

EGO AND REALITY¹

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In psycho-analytic theory we are accustomed to think of the relationship between ego and reality as one of adjustment or adaptation. The so-called mature ego has renounced the pleasure-principle and has substituted for it the reality-principle. It does not follow the direct path of instinctual gratification, without regard to consequences, to the demands of reality, does not indulge in hallucinatory wish-fulfilment, but tests external reality and thinks and acts accordingly, adapting its thoughts and actions to the demands of reality. This conception of the relationship between ego and reality presupposes a fundamental antagonism which has to be bridged or overcome otherwise in order to make life in this reality possible.

And indeed we see that Freud, in *The Ego and the Id*, calls the ego 'the dweller in a borderland', trying 'to mediate between the world and the id, to make the id comply with the world's demands and . . . to accommodate the world to the id's desires'.² We know that Freud's first conception of the ego was that it represents the repressive, defensive agency within the psychic apparatus. Only later did he stress the synthetic function of the ego. He speaks then of the ego as 'an organization distinguished by a very remarkable striving toward unification, synthesis'.³ Yet he tends to see this synthetic function itself as a defence. In *The Ego and the Id* he describes vividly the unfortunate role of the ego, sandwiched between id and outer world (and superego), trying to compromise between and to satisfy these masters and to defend itself against their different demands. Freud's recognition of the defensive function of the ego has never ceased

to play a predominant role in his conception of the ego, and has again and again overshadowed other aspects of the ego in psycho-analytic thinking. Correspondingly, external reality has predominantly been seen in the aspect of a hostile, threatening power.

Freud also characterizes the ego as 'a kind of façade of the id, a foreground, like an external, cortical layer of it'. 'We know, outer layers owe their peculiar characteristics to the modifying influence of the external medium on which they border. Thus, we imagine the ego as that layer of the psychic apparatus, the id, which has been modified by the influence of the external world (reality)' (*The Problem of Lay Analysis*).

We have then, so far, the following picture of the ego: it is a mediator between the outer and inner world (between external reality and id), an organizing agency, tending toward synthesis and unification (as against the id which is 'scattered' and individualistic). Genetically speaking, it is differentiated from the id through the modifying influence of external reality; in biologicistic terms, it is the outer, cortical layer of the id and has as such become different from the inner stratum. The influence of external reality, which has brought forth the ego, is seen as essentially threatening and hostile. Correspondingly, the predominant function of the ego is a defensive one, not only against reality but also against the inner world of the id which disregards reality. It is this threatened position of the ego, threatened from three sides (external reality, id and superego), which makes it so susceptible to inner conflicts and disturbances.⁴

¹ Based on a paper read before the Baltimore Psycho-analytic Society, June, 1949.

² Freud, S. (1942) *The Ego and the Id*, London, p. 83.

³ — (1927) *The Problem of Lay Analysis*, New York; (1947) London.

⁴ 'Reality', in this paper, is meant in the sense of the 'external world', the world of 'external objects'. In *The Ego and the Id* Freud says 'the id, however, is another outer world to it' (the ego) (p. 82). In this sense, the

ego is in between two realities or outer worlds, the id and the external world, and thus by implication not real itself, since Reality and Outer World are synonymous terms for Freud. The problems raised by this implication of the ego as unreal (due to certain philosophical preconceptions) and its far-reaching consequences for psycho-analytic theory and practice cannot be discussed in this paper.

The only statement we have heard so far about the genesis of the ego is that it becomes differentiated from the id through the modifying influence of the medium bordering on the id, the external world. How did this modification come to pass? How did the ego develop?

I shall condense a passage from *Civilization and its Discontents* which throws some light on this question. Freud states in the first chapter that the ego-feeling of the adult must have had a development which we can try to reconstruct. The neonate does not as yet distinguish an ego from an outer world. Some sources of stimulation, in which later on he will recognize his body organs, can send him sensations at any time, while others do so at times and at other times are not available. The most important of these latter sources of stimulation is the mother's breast. It is not always available. In this way for the first time something like an 'object' becomes constituted, an outside against an inside, and therewith a border between the two. It is important to realize that when we speak of object and ego at this stage of development, these terms characterize the most primitive beginnings of the later structures thus designated. Ego, id and external reality become distinguishable in their most primitive, germinal stages. This state of affairs can be expressed either by saying that 'the ego detaches itself from the external world', or, more correctly: the ego detaches from itself an outer world. Originally the ego contains everything. Our adult ego-feeling, Freud says, is only a shrunken vestige of an all-embracing feeling of intimate connection, or, we might say, unity with the environment.⁵

