

Freud's Error

As against sex, there is a more basic influence in man, says the author, who nevertheless sees in psychoanalysis a historic advance

By Jack Lindsay

WE can best understand where Freud goes wrong if we consider the way in which his theories have developed. He began by trying to find the cause for the neuroses of people in his period, the late nineteenth century. These people were adults, mostly (but not all) of the middle and upper classes. Neurosis, being an entire derangement of the organism, naturally deranges sexual relations and emotions; and, as we see in the instance of Christianity, the person who has lost touch with the social whole is increasingly driven back on the narrowly personal relations, the generative symbols and mechanism. Freud, therefore, quite rightly found the trail of sexual symbols everywhere in the sufferings of his neurotic patients; and since this discovery had many surprising aspects, since it ran counter to so many established ideas and prejudices, he found that to make his points he had to lay more and more emphasis on the sexual factors both in neurosis and in normal adult life.

We cannot say that this direction and emphasis in his analysis were incorrect. Sex is at the root of all activity insofar as activity involves a desire to reproduce oneself, to find a harmonious balance in personal relations, to project oneself into a higher stage of being; it pervades the whole life of the adult, even when it is not consciously obtruding itself.

The denial of sex was part of the denial of life's wholeness inevitable in a class-riven society; and so Freud's discovery of the centrality of sex was a revolutionary scientific act.

But he was not content to mark the pervasive quality of sex; he tended to abstract it as a kind of god-force controlling the individual. This tendency is easily understood if we remember the startling nature of his discovery and the fact that the most obvious manifestations of his patients' collapse were sexual disorders. He soon found that the pervasive and central nature of sex was not merely incidental to neurotics, but was universal. The neurotic was merely an individual in whom through excessive stress the key nature of the sexual relations and emotions became obtrusive; the cracking of the shell revealed the inner structure. To correct the disorder was not to eliminate the centrality of the sexual emotions and relations; it was to make them function effectively, so that their mechanism was again for the most part unapparent.

But Freud tended to abstract the sexual relations as a kind of fate, a structure of compulsion living over against the consciousness of the individual and ready to destroy and

disrupt if its dues were not paid. As usual, the division of the abstraction shows the structure of fear and discord created by the class state. Having once made a kind of abstraction of the sex force, the libido, Freud was unable to make a genuinely dialectical analysis of sex and neurosis.

This failure shows itself nakedly when we follow him back into the crannies of "unconscious" emotion and symbolism in the child. For Freud by his unerring diagnostic skill realized that the sources of pang in the individual could not be localized in hard-and-fast fashion.

They went back and back, to the cradle, into the very womb. Here then, in the actual clinical analysis, Freud showed himself magnificently dialectical. But he could not, because of his initial abstraction of the sex-force, gain the full advantage of his own method; he could not make the complete dialectical approach which would have united individual and social, and which would have seen the social relation without losing sight of the organic centrality of sex.

He traced the discords in relationship right back to infantile traumata. But, hampered by his concept of libido, he was forced to analyze the infantile expressions or distortions of emotion as sexual. This was a great error of reduction. The reason that he made it was as follows. He found that the relations of the child to its parents played a decisive part in later love-relations; he found that the pattern of attraction and repulsion imprinted on the child by its early experiences set up a "repetition-compulsion" which largely dictated the pattern of later relationships. These later relationships were sexual; the patterns of the repetition-compulsion were clearly one at root; therefore (he argued) the child's experience was sexual.

In insisting thus he was partly reacting against stupid prejudices, but more importantly was seeking to establish the organic continuity and unity of life in the individual. But his initial abstraction of the libido made him misstate. He ignored the "revolution" of puberty. At puberty, male or female, the individual steps forward into an existence qualitatively different from childhood. He or she is still organically the same individual; but the patterns of action and reaction in his or her being now take place on a new level, are directed to new ends. Sex is the signa-

ture and psychic centralization of this new birth.

Therefore to cloud all this new development by saying that the child was sexual also because it revealed the same patterns of desire and fear as the adult, is to be mechanist, static, non-dialectical. And this non-dialectical approach is based on the initial error of abstracting the libido.

