

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *THE PSYCHIC APPARATUS (concluded)*

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In this final chapter on the so-called structural hypothesis of the psychic apparatus we shall discuss some aspects of the individual's relationship to the persons of his environment and also the topic of the development of the superego. As usual we shall try to begin with the state of affairs in very early life and to follow our topic forward during the course of the child's development and into later life.

Freud was the first to give us a clear picture of the very great importance to our psychic life and development of our relationship to other people. The earliest of these of course is the child's relationship to its parents, a relationship which is in most cases at first principally restricted to its mother or mother substitute. A little later comes its relationship to its siblings, or other close playmates, and to its father.

Freud pointed out that the persons to whom the child is attached in its early years have a place in its mental life which is unique as far as influence is concerned. This is true whether the child's attachment to these persons is by bonds of love, of hate, or of both, the last being by far the most usual. The importance of such early attachments must be due in part to the fact that these early relationships influence the course of the child's development, something that later relationships cannot do to the same extent by virtue of the very fact that they are later. In part also it is due to the fact that in its early years the child is relatively helpless for a very long period of time. The consequence of this protracted helplessness is that

the child is dependent on its environment for protection, for satisfaction, and for life itself for a much longer period than is any other mammal. In other words, biological factors per se play a great role in determining the significance as well as the character of our interpersonal relationships, since they result in what we might call the prolonged postpartum fetalization that is characteristic of our development as human beings.

In psychoanalytic literature the term "object" is used to designate persons or things of the external environment which are psychologically significant to one's psychic life, whether such "things" be animate or lifeless. Likewise the phrase "object relations" refers to the individual's attitude and behavior toward such objects. For convenience we shall use these terms in the following discussion.

In the earliest stages of life we assume, as we have said in Chapter III, that the infant is unaware of objects as such and that he learns only gradually to distinguish self from object during the course of the first several months of his development. We have also stated that among the most important objects of infancy are the various parts of the child's own body, e.g., his fingers, toes and mouth. All of these are extremely important as sources of gratification and hence, we assume, they are highly cathected with libido. To be more precise we should say that the psychic representatives of these parts of the infant's body are highly cathected, since we no longer believe, as some analysts formerly did, that libido is like a hormone which can be transported to a part of the body and fixed there. This state of self-directed libido Freud (1914) called *narcissism*, after the Greek legend of the youth, Narcissus, who fell in love with himself.

The present place of the concept of narcissism in psychoanalytic theory is uncertain to some degree. This is because the concept was developed by Freud before the dual theory of instincts had been formulated. As a result only the sexual drive found a place in the concept of narcissism, and the latter has

never been explicitly brought into line with either the dual theory of instincts or with the structural hypothesis. Should we consider, for example, that self-directed energy arising from the aggressive drive is also a part of narcissism? Again, what part of the psychic apparatus is cathected by drive energy which is narcissistic in its nature? Is it the ego proper, or is it special parts of the ego, or even, perhaps, other parts of the psychic apparatus which are as yet undefined? These are questions to which definitive answers have yet to be given.

However, in spite of the fact that the concept of narcissism has not been brought up to date, so to speak, it remains a useful and necessary working hypothesis in psychoanalytic theory. In general the term is used to indicate at least three somewhat different, though related things when it is applied to an adult. These are: (1) a hypercathexis of the self, (2) a hypocathexis of the objects of the environment, and (3) a pathologically immature relationship to these objects. When the term is applied to a child, of course, it generally indicates what we consider to be a normal stage or characteristic of early development. It might be worth adding that Freud believed that the major portion of libido remained narcissistic, that is, self-directed, throughout life. This is usually referred to as "normal" or "healthy" narcissism. He also believed that those libidinal forces which cathected the psychic representatives of the objects of the outer world bore the same relationship to the main body of narcissistic libido as do the pseudopodia of an amoeba to its body. That is to say, object libido derives from narcissistic libido and may return to it if the object is later relinquished for any reason.

Let us return now to the topic of the development of object relations. The child's attitude toward the first objects of which it is aware is naturally an exclusively self-centered one. The child is at first concerned only with the gratifications which the object affords, that is, with what we might call the need-satisfying aspect of the object. Presumably the object is at

first only cathected when the infant begins to experience some need which can be gratified by or through the object and is otherwise psychically nonexistent for the infant. We assume that only gradually does there develop a continuing relation with an object, by which we mean a persistent object cathexis, even in the absence of an immediate need which the object is to satisfy. We may express this same idea in more subjective terms by saying that it is only gradually that the infant develops an interest in objects of its environment which persists even when it is not seeking pleasure or gratification from those objects. At first, for example, mother is of interest to the infant only when it is hungry or needs her for some other reason, but later in infancy or early childhood mother is psychologically important on a continuing basis and no longer only episodically.

We are not well acquainted with the exact ways in which a continuing object relation does develop, or the stages through which it passes, particularly the very early stages. One fact that is worth mentioning is that the earliest objects are what we call part objects. This means, for example, that it is a long time before the mother exists as a single object for the child. Before that, her breast, or the bottle, her hand, her face, etc., are each separate objects in the child's mental life and it may well be that even different aspects of what is physically the same object may also be distinct objects to the child, rather than united or related ones. For instance, the mother's smiling face may be at first a different object to the child from her scowling or angry one, her loving voice a different object from her scolding one, etc., and it may be that it is only after some time that these two faces or two voices are perceived by the child as a single object.

