

Defence

come about that instinctual discharge, which is given over by definition to the attainment of pleasure, can be perceived as unpleasure or as the threat of unpleasure to the point of occasioning a defensive operation? It is true that the topographical diversification of the psychical apparatus clears the way for the thesis that what is pleasure for one system is unpleasure for another (i.e. the ego), but this distribution of roles still leaves one question unanswered: what exactly leads certain instinctual demands into opposition with the ego? Freud rejects a theoretical solution along the lines that defence arises . . . in cases where the tension produced by lack of satisfaction of an instinctual impulse is raised to an unbearable degree' (2). Unsatisfied hunger, for example, is not repressed; whatever the 'methods of defence' may be which are open to the organism for dealing with a threat of this type, they certainly have nothing to do with defence as it is known to psycho-analysis. And defence cannot be adequately accounted for by *homoeostasis of the organism*.

So what is the ultimate basis of the defence of the ego? Why does the ego experience a certain instinctual impulse as unpleasure? The question is fundamental to psycho-analysis, and there are a variety of answers to it which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. An initial distinction is often made as regards the fundamental source of the danger which is inseparable from instinctual satisfaction: the instinct itself may be deemed dangerous to the ego, and seen purely as an attack upon it from the inside. Alternatively, all danger can be attributed, in the last reckoning, to the individual's relations with the outside world: in this sense, the instinct is only dangerous because of the real harm which its satisfaction might bring in its wake. It is the latter option, for example, which informs the thesis adopted by Freud in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926d) and, in particular, his new interpretation of phobias; consequently, he promotes 'realistic anxiety' (**Realangst*) to a special status and—carrying this tendency to the extreme—he treats neurotic anxiety, or anxiety carrying the face of the instinct, as purely derivative.

If the problem is approached from the standpoint of the way the ego is conceived of, the solution will naturally vary according to whether the stress is laid upon its function as the agent of reality and the representative of the reality principle; or whether the main emphasis is placed instead on its 'compulsion to synthesis'; or, again, whether the ego is seen above all as a *gestalt*—a sort of intrasubjective replica of the organism-governed, like the organism, by a principle of homeostasis. Lastly, from the dynamic point of view, it is tempting to account for the difficulty raised by unpleasure of instinctual origin by positing an antagonism not just between the instincts and the agency of the ego but also between two kinds of instinct with differing aims. Freud embarked upon just such a course in the years 1910-15, when he set up an opposition between the sexual instincts and the instincts of self-preservation or ego-instincts. In his final theory, of course, this instinctual pair of opposites was to be replaced by the antithesis between the life and death instincts—an opposition which no longer coincided directly with the disposition of forces in the dynamics of the conflict*.

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Defence Hysteria

The term 'defence' itself, especially when used in its absolute sense, is full of ambiguity and necessitates the introduction of notional distinctions. It connotes both the action of *defending*—in the sense of fighting to protect something—and that of *defending oneself*. It might be of use therefore to distinguish between different parameters of defence, even if these coincide with one another to some extent, viz. *the stake of defence*: the 'psychical space' which is threatened; *the agent of defence*: whatever supports the defensive action; *the aims of defence*: an example would be the tendency to maintain and re-establish the integrity and the constancy of the ego, and to avoid all perturbing factors liable to be transposed into subjective unpleasure; *the motives of defence*: whatever heralds the danger and sets the defensive process in motion (affects reduced to the function of signals, anxiety as signal*); and *the mechanisms of defence*.

A final point: the distinction between *defence*, in the virtually strategic sense that it has acquired in psycho-analysis, and *prohibition*, particularly as it is understood in the context of the Oedipus complex, underlines the discrepancy which exists between the two levels of the structuring of the psychical apparatus and the structure of the most fundamental wishes and phantasies: the question of the articulation of these two levels in the theory and practice of the psycho-analytic cure remains an open one.

(4) The thesis of an 'experience of pain' taken to be the diametrical opposite of the experience of satisfaction is paradoxical from the outset, for why would the neuronal apparatus repeat a pain—which is defined by an increased change—to the point of hallucinating it, when the function of this apparatus is, precisely, the avoidance of any rise in tension? This paradox can be explained if one takes into consideration the many passages in Freud's work in which he tackles the economic problem of pain. Any such examination, in our opinion, reveals that physical pain, as a breach of the confines of the body, ought rather to be taken as a model of physical pain, as a breach of the confines of the body, ought rather to be taken as a model of that internal aggression which the instinct constitutes for the ego. The 'experience of pain' should therefore be understood not as an hallucinatory repetition of an actually experienced pain but rather as the emergence, with the revival of an experience which may not have been painful in itself, of that 'pain' which anxiety consists of from the ego's point of view.

(1) FREUD, S.: a) *Abf.*, 438; S.E., I, 359. b) *Abf.*, 438; S.E., I, 358. c) *Abf.*, 433; S.E., I, 353.

(2) FREUD, S.: 'Repression' (1915d), G.W., X, 249; S.E., XIV, 147.

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= D.: Abwehrhysterie. Es.: histeria de defensa.—Fr.: hystérie de défense.
I.: histeria da defesa.—P.: histeria de defesa.

Type of hysteria distinguished by Freud in 1894-95 from two other forms, namely, hypnoid hysteria* and retention hysteria*.

Defence hysteria is characterised by the defensive activity of the subject against ideas liable to provoke unpleasent affects.

As soon as Freud recognises the fact that defence has a part to play in every hysteria, he drops the term 'defence hysteria' along with the distinction which it implies.