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Have you ---
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HAVE YOU A COMPLEX ?



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BY J. ELLIOT ROSS

ONE of the most popular indoor sports today is psycho-analysis. "Everybody is doing it." If you can't bandy about such terms as "complex," "sex-repression," "inhibition," "libido," you are convicted of being mid-Victorian. And if you have not been "psyched" by a professional at twenty-five dollars a throw, you must at least have analyzed yourself.

But what is "psycho-analysis"? Well, in its simplest meaning it is merely the division of a man into the conscious and the unconscious, and an attempt to explain the conscious by the unconscious. The following story will make clear what I mean.

Mr. B—— always became violently sick at his stomach whenever he passed through a railroad tunnel. He was not aware of any cause for his sickness. Physicians examined him, but could find no organic explanation for his condition. In despair he consulted a psycho-analyst. Having probed into the past, the analyst found that when Mr. B—— was a very small child he had been taken on a railroad journey by his mother, shortly after the death of his father. A man, who afterwards became his step-father, occupied the same seat with him and his mother. While they were passing through a tunnel, the man took the opportunity of embracing the boy's mother. This action aroused such a paroxysm of jealousy in the child that he was violently nauseated.

Now, the theory of the analyst is that this experience of jealousy dropped out of Mr. B——'s conscious memory. Nevertheless, an association between tunnels and nausea was created, and this association persisted in the unconscious. A complex (knotted association), having its basis in the unconscious, was

created. What was needed for a cure was to bring the whole incident back into consciousness, to realize the cause of the nausea in the first instance, and then deliberately to break the association by recognizing that as there was no longer any cause for jealousy, so there was no longer any cause for nausea.

The story of Mr. B—— is an example of psycho-analysis in its barest terms, and in its least objectionable form. As a method of treatment it is often successful in cases of this kind. An unconscious association of ideas takes place and all that is needed to break the association is to bring the incident on which the association is based back into consciousness. But it may happen that the part played by the unconscious is even more important than in the illustration I have used of Mr. B——. In his case there was an external objective incident that caused the nausea in the first place. In other instances, according to the theory of psycho-analysis, it may be the unconscious self of a person that builds up a condition to meet a disagreeable situation.

For instance, an unattractive girl who has not received the attention for which she longs, may develop an apparent sickness, making her an invalid, because in this way she actually gets more attention than she would if she were well. It may be that she becomes unable to use her feet, and has to lie in bed all the time. She, herself, does not realize that she is feigning.

Or a man who has been nerving himself to meet business problems day after day, may finally contract such deafness that he can no longer fill the position he has. But instead of the deafness being really organic, it may be merely hysterical. The unconscious may have introduced this defect as a means of escape from a situation that had become intolerable. With more stamina the man could have faced the divided

self and made it do the bidding of his conscious will. But because he lacked the necessary determination and endurance, the unconscious self took this round-about way.

Shell-Shock and Psychology

What was called shell-shock during the war, was thought at first to be a result of actual physical shock induced by the noise or deadly power of the high explosives. But later on, psychologists were convinced that the origin of the whole difficulty was psychic. The unconscious self of the soldier was producing deafness, or blindness, or apparent paralysis, as a way of avoiding the front without disgrace. This condition, called a defense mechanism, is built up without the conscious knowledge of the victim, and is an exaggerated result of a fear complex.

Psycho-analysis, therefore, is an attempt to find an explanation in the unconscious for what is adversely affecting the conscious life. In this meaning of the term, it contains nothing to which one can object.

But, accompanying these fundamental principles of psycho-analysis, as I have explained them, is an elaborate technique for discovering the past in the unconscious, and also a simplified philosophy that attempts to interpret the whole of life in terms of sex. The process of recalling the unconscious, then, becomes an attempt to bring back into conscious memory every sex experience from earliest childhood. It is in this latter sense that the term "psycho-analysis" is generally used today.

Underlying Principle

Let us start with the philosophy of the modern psycho-analyst which maintains that the great dominant force in human life is the sexual urge. All sorts

of insignificant occurrences are assumed to have some subtle explanation in one's sexual constitution and nothing is too great or too trifling for sex to be responsible for.