We believe that a continuing object relation probably develops in the latter part of the first year of life. One of the important characteristics of such early object relations is a high degree of what we call *ambivalence*. That is to say, feel-

ings of love may alternate with equally intense feelings of hate, depending on the circumstances. We may doubt indeed whether the destructive fantasies or wishes toward the object which may be presumed to be present in the latter part of the first year of life should be considered as hostile in intent. To be sure, they would result in the destruction of the object if they were carried out, but a tiny infant's wish or fantasy of swallowing the breast or the mother is as well a primitive forebear of love as of hate. However, there is no doubt that by the second year of life the child is beginning to have feelings of rage as well as of pleasure toward the same object.

This early ambivalence persists normally to some extent throughout life, but ordinarily its degree is much less even in later childhood than it is in the second through the fifth years and it is still less in adolescence and adult life. To be sure, the diminution in ambivalence is often more apparent than real. The *conscious* feelings for the object often reflect one half of the ambivalence, while the other half is kept unconscious, though nonetheless powerful in its effect on the individual's mental life. Such persistent ambivalence is often associated with severe neurotic conflicts and symptoms, as one might expect.

Another characteristic of early object relationships is the phenomenon of identification with the object. This is something which we have already discussed in Chapter III. There we pointed out the great importance of the part played by identification in the complex processes of ego development. Although there are many motives for identification, we stated that any object relation carries with it a tendency to identify with, that is, to become like the object and that the more primitive the stage of ego development, the more pronounced is the tendency to identification.

We can understand, therefore, that object relations in early life in particular play a most important part in ego development, since a part of the ego is in a way a precipitate of these

relations. In addition it has been emphasized in recent years that inadequate or unsatisfactory relationships with the objects, that is with the external environment of very early life may prevent the proper development of those functions of the ego which we discussed in Chapter IV: reality testing and mastery of the drives (Spitz, 1945; Beres and Obers, 1950). In this way the stage may be set in very early life for serious psychological difficulties either in later childhood or in adult life (Hartmann, 1953a).

As we said in Chapter III, a tendency to identify with highly cathected objects persists *unconsciously* in all of us throughout life, although it does not normally occupy the predominant position in the object relationships of later life which it characteristically assumes in early childhood. This unconscious persistence of the tendency to identify with the object is but one example of a general attribute of many early modes or characteristics of mental functioning, which, though outgrown as far as conscious mental life is concerned, yet live on without our even being aware of their continued existence and operation.

However, if identification continues to play a dominant role in object relations in adult life, we consider it to be evidence of a maldevelopment of the ego which is severe enough to be considered to be pathological. The first striking examples of such maldevelopment were reported by Helene Deutsch (1934), who called them "as if" personalities. These were people whose personalities changed with their object relations in a chameleon-like fashion. If such a person was in love with an intellectual, his personality and interests conformed to the intellectual type. If he then gave up this relation and became attached to a gangster instead, he conformed as wholeheartedly to that attitude and way of life. As would be expected from our previous discussion, Helene Deutsch found that the early object relationships of these patients, e.g., their relationships to their parents, had been grossly abnormal. Similar cases of

arrested or improper ego development have since been reported by others, e.g., Anna Freud (1954b).

The early stages of object relations which we have thus far attempted to characterize are usually referred to as pregenital object relations, or sometimes more specifically as anal or oral object relations. Incidentally, the customary use of the word "pregenital" in this connection is inaccurate. The proper term would be "prephallic." At any rate, in the psychoanalytic literature, the object relations of the child are usually named according to the erogenous zone which happens to be playing the leading role in the libidinal life of the child at the time.

Such a designation has of course primarily a historical significance. Freud studied the stages of libidinal development before he studied the other aspects of the mental life of these early periods which he was also the first to clarify, so that it was only natural that the names of the stages of libidinal development were later used to characterize all the phenomena of that period of the child's life. When it comes to object relations, however, the use of libidinal terminology has more than just a historical value. It serves to remind us that after all it is the drives and perhaps primarily the sexual drive, that seek after objects in the first place, since it is only through objects that discharge or gratification can be achieved. The importance of object relations is *primarily* determined by the existence of our instinctual demands, and the relationship between drive and object is of fundamental importance throughout life. We stress this fact because it is one which is sometimes lost sight of in the face of the more recently discovered connections between object relations and ego development.

When the child is from two and a half to three and a half years old, it enters into what ordinarily become the most intense and fateful object relations of its entire life. From the point of view of the drives, as the reader will remember from our discussion in Chapter II, the child's psychic life changes at this age from the anal to the phallic level. This means that

the leading, or most intense wishes and impulses which the child experiences toward the objects of his instinctual life will henceforth be phallic ones. Not that the child quickly or totally gives up the anal and oral wishes which dominated his instinctual life at still earlier ages. On the contrary, as we said in Chapter II, these prephallic wishes persist well into the phallic stage itself. However, during this stage they play a subordinate rather than a dominant role.

The phallic stage is different from the previous ones from the point of view of the ego as well as from that of the drives. In the case of the ego, however, the differences are due to the progressive development of the ego functions which characterizes all the years of childhood and most particularly the early ones, while the changes in the instinctual life, that is in the id, from oral to anal to phallic are due, we believe, primarily to inherited, biological tendencies.