In other words, the psychological constitution of ego and outer world go hand in hand. Nothing can be an 'object', something that stands against something else, as long as everything is contained in the unitary feeling of the primary, unlimited narcissism of the newborn, where mouth and mother's breast are still one and the same. On the other hand, we cannot, in the strict sense, speak of an ego, a mediator between an id and an external world, where there is as yet nothing to mediate. The infant's repeated experience that something, in his original feeling a part of him, is not always available, this repeated experience of separateness leads to the development of an ego which

has to organize, mediate, unify. Freud in his essay on narcissism⁶ already expresses this clearly, saying that 'the development of the ego consists in a moving away from primary narcissism'.

It should be clear, then, that in correspondence to a primary ego, a pre-ego so to speak, of the primary narcissistic stage, we have to conceive of primary objects and primary reality; and further, that this primary reality, and its subsequent stages of development, are very different from 'reality' as a finished product which is related to the 'mature' ego.

The trend of thought in the theory of the development of the ego, so far, appears to be as follows: The ego is pictured as a cortical layer of the psychic apparatus. This layer comes into being through increasing tension between the psychic apparatus of the organism and what later is experienced as the external world. This is an image borrowed from biology, in analogy to a biochemical system consisting of two phases, separated by a membrane, which membrane is the structural expression, or crystallization, of the dynamic interrelationship between forces in the two media bordering on each other. In psychological terms: in successive stages the growing infant and child moves away from primary narcissism in which there were as yet no boundaries separating him from an 'outside world'. The development of the relationship with the mother is representative of this growth process, even though this does not for long remain the only 'outside' the child is related to. There is, biologically and psychologically, an increasing emancipation from the mother which leads to an ever-growing tension. The less mother and child are one, the more they become separate entities, the more will there be a dynamic interplay of forces between these two 'systems'. As the mother becomes 'outside', and hand in hand with this, the child an 'inside', there arises a tension system between the two. Expressed in different terms, libidinal forces arise between infant and mother. As infant (mouth) and mother (breast) are not identical, or better, not one whole, any longer, a libidinal flow between infant and mother originates, in an urge towards re-establishing the original unity. It is this process in which consists the beginning constitution of a libidinal object. The emanci-

⁵ Freud, S. (1949) *Civilization and its Discontents*, London, pp. 11-14. Freud refers in this connection to the contributions to this subject by Ferenczi and Federn,

which clearly have influenced his thinking.

⁶ — (1914) 'On Narcissism: an Introduction', *Collected Papers*, 4 (1948), London.

pation from the mother, which entails the tension system between child and mother and the constitution of libidinal forces directed towards her, as well as of libidinal forces on the part of the mother toward, the child—this emancipation and tension culminate in the phallic phase of the psycho-sexual development, lead to the Œdipus situation, and to the emergence of the super-ego.

The development away from primary narcissism, that is, the development of the ego, culminates in the resolution of the Œdipus conflict through the castration complex. The castration threat, directed against the gratification of libidinal urges toward, the mother, so that she is given up as a libidinal object, is seen as the representative of the demands of reality, the submission to the castration threat as the decisive step in the establishment of the ego as based on the reality principle.

This schematic outline of the psychosexual development is sufficient for our present purpose. It must be recognized, however, that what is condensed in the terms Œdipus conflict, castration complex, etc., takes place as a process over a long period of time, is not one event or one conflict. The time dimension contained in such concepts as Œdipus conflict, castration complex, as well as in the concepts of ego and reality, not being adequately verbalized, is all too easily omitted from our thinking. The investigations of the British School, especially of Melanie Klein, have shown that Œdipus, castration complex, superego, have all fore-runners or developmental stages going back to much earlier ages than those originally postulated by Freud. This was already recognized by Ferenczi in his concept of the sphincter morality. When I speak here of Œdipus and castration complex, etc., I understand them as processes, not as anything like circumscribed events, while their names derive originally from 'traumatic events' which at best may be called representative of the processes in question.