If you love company, it is sex; if you like solitude, it is sex; if you marry, it is sex; but if you do not marry, that, too, is sex. According to the psycho-analytic theory you can no more escape from sex than you can escape from the air you breathe. Sex surrounds you and interpenetrates you in the most intimate way possible.

The sex element does not, however, always lie on the surface. If it were at once apparent or easily detected there would be fewer cases for the analysts. Sex disguises itself effectively and in many ways, and it sometimes takes great skill to unearth this elusive element. Long hours must be spent in consultation with the analyst, but sooner or later the sex motive will be found to be at the root of the trouble, since the analyst starts out with the assumption that it is responsible for everything.

Mental Dissection

When a person applies to a psycho-analyst for treatment, the first step on the part of the latter is to have the patient recall with minute detail every sexual experience of his life. In order to facilitate this process of remembering, the patient is protected as far as possible from distractions. The room is somewhat darkened, the patient reclines on a couch, and is told to relax as much as possible. Then he or she is encouraged to go back and back, detailing every sexual experience until the first remembered things of childhood are reached.

A patient not obsessed with sex before going to an analyst, might very likely become sexually obsessed after a continued treatment of this sort. It is like

reading a book of symptoms. The uninformed layman who does so, imagines he has every disease known to modern science from measles to cancer. And the analyst's victim begins to see sex in everything. The most innocent actions take on a different complexion. Wherever one turns there is the little imp of sex leering wickedly.

The Confessional

Something can be learned from the wise practice of the Catholic Church in throwing certain safeguards about the confessional. Her priests have had to undergo a long and rigorous training; the confession takes place in church with other people close by; a screen separates confessor from penitent. But "confessions" under such circumstances as the analyst provides and confined almost exclusively to sexual experiences involve an obvious danger. It needs no prurient imagination to foresee some very undesirable consequences. In the confessional, too, the penitent is discouraged from going into detail. He is told that the less he says about sexual sins the better. The confessor need only to understand the nature of the sin and learn the number of times it has been committed. But the analyst, in the rôle of confessor, wants all the detail possible and asks questions that no confessor would put to a penitent. Neurotic patients are especially susceptible to suggestion, and if hour after hour an analyst insists that there is some sexual experience responsible for the patient's present trouble, if he asks leading questions again and again, the poor patient can easily be led on until sex does become all-engrossing for him. But it is not a proof that this was originally the cause of his trouble, but rather that the analyst's technique has produced a result which could have been foretold. He, himself, to a great extent is responsible for the introduction of the

sexual element. A diagnosis in the Freudian sense, therefore, becomes a diagnosis of the mind that made it.

“Free Association”

If the patient's deliberate effort to remember sexual experience yields nothing, the analyst tries another means. Perhaps the patient is not entirely honest, but may be concealing sexual tendencies. And so the method of free association was invented. The analyst calls off a number of words, carefully noting with a stop-watch the time it takes for the patient to answer what idea is called up by the word. He may say “queen,” and the answer be “crown.” Or the word may be “chocolate” and the answer “Huyler's.” As long as there is no hesitation on the part of the patient, there is no particular significance to the affair. But if there is hesitation, that is an indication that the association which first came into the mind, is not being frankly revealed. The hesitation is continued for the purpose of concealing the first association suggestive of sex, and substituting another. Hence the analyst goes back over these words where there was hesitation. He encourages the patient to be perfectly frank. And perhaps in the end he does get some sort of sexual association.

“—Such Stuff as Dreams—”

When the first two steps are fruitless, when the deliberate effort to remember and the method of free association yield no sexual content, the analyst is not discouraged. There is still another resource, this time an appeal to the unconscious, the examination of dreams. Psycho-analysis assumes that what a person dreams unveils his sexual life more clearly than he is willing to disclose when conscious; that his consciously suppressed or unconsciously repressed im-

pulses and desires come to the surface in dreams and are revealed under disguised forms or symbols. The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to the knowledge of the unconscious in mental life.

The Non-Existent Censor

Before going on with this subject it may be well to speak of the term known as censorship or the censor in the philosophy of Freud. The constant effort of the individual to adapt himself to his psychic environment, hence to oppose and suppress his more primitive self, has resulted in the setting up of a barrier between the unconscious and the conscious, a sort of policeman, whose function is to watch over and inhibit the manifestations of the more primitive part of the individual. This almost humorous creation called the censor, is in direct opposition to Freud's claims that psycho-analysis is a science. Scientific facts can be proved—the censor, like the ogre, seems to belong to the realm of fairy stories or old wives' tales.