The ego of the three- or four-year-old is more experienced, more developed, more integrated, and consequently different in many ways from the ego of the one- or two-year-old child. These differences are apparent in that aspect of ego functioning with which we are principally concerned at the moment, namely in those characteristics of the child's object relationships which are related to the ego. By this age the child no longer has part object relationships if it has developed normally. Thus, for example, the several parts of mother's body, her varying moods, and her contrasting roles of the "good" mother who gratifies the child's wishes and the "bad" one who frustrates them are all recognized by the child of this age as comprising a single object called mother. Moreover, the child's object relationships have by now acquired a considerable degree of permanence or stability. The cathexes which are directed toward an object persist in spite of the temporary absence of need for the object, something which is not true in very early stages of ego development. They even persist despite fairly prolonged absence of the object itself. In addition,

by the time the phallic phase is well under way at least, the child is able to distinguish pretty clearly between self and object and to conceive of objects as individuals like himself with similar feelings and thoughts. To be sure, this latter process goes so far as to be somewhat unrealistic, both because animals and toys are thought to be just like humans and because the child's own thoughts and impulses are apt to be projected onto other persons in an incorrect way, as we have seen in Chapter IV. However, the principal point which we wish to make here is that the child's ego development has reached such a level by the time of the phallic stage that object relationships are possible which are comparable to those of later childhood and of adult life, even though they may not be identical with them in every respect. The nature of the four- or five-year-old's self-awareness and of his perception of objects are such as to make possible the existence of feelings of love or hate for a particular object as well as of feelings of jealousy, fear, and rage toward a rival which contain all of the essential characteristics of such feelings in later life.

The most important object relations of the phallic phase are those which are grouped together as the *oedipus complex*. Indeed the period of life from about two and a half to six years is called the oedipal phase or the oedipal period as often as it is called the phallic stage or phase. The object relations which comprise the oedipus complex are of the greatest importance both to normal and to pathological mental development. Freud considered the events of this phase of life to be crucial, in fact (Freud, 1924a), and although we now know that still earlier events may be crucial to some individuals, so that the events of the oedipal period are of less importance in their lives than those of the preoedipal or prephallic period, it still seems probable that the events of the oedipal period are of crucial significance for most persons and of very great significance for nearly all.

Our knowledge about the oedipus complex developed in

this way. Freud discovered rather early that there were regularly present in the unconscious mental lives of his neurotic patients fantasies of incest with the parent of the opposite sex, combined with jealousy and murderous rage against the parent of the same sex. Because of the analogy between such fantasies and the Greek legend of Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother, Freud called this constellation the oedipus complex (Freud, 1900). In the course of the first ten or fifteen years of this century, it became apparent that the oedipus complex was not just characteristic of the unconscious mental life of neurotics, but was on the contrary present in normal persons as well. The existence of such wishes in childhood and the conflicts to which they give rise are in fact an experience which is common to all of mankind. It is true, as many anthropologists have made clear, that in cultures different from our own there are consequent differences in the mental life and conflicts of childhood, but the best evidence which is available at present speaks for the existence of incestuous and parenticidal impulses and of conflicts about them in every culture we know of (Róheim, 1950).

In addition to the realization that the oedipus complex is universal, our understanding of the oedipal wishes themselves was increased during the first two decades of this century to include what were at first called the inverse or negative oedipal wishes, that is, fantasies of incest with the parent of the same sex and murderous wishes toward the parent of the opposite sex. In its turn, this constellation of fantasies and emotions was thought at first to be exceptional, but was in time recognized to be general instead.

This then, in briefest summary, is the full statement of what we call the oedipus complex. It is a twofold attitude toward both parents: on the one hand a wish to eliminate the jealously hated father and take his place in a sensual relationship with

the mother, and on the other hand a wish to eliminate the jealously hated mother and take her place with the father.

Let us see whether we can give more real meaning to this extremely condensed formulation by attempting to trace the typical development of the oedipus complex in a schematic way. But before we start, a word of warning. The most important single fact to bear in mind about the oedipus complex is the strength and force of the feelings which are involved. It is a real love affair. For many people it is the most intense affair of their entire lives, but it is in any case as intense as any which the individual will ever experience. The description that follows cannot begin to convey what the reader must keep in mind as he reads it: the intensity of the tempest of passions of love and hate, of yearning and jealousy, of fury and fear that rages within the child. *This* is what we are talking about when we try to describe the oedipus complex.

At the start of the oedipal period the little child, whether boy or girl, ordinarily has its strongest object relation with its mother. By this we mean that the psychic representatives of the mother are more strongly cathected than any others except for those of the child's own self, principally its body. As we shall see later, this is an important exception. The first clear step into the oedipal phase, then, is the same for either sex, as far as we know, and consists of an expansion or extension of the already existing relationship with the mother to include the gratification of the child's awakening genital urges. At the same time there develops a desire for her exclusive love and admiration, which is presumably connected with a wish to be grown up and to "be daddy" or "do what daddy does" with mother. What it is that "daddy does" the child at this age naturally cannot understand clearly. From its own physical reactions, however, regardless of any chances it may have had for observation of its parents, it must connect these wishes with exciting sensations in its genitals and, in the case of the boy, with the sensation and phe-

nomenon of erection. As Freud discovered very early in his work with neurotic patients, the child may develop any one or several of various fantasies about the sexual activities of its parents which it wishes to repeat with mother. For example, it may conclude that they go to the toilet together, or that they look at each other's genitals, or take them in each other's mouths, or handle them in bed together. These conjectures or fantasies of the child, as one can see, are in general related to the child's pleasurable experiences with adults with which it was already familiar by the beginning of the oedipal phase and to its own autoerotic activities. There can be no doubt, in addition, that as the months and years go by, the child's sexual fantasies grow with its experience and knowledge. We should also add that the desire to give mother babies, as father did, is one of the very important oedipal wishes and that the sexual theories of this period are very much concerned with the problem of how this is done, as well as of how the babies come out when they are made.

Along with the sexual yearnings for mother and the desire to be her exclusive love object go wishes for the annihilation or disappearance of any rivals, who are generally father and siblings. Sibling rivalry admittedly has more than one source, but its principal one is surely the desire for the exclusive possession of the parent.