If we understand the Œdipus conflict and the castration threat as the prototype of the demands of reality, it should be clear how strongly for Freud the concept of reality is bound up with the father. Fundamentally, for Freud the father is a hostile figure who has to be fought or submitted to. This is the basic tenet in *Totem and Taboo*, as well as in his later writings dealing with the origins of religion (*The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents*).

Reality, then, is represented by the father

who as an alien, hostile, jealous force interferes with the intimate ties between mother and child, forces the child into submission, so that he seeks the father's protection. The threat of the hostile reality is met by unavoidable, if temporary, submission to its demands, namely to renounce the mother as a libidinal object, and to acknowledge and submit to paternal authority. It is of no importance for the purposes of this presentation that actually roles may be less well defined, or even reversed, that the mother may to a large extent represent authority and reality demands rather than the father.

The significant point in this discussion is that reality is seen as an outside force, for Freud most typically and decisively represented by the paternal figure, which actively interferes with the development of the child in such a way that the ego essentially is on the defensive, in fact becomes the defensive agency within the psychic apparatus. The interference is directed against the strivings for gratification of the libidinal urges toward, the mother, and under the assault of reality (father) the psychic apparatus undergoes a series of modifications, repressions, deflections of its original tendencies, the structural representative of which is the ego.

On the other hand, we know from considering the development of the ego, as a development away from primary narcissism, that to start with, reality is not outside, but is contained in the pre-ego of primary narcissism, becomes, as Freud says, detached from the ego. So that reality, understood genetically, is not primarily outside and hostile, alien to the ego, but intimately connected with, originally not even distinguished from it.

I believe that in Freud's thinking these two concepts of reality have never come to terms with each other, and without doubt the former concept, of reality as an essentially hostile (paternal) power, has remained the predominant one for him.

In his discussions of the origin of religious feelings, which he sees as an attempt to cope with the threatening reality, the conflict with the father and the need and longing for his protection are entirely in the foreground. 'The derivation of a need for religion from the child's feeling of helplessness and the longing it evokes for a father seems to me incontrovertible, especially since this feeling is not simply carried on from childhood days, but is kept alive perpetually by the fear of what the superior power

of fate will bring. I could not point to any need in childhood so strong as that for a father's protection.'⁷ This harks back to *Totem and Taboo* where the longing for the father is described as 'the root of all religious evolution'.⁸ And in this same connection Freud writes: 'In this evolution I am at a loss to indicate the place of the great maternal deities who perhaps everywhere preceded the paternal deities.'⁹ And again, in *Civilization and its Discontents*: 'Thus the part played by the "oceanic" feeling, which I suppose seeks to reinstate limitless narcissism, cannot possibly take the first place. The derivation of the religious attitude can be followed back in clear outline as far as the child's feeling of helplessness. There may be something else behind this, but for the present it is wrapped in obscurity.'¹⁰

Religious feelings, thus, are understood as originating in an attempt to cope with hostile reality forces. The creation of father-gods is an expression of the need for help and protection from the father, in order to avoid the castrating reality which the father represents. The longing for the father, the seeking his help and protection is a defensive compromise in order to come to terms with his superior, hostile power. The idea that religious feelings may contain elements having to do with the primary narcissistic position in which 'reality' is comprised in the primary ego, and therefore with the mother—this idea is, if not rejected, declared to be obscure, at best of secondary importance, and objectionable.

In a significant passage in *Civilization and its Discontents* which has been commented upon by several authors,¹¹ Freud confesses his unwillingness to plunge into the depths of primordial, buried psychological levels of the primary narcissistic or related stages, and investigate them. Much in contrast to the proud and rebellious motto of *The Interpretation of Dreams*—'Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta

movebo'—here he exclaims 'Let him rejoice who breathes in the rosy light of day',¹² as against the diver who has to plunge into the depth and darkness of the ocean. Yet he touches on this problem in the same book, speaking of 'the more general problem of conservation in the mind, which has so far hardly been discussed',¹³ that is, the problem of psychological survival of original stages beside the later stages of development. And further: 'If we may suppose that this primary ego-feeling has been preserved in the minds of many people—to a greater or less extent—it would co-exist like a sort of counterpart with the narrower and more sharply outlined ego-feeling of maturity, and the ideational content belonging to it would be precisely the notion of limitless extension and oneness with the universe . . .'¹⁴

Let us try to take some steps towards the clarification of the problem of reality, to see whether we can bring the two contrasting concepts closer to each other.

