Concerning the Proto System – Freud's theory of the psyche-soma

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According to the theory of psycho-analysis, the fundamental energy-drives and patterns of behaviour in the human being take the form of instincts. These instinctive drives are teleological ('goal-directed', 'aim-inhibited'). The primary instincts Freud at first defined as sex and aggression, adding later eros and Thanatos in recognition of the tendency of the aggressive instinct to become directed against the instincts of self-preservation and propagation and thus to become destructive of the psyche. The instincts of sex and aggression are definite and straightforward in their action, developing from the pregenital to the genital. The genital stage is the mature stage which is the goal or aim of the process. This aim which controls the direction of the process is present throughout, and, if not interfered with, will make steadily for and arrive at its goal. A complementary concept is 'tension': the movement of the instinctive energy towards its goal produces a state of tension, which it becomes the aim of the activity to discharge. Tension is temporarily relieved in the individual acts of discharge, but the instinct remains.

This theory does not concern itself primarily with the body as such. Illnesses which arise in the course of analysis are regarded as psychically determined. The body processes can mirror the psychic processes; but the two are regarded as distinct but interacting. The bodily processes can be directly observed. But the 'psyche' is a concept, the locus of the instincts, in terms of which certain kinds of experience can be described.

The hypothesis based on the observations described in this book

This book is an attempt to describe as accurately and adequately as possible the empirical evidence out of which the point of view adopted here has arisen, and the instrument by means of which the facts have been brought to light and observed.

1. Life and its physical manifestations

The observations made in the course of the work to be described indicate no dichotomy between body and psyche. It is sufficient to posit one entity: the living organism. The elaborate processes by which life, having once started, is maintained and developed, are the subject of other sciences.

The living organism as observed here appear to manifest itself in three different modes:

a. What is called for convenience the physical mode which includes all the processes concerned with the maintenance and functioning of the body as such. In such special conditions as sleep, coma etc., these processes continue to function in the same way though not necessarily in the same degree.

b. Emotional experience. Emotional experiences differ from physical activities in that they cannot be directly observed. They are, as we say, experienced by the individual 'inside himself', though the evidences of their presence may be visible to observation, and states of emotion are conditioned by the organs through which they pass. That is to say, emotions are part of the organism and are accompanied by changes in the organism.
c. Thought. It is probable that thinking is also accompanied by physical changes; but very little is at present known about their relationship.

2. The locus of (b) and (c)

There appears to be a physical locus for the functioning of both (b) and (c). The emotional functioning is located in the endocrine system and certain parts of the brain known as the basal ganglia. What knowledge we have at present points to the cerebrum as the locus of (c), though not all scientists would agree; their connection, if any, is certainly not a one-one relationship.

3. The 'E'

Detached observation of the organism, especially in childhood, seems to make it clear that some dynamic flows between (a), (b) and (c), so that when a process starts somewhere in the organism it seems to involve (a), (b) and (c) or any combination of them, or, having started in one is communicated to another.

Note:

The author finds no evidence of a teleological drive. On the contrary the evidence seems to point to a number of discontinuous happenings some of which are teleological while some are not. She therefore puts forward, as a tentative hypothesis which seems to fit the facts as observed up to date, that there is a basic face or energy which we may designate 'E', derived originally from the fertilization process, and maintained by food, sunlight etc. This flows into (a) and becomes to some extent specialised while energising (b) and (c).

4. Characteristics of 'E'

i) 'E' in itself is impersonal, undifferentiated, has no character or goal, and no attributes except intensity or the lack of it. In these respects it may be compared with electricity.

ii) The character of its manifestations arises from what it flows into. Thus the manifestation of the 'psyche' are manifestations of parts of the organism energised by 'E'.

(Footnote: In the author's view this does not imply any theory of materialism. This book is a scientific treatise which is purely descriptive, and therefore the 'E' is left undefined. It might be expressed in religious terms by anyone so inclined).

iii) So long as there is life, 'E' is present. But it varies very widely in different organisms, both in basic intensity, in distribution, and the manner of its manifestation. All that has been described about human beings can find a place here. But while such descriptions do not hinder or darken our understanding they do not at this stage contribute anything to it. The understanding of human nature is therefore here transposed from the study of instinct and its behaviour, the relation of the individual to the collective and so forth, to the study of what happens to 'E' in any particular individual.