If we traverse the ground of Freud's inquiry after releasing ourselves from his abstract concept of the libido, we find little need of all his machinery of ego, id, and so on. (For it is inevitable that the abstract approach will tend to the idealist method of creating a hierarchy of interrelated entities: the reflection of a hierarchical idea of social relationships.) We find that the real basis of all the infantile emotions and relations is *food and digestion*. The child's mother-love and father-antagonism are based on its food-needs and nothing else—except the primal birth-pattern that is omnipresent for both child and adult. So far from describing the child's relationships as sexual, it would be far more correct to effect reduction the other way round and to analyze sexual emotion as the expression of food-cravings.

This attitude would not, of course, be correct for a complete analysis of sex, but it would have a lot of truth in it. Digestion is basic. Reproduction, low in the evolutionary scale, is inseparable from digestion; the two processes are simultaneous. As organisms grow more complex, the mechanisms of digestion and reproduction tend to separate. But comparatively recently in our history (in evolutionary time) the reproductive and digestive organs were still closely connected, as in platypus and crocodile. In the same way as the organs have managed to separate only after a long identity, the sudden sprouting of the procreative capacity at puberty occurs as a division of the blood's function. Till puberty the blood has only its digestive functions; after puberty it has also the reproductive function. This duality does not occur as an abstract separation of sex. The bloodstream is one, and always one. And sex expresses itself in the same patterns of relationship as did the digestive need. Many of the forms of activity it creates are merely modifications of activities originally started off by food-needs: such as kissing, in which the sensitivity of the lips developed for food-sampling and so on, is made a medium for achieving contact and a sense of possession of the beloved. If we are going to make reductions it would therefore clearly be more



Soriano

sensible to talk about the lover wishing to eat his beloved than about the child having a sexual relation with its parents.

This is not to say that there are no desires in the child for caresses, etc., of the kind that we call sexual in the adult. But there is a basic difference. With the child the relation to the pattern of food-needs and satisfactions is direct. With the adult there is a differentiation set up, which means a basic variation in functioning.

What is important is the difference: the new quality, the new intensity, of psychic organization; the new unity of thought and act.

This new unity involves the whole question of the relation of the individual to society; for it is not a mere outburst of Freud's abstract libido. It is a new expansion and centralization of the individual. It looks outward on the whole problem of human relationship, social responsibility, work, food, shelter, mating. Sex is clearly of tremendous importance in the new balance that is sought. But we do not clarify that importance if we abstract it as a kind of lord and master amid a hierarchy of psychic agents, as Freud does. The basic thing is still the food-relationship, since without food life itself, with sex and all other manifestations, ceases.

Here is a delicate problem which I do not pretend to be able to state satisfactorily. It will be the business of a developed Marxist psychoanalysis to do so. But one can see that the polarity of the individual as a sexual and as a social being produces no problems when the unity of function in the organism is harmoniously expressing itself. Sex, as we said, is not an abstract division in the blood at puberty. The new sexual centralization of the organism is in no way separate from the unity of thought and act required from the individual as a social being. Discord in the sexual mechanism is inseparable from discord in the sphere of social activity.

The problem of food that confronts the individual at puberty is a social problem, for the very meaning of humanity is the social union, with tool and speech, for productive purposes. Therefore the basic relationship that the individual at puberty has to get right is the social relationship of work. If he solves that problem, he has the basis for the liberation of his sexual nature. Not vice versa, as the Freudian back-to-front conception would have it. One point to remember in assessing the reasons for Freud's errors is that his patients were casualties from industrial capitalism on its last legs, mostly casualties from the social levels divorced from productive activity. These people were driven back on their purely personal resources, on emotion abstracted as much as possible from social activity and reduced to the narrowest form of personal and physical relationship. Hence the social discord, though the very heart of the breakdown, was peculiarly deeply hidden.

Moreover, the anarchic basis of capitalist competition, reaching the first culmination of its contradictions in imperialism about that



"With things so much better, I expected the Times to find no more than Fifty Neediest Cases this year."

A. AJAY

time, doubtless helped to create the emotion of a vast dark force of ruthless necessity operating by laws totally unconscious and devoid of any planned significance.

That Freud's depiction of the Unconscious has been very fruitful in helping us to realize our psychic organization, I thoroughly agree. But his idealist abstract-force approach is to be found here also. He tends to set up the Unconscious as a kind of monster, a jungle-fate; and this tendency, I suggest, was aided by the nature of the capitalist state at the time when he began his work.