In the primary narcissistic stage, as we have seen, there is as yet no ego confronted with objects. It is the undifferentiated stage in which the infant and its world are still one, are only beginning to differentiate from one another, which means also that the differentiation of the psychic apparatus itself into its structural elements still is dormant. In his paper on narcissism, Freud asks the question, 'Whence does the necessity arise that urges our mental life to pass on beyond the limits of narcissism and to attach the libido to objects?' His tentative answer is that 'we are so impelled when the cathexis of the ego with libido exceeds a certain degree'.¹⁵ But, we have to say now, in the primary narcissistic position there are as yet no objects as such. We should speak, therefore, not of a passing beyond the limits of narcissism to objects, but of a differentiation into id-ego and objects out of the primary stage of unity or identity. As Freud expressed

⁷ Freud, S. (1949) *Civilization and its Discontents*, London, p. 21.

⁸ — (1938) 'Totem and Taboo' *Basic Writings*, Modern Library, New York, p. 920.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*, p. 921.

¹⁰ *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 21.

¹¹ Federn, Paul (1931) 'Die Wirklichkeit des Todes-triebes', *Almanach der Psychoanalyse*, Vienna. Wittels, Fritz (1949) 'A Neglected Boundary of Psycho-analysis', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 18, p. 47.

¹² *Loc. cit.*, p. 22. This verse is from Schiller's poem 'The Diver' (translation modified), which, understood analytically, clearly symbolizes primary anxiety about a return to the womb. The assembled knights are chal-

lenged by the king to recover a cup from the depths of the ocean. He who returns the cup may keep it. A young squire accepts the challenge and dives in, returns the cup and informs the king of the horrors of the depths and of the fact that there are further depths still unexplored. The king promises the squire his daughter if he will plunge in again to explore these dreadful regions. The squire does not return from his second dive. The greater part of the poem is given to a vivid description of the horrors and dangers of the depths.

¹³ p. 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

¹⁵ Freud, S., 'On Narcissism: an Introduction', *Collected Papers*, 4, p. 42.

it himself: the (primitive) ego detaches an external world from itself.

The two types of libido, ego libido and object libido, derive genetically from the same source, the primary narcissistic stage of libido in which ego and object are not as yet distinguishable as such. Freud, confusingly, calls this primary narcissistic libido frequently ego-libido too, since he uses the same term, ego, for the fully developed ego of the post-œdipal stage as well as for the psychic apparatus in its original, unstructured, narcissistic stage.¹⁶

The following formulation, at this point, seems justified: The relationship of ego to reality is not primarily one of defence against an outer force thrust upon the ego, originally unrelated to it. The relatedness between ego and reality, or objects, does not develop from an originally unrelated co-existence of two separate entities which come into contact with each other, but on the contrary from a unitary whole which differentiates into distinct parts. Mother and baby do not get together and develop a relationship, but the baby is born, becomes detached from the mother, and thus a relatedness between two parts which originally were one becomes possible.

This does not imply, of course, that the emergence of an ego and of reality is unassociated with pain and anxiety, and, as it were, unresisted; or that there is, for the observer, no world, no environment which sends stimuli to the organism. We are concerned here merely with the question how this world becomes psychologically constituted. And we want to stress the point that the boundaries between ego and external reality develop out of an original state where, psychologically, there are no boundaries and therefore there is no distinction between the two.

It is from here that the synthetic, integrative function of the ego can be understood. The ego mediates, unifies, integrates because it is of its essence to maintain, on more and more complex levels of differentiation and objectivation of reality, the original unity. To maintain, or constantly re-establish, this unity, in the face of a growing separation from what

becomes the outside world for the growing human being, by integrating and synthesizing what seems to move further and further away from it and fall into more and more unconnected parts—this is part of the activity of the ego which constitutes it as an organization, in the sense of an agency that organizes.