These jealous, murderous wishes arouse severe conflicts within the child on two grounds. The first of these is the obvious fear of retaliation, particularly from the parent, who at that age seems to the child to be truly omnipotent. The second is that they conflict with feelings of love and admiration and often enough, with feelings of longing and dependence as well for the parent or older sibling, as well as the fear of parental disapproval for wishing to destroy a younger sibling. In other words, the child fears both retaliation and loss of love as consequences of its jealous wishes.

From this point, it will be convenient for us to consider

separately the evolution of the oedipus complex in the girl and in the boy. We shall start with the latter.

Experience with the analyses of many adults and children, as well as evidence from anthropology, religious and folk myths, artistic creations, and various other sources, has shown us that the retaliation which the little boy fears as the consequence of his oedipal wishes for his mother is the loss of his own penis. It is this which is meant in psychoanalytic literature by the term *castration*. The evidence as to *why* this should be the boy's fear, regardless of the individual or cultural environment of his childhood, has been presented or formulated differently by different authors, and we need not concern ourselves with a discussion of them at this point. For our purpose it is enough to know the fact that it is so.

The observation by the child that there are in fact real people who do *not* have penises, that is, girls or women, convinces him that his own castration is a genuine possibility and the fear of losing his highly prized sexual organ precipitates an intense conflict over his oedipal wishes. This conflict eventually leads to the repudiation of the oedipal wishes. In part they are abandoned and in part they are repressed, that is to say they are banished into the inaccessible recesses of the child's unconscious mind.

The situation is complicated by the fact that the little boy is also stirred to a jealous rage against his mother for her rejection of his wish for exclusive possession of her caresses and her body and this either reinforces or gives rise to a wish to get rid of her (kill her) and to be loved by his father in her place. Since this too leads to the fear of castration, once he has learned that to be a woman is to be without a penis, these wishes also must eventually be repressed.

Thus we see that both the masculine and the feminine wishes of the oedipal period arouse castration anxiety and since the little boy is really neither physically nor sexually mature, he can only resolve the conflicts stirred up by his wishes either

by giving up the wishes or by holding them in check by various defense mechanisms and other defensive operations of the ego.

In the case of the little girl the situation is somewhat more complicated. Her desire to play the man with her mother does not founder on castration fear, since of course she does not have a penis to begin with. It comes to grief as a result of the realization that she is not so equipped, a realization which brings with it intense feelings of shame, inferiority, jealousy (penis envy), and rage against her mother for having permitted her to be born without a penis. In her rage and despair she normally turns to her father as her principal love object and hopes to take mother's place with him. When these wishes too are frustrated, as in the ordinary course of events they must be, the little girl may again return to the earlier attachment to her mother and remain committed in her psychosexual behavior throughout life to the wish to have a penis and be a man. More normally, however, the little girl, rebuffed by her father in her desire to be his sole sexual object, is forced to renounce and repress her oedipal wishes. The analogues in the little girl to the castration anxiety which is such an immensely powerful determinant in the fate of the little boy's oedipal wishes, are first, the mortification and jealousy which are referred to by the term "penis envy" and second, the fear of genital injury which is consequent upon the wish to be penetrated and impregnated by her father.

The reader will understand that this highly condensed presentation of the essentials of the oedipus complex is likewise a highly schematic one. In fact, each child's mental life during this period is unique for him or her and is profoundly influenced both by experiences during the first two years of life, which have preceded the oedipal period, and by the events of the oedipal period themselves. For example, one can imagine what immense consequences would ensue upon the illness, absence, or death of a parent or sibling, or upon the birth of

a new sibling, or upon an observation of parental or other adult intercourse, or upon the sexual seduction of the child by an adult or older child if any one of these should occur during the oedipal period.

In addition to these environmental factors, we believe that it is likely that children vary in constitutional capacities or predispositions. Freud (1937) mentioned the variations in instinctual endowment that may occur, for example, in the tendency to bisexuality, that is, in the predisposition in the boy toward femininity and in the girl toward masculinity. He postulated, and most analysts agree, that some degree of bisexuality in the psychic sphere is normally present in every human being. This is indeed a corollary of the fact that the oedipus complex normally includes fantasies of sexual union with *both* parents. It is clear, however, that variations in the relative strength of the masculine and the feminine components of the sexual drive might considerably influence the relative intensity of the various oedipal wishes.

For instance, an unusually strong, constitutional tendency toward femininity in a boy would be expected to favor the development of an oedipal constellation in which the wish to take the mother's place in sexual union with the father was more intense than the wish to take the father's place with mother. The converse would of course be true in the case of an unusually strong, constitutional tendency toward masculinity in a girl. Whether or not this would be the actual result in any particular case would naturally depend on how much the constitutional tendency was favored or opposed by environmental factors. Moreover, what the relative importance may be of constitution and environment is something which we have no way of estimating satisfactorily at present. In fact, in our clinical work we are as a rule ignorant of constitutional factors and tend therefore to lose sight of their possible importance as compared to the environmental factors, which are usually more obvious and hence more impressive.



There is at least one other important aspect of the oedipal phase that we have not yet mentioned and that should not be passed over. That is the genital masturbation which ordinarily constitutes the child's sexual *activity* during this period of its life. Both the masturbatory activity and the fantasies which accompany it substitute in great part for the direct expression of the sexual and aggressive impulses which the child feels toward its parents. Whether this substitution of autoerotic stimulation and fantasy for real actions toward real people is in the long run more beneficial or more harmful to the child depends in part on what value standards one chooses to adopt, but in any case the question seems to be an idle one. The substitution is inevitable, because in the last analysis it is forced on the child by his biological immaturity.