By this statement one does not mean that neurosis first began to appear during that time. But one does mean that the reason why consciousness of the problem then became possible, why the division had grown so acute that it threatened to destroy the basis of individuality altogether, was because the contradictions of class-society had reached such a dangerously anarchic stage, on such a huge scale, that Freud's inquiry into the sources of discord in individual life was as necessary as Marx's inquiry into the sources of discord in social life.

A Marxist will find much that interests and illuminates in Freud's concept of the ambivalence of the Unconscious; for dialectics insists on the fusion of opposites in all process. But Freud, because of his mechanist viewpoint, is unable to explain how his Unconscious, cleft as it is by contradictions of desire, can ever issue in act at all. Such dilemmas are inevitable wherever the idealist-mechanist method of analysis is used.

A few words on the chief dissident schools of psychoanalysis. It is worth while noticing these schools because the basis of their quarrels with Freud expresses Freud's shortcomings. Jung felt that Freud was wrong in importing the sex-concept wholesale into infantile life; he tried to correct this error by abstracting all the patterns of relationship altogether. In short, so far from correcting Freud, he disrupted the real connections revealed by Freud and took a wholly idealist attitude. Yet the angle of his criticism is of value in helping us to clarify where Freud went wrong.

Adler also felt that Freud had erred in imposing the sex-analysis on all psychic manifestations. But, like Jung, governed by the very method against which he was protesting, he substituted another abstraction for Freud's libido; he saw all activity as personal struggle, ignoring the whole social content which distinguishes human conflict from other biological manifestations of conflict. He, like Jung, thus ends by destroying the intricate strands of reality in Freud's demonstration of the interconnecting lines of experience. Yet he, too, incidentally makes many shrewd points of criticism and suggestion.

Indeed, if we take the real edge of Jung's and Adler's criticism—which is directed against Freud's missing of the social whole—we find that Freud's work, redirected by their protest, can produce a dialectically-materialist psychoanalysis. Freud's position as the discoverer of a new world of knowledge is as secure as that of Newton or Darwin.

Walter Lippmann's Logic

Contrasting his pre-election with his post-election comments, not to mention the facts, reveals a new flexibility in an already willowy mind

By A. B. Magil

YOU may recall that as the great night which descended on Landon settled thicker over what had been the dream of Hearst, a small still voice arose to dispel the darkness.

It was Lippmann—yes, Walter, the *Herald Tribune*. The same who had once been a Socialist, who had contributed to the old *Masses*, rubbed elbows with John Reed, and helped found the *New Republic*. And who had in the course of years attained the ripe wisdom that permitted him to swallow Landon raw, skin, bones, and all, and still retain that look of owl-like innocence and the knack of floating on the surface of every political idea like oil upon water. For example:

The character of the returns disposes of the idea that the President's victory is due to a sectional or a class alignment in American politics. The cities voted for him, but so did the countryside, the industrial centers, where the more recent immigrants predominate, the agricultural communities, peopled by the older American stock. [In fact, almost everybody except the Morgans, du Ponts, Hearsts, *et al.* and those seduced by their loyal Lippmanns—A. B. M.] . . . Though a certain amount of class-consciousness was felt on both sides, I am inclined to believe that it was no greater than in the election of 1928, when Al Smith was running. There was some bitterness, but not more bitterness than in 1916, in 1920, and in 1928.

"There was some bitterness. . . ." Really, Walter, how could you?

The election, in short [said Lippmann] may be called a normal American landslide in which the victor polled the votes of all sorts of people in every part of the country. The results call for no subtle interpretation, for no attempt, as the French say, to find twelve o'clock at quarter past two.

In short, everything is normal—including the Lippmann casuistry. There was an election; one man won, the other lost. So what?

Thus Lippmann applies his intellectual mustard plaster to the choleric chests of the Liberty Leaguers which but yesterday were choked with hoarse cries of "Communism," "collectivism," "dictatorship."

Only shortly before the election, he wrote:

Nothing could be worse for Mr. Roosevelt or the Democratic Party, or for the country, than another Democratic landslide. For Mr. Roosevelt it would be another personal triumph which in human nature generally, and in his nature peculiarly, does not make for judgment or magnanimity. For the Democratic Party, a landslide would give a great impetus to its transformation from a national to a sectional and class organization.