The Œdipus conflict would be one very decisive step in this growing separation of the individual from its environment. The tension system between child and mother, seen from this angle, through the paternal castration threat is forced on to, is transposed to a new level of integration.

It would be justified to look at the defensive function of the ego, seen in the light of the above considerations, from an entirely different point of view. What the ego defends itself, or the psychic apparatus, against, is not reality but the loss of reality, that is, the loss of an integration with the world such as it exists in the libidinal relationship with the mother, and with which the father seems to interfere in the Œdipus situation (castration threat).

Do we then advocate swinging from a 'paternal' concept of reality to a 'maternal' one? Here we have to make a fresh start and consider again the relationship between child and mother. We have taken into account only the positive libidinal tension between them, with which various factors, such as especially the paternal castration threat, interfere. We have maintained that this castration threat cannot be considered as the prototype of 'reality'. We have to add now that, while it is not reality, it is one factor in the constitution of reality. The question is, in which way, and further, is this factor adequately described if it is seen merely as a hostile, castrating factor which calls for defence on the part of the ego, and nothing else?

We have seen that ego and reality evolve gradually in conjunction with each other; the psychic apparatus undergoes a series of modifications, repressions, deflections of its original tendencies towards re-establishment of the primary narcissistic unity or identity with the environment (mother), under the interfering

¹⁶ Freud, it should be called to mind here, introduces primary narcissism as a new concept in an attempt 'to bring our knowledge of . . . schizophrenia into line with the hypothesis upon which the libido-theory is based', to explain the withdrawal of libido from objects, as well as the megalomania (omnipotence) of psychotics, primitives and children. He says: 'Thus we form a conception of an original libidinal cathexis of the ego, part of which cathexis is later yielded up to objects,

but which fundamentally persists and is related to the object-cathexes much as the body of a protoplasmatic animalcule is related to the pseudopodia which it puts out.' In the discussion referred to here, Freud struggles with the problems involved in the assumed dualism of ego- and object-libido (ego instincts and sexual instincts) without coming to a satisfactory conclusion ('Narcissism: an Introduction', *Collected Papers*, 4, pp. 31-38).

influence of the (paternal) castration threat. The resultants of this development are the structures which we call ego and reality.

Obviously, without any 'interference' (of which the paternal castration threat is only one representative, but which starts, in extrauterine life, with the first instance of withdrawal or unavailability of the breast, and continues in such occurrences as weaning, toilet training, etc.), there would be no development of either ego or reality.

The paternal castration threat (in its broadest sense), then, would represent the interference with the primary narcissistic position in which ego and reality have as yet not evolved into distinct structures, and as such would be the stimulus necessary for their development. Thus it is one factor in the constitution of reality (and ego). But is it merely a 'hostile' factor?

It was assumed throughout this paper, and this assumption is explicit or implicit in the whole psycho-analytic literature, that the castration threat is essentially paternal. Even where the maternal aspects of the castration threat are discussed, and the fear of it as the dread of the womb, these are generally understood as in the last analysis deriving from the fear of the paternal penis phantasied inside the vagina or womb.¹⁷ Jones quotes 'the exceptional opinion' of Karen Horney 'that this dread of the vulva is not only earlier than that of the father's penis—whether external or concealed in the vagina—but deeper and more important than it; in fact, much of the dread of the father's penis is artificially put forward to hide the intense dread of the vulva'.¹⁸

It seems to me that there is clinical material to support the thesis of a 'dread of the vulva' earlier than and independent of the dread of the father's penis, whether or not we agree with Karen Horney's idea that this dread of the vulva is derived 'from the boy's fear of his self-esteem being wounded by knowing that his penis is not large enough to satisfy the mother'¹⁹ (an explanation which strikes me as touching just the surface of the problem). This fear of the woman is expressed by patients in terms such as: being drowned, sucked in, over-

powered, and this in regard to intercourse as well as in regard to the relationship to mother, in particular in cases where there is no father or where the father has remained an insignificant and weak figure.²⁰

If we assume that one component of the 'castration' threat is maternal in origin, in the sense stated above, this component could not be described as interfering with the primary narcissistic position. On the contrary, it would be the threat to perpetuate or re-establish this position, to engulf the emerging ego into the original unity.