5. The Primary Centre.

If we observe 'E' at work, we find that there is in addition to the functions described above, a selective and organising factor (or factors). This is something different from either (a), (b), or (c). Nor can it be identified with 'E', (though it must in the last resort derive its basic power from the 'E'). Its function is, in the first place, to select and arrange experience. It stands in a relation to (a), (b), and (c), but at the same time it organises and gives shape to what is happening in the actual world, since the organism does not exist in a vacuum; and interaction between the outside world and the organism can only take place in terms of (a), (b) and (c). this centre is concerned with the selection and recording of the interaction that is continually taking place between (a), (b), and (c) and the outside world and in its activity is influenced by the specialised characteristics of the individual.

It is proposed to call this centre 'The Primary Observing and Recording Centre'.

6. The relation of Universal to Particular

Although the mode of describing the phenomena observed by Freud seems to the author in some respects to hamper rather than to aid understanding, the phenomena as he observed them are real and can be verified. But the evidence of the World Technique and other techniques employed by the author does not support the claim that they occur in all men and are part of the essential structure of human nature. They can thus be accepted as things that can and do happen in and to human beings at certain times and places without reference to the frequency of their appearance and the wideness of their distribution. Basic and universal phenomena, however, do exist; but the evidence before the author suggests that they are different from those phenomena selected and described by Freud.

It is of course essential that the phenomena described by Freud should be admitted and his account of them understood. But they are far more intimately related to (a), (b) and (c) than has been hitherto realised. Moreover development includes such phenomena as those studied by Margaret Mead and her fellow workers in the relation of child management to forms of culture. But what is of basic importance is to grasp the particular differences in individual human beings as well as the likenesses.

The most important of these differences are as follows

(i) Differences in the absolute and relative sensitivity/insensitivity of the 5 basic senses.
(ii) Absolute and relative differences in 'E' charge of the structures that make up (b).
(iii) The inter-relations between (b) and (c) (Types etc.)
(iv) The amount of the absolute charge of 'E' in the individual organism.
(v) The relative distribution of 'E' between (a), (b), and (c) in different individuals (Jung's Four Functions).

Ideal Development

The ideal condition would be for 'E' to flow equally into (a), (b) and (c); the Primary Centre would work harmoniously; and the interrelation between (b), (c) and the outer world would afford fundamental satisfactions. The 'E' would thus be fully employed in the developing interaction between (a), (b), and (c) and the outer world; there would be adequate opportunities for all these to function; and they would become progressively integrated. There would then be no charge of 'E' which was not in a state of functioning in relation to the outside world.

In children like Robert the free activity of the Primary centre has for some reason been blocked, with the result that a large charge of 'E' has accumulated with no outlet in (a), (b) or (c). It therefore remains in a crude and primitive condition with no suitable mode of discharge, and a state of tension develops. A curious phenomenon now appears. The current of 'E' forks; and because a relief of tension by direct discharge would operate at a crude level and so produce disharmony in the (b) and (c) standards of the personality, a considerable amount of 'E' goes into energising the mechanisms, chiefly in (a) but also in (b) which prevent the charge of crude 'E' from reaching expression. Thus when it does finally reach expression, it can only do so at the most primitive level of all: screaming, running, 'shamming dead', hitting out and so forth.

Such a state can be cured by the following steps.

1. By the education of the individual in understanding the true nature of the situation. This brings about a progressive modification of the anxiety and tension, as genuine understanding and acceptance of the condition is brought about. In the opinion of the author, a very important element in this stage of the process is the setting free of the whole situation from emotional complications.
2. By the most careful study of the exact mechanism of each case of unsuitable discharge, <u>not</u> in terms of emotion but in terms of 'E' and pictorial representation.
3. By the use of all the creative techniques at hand, or the production of pictures illustrating the same basic situation, so that the nature of the blockage or the failure in development can be understood. Such understanding sets free channels for the discharge of 'E' which gradually integrate with b and c, and 'E' flows through (a), (b), and (c) and in an appropriate manner into the outside world and to the primary

observing centre. A situation thus comes about in which development can take place in a proper way.