To go on, then, with the treatment of dreams, the patient is encouraged to tell every dream in all detail to the analyst who interprets them. The old interpreters of dreams who made everything have an allegorical meaning are surpassed by modern analysts in their *twisting of fancies* to fit a theory. Any dream can signify almost anything, and every dream has its origin in the sex motive.

It is not the food you ate for supper that causes your dreams through a perfectly natural reaction on the digestive processes, rather it is the desires you have consciously or conscientiously repressed during waking moments. But since in his conscious moments the dreamer has repressed sexual desires, the dreams take the allegorical form. If you dream you

are on a high mountain, that is sex; if in a canyon, that is sex; if on the open sea, that is sex. I will not go into the ways in which the analysts try to show that these various natural phenomena symbolize sexual experiences, but anyone who is interested can find the attempted explanation in Freud's book.

Good and Bad

Now we have admitted that there is really something to psycho-analysis and the theory of the influence of the unconscious on the conscious self, that some of its principles are sound and that a knowledge of these principles may be able to prevent the creation of certain mental conditions. But that there are grave dangers connected with its practice no one who knows anything at all about the subject can deny.

The first and greatest danger is the over emphasis laid on sex, the reduction of every act of the mind, conscious or unconscious to the sex motive. Some of the analysts do not go as far as Freud in this respect whose sexual theory is that all the primitive trends of the soul are sexual in origin. Sex is very important in life, but it is not everything. And to make it everything, to probe into every manifestation of it, to dig up from the past all expressions of the sexual urge, and to parade them before the analyst is certainly going to make it much more prominent than it should be. This procedure of the analysts is very likely, indeed, to make sex all-important, to give the sex impulse such an emphasis that it may become almost uncontrollable.

It is true that sexual experience in the remote past may be responsible for a present neurosis. And the fact of bringing the experience back into consciousness, of showing that it should no longer influence one's life, may be helpful. I suppose the jealousy of the child in the railroad tunnel, in the illustration

with which we began, might be called sexual. Very possibly, the analyst's explanation is correct in making this the case of Mr. B———'s nausea, and the explanation may effect a cure. But the truth remains that sex is not the whole of life, and that not all neuroses are due to this element.

Too Much Analysis

However, even if the reason for all this digging into the past were not a sexual one, there still would be grave dangers attached to the process. The trouble with a great many people is not that they need more self analysis, but less. They are already too introspective. The simplest act has to be looked at and gone into as if the fate of nations depended upon it. As Hamlet said centuries ago, they are "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." Conscience has made cowards of them. It is hard to say what the best cure for such people would be. Religion helps. So does active and healthy employment of body and mind in which they have little time to think of themselves.

A second mistake made by many analysts is in maintaining that the repression of sex is at the root of all our ills. A dread of crowds, indigestion or megalomania, they say, are traceable to some repression of the sexual impulse, and that the only way to avoid the dire consequences of such repression is not to repress. This principle of psycho-analysis, it may be readily seen, if strictly applied would lead to all sorts of sexual indulgences.

Very possibly a great deal of suffering has been caused by sexual repression. Sometimes the repression may lead to nervous disorders, and even to insanity. But we must not overlook the fact that the lack of repression opens the way to even more serious

consequences as every physician and many persons know.

Good Balance

Moreover, sexual repression does not always result in the dire consequences emphasized by the analysts. There have been innumerable cases of perfectly controlled men and women who were examples of the best balanced people in the world. It is those who are pathological to start with, who suffer such dreadful effects from repressing the sex instinct. And their nervous constitution is such already that yielding to their sexual impulses would probably produce even worse results.

Not Honest

When sexual repression does create nervous disorders, as happens at times, it is because of a conflict with the self. A man is not really honest in his effort at repression. Deliberately, he is dwelling on sexual desires, feeding his imagination with sexual images, yet attempting to restrain the natural culmination of such thoughts and desires. The strain comes not from complete repression, but from trying to go just so far and no farther. He is like the alcoholic patient, who instead of avoiding contact with liquor in as far as he can do so, deliberately mingles with drinking companions, touches the glass to his lips, inhales the contents.

