

SIGMUND FREUD

Introductory Lectures On
Psychoanalysis



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XXI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBIDO AND THE SEXUAL ORGANIZATIONS

GENTLEMEN, - I am under the impression that I have not succeeded in bringing home to you quite convincingly the importance of the perversions for our view of sexuality, and I should therefore like so far as I can to improve and supplement what I have said.

It is not the case that the perversions alone would have obliged us to make the change in the concept of sexuality which has brought such violent contradictions down on us. The study of infantile sexuality had even more to do with it and it was the concurrence of the two which was decisive for us. But the manifestations of infantile sexuality, however unmistakable they may be in later childhood, seem to melt into indefiniteness towards their beginnings. Anyone who chooses to disregard the history of their development and their analytic context will deny that they are of a sexual character and will attribute some undifferentiated character to them instead. You must not forget that at the moment we are not in possession of any generally recognized criterion of the sexual nature of a process, apart, once again, from a connection with the reproductive

function which we must reject as being too narrow-minded. The biological criteria, such as the periodicities of twenty-three and twenty-eight days postulated by Wilhelm Fliess, are still highly debatable; the chemical characteristics of the sexual process, which we may suspect, are still awaiting discovery. On the other hand, the sexual perversions of adults are something tangible and unambiguous. As is already shown by the name by which they are universally known, they are unquestionably sexual. Whether they are described as indications of degeneracy or in any other way, no one has yet had the courage to class them as anything but phenomena of sexual life. On their account alone we are justified in asserting that sexuality and reproduction do not coincide, for it is obvious that all of them disavow the aim of reproduction.

I find a parallel here which is not uninteresting. Whereas for most people 'conscious' and 'psychical' are the same, we have been obliged to extend the concept of 'psychical' and to recognize something 'psychical' that is not 'conscious'. And in just the same way, whereas other people declare that 'sexual' and 'connected with reproduction' (or, if you prefer to put it more shortly, 'genital') are identical, we cannot avoid postulating something 'sexual' that is not 'genital' - has nothing to do with reproduction. The similarity here is only a formal one, but it is not without a deeper foundation.

But if the existence of sexual perversions is such a decisive argument in this question, why has it not long since had its effect and settled the matter? I really cannot say. I think it is connected with the fact that these sexual perversions are subject to a quite special ban, which has even affected theory and has stood in the way of the scientific consideration of them. It is as though no one could forget that they are not only something

disgusting but also something monstrous and dangerous – as though people felt them as seductive, and had at bottom to fight down a secret envy of those who were enjoying them. One is reminded of the admission made by the condemnatory Landgraf in the famous Tannhäuser parody:

‘Im Venusberg vergass er Ehr und Pflicht!

– Merkwürdig, unser einem passiert so etwas nicht.’³⁴

In reality perverts are poor wretches, rather, who have to pay extremely dear for their hard-won satisfaction.

What makes the activity of perverts so unmistakably sexual in spite of all the strangeness of its objects and aims is the fact that as a rule an act of perverse satisfaction nevertheless ends in complete orgasm and voidance of the genital products. This is of course only the result of the people concerned being adults. In children orgasm and genital excretion are scarcely possible; their place is taken by hints which are once more not recognized as being clearly sexual.

There is something else that I must add in order to complete our view of sexual perversions. However infamous they may be, however sharply they may be contrasted with normal sexual activity, quiet consideration will show that some perverse trait or other is seldom absent from the sexual life of normal people. Even a kiss can claim to be described as a perverse act, since it consists in the bringing together of two oral erotogenic zones instead of the two genitals. Yet no one rejects it as perverse;

³⁴ [‘The Venusberg made him forget

Honour and Duty thus!