Characteristics of early experience.

Normal every-day adult experience is permeated by the sense of space, direction and gravity, both in relation to and detached from the self. This condition does not exist at all in the primary experiences of the infant.

There are three kinds of experience going on simultaneously in the infant.

1. An unceasing stream of sensuous happenings. These have to do with the experiences of the five senses and should be understood as referring to the total sensations coming from the inside as well as the outside of the body.
2. An intermittent series of impulses and movements concerned with and arising from within the child's own body, such as sucking, wriggling, muscular movements and the like.
3. In the intelligent child there is also a process of rudimentary thought. We follow here the theory of the late Prof. Collingwood that intelligence consists essentially of a need to classify, order and master experience. This impulse is what makes the Observing Centre notice what is happening. The author works on the assumption that the difference between defective and normal intelligence at this stage lies in the relative presence or absence of this need to respond to the pressure of experience by this activity of classification. The adult patterns of selection and classification have not yet developed nor has the acquisition of language standardised this; so that this pressure is continual. The response of the infant will vary according to its degree and type of intelligence. Thus the function of the Primary Centre and of 'E' in relation to that centre is to organize and classify experience in order to master it. In the view of the author, this activity of classification is very highly energised, and constitutes a major need of the intelligent individual, since once the classification is made at any point attention becomes free for other purposes.

The question then arises how does this process of classification take place at this stage?

What sort of a classification is it? On what evidence is the above assumption based, and how does the author propose to set about finding a solution to the problem? For an answer to these questions we may begin by considering two of our detailed cases.

1) **Robert Chown**. This child has been selected because of the simplicity of his problems and the fact they are almost wholly concerned with 'E'. he is a child whose relations to life, both at home and at school, have broken down completely owing to outbursts of 'E' which he can neither explain nor control. Everything else was in order, both at the time of his referral and before it, except for a short history of asthma. In his work with the World Technique his choice and handling of objects was correctly orientated

spatially, practical and well related to reality. His material therefore is of little help in the problem under investigation.

2) **Christopher Ward**. This child, on the other hand, presents a very peculiar picture which is directly relevant to the problem. He is an intelligent boy attending a prep-school with a view to going on later to a public school, as is traditional with his social class. He thus falls within Collingwood's classification of individuals likely to feel a need to classify and master his experience. He is noteworthy also for the keenness which he displays in his handling of material. His approach to it on every occasion was eager, busy and wholly concentrated and almost headlong in his endeavours to get expressed what was in his mind. His worlds themselves, however, show some very strange characteristics. They are entirely divorced from reality, and constantly contain impossibilities. They exhibit also very uncertain spatial and temporal relations, and present several dimensions together. In short, they are in every way in marked contrast to the Worlds of R.C. We find too that this child's symptoms exhibit irrational fears, involuntary somatic happenings, and a nervous excitation. It might be that C is 'odd' and that this use of the material is peculiar to him. But this is by no means the case. it is of course impossible to set out the evidence for this in detail here. The very nature of the work makes it difficult to present the characteristic with which it is concerned in an effective and convincing manner, owing to limitations imposed by sheer space and also by what may reasonably be expected of a reader. But several of the Illustrations present Worlds of the same kind, made by adults. It may be pointed out, however, that the account given, here and in other places in this book, of the mode in which the Primary Centre classifies experience has been derived from study, over a period of more than 20 years, by a considerable group of people, of the material produced by children in this and other techniques; and it can be demonstrated at any time in the material recorded at the Institute of Child Psychology.