With the passing of the oedipal phase, genital masturbation is usually abandoned, or greatly diminished, and does not reappear till puberty. The original, oedipal fantasies are repressed, but disguised versions of them persist in consciousness as the familiar daydreams of childhood, and they continue to exert an important influence on nearly every aspect of mental life: on the forms and objects of adult sexuality; on creative, artistic, vocational, and other sublimated activity; on character formation; and on whatever neurotic symptoms the individual may develop.

This is not the only way in which the oedipus complex influences the future life of the individual, however. It has in addition a specific consequence which is of very great importance in subsequent mental life and which we propose to discuss now. This consequence is the *formation of the superego*, the third of the group of mental functions which Freud postulated in his so-called structural hypothesis of the psychic apparatus.

As we said in Chapter III, the superego corresponds in a general way to what we ordinarily call conscience. It comprises the moral functions of the personality. These functions

include (1) the approval or disapproval of actions and wishes on the grounds of rectitude, (2) critical self-observation, (3) self-punishment, (4) the demand for reparation or repentance of wrongdoing, and (5) self-praise or self-love as a reward for virtuous or desirable thoughts and actions. Contrary to the ordinary meaning of "conscience," however, we understand that the functions of the superego are often largely or completely unconscious. It is thus true, as Freud (1933) said, that while, on the one hand, psychoanalysis showed that human beings are less moral than they had believed themselves to be, by demonstrating the existence of unconscious wishes in each individual which he consciously repudiates and denies, it has demonstrated on the other hand that there are more and stricter moral demands and prohibitions in each one of us than we have any conscious knowledge of.

To return to the topic of the origin of the superego, it is fairly generally agreed at present that its earliest beginnings, or perhaps one had better say, its precursors, are present in the prephallic or preoedipal phase. The moral demands and prohibitions of parents, or of the nursemaids, governesses, and teachers who may act as substitutes for the parents, begin to influence the mental life of the child very early. Certainly their influence is apparent by the end of the first year. We may mention in passing that the moral demands of this very early period are rather simple ones, if we judge them by our adult standards. Among the most important of them are those that have to do with toilet training. Ferenczi referred to these precursors of the superego as "sphincter morality."

In the preoedipal phase, however, the child treats the moral demands which are made upon him as a part of his environment. If mother, or some other moral arbiter, is there in the flesh and if the child wants to please her, he will refrain from transgression. If he is alone, or if he is angry at mother, he will either displease her or do as he wishes, subject only to his fear of punishment. During the course of the oedipal phase

itself matters begin to change in this respect and somewhere around the ages of five or six years morality begins to be an inner matter. It is then, we believe, that the child first begins to feel that moral standards and the demand that wrongdoing must be punished, repented, and undone, come from within himself, rather than from another person whom he must obey. In addition we believe that it is not until the age of nine or ten years that this process of internalization has become stable enough to be essentially permanent, even though it is normally still subject to addition and modification throughout adolescence and to some extent perhaps even into adult life.

What is it that happens to produce this fateful internalization? As far as we understand it, in the course of abandoning and repressing or otherwise repudiating the incestuous and murderous wishes which constitute the oedipus complex, the child's relations with the objects of these wishes are in considerable part transformed into identifications with them. Instead of loving and hating his parents, who he believes would oppose and punish such wishes, he becomes like his parents in his repudiation of his wishes. Thus the original nucleus of the prohibitions of the superego is the demand that the individual repudiate the incestuous and hostile wishes that comprised that individual's oedipus complex. Moreover, this demand persists throughout life, unconsciously of course, as the essence of the superego.

We see, therefore, that the superego has a particularly intimate relationship to the oedipus complex and that it is formed as a consequence of the identifications with the moral and prohibiting aspects of his parents, identifications which arise in the child's mind in the process of the dissolution or passing of the oedipus complex. The superego, we may say, consists originally of the internalized images of the moral aspects of the parents of the phallic or oedipal phase.

Let us now examine certain aspects of this process of identification in greater detail. As we do so, we must bear in mind

that the ego's main task at the time the identifications in question take place is the defensive struggle against the oedipal strivings. We understand that it is principally castration anxiety in the boy and its analogues in the girl that constitute the fear that motivates this struggle and that the struggle itself occupies the center of the stage of the child's psychic life at this age. All else is a part of it, a consequence of it, or subordinate to it.

From the point of view of the ego the establishment of the identifications which form the superego is a very great aid to its defensive efforts against the id impulses which it is struggling to master. It means that the parental prohibitions have been permanently installed within the mind, where they can keep an ever watchful eye on the id. It is as though, by identifying with his parents in this way, the child can ensure that they are always present, so that whenever an id impulse threatens to assert itself the parents are at hand, ready to enforce their demand that it be repudiated.

We see then that the superego identifications are an advantage to the ego from the point of view of defense. Indeed, we might go farther and say that they are an essential support to the ego in this respect. However, from the point of view of the ego's independence and its freedom to enjoy instinctual gratification the superego identifications are a very great disadvantage. From the time of the formation of the superego, the ego loses a large share of its freedom of action and remains forever afterward subject to the domination of the superego. The ego has acquired not merely an ally in the superego, it has acquired a master. Thenceforward the demands of the superego are added to those of the id and of the external environment to which the ego must bow and among which it must try to mediate. The ego is able to participate in the power of the parents by identifying with them, but only at the cost of remaining to some extent permanently subject to them.