– Strange how these things don’t happen To people such as us.’]

on the contrary, it is permitted in theatrical performances as a softened hint at the sexual act. But precisely kissing can easily turn into a complete perversion – if, that is to say, it becomes so intense that a genital discharge and orgasm follow upon it directly, an event that is far from rare. We can learn, too, that for one person feeling and looking at the object are indispensable preconditions of sexual enjoyment, that another person will pinch or bite at the climax of sexual excitation, that the highest pitch of excitement in lovers is not always provoked by the genitals but by some other region of the object's body, and any number of similar things besides. There is no sense in excluding people with individual traits of this kind from the class of the normal and putting them among the perverts. On the contrary, we shall recognize more and more clearly that the essence of the perversions lies not in the extension of the sexual aim, not in the replacement of the genitals, not even always in the variant choice of the object, but solely in the exclusiveness with which these deviations are carried out and as a result of which the sexual act serving the purpose of reproduction is put on one side. In so far as the perverse actions are inserted in the performance of the normal sexual act as preparatory or intensifying contributions, they are in reality not perversions at all. The gulf between normal and perverse sexuality is of course very much narrowed by facts of this kind. It is an easy conclusion that normal sexuality has emerged out of something that was in existence before it, by weeding out certain features of that material as unserviceable and collecting together the rest in order to subordinate them to a new aim, that of reproduction.

Before we make use of our familiarity with the perversions to plunge once again into the study of infantile sexuality on the basis of clearer premisses, I must draw your attention to

an important difference between them. Perverse sexuality is as a rule excellently centred: all its actions are directed to an aim - usually to a single one; one component instinct has gained the upper hand in it and is either the only one observable or has subjected the others to its purposes. In that respect there is no distinction between perverse and normal sexuality other than the fact that their dominating component instincts and consequently their sexual aims are different. In both of them, one might say, a well-organized tyranny has been established, but in each of the two a different family has seized the reins of power. Infantile sexuality, on the other hand, lacks, speaking generally, any such centring and organization; its separate component instincts have equal rights, each of them goes its own way to obtaining pleasure. Both the absence and the presence of centring harmonize well, of course, with the fact that both perverse and normal sexuality have arisen out of infantile sexuality. Incidentally, there are also cases of perverse sexuality which have a much greater resemblance to the infantile kind, since in them numerous component instincts have put through (or, more correctly, have persisted in) their aims independently of one another. It is better in such cases to speak of infantilism in sexual life rather than of a perversion.

Thus forearmed we can proceed to the consideration of a suggestion which we shall certainly not be spared. 'Why', we shall be asked, 'are you so obstinate in describing as being already sexuality what on your own evidence are indefinable manifestations in childhood out of which sexual life will later develop? Why should you not be content instead with giving them a physiological description and simply say that in an infant at the breast we already observe activities, such as sensual sucking or holding back the excreta, which show us that he is

striving for “organ-pleasure”? In that way you would have avoided the hypothesis, so repugnant to every feeling, of the smallest babies having a sexual life.’ – Indeed, Gentlemen, I have no objection at all to organ-pleasure. I know that even the supreme pleasure of sexual union is only an organpleasure attached to the activity of the genitals. But can you tell me when this originally indifferent organpleasure acquires the sexual character which it undoubtedly possesses in the later phases of development? Do we know any more about ‘organ-pleasure’ than about sexuality? You will reply that it gains its sexual character precisely when the genitals begin to play their part; ‘sexual’ coincides with ‘genital’. You will even reject the objection raised by the perversions by pointing out to me that in the majority of perversions a genital orgasm is after all aimed at, even if it is arrived at by a method other than the union of the genitals. You are certainly taking up a much stronger position in determining the characteristics of what is sexual if you knock out of it the relation to reproduction which is made untenable by the perversions and put genital activity in its place. But, if so, we are no longer far apart: it is only a question of the genital organs versus the other organs. What are you going to do, however, about the numerous experiences which show you that the genitals can be represented as regards their yield of pleasure by other organs, as in the case of kissing or of the perverse practices of voluptuaries or of the symptoms of hysteria? In that neurosis it is quite usual for signs of stimulation, sensations and innervations, and even the processes of erection, which belong properly to the genitals, to be displaced on to other, remote regions of the body – as, for instance, by transposition upwards, to the head and face. Being thus convinced that you have nothing to catch hold of for your characterization of what is sexual, you

will no doubt have to make up your minds to follow my example and extend the description of being 'sexual' to the activities of early childhood, too, which strive for organ-pleasure.