The point of view advanced here is that the main activity of a small child in relation to his experience appears to be less concerned with the affective aspects of that experience than is at present supposed, and more with the organisation and grouping of his sensorial experience; and that certain of the characteristics of this way of grouping the sensorial experience are of primary and determinative importance in the formation of the ego and of the child's subsequent reactions to life. These characteristics are:

1. That the groupings formed by the child carry for him the stamp of self-evident and unquestionable truth. They form the kernel of his picture of himself and of the world about him.
2. That they are structured in a way which seems strange to the adult, but which in fact has an obvious logic of its own when they are carefully considered. What seems to happen is something like this. The experience, whatever it may be, that is pressing for classification in the child presents itself as a series of points. This is a normal

characteristic of adult procedure also in the consideration of problems. But whereas the adult can remember and bear in mind what has been thought or said during a process of interior or exterior comparison and discussion etc., and can therefore bring such experiences together for himself, the young child cannot bear any points in mind; the operation of comparison therefore takes place unconsciously and automatically, and each pair of points compared passes out of focus the moment the ac of comparison has been completed.

3. Two very simple single elements of experience which may appear to the adult mind as two quite dissimilar experiences, may, to the child's mind, link the two experiences together so that they become for him part of one whole composed of the two experiences. An illustration may help to make this clear … (quaking dress story). In this story the fact that green occurs both in the dress and the duck have brought the dress and duck together so that they form what is to the child an obvious whole. The only difference between the process as it happens in the adult and the child is that for the adult there is a wide context which automatically brings about a criticism of perceptions of similarity that are bizarre and improbable as soon as they occur; so that one says: "How odd that that coal should look like the face of Aunt Jane's solicitor". No such context exists for the child; and therefore a similarity once perceived is a part of reality, of the nature of the world and himself; he cannot exercise any criticism upon it. Although it is probable that such linkages of similars primarily occur in pairs, in fact any number of links may occur between two experiences; for the same kind of link can bind together a large number of other experiences. Thus if n forms a link between experiences, a and b, p, q and r may also appear as further links; for example, in the 'quacking dress' illustration, it was not only the colour but the smoothness, the shininess and the habitual relation of both duck and dress to the child's cheek that gave rise to the 'quacking dress'. It is also possible that n may connect a to c, d and e as well.
4. When links are formed the relationships are not for the child associations but identities.
5. Further, the identities described in (3) also form links with each other. The result is that gradually a set of complex concepts forms which might be compared to the mulberry fruit, in which a more or less vague central significance holds together a number of smaller identities, each in fact quite separate from its neighbour, but each forming a whole with the rest on account of their common points of similarity.

How does this organisation take place?

It is suggested by psycho-analytic research that the dominant principle in the organisation of interior infantile experience is the endeavour of the child to prolong and to recapture pleasurable experience, and to avoid or turn attention away from unpleasant or uncomfortable experience. Following out this principle it is clear that both pleasurable and

unpleasurable experiences will tend to get ‘clumped’ together, and a great deal of work has been done upon the after results in the mind of this process.

Here however it is the affective aspect of interior experience which is being studied, and this covers only a certain area of the whole of interior experience. It is with the rest of the area that we are now concerned. At every moment in the day, and as far as we know also during sleeping hours, sensorial experience is streaming past the Organising Centre. What is it that happens to this material?

Recent work on electrical stimulation of the temporal lobe in conscious subjects has brought to light the startling fact that long-past events, of no particular emotional significance to the subject, are ‘played back’ under stimulus exactly as they originally happened. Both this evidence and that gained from study of Worlds and of allied material suggest that within the realm of the total interior experience of an individual a great deal is registered of which we at present have no knowledge.

Experience with the World Technique constantly presents the investigator with arrangements of World objects in the tray whose only parallel is to be found among the drawing, words and modelling of psychotic subjects, or perhaps among the more bizarre rituals and beliefs of primitive peoples. Figs… have been included to provide examples of this sort of material; and the investigator is faced with the necessity of accounting for them.

This accounting, if it is to be complete, should include: an understanding of the actual structure of the individual scene being studied; at least a reasonable idea of its significance to the individual who made it; and some theory, however vague, of the process at work in the selection and arrangement by the subject of lust those objects used that manner at that time.

With the exception of figs…., all the Worlds illustrated in the book were made by sane individuals; that is, although suffering from some disability, disturbance or inhibition which has brought them into the care of a therapist, there is nothing about these children and adults which would suggest that any psychotic process is at work in them.