Freud (1923) made two further observations concerning

the formation of these identifications that are of interest to mention here. The first of these observations is that the child experiences his parents' prohibitions in large part as verbal commands or scolding. The consequence of this is that the superego bears a close relationship to auditory memories and in particular to memories of the spoken word. Some intuitive perception of this fact is probably responsible for the common figure of speech which refers to the "voice of conscience." In states of psychological regression, such as dreams (Isakower, 1954) and certain types of severe mental illness (Freud, 1923), the functioning of the superego is perceived in the form of spoken words which the subject experiences as coming from a source outside himself, just as his parents' commands did when he was little. It must not be supposed, however, that the superego is exclusively related to auditory perceptions and memories. Memories of other sensory perceptions, such\* as visual and tactile ones, are related to it as well. For example, one patient, who was very much frightened by his own hostile fantasies, at the height of an attack of acute anxiety felt that his face was being slapped whenever he thought of being angry. In this case the operation of the superego was experienced as physical punishment which was felt as coming from someone outside himself in quite the same way as his parents had punished him on occasion in his childhood.

The second of Freud's (1923) observations was that in large measure the parental images which are introjected to form the superego are those of the parents' superegos. That is, it happens in general that parents, in bringing up their children, tend to discipline them very much as they were themselves treated by their parents in their own childhoods. Their own moral demands, acquired in early life, are applied to their children, whose superegos in consequence reflect or resemble those of their parents. This characteristic has an important social consequence, as Freud (1923) pointed out. It results in a perpetuation of the moral code of a society and is respon-

sible in part for the conservatism and resistance to change which social structures show.

Let us now consider some aspects of superego formation which are rather more closely concerned with the id than with the ego. For one thing, as Freud (1923) pointed out, the superego identifications are in some degree the consequence of the abandonment of the incestuous object relations of the oedipus complex. In this sense these identifications are partly the consequence of object loss. The reader will remember that this was one of the mechanisms of identification which we discussed in Chapter III. As we understand it, when the instinctual cathexes are withdrawn from their original objects, their constant search for another object leads to the formation of an identification with the original object within the ego itself to which the cathexes are then attached. What were object cathexes thus become narcissistic ones. In the case in which we are now interested, of course, the identifications which are thus formed within the ego comprise that special part of the ego which we call the superego.

Thus, from the point of view of the id, the superego is the substitute for and the heir of the oedipal object relations. It is for this reason that Freud described it as having its roots deep within the id. We see, moreover, that the formation of the superego results in the transformation of a very substantial amount of object cathexes into self-directed or narcissistic ones. It is ordinarily the most openly sexual cathexes and the most directly or violently hostile ones which are thus given up, while feelings of tenderness and of less violent hostility continue to be attached to the original objects. That is, the child continues to have feelings of tenderness and of less violent hatred or rebelliousness toward his parents. In order to avoid misunderstanding we should make it clear that by no means all of the child's directly incestuous and murderous impulses toward his parents are abandoned. On the contrary, at least a portion of them, and in many, perhaps even in most

persons, a considerable portion of them are simply repressed, or otherwise defended against. This portion lives on in the id, as do any other repressed wishes, still directed toward the original objects and kept from open expression in act or conscious thought and fantasy only by the constant opposition of the countercathexes which the ego has directed against them. However, these repressed oedipal wishes, with their cathexes, do not contribute to the formation of the superego (Freud, 1923). For that reason they have been omitted from our present discussion despite their obvious importance.

It is a surprising, but easily observable fact that the severity of an individual's superego does not necessarily, nor even regularly, correspond to the severity with which his parents opposed his instinctual wishes when he was a child. On the basis of our discussion so far we should expect this to be the case. Since the superego is the introjected parent, we should expect that the child with a severe parent would have a severe superego and vice versa. To some extent this is no doubt true. It is very likely that direct castration threats toward a little boy during the oedipal phase, for instance, or similar threats to a little girl of the same age tend to result in the formation of an undesirably severe superego and in consequence an undesirably severe prohibition of sexuality or aggressiveness, or both, in later life.

However, it appears that other factors than the severity of the parent play the major part in determining the severity of the superego. The principal factor appears to be the intensity of the aggressive component of the child's own oedipal wishes. In simpler, though less exact language we may say that it is the intensity of the child's own hostile impulses toward his parents during the oedipal phase that is the principal factor in determining the severity of the superego, rather than the degree of the parents' hostility or severity toward the child.

We believe that we can understand or explain this in the following way. When the oedipal objects are abandoned and

replaced by superego identifications, the drive energy which formerly cathected those objects comes to be at least in part at the disposal of the newly established part of the ego which we call the superego. Thus the aggressive energy at the disposal of the superego derives from the aggressive energy of the oedipal object cathexes and the two are at least proportional, if not equal in amount. That is, the greater the amount of aggressive energy in the oedipal object cathexes, the greater the amount of such energy which is subsequently at the disposal of the superego. This aggressive energy, can then be turned against the ego whenever occasion arises in order to enforce its obedience to the prohibitions of the superego or to punish the ego for its transgressions. In other words, the severity of the superego is determined by the amount of aggressive energy at its disposal and this in turn bears a closer relationship to the aggressive cathexes of the child's oedipal impulses toward its parents than it does to the severity of the parents' prohibitions during the child's oedipal phase. The little child whose oedipal fantasies were especially violent and destructive will tend to have a stronger sense of guilt than one whose fantasies were less destructive.

Our final comment on superego formation from the point of view of the id is this. One way of formulating the conflicts of the oedipal period is to say that the id impulses associated with the objects of that period, that is, with the parents, appear to the child to expose him to the danger of bodily injury. In the case of the boy the fear is that he will lose his penis. In the case of the girl it is some analogous fear of genital injury, or an intensely unpleasant feeling of mortification because of the lack of a penis, or both. In any case there is a conflict between the demands of object cathexes on the one hand and narcissistic or self-cathexes on the other hand. It is instructive to note that the issue is decided in favor of the narcissistic cathexes. The dangerous object cathexes are repressed or abandoned, or they are mastered or repudiated in

other ways, while the narcissistic cathexes are maintained essentially intact. We are thus reminded once more of the fact that the narcissistic component of the child's instinctual life is normally stronger than the part which is concerned with object relations, even though these are much the easier to observe and consequently more likely to occupy our attention.