And now, for my justification, there are two other considerations which I must ask you to take into account. As you know, we call the dubious and indefinable pleasurable activities of earliest childhood sexual because, in the course of analysis, we arrive at them from the symptoms after passing through indisputably sexual material. They need not necessarily themselves be sexual on that account – agreed! But take an analogous case. Suppose we had no means of observing the development from their seed of two dicotyledonous plants, the apple-tree and the bean, but that it was possible in both cases for us to trace their development backwards from the fully developed individual plant to the first seedling with two seedleaves. The two seed leaves have a neutral appearance; they are just alike in both cases. Am I then to suppose that they are really alike, and that the specific difference between an apple-tree and a bean is only introduced into the plants later? Or is it biologically more correct to believe that this difference is already there in the seedling, although I cannot observe any distinction in the seed leaves? But we are doing the same thing when we call the pleasure in the activities of an infant-in-arms a sexual one. I cannot discuss here whether each and every organ-pleasure should be called a sexual one or whether, alongside of the sexual one, there is another which does not deserve to be so called. I know too little about organ-pleasure and its determinants; and, in view of the retrogressive character of analysis in general, I cannot feel surprised if at the very end I arrive at what are for the time being indefinable factors.

And one thing more! On the whole you will have gained very

little for what you want to assert – the sexual purity of children – even if you succeed in convincing me that it would be better to regard the activities of infants-in-arms as non-sexual. For the sexual life of children is already free from all these doubts from the third year of life onwards: at about that time the genitals already begin to stir, a period of infantile masturbation – of genital satisfaction, therefore – sets in, regularly perhaps. The mental and social phenomena of sexual life need no longer be absent; the choice of an object, an affectionate preference for particular people, a decision, even, in favour of one of the two sexes, jealousy – all these have been established by impartial observations made independently of psycho-analysis and before its time, and they can be confirmed by any observer who cares to see them. You will object that you have never doubted the early awakening of affection; you have only doubted whether this affection bears a ‘sexual’ character. It is true that children have already learnt to conceal this between the ages of three and eight. But if you are attentive you will be able nevertheless to collect enough evidence of the ‘sensual’ aims of this affection, and whatever you still lack after that can easily be supplied in plenty by the investigations of analysis. The sexual aims at this period of life are intimately connected with the child’s contemporary sexual researches, of which I have given you some instances. The perverse character of some of these aims is of course dependent on the child’s constitutional immaturity, for he has not yet discovered the aim that consists in the act of copulation.

From about the sixth to the eighth year of life onwards, we can observe a halt and retrogression in sexual development, which, in cases where it is most propitious culturally, deserves to be called a period of latency. The latency period may also be absent:

it need not bring with it any interruption of sexual activity and sexual interests along the whole line. The majority of experiences and mental impulses before the start of the latency period now fall victim to infantile amnesia – the forgetting (already discussed by us) which veils our earliest youth from us and makes us strangers to it. The task is set us in every psycho-analysis of bringing this forgotten period back into memory. It is impossible to avoid a suspicion that the beginnings of sexual life which are included in that period have provided the motive for its being forgotten – that this forgetting, in fact, is an outcome of repression.

From the third year of life a child's sexual life shows much agreement with an adult's. It differs from the latter, as we already know, in lacking a firm organization under the primacy of the genitals, in its inevitable traits of perversion and also, of course, in the far lesser intensity of the whole trend. But from the point of view of theory the most interesting phases of sexual, or, as we will say, of libidinal, development lie earlier than this point of time. This course of development takes place so rapidly that we should probably never have succeeded in getting a firm hold of its fleeting pictures by direct observation. It was only with the help of the psycho-analytic investigation of the neuroses that it became possible to discern the still earlier phases of the development of the libido. These are nothing but constructions, to be sure, but, if you carry out psycho-analyses in practice, you will find that they are necessary and useful constructions. You will soon learn how it comes about that pathology can here put us in possession of conditions which we should inevitably overlook in a normal subject.