The sexual impulses arising in a normally healthy body can be restrained without producing any neuroses. When this country entered the World War, Secretary Baker called into conference at Washington, scores of the leading physicians of the country. He asked them if their professional opinion was that the millions of men to be assembled in camps needed any

sexual outlet. It was a problem of administration. Every government in the modern world, probably, had previously tolerated prostitution in connection with armies. But these physicians, almost to a man, declared there should be no recognition of vice. And one of the conditions for a city getting a cantonment, was that it should clean up commercialized vice. I do not mean that all our soldiers were ascetics, that they responded perfectly to this attitude of the Government. But certainly hundreds of thousands of them did; nor did these become neurotic weaklings. Galahads were found among them whose strength was as the strength of ten, because their hearts were pure. There is more truth in the belief that sound morals make for sound bodies than in the analyst's theories about repression. And this belief finds confirmation in the splendid lives of many celibates, men and women both religious and lay.

False Principles

Two of the principles, then, advocated by many analysts are really untenable; the first, that sex explains everything in life; and the second, that sexual impulses should never be repressed.

I do not affirm that all analysts hold these principles, nor that they are necessarily connected with psycho-analysis. I began with an example of what I should call reasonable analysis. And we may readily grant that analysts sometimes have effected cures that could have resulted from no other treatment. But nevertheless it remains true that there have been great exaggerations as to the number of successful cures made by those posing as analysts, as it remains true also that in many cases the result has been harmful to the patient, and that the technique easily lends itself to charlatan exploitation.

Another point is that even those analysts who avoid the pitfall of exaggerating the influence of sex, may fall into the fault of exaggerating the influence of the unconscious. There is a rôle for the unconscious, undoubtedly. I have admitted it in the example with which I began. But the cause of every psychic trouble is not necessarily in the unconscious. A great many troubles may come from causes consciously recognized by those suffering from a diseased mental condition.

Perfectly Plain

A man who has drifted into melancholia because his wife died, or because he has lost his fortune in a risky speculation, has no reason to look for the cause of his illness in the unconscious. He knows well enough what is the matter with him. What he needs is resolution to brace up and face life bravely. His conscious, not his unconscious, self is at fault.

Even when the cause of trouble lies in the unconscious, analysis frequently fails to effect a cure. And the reason is because of a faulty theoretical basis. It is assumed that all that is necessary to bring about a cure is to make the analysis, that once the patient realizes the way in which he got into a certain state of mind he is supposed to break the association.

Knowledge Not Virtue

But as a matter of fact, this analysis does not always produce a cure. A man may be made to see clearly enough the way by which he developed a fear complex, or an inferiority complex, or the drug habit. But that does not necessarily give him strength of will enough to overcome the complex, or later, the habit. Psycho-analysis fails to take into consideration the will. Its appeal is too exclusively to the intellect as distinct from the will.

Suppose, for instance, that the invalid girl mentioned in the beginning, is made to see that her condition is simply the result of an elaborate mechanism for gaining the attention she could get in no other way? Does that make her brave enough to face life without the attention she longs for? What she really needs is a new sense of values, not merely analysis. And perhaps a clear insight into the source of the unattractiveness which often enough is her selfishness. She needs a new standard. And analysis is powerless to give her this new standard. Religion can do it, if she can be made to see the emptiness of time in the light of eternity.

Or if a man dreads battle so much that the unconscious working of this dread produces an incapacity for fighting, will this dread be overcome by mere analysis? How can analysis turn a coward into a hero? Or if the man is not a coward, but is really making an heroic effort to overcome an instinctive fear, how can analysis alone give him the strength to conquer? Something more is needed. Analysis may be useful as a preliminary, but in itself it will not effect a cure. There must be a new man created in some way. Religion again can accomplish the task if the man is religious to start with, or if he can become inspired with the love of God.

Emotion Underrated

In still another way analysis is at fault, this time from being *too intellectual*, from not accurately gauging the power of the emotions. The theory of psychoanalysis is that the mere recalling of the previous experience, the re-enacting of the scene, will effect an emotional discharge that will cure the patient of all further trouble from this source.