We meet here with a 'castration threat' diametrically opposed to the 'paternal' threat of interference with the mother-child unity, and later, mother-child libidinal relationship. Against the threat of the engulfing, overpowering womb, stands the paternal veto against the libidinal relationship with the mother. Against this threat of the maternal engulfment, the paternal position is not another threat or danger, but a support of powerful force.

The ego, it is true, is for ever in an embattled position where it has to defend itself against powerful forces. But the danger is not all on the side of frustration of and threat to the primary narcissistic position and its genetic derivatives, the libidinal urges towards the mother. The danger is as much on the other side, on the side of the overpowering, annihilating mother. To express it in broader terms: the original unity and identity, undifferentiated and unstructured, of psychic apparatus and environment, is as much of a danger for the ego as the demand of the 'paternal castration threat' to give it up altogether. Against the threatening possibility of remaining in or sinking back into the structureless unity from which the ego emerged, stands the powerful paternal force. With this force an early identification is attempted, an identification which precedes and prepares the Oedipus complex. It would seem that Freud has in mind this positive, non-hostile aspect of the father figure (preceding the later passive identification due to the castration threat) when he speaks of an identification which 'plays a role in the early history

¹⁷ See: Jones, Ernest (1948) 'The Phallic Phase' in *Papers on Psychoanalysis*, 5th ed., p. 452 ff.

¹⁸ Jones, Ernest (1932) *loc. cit.*, pp. 458-9, quoting Karen Horney (1932), 'The Dread of Women', *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (1932) *loc. cit.*, quoting Karen Horney, 'The Dread of Women', *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 13, pp. 458-9.

²⁰ It is impossible, within the limits of this paper, to enter into a discussion of these problems. I feel sure, on clinical grounds, however, that a clear distinction has to be made between the castrating mother as a masculine figure on the one hand, and the mother who is feared as an all-engulfing womb, even though these two aspects may very well be fused together in the patient's unconscious.

of the Œdipus complex. The little boy manifests a special interest for his father, he wants to become and be like him. . . . *This behaviour has nothing to do with a passive or feminine attitude towards the father (or towards the male in general), it is, on the contrary, exquisitely masculine.* It is not in opposition to the Œdipus complex, but helps to prepare it.' And further: the boy then 'shows two psychologically different attachments, towards the mother a clearly sexual object cathexis, towards the father one of identification with an ideal'.²¹ These two currents meet and, in mutual modification, help to form the Œdipus complex.

The father figure, then—and we are supported in this view by the above-quoted passage from Freud—is not *primarily* hostile, representing the threat of castration with which the boy copes by passive submission and/or rebellion. Earlier, and in my opinion more essential for the development of the ego (and reality), is his positive stature with whom an active, non-passive, identification is made; an identification which lies before and beyond submission as well as rebellion.

It seems that in the development of psychoanalysis, notwithstanding other observations, the predominant emphasis was laid on the secondary, threatening character of the father imago. And further, this threatening character of the father imago was understood as the personal representative, so to speak, of Reality. The ego, then, was seen as developing partly in submission to and partly in protest against such a Reality.

The foregoing analysis leads us to the assumption of two pairs of relationships to the parent figures: (1), in regard to the mother, a positive libidinal relationship, growing out of the primary narcissistic position; and a defensive, negative one of dread of the womb, dread of sinking back into the original unstructured state of identity with her; (2) in regard to the father, a positive, 'exquisitely masculine' identification with him, which lends powerful support against the danger of the womb; and

a defensive relationship concerning the paternal castration threat.

The early positive identification with the father, as well as the early dread of the engulfing mother, both these currents enter into the Œdipus complex, form components of it, as much as the positive libidinal relation to the mother and the castration fear of the father. What, on the level of the Œdipus complex, has been called the paternal castration threat, is now understood as consisting of two components, a genetically later, hostile (castration) threat, and an early positive identification 'with an ideal'. Equally, what on the level of the Œdipus complex has been described as the positive libidinal relation to the mother, is understood as consisting of the two components: need for union with her and dread of this union. It is claimed here that, as the dread of the womb cannot be explained primarily by the fear of the father's penis, so the positive identification with the father cannot be reduced to the fearful submission to his castration threat.²²

We have said earlier that the ego mediates, unifies, integrates because it is of its essence to maintain, on more and more complex levels of differentiation and objectivation, the original unity stemming from the primary narcissistic position. Reality on the post-œdipal level, however, is constituted by just these characteristics, differentiation and objectivity, which the post-œdipal ego evolves in its integrative, organizing activity. In terms of parental relationships (representing the experiential basis for this development), the original identity differentiates into the libidinal tension-system child-mother. Primary identification with father and 'dread of the womb' in mutual reinforcement drive towards further structuralization of this tension system, which is held together as a system, as it were, by the continuing libidinal urge towards the mother. The paternal castration threat operates as a further stimulus for differentiation, that is, towards the constitution of libidinal objects *as such*.