Accordingly, I can now describe to you the form taken by a child's sexual life before the establishment of the primacy of the

genitals, preparations for which are made in the first period of infancy preceding the latency period and which is permanently organized from puberty onwards. A kind of loose organization which may be called 'pregenital' exists during this early period. During this phase what stand in the forefront are not the genital component instincts but the sadistic and anal ones. The contrast between 'masculine' and 'feminine' plays no part here as yet. Its place is taken by the contrast between 'active' and 'passive', which may be described as a precursor of the sexual polarity and which later on is soldered to that polarity, what appears to us as masculine in the activities of this phase, when we look at it from the point of view of the genital phase, turns out to be an expression of an instinct for mastery which easily passes over into cruelty. Trends with a passive aim are attached to the erotogenic zone of the anal orifice, which is very important at this period. The instincts for looking and for gaining knowledge are powerfully at work; the genitals actually play a part in sexual life only as organs for the excretion of urine. The component instincts of this phase are not without objects, but those objects do not necessarily converge into a single object. The sadistic anal organization is the immediate forerunner of the phase of genital primacy. Detailed study shows how much of it is retained in the later definitive shape of things and shows too the way in which its component instincts are compelled to take their place in the new genital organization. Behind the sadistic anal phase of libidinal development we get a glimpse of a still earlier and more primitive stage of organization, in which the erotogenic zone of the mouth plays the chief part. As you will guess, the sexual activity of sensual sucking belongs to it. We must admire the understanding of the Ancient Egyptians who, in their art, represented children, including the God Horus, with a finger in

their mouth. Only recently Abraham has given examples of the traces which this primitive oral phase leaves behind it in later sexual life.

I can well suppose, Gentlemen, that this last account of the sexual organizations has obstructed rather than instructed you, and it may be that I have once more entered too much into details. But you must have patience. What you have just heard will derive increased value for you from its later application. For the present you should keep firmly in mind that sexual life (or, as we put it, the libidinal function) does not emerge as something ready-made and does not even develop further in its own likeness, but passes through a series of successive phases which do not resemble one another; its development is thus several times repeated – like that of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The turning-point of this development is the subordination of all the component sexual instincts under the primacy of the genitals and along with this the subjection of sexuality to the reproductive function. This is preceded by a sexual life that might be described as distracted – the independent activity of the different component instincts striving for organ-pleasure. This anarchy is mitigated by abortive beginnings of ‘pregenital’ organizations – a sadistic-anal phase preceded by an oral one, which is perhaps the most primitive. In addition, there are the various, still incompletely known, processes which lead one stage of organization over to the subsequent and next higher one. We shall learn later what an important light is thrown on the neuroses by the fact that the libido passes through such a long course of development and one which has so many breaks in it.

To-day we will follow yet another side of this development namely the relation of the component sexual instincts to their

object. Or rather, we will make a hasty survey of this development and dwell somewhat longer on one of its rather late consequences. A few of the components of the sexual instinct, there, have an object from the first and hold fast to it – for instance, the instinct for mastery (sadism) and the scopophilic and epistemophilic instincts. Others, more definitely linked to particular erotogenic zones of the body, have one to begin with only, so long as they are still attached to the non-sexual functions, and give it up when they become separated from them. Thus the first object of the oral component of the sexual instinct is the mother's breast which satisfies the infant's need for nourishment. The erotic component, which is satisfied simultaneously during the sucking, makes itself independent with the act of sensual sucking [lutschen]; it gives up the outside object and replaces it by an area of the subject's own body. The oral instinct becomes auto-erotic, as are the anal and other erotogenic instincts from the first. Further development, to put the matter as concisely as possible, has two aims: firstly, the abandonment of auto-erotism, the replacement of the subject's own body once more by an outside object, and secondly, the unification of the various objects of the separate instincts and their replacement by a single object. This can, of course, only be achieved if the object is again a whole body, similar to the subject's own. Nor can it be effected unless a number of the auto-erotic instinctual impulses are left behind as being unserviceable.