But practically, the re-enacting of the experience emotionally may produce just the opposite results.

Instead of effecting a catharsis or purging, this re-enacting may emphasize the emotion. Its grip on the patient may become stronger. Instead of freeing him from the trouble, it may intensify it. This is especially true, probably, of emotions connected with sex. To conjure up into consciousness what long ago has been forgotten may easily make matters worse instead of better. Emotion is likely to prove stronger than intellect. All the intellectual conviction in the world that the emotion is foolish, may come to naught in a moment of strong feeling.

Analyst or Lover?

Besides the many defects and dangers to be found in the theory and practice of psycho-analysis, there is also a grave external danger, especially to women patients, in the person of the analyst himself. One of the principles of the theory is that where the neurosis of the patient has been caused by some misplaced sexual attachment, there must be a transference (a feeling of acknowledged sympathy from the patient to the physician) before a cure can be effected. And the transference is to the analyst. The first step is to gain the confidence of the patient. He becomes her guide, philosopher, and friend in the mazes of sexual experience. In plain English, he leads the patient on to love him.

Of course, he does not want that condition to last. It might lead to complicating circumstances. Theoretically, there should be after the transference a "sublimation" (a diverting of the original energy connected with the primitive impulse) of the sexual desire. The woman who has been passionately in love with a man already married, and who has wanted children, may be led to sublimate this desire in caring for children in an orphan asylum.

Theory and Fact

Such is the theory; in practice things may not work out this way at all. A transference has been effected, but the last state of this woman may be worse than the first. And it is no easy matter to lead her on to this sublimation. Everyone who has dealt at all intimately with such cases, knows the difficulties that beset sublimation. Nor does the technique developed by the analyst seem to be either sensible or safe.

The wisest thing for persons afflicted with mysterious maladies of mind or body is to consult the orthodox healers, physicians and priests, and to follow their advice. Above all, no one should treat with an analyst without being absolutely sure of his character. Unless he is reliable you may lose not only your money but your virtue. And at best you are likely to produce a sex-obsession that will follow you to your grave. Instead of being cured, you will find yourself saddled with all the ills that undoubtedly do come from over-emphasis on sex.

Little That Is New

In conclusion I think we may say of psycho-analysis that what is good in it has been known and practiced for centuries. It never had the popularity it now enjoys nor had its pseudo-scientific terminology been developed, but the essence of psycho-analysis was there. What has been added by Freud, Jung, and some of the other moderns are the sexual theory spoken of in another place, and the development of an elaborate technique of investigation, which theory and process of investigation constitute the present so-called science.

Psycho-analysis has for its goal, according to its interpreters, the bringing back to normal those suffering in mind. The purpose of the knowledge of its principles and of the treatment is to free the uncon-

scious with a view to the discovery and comprehension of the patient's buried complex. The analyst's belief is that a knowledge of psycho-analysis will do much to prevent the creation or at least the recurrence of the neuroses from which many people suffer.

With these aims and ideas no one can find fault. And it is true that the theory has been beneficial in throwing new light on mental diseases as well as in increasing the knowledge of certain mental processes. So much for the good side of psycho-analysis: now for the other.

The Creed of Psycho-analysis

A recent critic has said that the creed of the analyst can be summed up in five words—"The omnipotence of the unconscious." If a man is at the mercy of uncontrollable forces within himself, if he must act as these impulses dictate, then the doctrine of free will is swept away, and there can be no sense of moral responsibility, there is no sin. Moreover, religion, ideals of all kinds, everything that men and women have been taught to look upon as sacred and holy and beautiful, become, through the theory of sublimation, only symbols for the sex-motive. The world would be a sorry place to live in, dangerous as the jungle is dangerous, and unspeakably sordid if the people in it were the slaves that psycho-analysis makes them out to be. But we, these people, are not slaves, we know we are free with the freedom of the children of God.

The practice of medicine in our day aims primarily at preventing diseases. Applying the principle to diseases of the mind, we find that wisdom lies in the attempt to keep minds and souls in such good health that psycho-analysis may be known only as the interesting, somewhat fantastic theory developed by a Viennese doctor called Freud, a thing without any real part or place in normal people's lives.



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