²¹ Freud, S., *Group-Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Chapter VII (Identification). Italics are mine.

²² In the analysis of male homosexuals it can frequently be shown that their homosexuality is fed from two sources: the fear of women and the lack of opportunity for masculine identification. The fear of the woman is, if not predominantly a fear of being engulfed by her, a mixture of this and the fear of her as the woman with a penis. In such cases the homosexual partner is

sought not only in feminine identification with the mother, but also representing the ever-recurring attempt at the pre-œdipal, masculine identification with the father which could not be achieved in early childhood. It is my impression that this masculine identification can become impossible also if the father is not weak, but so overwhelming that there seems to be no hope of being like him, a constellation which easily becomes fused with and overlaid by the later castration threat.

In this view, the unstructured nothingness of identity of 'ego' and 'reality' represents a threat as deep and frightening as the paternal castration threat. It is the threat of the all-engulfing womb. Dread of the womb and castration fear, both, may be powerful motives for defence, but not just defence against reality. They threaten loss of reality. Reality is lost if the ego is cut off from objects (castration threat); reality is lost as well if the boundaries of ego and reality are lost (the threat of the womb). Loss of reality always means also loss of ego. Loss of reality, in the sense here intended, does not mean that a 'part' of reality gets lost (while 'another part' is preserved). It means that the ego-reality integration sinks back, regresses to an earlier level of organization. What we observe in clinical or experimental states of regression is not that objects get lost but that they become less objective, as it were. Ego and reality, in a compulsion neurosis, regress to a magical level of integration, as they regress further in a schizophrenic reaction.²³ Upon a threat to the existing ego-reality integration, in the organizing activity of the ego they become reintegrated on a different level.

Between the danger of a loss of object-relationships and the danger of a loss of ego-reality boundaries the ego pursues its course of integrating reality. While the primary narcissistic identity with the mother forever constitutes the deepest unconscious origin and structural layer of ego and reality, and the motive force for the ego's 'remarkable striving toward unification, synthesis',—this primary identity is also the source of the deepest dread, which promotes, in identification with the father, the ego's progressive differentiation and structuralization of reality.

There is, then, a profoundly ambivalent relationship with the parent-figures at work in the constitution of ego and reality. In psychoanalytic theoretical constructions concerning ego-development and structure, the positive libidinal relationship to the mother and the hostile-submissive relationship to the father had overshadowed, if not led to a neglect of,

the role of the dread of the womb and of the primary positive identification with father, in the constitution of the ego. The concept of reality had been dominated by the emphasis on the paternal castration threat, notwithstanding the introduction of the concept of primary narcissism and the investigation of early ego-development. We have tried to show that for a deeper understanding of ego and reality it is necessary to elaborate the implications of early ego-development. Ego and reality cannot be considered separately as they evolve together in successive stages of ego-reality integration.

A few implications of this approach to the ego-reality problem will be indicated in the following remarks.

It should be clearly understood that the conception of ego-reality development discussed above does by no means deny or disregard the essential role played by infantile aggression, anxieties, guilt feelings, etc., in ego formation and reality formation. It should, on the contrary, further the understanding of these phenomena if they are seen on the background given above. The various processes of infantile aggression, the various stages of incorporation and projection are considered as early stages of the activity of the primitive ego, whose synthesizing and differentiating is still much more concrete action than the comparatively abstract activity of the fully developed ego.²⁴ Introjection and projection are such early stages of ego-activity. In the beginning phases, as in some psychotic disturbances, it is hardly possible to distinguish between introjection and projection, as the boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside' are still so rudimentary and fluid that the two terms signify different directions of the same process rather than two different processes.