The processes of finding an object are fairly complex and no comprehensive account has hitherto been given of them. For our purposes it may be specially pointed out that when, in the years of childhood before puberty, the process has in some respects reached a conclusion, the object that has been found

turns out to be almost identical with the first object of the oral pleasure-instinct, which was reached by attachment. Though it is not actually the mother's breast, at least it is the mother. We call the mother the first loveobject. For we speak of love when we bring the mental side of the sexual trends into the foreground and want to force back the underlying physical or 'sensual' instinctual demands or to forget them for a moment. At the time at which the child's mother becomes his love-object the psychical work of repression has already begun in him, which is withdrawing from his knowledge awareness of a part of his sexual aims. To his choice of his mother as a love-object everything becomes attached which, under the name of the 'Oedipus complex', has attained so much importance in the psycho-analytic explanation of the neuroses and has played no less a part, perhaps, in the resistance to psycho-analysis.

Listen to this episode which occurred in the course of the present war. One of the stout disciples of psycho-analysis was stationed as medical officer on the German front somewhere in Poland. He attracted his colleagues' attention by the fact that he occasionally exercised an unexpected influence on a patient. When he was questioned, he acknowledged that he was employing the methods of psycho-analysis and declared his readiness to convey his knowledge to his colleagues. Every evening there after the medical officers of the corps, his colleagues and his superiors, came together in order to learn the secret doctrines of analysis. All went well for a while; but when he spoke to his audience about the Oedipus complex, one of his superiors rose, declared he did not believe it, that it was a vile act on the part of the lecturer to speak of such things to them, honest men who were fighting for their country and fathers of a family, and that he forbade the continuance of the lectures. That was the end of

the matter. The analyst got himself transferred to another part of the front. It seems to me a bad thing, however, if a German victory requires that science shall be 'organized' in this way, and German science will not respond well to organization of such a kind.

And now you will be eager to hear what this terrible Oedipus complex contains. Its name tells you. You all know the Greek legend of King Oedipus, who was destined by fate to kill his father and take his mother to wife, who did everything possible to escape the oracle's decree and punished himself by blinding when he learned that he had none the less unwittingly committed both these crimes. I hope many of you may yourselves have felt the shattering effect of the tragedy in which Sophocles has treated the story. The work of the Athenian dramatist exhibits the way in which the long-past deed of Oedipus is gradually brought to light by an investigation ingeniously protracted and fanned into life by ever fresh relays of evidence. To this extent it has a certain resemblance to the progress of a psycho-analysis. In the course of the dialogue Jocasta, the deluded mother and wife, declares herself opposed to the continuance of the enquiry. She appeals to the fact that many people have dreamt of lying with their mothers, but that dreams should be despised. We do not despise dreams - least of all, typical dreams which occur to many people; and we do not doubt that the dream referred to by Jocasta has an intimate connection with the strange and terrifying content of the legend.

It is a surprising thing that the tragedy of Sophocles does not call up indignant repudiation in his audience - a reaction similar to that of our simple-minded army doctor but far better justified. For fundamentally it is an amoral work: it absolves men from moral responsibility, exhibits the gods as promoters of crime