We cannot leave the subject of superego formation without some discussion of the modifications of it and accretions to it which occur in later childhood, in adolescence and even to some extent in adult life. Each of these additions and alterations results from an identification with an object of the child's or adult's environment, or, rather, with the moral aspect of such an object. At first, such objects are exclusively people whose role in the child's life is similar to that of his parents. Examples of such persons are teachers, religious instructors, and domestic servants. Later on the child may introject persons with whom he has no personal contact and even historical or fictional characters. Such identifications are particularly common in prepuberty and in adolescence. They mold the individual's superego in the direction of conformity with the moral standards and ideals of the social groups of which he is a member.

When we stop to think of the very considerable differences that are found among the moral codes of various social groups, we realize what a great part of the adult superego is the result of these later identifications. Changes may even occur in the superego during adult life, as happens for instance as the result of a religious conversion. However, the original nucleus of the superego which was formed during the oedipal phase remains always the firmest and most effective part. As a result, the prohibitions against incest and parenticide are the parts of most persons' morality which are the most thoroughly internalized, or, conversely, the least likely to be transgressed. Other superego prohibitions are much more likely to be trans-

gressed if there is a particularly favorable opportunity or a particularly strong temptation.

We wish now to discuss certain aspects of the role which the superego plays in the functioning of the psychic apparatus once it has been formed. We may say in general that after the oedipal phase is over it is the superego which initiates and enforces the defensive activities of the ego against the impulses of the id. As the child in the oedipal period feared that he would be castrated by his parent and repressed or repudiated his oedipal wishes in order to avoid the danger, so the child or adult in the post-oedipal period unconsciously fears his introjected parental images, that is, his superego and controls his id impulses in order to avoid the danger of his superego's displeasure. Disapproval by the superego thus takes its place as the final one of the series of danger situations to which the ego reacts with anxiety which we discussed in Chapter IV (Freud, 1926). To repeat and complete the list from that chapter, the first such danger situation, chronologically speaking, is loss of the object, the next is loss of the object's love, the third is the fear of castration or of analogous genital injury, and the final one is disapproval by the superego. As the reader will remember, these various danger situations do not successively *disappear* as the next one emerges. It is rather that each in turn plays the chief role as the source of anxiety and as the occasion for the ego to employ defensive measures against whatever id impulses precipitate the danger situation or threaten to do so.

Disapproval by the superego has some consequences which are conscious and hence familiar to us and others which are unconscious and therefore have been made apparent only as the result of psychoanalytic investigation. For example, we are all familiar with the painful feeling of tension which we call guilt or remorse, and we have no hesitation in connecting it with the operation of the superego. However, there are other equally familiar psychic phenomena whose relation to

the superego is less obvious, though equally close. Thus, as Freud (1933) pointed out, the commonest cause of painful and apparently unwarranted feelings of inferiority is disapproval by the superego. For practical purposes such feelings of inferiority are the same as feelings of guilt. This is obviously a point of considerable clinical importance, since it tells us that a patient who has considerable feelings of inferiority or lowered self-esteem is probably unconsciously accusing himself of some misdeed, regardless of what reason he may consciously give to account for his feelings of inferiority.

Just as disapproval of the ego by the superego gives rise to feelings of guilt and inferiority, so may feelings of joy or happiness and self-satisfaction be the result of the superego's approval of the ego for some behavior or attitude on the part of the ego which the superego particularly approved. Such a "virtuous" glow, like its opposite, a sense of guilt, is a familiar phenomenon, of course, and these two opposite feelings or states of mind are readily comparable to the states of mind of the small child who is either praised and loved, or scolded and punished by his parents for his behavior. In other words, the conscious feelings which result from the approving or disapproving attitude of the superego in later life are easily understood when we realize that the superego is the introjected parental images and that throughout life the relationship between ego and superego is very similar to the relationship between a small child and his parents.

There are two features of the operation of the superego which are ordinarily unconscious in adult life and which show very clearly its connection with the mental processes of those early periods of childhood in which the superego takes its origin. The first of these is the talion law and the second is the lack of discrimination between wish and deed.

*Lex talionis* means very simply that the punishment for a misdeed or crime is to have the malefactor suffer the same injury as he inflicted. This is expressed most familiarly in the

Biblical demand of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." It is a concept of justice which is a primitive one in two senses. The first sense is that it is a concept of justice which is characteristic of historically old or primitive social structures. This fact is undoubtedly of great importance, but it does not concern us at present. The second sense, which does concern us, is that the talion law is essentially the little child's concept of justice. The interesting and unexpected thing about it is the degree to which this concept persists unconsciously into adult life and determines the functioning of the superego. The unconscious penalties and punishments which the superego imposes are found on analysis to conform in many instances to the talion law, even though the individual has long since outgrown this childish attitude as far as his conscious mental life is concerned.

As for the lack of discrimination between wish and deed, it is a commonplace of psychoanalytic investigation that the superego threatens punishment for the one nearly as severely as for the other. It is clearly not merely the doing something that is forbidden by the superego, it is the wish or impulse itself that is interdicted or punished, as the case may be. We believe that this attitude of the superego is a consequence of the fact that a child of four or five, or younger, distinguishes between his fantasies and his actions much less clearly than he does in later life. He is in large part dominated by the belief that "wishing makes it so" and this magical attitude is perpetuated by the unconscious operations of the superego in later life.