This leads to the problem of psychotic phenomena. Paul Federn, who made such important contributions to our understanding of ego-psychology and psychology of schizophrenia, has pointed out the loss of ego boundaries which occurs in schizophrenic disorders.²⁵ He considers this loss of ego boundaries, rather than any loss of or withdrawal from reality,

²³ In an obsessive character disorder, the difficult therapeutic task is to bring about ego-reality organization on a higher level, against the patient's 'intellectual' adjustment to what he is told is reality but remains unreal to him. This 'adjustment', to him, therefore, is at best a successful trick by which the hostile world is controlled. It is this misconception of reality which lurks behind the notion of the ego as a defence agency

against a hostile reality.

²⁴ Ferenczi spoke of an 'omnipotence of movements' which would precede omnipotence of thought (see: Fenichel (1937) 'Frühe Entwicklungsstadien des Ichs', *Imago*, 23, pp. 244 ff.).

²⁵ See especially: 'Psychoanalysis of Psychoses', *Psychiatric Quarterly*, January, April, July, 1943.

as the primary process in schizophrenia. The schizophrenic does not primarily defend himself against reality, by withdrawing from it, but reality regressively changes its character in such a way that the boundaries between ego and reality (and that means also: the boundaries of ego and of reality) become fluid and to various degrees get lost. It is a regression to more primitive stages of ego-reality integration. This should throw some light on the question of transference in schizophrenia. Freud claimed that schizophrenics were inaccessible to psycho-analysis because they do not develop transference. This is true if transference is understood as an object relationship. The often precipitous and extremely intimate transference, of hatred as well as of love, which is so frequently experienced with schizophrenics, a relationship to the therapist which seems to leap over and disregard conditions and considerations of the reality situation (as experienced by the therapist)—this transference is not an object relationship. It is an earlier stage of relatedness to others, closer to the primary narcissistic and magical feelings of identity and mutual influence. The extreme sensitivity, the 'sixth sense' many schizoid people have concerning other persons, the empathic quality of their relationships, is due to a more fluid and less differentiating ego-reality integration, similar to earlier stages.

It is impossible to grasp the full significance of such different ego-reality integration unless it is seen that the magical quality exists not only on the side of the ego but also on the side of reality. Not only the ego, at such a stage, has magical powers or is a magical power, but also reality is a magical power. The empathic relationship between baby and mother is a mutual one; not only is the baby in empathic communication with the mother, but also the mother is in empathic communication with the baby. The magical quality of this relationship may be experienced by the child not only as magical identity or communication of a positive nature, but also as a threatening, overpowering force. Omnipotence is not something that the ego experiences as within itself only, but reality is also omnipotent (whether it

be so for the 'objective' observer or not), and against this the ego may experience itself as completely impotent. For a deeper understanding of the regressive phenomena in neurotic and psychotic disorders these considerations have to be taken into account.

In the formation of the ego, the libido does not turn to objects which, so to speak, lie ready for it, waiting to be turned to. In the developmental process, reality, at first without boundaries against an ego, later in magical communication with it, becomes objective at last. As the ego goes through its transformations from primitive beginnings, so libido and reality go through stages of transformation, until the ego, to the extent to which it is 'fully developed', has an objective reality, detached from itself, before it, not in it, yet holding this reality to itself in the ego's synthetic activity. Then the ego's libido has become object relationship. Only then does the ego live in what we call an objective reality. In earlier stages of ego-formation the ego does not experience reality as objective, but lives in and experiences the various stages of narcissistic and magical reality.

I mentioned earlier that Freud has raised the problem of psychological survival of earlier ego-stages side by side with later stages of ego-development, a problem which he says has as yet hardly been investigated. If we look closely at people we can see that it is not merely a question of survival of former stages of ego-reality integration, but that people shift considerably, from day to day, at different periods in their lives, in different moods and situations, from one such level to other levels. In fact, it would seem that people are more alive (though not necessarily more 'stable'), the broader their range of ego-reality levels is. Perhaps the so-called fully developed, the mature ego is not one that has become fixated at the presumably highest or latest stage of development, having left the others behind it, but is an ego that integrates its reality in such a way that the earlier and deeper levels of ego-reality integration remain alive as dynamic sources of higher organization.

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