and shows the impotence of the moral impulses of men which struggle against crime. It might easily be supposed that the material of the legend had in view an indictment of the gods and of fate; and in the hands of Euripides, the critic and enemy of the gods, it would probably have become such an indictment. But with the devout Sophocles there is no question of an application of that kind. The difficulty is overcome by the pious sophistry that to bow to the will of the gods is the highest morality even when it promotes crime. I cannot think that this morality is a strong point of the play, but it has no influence on its effect. It is not to it that the auditor reacts but to the secret sense and content of the legend. He reacts as though by self analysis he had recognized the Oedipus complex in himself and had unveiled the will of the gods and the oracle as exalted disguises of his own unconscious. It is as though he was obliged to remember the two wishes – to do away with his father and in place of him to take his mother to wife – and to be horrified at them. And he understands the dramatist's voice as though it were saying to him: 'You are struggling in vain against your responsibility and are protesting in vain of what you have done in opposition to these criminal intentions. You are guilty, for you have not been able to destroy them; they still persist in you unconsciously.' And there is psychological truth contained in this. Even if a man has repressed his evil impulses into the unconscious and would like to tell himself afterwards that he is not responsible for them, he is nevertheless bound to be aware of this responsibility as a sense of guilt whose basis is unknown to him.

There can be no doubt that the Oedipus complex may be looked upon as one of the most important sources of the sense of guilt by which neurotics are so often tormented. But more than this: in a study of the beginnings of human religion and morality

which I published in 1913 under the title of Totem and Taboo I put forward a suggestion that man kind as a whole may have acquired its sense of guilt, the ultimate source of religion and morality, at the beginning of its history, in connection with the Oedipus complex. I should be very glad to tell you more about this, but I had better leave it on one side. Once one has begun on that topic it is hard to break off; and we must go back to individual psychology.

What, then, can be gathered about the Oedipus complex from the direct observation of children at the time of their making their choice of an object before the latency period? Well, it is easy to see that the little man wants to have his mother all to himself, that he feels the presence of his father as a nuisance, that he is resentful if his father indulges in any signs of affection towards his mother and that he shows satisfaction when his father has gone on a journey or is absent. He will often express his feelings directly in words and promise his mother to marry her. It will be thought that this amounts to little compared to the deeds of Oedipus; but in fact it is enough, it is the same thing at root. Observation is often obscured by the circumstance that on other occasions the same child will simultaneously give evidence of great affection for his father. But contrary – or, as it is better to say, ‘ambivalent’ – emotional attitudes, which in adults would lead to a conflict, remain compatible with each other for a long time in children, just as later they find a permanent place beside each other in the unconscious. It will also be objected that the little boy’s conduct arises from egoistic motives and gives no grounds for postulating an erotic complex: the child’s mother attends to all his needs, so that he has an interest in preventing her from looking after anyone else. This also is true; but it will soon become clear that in this situation as in similar ones the

egoistic interest is merely affording a point of support to which the erotic trend is attached. The little boy may show the most undisguised sexual curiosity about his mother, he may insist upon sleeping beside her at night, he may force his presence on her while she is dressing or may even make actual attempts at seducing her, as his mother will often notice and report with amusement – all of which puts beyond doubt the erotic nature of his tie with his mother. Nor must it be forgotten that the mother devotes the same attention to a little daughter without producing the same result and that the father often competes with her in looking after the boy and yet fails to gain the same significance as she does. In short, the factor of sexual preference cannot be eliminated from the situation by any criticism. From the standpoint of egoistic interest it would be simply foolish of the little man not to prefer to put up with having two people in his service rather than only one of them.

As you see, I have only described the relation of a boy to his father and mother. Things happen in just the same way with little girls, with the necessary changes: an affectionate attachment to her father, a need to get rid of her mother as superfluous and to take her place, a coquetry which already employs the methods of later womanhood – these offer a charming picture, especially in small girls, which makes us forget the possibly grave consequences lying behind this infantile situation. We must not omit to add that the parents themselves often exercise a determining influence on the awakening of a child's Oedipus attitude by themselves obeying the pull of sexual attraction, and that where there are several children the father will give the plainest evidence of his greater affection for his little daughter and the mother for her son. But the spontaneous nature of the Oedipus complex in children cannot be seriously shaken even

by this factor.