Another feature of the unconscious operation of the superego is that it may result in an unconscious need for expiation or self-punishment. Such a need for punishment, in itself unconscious, can ordinarily be discovered only by psychoanalysis. However, once one knows that such a thing exists and is on the lookout for it, one sees evidence of its presence much oftener than one might think. For example, an opportunity,

as prison psychiatrist, to read the official records of the ways in which felons are caught is very instructive in this regard. The criminal's own unconscious desire for punishment is frequently a most important aid to the police. The criminal often unconsciously provides the clues that he himself knows will lead to his being discovered and captured. To analyze a criminal is ordinarily not possible, of course, but in some cases the mere facts of the record are sufficient to make matters clear.

For instance, a sneak burglar operated successfully for over a year in the following way. He frequented lower middle-class, tenement districts where entrance to any apartment could easily be effected from a rear porch or stairway. By keeping watch during the middle of the morning he could wait until the housewife in a particular apartment was out shopping and he would then force an entry into the vacant flat. He left no fingerprints and took nothing but cash, which of course the police had no way of tracing. It was obvious that this burglar knew just what he was doing and for months the police were quite unable to interfere with his activities in any substantial way. It seemed as though only bad luck could put an end to his career. Suddenly he changed his habits. Instead of taking only cash, he stole some jewelry as well, pawned it for a relatively small sum in a nearby pawnshop, and was in the hands of the police within a few days. On many previous occasions he had left untouched jewelry which was just as valuable as that which he finally stole precisely because he knew that it was quite impossible for him to dispose of stolen goods without the police tracing it to him sooner or later. The conclusion seems inescapable that this criminal unconsciously arranged for his own arrest and imprisonment. In view of all we know at present about the unconscious workings of the mind, his motive for doing so was an unconscious need to be punished.

Of course the need for punishment need not be connected

with actual misdeeds, as in the instance just described. It may as well be a consequence of fantasies or wishes, whether conscious or unconscious ones. Indeed, as Freud (1924c) pointed out, a person's criminal career may begin as the result of a need for punishment. That is to say, an unconscious need for punishment which stems from repressed oedipal wishes may result in the commission of a crime for which punishment is certain. Such a person is often referred to as a criminal from a sense of guilt.

However, we must add that an unconscious need for punishment need not necessarily result in criminal actions which will be punished by some legal authority. Other forms of suffering or self-injury may be unconsciously arranged for instead, such as failure in career (the so-called "fate-neurosis"), "accidental" physical injuries, and the like.

We can readily understand that a superego which insists on self-punishment or self-injury becomes itself a danger from the point of view of the ego. It will not surprise us, therefore, to learn that the ego may employ against the superego defensive mechanisms and other defensive operations which are entirely analogous to those which it regularly employs against the id. Perhaps the following example will serve to clarify what we mean by this.

A man with strong voyeuristic tendencies in childhood grew up to be a strong and active supporter of an anti-vice society in adult life. In this connection he was especially zealous in the detection and prosecution of dealers in obscene pictures. Since his activities in this connection involved his continually looking for pictures of naked men and women, it is easy to see that they offered ready opportunity for the unconscious gratification of his voyeurism. This comment, however, is made from the point of view of the defensive struggle or conflict between the id and the ego rather than from that of conflict between ego and superego. From the latter point of view we may say two things. In the first place,

the feeling of guilt that would have been conscious in childhood as a consequence of looking at naked bodies was not apparent when he looked at naked pictures in adult life. His ego had succeeded in barring any guilt feeling from consciousness and had instead projected it onto others. It was then *other* people who were guilty of voyeurism, or, more exactly, who were bad and should be punished for their voyeuristic wishes and actions. In addition, our subject's ego had established a reaction formation against his sense of guilt, so that instead of any conscious sense of guilt he felt consciously superior and particularly virtuous in connection with his absorbing interest in ferreting out and discovering pictures of naked bodies.

We do not know whether defenses on the part of the ego against the superego are a regular thing, but there is no doubt that they may occur, and that in at least some individuals they are of considerable practical importance (Fenichel, 1946).

There is an important connection between the superego and group psychology which Freud (1921) pointed out in a monograph on the subject. Certain groups at least are held together by virtue of the fact that each of the members of the group has introjected or identified with the same person, who is the leader of the group. The consequence of this identification is that the image of the leader becomes a part of the superego of each of the members of the group. In other words, the various members of the group have in common certain superego elements. The will of the leader, his commands and precepts thus become the moral laws of his followers. Although Freud's monograph was written long before the beginning of Hitler's rise, his analysis of this aspect of group psychology explains very well the extraordinary alterations that were effected by Hitler's influence in the moral standards of the millions of Germans who were his followers.

A similar mechanism is presumably involved in the case of religious groups or sects. In these instances also the various

members of the group have a common morality, that is, common superego elements, which are derived from identification with the same god or spiritual leader. Here the god plays the same role, psychologically speaking, as the leader or hero does in the nonreligious group. This comes as no surprise, of course, in view of the close relationship that we know existed quite consciously in peoples' minds between gods and heroes even among such highly civilized people as the Romans of the empire, who deified their emperors as a matter of course.

Perhaps we may conclude our discussion of the superego by restating the essentials of its origin and nature. It arises as a consequence of the introjection of the parental prohibitions and exhortations of the oedipal phase and throughout life its unconscious essence remains the prohibition of the sexual and aggressive wishes of the oedipus complex, despite the many alterations and additions it undergoes in later childhood, in adolescence, and even in adult life.

## SUGGESTED READING

- FREUD, S. *The Ego and the Id*. London: Hogarth Press, 1927.  
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