors included a diagram in their description of this case in which no mention was made of the patient's hostility, but only of her guilt feelings, which seems a better interpretation. Similarly, another analyst reported a case in which she attributed the patient's headaches to repressed hostility turned against herself. But after discussing the case with her colleagues she modified her opinion, and affirmed that there were fewer paranoid reactions of rage and hate (i.e. hostility) in this case than there were of the terror and panic the patient had felt as a child when her mother died.

In 1954 I tried to show that repressed hostile urges turned against the self are of much less importance in the genesis of headaches and some of their special symptoms, such as scotoma (Garma, 1959) than the patient's moral masochism before his actual and infantile real and fantasied objects and particularly his superego. Other Argentinian analysts, F. Cesio, H. Garcia Vega, J. L. Gonzalez, L. Grinberg, A. and M. Rascovsky and J. Weil, express a similar opinion in their writings (Garma, 1958). Monsour (1957) also places more emphasis on masochism than on hostility in migraine; Sperling (1969) related migraine headache directly to the death instinct.

I find that analytic trainees insist particularly on technically erroneous interpretations of repressed hostility turned against the subject, in their analysis of headaches, both their patients' and their own.

My trainees in analysis interpret their own headaches as coming from repressed hostility turned against the self, when they are in situations of submission to me or to someone else in authority whom they believe might have called a given masochistic form of behaviour sadistic. Because of their submission, these trainees repress more correct interpretations of masochistic reactions to real and fantasied persecutory objects and substitute for them another type of interpretation in which they identify themselves with a sadist, a malevolent aggressor, so as to feel guilty.

In my opinion the theory of the death instinct helps the formulation of technically correct therapeutic interpretations which uncover the masochistic reactions underlying manifest or latent sadism or hostility. This is not to deny the importance of sadistic reactions, but rather to avoid the confusion that arises when the situation is attributed mainly to the sadistic components rather than to the underlying masochism which they mask. This theory makes it easier to

understand how present circumstances which are harmful to the individual reactivate the memories of detrimental infantile submissions to real and fantasied objects, and how both increase destructive behaviour, caused by masochistic submission to the superego or other types, of neurotic individuals. (Collective forms of behaviour may be regarded in a similar light.)

IS THE THEORY OF THE DEATH INSTINCT
PESSIMISTIC?

Some analysts feel that the theory of the death instinct is pessimistic because, according to it, if the psychic conflicts are not caused by experiences then they must be congenital, which means irreversible and therefore not capable of being modified by analysis.

This argument can readily be dismissed by comparing the death instinct to the sexual instinct. This is also congenital and contains intense congenital conflicts such as immaturity during the first years of life, the period of latency and slowness of genital development in puberty. None of this implies that an individual's sexual manifestations do not also depend on his individual experiences and cannot be modified by them.

The self-destructive tendencies have been called an instinct because they seem to be as deeply ingrained in the individual as the instinctual behaviour patterns which look for pleasure.

Is the main reason for rejecting the theory of the death instinct the distaste for admitting something in one's behaviour which is opposed

to the pleasure principle? Can we really believe that people become neurotic because they look for pleasure or that it is people's efforts to obtain happiness which make it so difficult to effect a psychoanalytic cure?

The theory of the death instinct tries to explain unnecessary self-caused suffering. It describes and studies the genesis of some of the ways in which people actively try not to be happy, taking into account the evolutionary progress of man and his ancestral and personal experiences. It also in no way denies that it is possible to modify them favourably, since it shows that the death instinct arose from and evolved with humanity's past experiences and that the destructive conflicts which it causes, increase or diminish according to the nature of each person's experience. If this is the case, if the theory of the death instinct can perceive the human personality without self-deception and can indicate the source of trouble and what possibilities there are of attaining happiness, then although it is a sinister theory it can be considered optimistic. On the contrary, if primary auto-destructive tendencies exist, a theory which denies them—and this is implicit in the denial of the death instinct—would be pessimistic. Such a denial would be tantamount to maintaining an illusion and passively accepting auto-destructive elements under a pleasant disguise.

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