When other children appear on the scene the Oedipus complex is enlarged into a family complex. This, with fresh support from the egoistic sense of injury, gives grounds for receiving the new brothers or sisters with repugnance and for unhesitatingly getting rid of them by a wish. It is even true that as a rule children are far readier to give verbal expression to these feelings of hate than to those arising from the parental complex. If a wish of this kind is fulfilled and the undesired addition to the family is removed again shortly afterwards by death, we can discover from a later analysis what an important experience this death has been to the child, even though it need not have remained fixed in his memory. A child who has been put into second place by the birth of a brother or sister, and who is now for the first time almost isolated from his mother, does not easily forgive her this loss of place; feelings which in an adult would be described as greatly embittered arise in him and are often the basis of a permanent estrangement. We have already mentioned that the child's sexual researches, with all their consequences, usually follow from this vital experience of his. As these brothers and sisters grow up, the boy's attitude to them undergoes very significant transformations. He may take his sister as a love-object by way of substitute for his faithless mother. Where there are several brothers, all of them courting a younger sister, situations of hostile rivalry, which are so important for later life, arise already in the nursery. A little girl may find in her elder brother a substitute for her father who no longer takes an affectionate interest in her as he did in her earliest years. Or she may take a younger sister as a substitute for the baby she has vainly wished for from her father.

This and very much else of a similar nature will be shown to

you by the direct observation of children and by the consideration of clearly retained memories from childhood uninfluenced by analysis. From this you will conclude among other things that the position of a child in the family order is a factor of extreme importance in determining the shape of his later life and should deserve consideration in every life-history. But, what is more important, in view of this information which can be so easily obtained, you will not be able to recall without a smile the pronouncements of science in explanation of the prohibition of incest. There is no end to what has been invented on the subject. It has been said that sexual inclination is diverted from members of the same family who are of the opposite sex by the fact of having lived together from childhood; or, again, that a biological purpose of avoiding inbreeding is represented psychically by an innate horror of incest. In all this the fact is entirely overlooked that such an inexorable prohibition of it in law and custom would not be needed if there were any reliable natural barriers against the temptation to incest. The truth is just the opposite. A human being's first choice of an object is regularly an incestuous one, aimed, in the case of the male, at his mother and sister; and it calls for the severest prohibitions to deter this persistent infantile tendency from realization. Among the primitive races still living to-day, among savages, the prohibitions against incest are even very much stricter than among ourselves, and Theodor Reik has only recently shown in a brilliant work that the puberty rites of savages, which represent a re-birth, have the sense of releasing the boy from his incestuous bond with his mother and of reconciling him with his father.

Mythology will teach you that incest, which is supposed to be so much detested by humans, is unhesitatingly allowed to the gods. And you may learn from ancient history that incestuous

sister marriage was a sanctified injunction upon the person of the Ruler (among the Egyptian Pharaohs and the Incas of Peru). What was in question was thus a privilege forbidden to the common herd. Mother-incest was one of the crimes of Oedipus, parricide was the other. It may be remarked in passing that they are also the two great crimes proscribed by totemism, the first socio-religious institution of mankind.

But let us now turn from the direct observation of children to the analytic examination of adults who have become neurotic. What help does analysis give towards a further knowledge of the Oedipus complex? That can be answered in a word. Analysis confirms all that the legend describes. It shows that each of these neurotics has himself been an Oedipus or, what comes to the same thing, has, as a reaction to the complex, become a Hamlet. The analytic account of the Oedipus complex is, of course, a magnification and coarsening of the infantile sketch. The hatred of the father, the death-wishes against him, are no longer hinted at timidly, the affection for the mother admits that its aim is to possess her as a woman. Should we really attribute such blatant and extreme emotional impulses to the tender years of childhood, or is analysis deceiving us by an admixture of some new factor? It is not hard to find one. Whenever someone gives an account of a past event, even if he is a historian, we must take into account what he unintentionally puts back into the past from the present or from some intermediate time, thus falsifying his picture of it. In the case of a neurotic it is even a question whether this putting back is an entirely unintentional one; later on we shall have to discover reasons for this and have to do justice in general to the fact of 'retrospective phantasying'. We can easily see, too, that hatred of the father is reinforced by a number of factors arising from later times and circumstances

and that the sexual desires towards the mother are cast into forms which must have been alien as yet to a child. But it would be a vain effort to seek to explain the whole Oedipus complex by retrospective phantasying and to attach it to later times. Its infantile core and more or less of its accessories remain as they were confirmed by the direct observation of children.