Came the landslide. But with a few whisks of the Lippmannian wand, what on October 20 had been visualized as a major disaster—"nothing could be worse"—became on November 5 only a routine phenomenon.

And the swirling class and sectional implications which the *Herald Tribune* crystal-gazer had foreseen on October 20 subsided on November 20 to not even a ripple on the calm waters of American life.

One might be tempted to say that this is Lippmann sober overriding Lippmann drunk, or vice versa. But there is always a vast sobriety in Lippmann, always the sage and circumspect air, the bound-in-calfskin patriotism, the spurious plausibility. Lippmann's thinking is always tailored to fit the occasion.

What this tory mandarin has done is to substitute arithmetic for politics. He counts votes and discounts history. He pretends that nothing has happened since 1928: no economic crisis which has shaken the foundations of capitalism and stirred millions into political activity; no rise of reaction and fascism to threaten democratic liberties in all capitalist countries, including our own; no unprecedented concentration of reactionary big business forces around the Republican candidate; no equally unprecedented rallying of the trade unions around the Democratic candidate; no movement of large numbers of voters toward independent political action and a farmer-labor party. It is just another Harding landslide.

Lippmann's fellow-columnist, Dorothy Thompson—whose contributions in the *Herald Tribune* are an amazing farrago of reactionary and progressive ideas—is also good at arithmetic.

"It is impossible to describe as a 'class vote' anything so overwhelming," she wrote after the election. "Every voter on relief, and every voter who is a member of any trade union could be eliminated, and still Mr. Roosevelt would have been reelected."

It is literally true that every voter on relief and every trade-union vote could be subtracted from the Roosevelt total and still leave him with enough to win. That's the arithmetic of it. But it is not true that without the support of the organized workers and those on relief Roosevelt could have swung all or even most of the other voters. John L. Lewis hit the nail on the head when he said after the election: "Unorganized labor has followed the leadership of organized labor."

What Lippmann and Miss Thompson chose to ignore is that for the first time the organized workers acted as a compact unit in the support of a presidential candidate. They thereby assumed leadership not only over the unorganized workers, but over the non-proletarian masses as well, and played the decisive role in the Roosevelt landslide.

There are broader implications of the election which the two columnists likewise ignore. In the first place, the vote constituted a virtual uprising of millions of the common people against the forces of big-business reaction ("The feeling seems to be bitter—almost dangerously so," wrote a spokesman for the right wing of the New Deal, General Hugh S. Johnson, on the eve of the election after a trip through four states). Secondly, in the minds of these millions the vote represented a mandate to Roosevelt to carry out a program of concrete social reforms. And in the third place, apart from the election successes of the farmer-labor movement in several states, the very nature of the hopes which millions have placed in Roosevelt will lead them to independent political action as the only way of converting these hopes into reality.

Hearst may don sheep's clothing, the National Association of Manufacturers may talk "era of good feeling" for public consumption, and the Walter Lippmanns may chatter about "normal landslides," but the responsible circles of Wall Street are gauging the election returns with something more than an adding machine. On the day after the election Thomas F. Woodlock wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*:

Today we have a new main cleavage of political opinion which, whether for good or ill, will be with us as far as we can see into the future. The first thing to note in that cleavage is that it is deeper than any heretofore experienced since the Civil War. It is a cleavage of opinion touching the fundamentals of our economic life. Finally, it is a cleavage upon lines largely of economic class divisions, more extensive than any similar cleavage in our experience in the past.

This is one Wall Street man speaking to his Wall Street brethren. Lippmann, writing for a wider public, cannot afford to be so forthright. And so we find him, only a few weeks after his valiant attempt to cover up the significance of the election, declaiming with characteristic sophistry against "the dictatorship of the majority"—in the name of democracy of course. Lippmann has been many things in his day: radical, faint-hearted liberal, and tory. Evidently he is still on the move. After Alf Landon, will it be Adolf Hitler?

Lippmann once sneered at John Reed. Reed is dead and Lippmann is alive; but in this case all the life is on the side of the dead. The words of Jack Reed will be meat and drink for the hearts and minds of free men in generations to come when the name of Walter Lippmann is not even a whisper in the wind.