The clinical fact which meets us behind the form of the Oedipus complex as it is established by analysis is of the highest practical significance. We learn that at puberty, when the sexual instinct first makes its demands in full strength, the old familiar incestuous objects are taken up again and freshly cathected with libido. The infantile object-choice was only a feeble one, but it was a prelude, pointing the direction for the object-choice at puberty. At this point, then, very intense emotional processes come into play, following the direction of the Oedipus complex or reacting against it, processes which, however, since their premisses have become intolerable, must to a large extent remain apart from consciousness. From this time onwards, the human individual has to devote himself to the great task of detaching himself from his parents, and not until that task is achieved can he cease to be a child and become a member of the social community. For the son this task consists in detaching his libidinal wishes from his mother and employing them for the choice of a real outside love-object, and in reconciling himself with his father if he has remained in opposition to him, or in freeing himself from his pressure if, as a reaction to his infantile rebelliousness, he has become subservient to him. These tasks are set to everyone; and it is remarkable how seldom they are dealt with in an ideal manner – that is, in one which is correct both psychologically and socially. By neurotics, however, no solution at all is arrived at: the son remains all his life bowed

beneath his father's authority and he is unable to transfer his libido to an outside sexual object. With the relationship changed round, the same fate can await the daughter. In this sense the Oedipus complex may justly be regarded as the nucleus of the neuroses.

As you may imagine, Gentlemen, I have passed very cursorily over a great number of considerations of both practical and theoretical importance connected with the Oedipus complex. Nor shall I enter into its variations or its possible reversal. Among its remoter connections I will only give you a further hint that it has turned out to have a highly important effect on literary production. In a valuable work Otto Rank has shown that dramatists of every period have chosen their material in the main from the Oedipus and incest complex and its variations and disguises. Nor should it be allowed to pass unnoticed that the two criminal wishes of the Oedipus complex were recognized as the true representatives of the uninhibited life of the instincts long before the time of psycho-analysis. Among the writings of the Encyclopaedist Diderot you will find a celebrated dialogue, *Le neveu Rameau*, which was rendered into German by no less a person than Goethe. There you may read this remarkable sentence: 'Si le petit sauvage était abandonné à lui-même, qu'il conservât toute son imbécillité, et qu'il réunît au peu de raison de l'enfant au berceau la violence des passions de l'homme de trente ans, il tordrait le col à son père et coucherait avec sa mère.'³⁵

But there is something else that I cannot pass by. The reminder

³⁵ ['If the little savage were left to himself, preserving all his foolishness and adding to the small sense of a child in the cradle the violent passions of a man of thirty, he would strangle his father and lie with his mother.']

of dreams given to us by the mother and wife of Oedipus must not be allowed to remain fruitless. Do you recall the outcome of our dream-analyses - how the wishes that construct dreams are so often of a perverse or incestuous nature or reveal an unsuspected hostility to those who are nearest and dearest to the dreamer? At that time we gave no explanation of the origin of these evil impulses. Now you can find it for yourselves. They are allocations of the libido and object-cathexes which date from early infancy and have long since been abandoned as far as conscious life is concerned, but which prove still to be present at night-time and to be capable of functioning in a certain sense. Since, however, everyone, and not only neurotics, experiences these perverse, incestuous and murderous dreams, we may conclude that people who are normal to-day have passed along a path of development that has led through the perversions and object-cathexes of the Oedipus complex, that that is the path of normal development and that neurotics merely exhibit to us in a magnified and coarsened form what the analysis of dreams reveals to us in healthy people as well. And this is one of the reasons why I dealt with the study of dreams before that of neurotic symptoms.