In 1947 in a collection of single Worlds made by Miss PMT from Chesterfield school children accounted normal by their school teachers, of …. number of Worlds made by …. number of children …. number showed these features. A normative study of Worlds from both children and adults is being made by Miss Ruth Bowyer which will add to our knowledge of the subject. But, as has been found in all dynamic psychological study to date, and also in the normal processes of Medicine, it is from careful analysis of the unusual and of the pathological that understanding of the normal is arrived at.

From analysis of such material therefore the following tentative hypothesis has been arrived at.

It would seem that in the infant's, and later the child's interior experience, it is the similarity of experiences in themselves which is the central principle of classification. "Things that make me feel wet' 'making me feel dry things' etc. Whatever makes a vivid impression on the infant is what we are concerned with and has been said above, the child is the seat of a continuous stream of sensuous and energic experience. It is the subjective similarities of this experience which act as the selectors linking together the objects which cause them.

It is the fact that the characteristic of these objects which chance to be importance to the child are wholly overshadowed in the adult mind with other and more important characteristics, which make this linking so hard to understand.

To complicate matters still further, no object and no experience however relatively tangible – even e.g. such an experience as wind – has only one quality. Every stimulant to an experience is unavoidably made up of a number of qualities, a small percentage of which will constitute the stimulus-producing aspect from the child's point of view.

We have stated earlier – and have at present deduced no evidence in support of this statement – that when a linkage takes place the two objects from which the stimuli arise become not associated but identified.

We have now to consider the further point that since the stimulus object will have more than one quality, in the process of identification with other objects all the other qualities of each object come with it, so that wholes, and to the adult eye very dissimilar objects, now become identified. The composite whole thus produced resembles the objects in Chaggal's paintings, since they are composites full of meaning to the individual who has made them, but constructed against all the laws of probability, common-sense and the rational experience of the adult.

The suggestion which we wish to put forward is that this process is an inevitable and a universal one, so that the mind of the infant is full of conglomerate constructs of this nature which are the results in him of the action of the Organising Centre collecting and arranging experience so that the developing Centre may grow and not be overwhelmed by experience. In the form in which we know it this appears to be a characteristic of the preverbal years. But it is paralleled by the effort which occurs in adult life. The difference between the infantile and adult versions is that the infant has no reason to doubt or criticise the absoluteness of his organised experience, whereas the adult can discriminate, compare, judge etc. The infant is his experience and not differentiated from it; he has no ego detached from his experience which is able to regard it critically. His classification of his experience functions satisfactorily; it enables him increasingly to make a map as it were of what is happening to him, to build up security by a cognition of the familiar, and so on.

It is this quality of absolute belief in the conclusions arrived at by the child which is so baffling to the adult.

To return therefore to the question of normal developments. It is our contention that in addition to processes discovered and described by other schools of thought as active in the infant, particularly those described as wish fulfilment fantasies, there goes on in the infant this process of the registration and organisation of sensuous experience which we have described.

As its products become more complex, a second process is to be detected, namely the emotions aroused in the infant and pre-verbal child by the conglomerates of experiences which have been produced. While this process is at its height in the first 2-2½ years, the relation of emotion to these interior concepts continues throughout life, its importance for the individual depending on the degree of inaccessibility to conscious reasoning of the original processes.

This process in relation to individual development.

Having now gained some small idea of the general principles upon which this part of interior experience is constructed, we need to consider the way in which it is differentiated in different individuals.

As has been explained above, the conception that we wish to put forward is that the nature of interior experience depends upon the nature of (a), (b) and (c).

These individual differences will mould and determine the interior experience of the small children in the same way as they mould and determine the World that each adult makes for himself. Thus every child's interior conglomerates will differ from those of every other child.

This is only one dimension of a 3-dimensional reality. And fortunately for our understanding, the existence of the 2nd dimension is as reliable as the first. The second dimension is made by the common experiences through which all humans pass. Every infant is small and helpless, is completely dependent on the adults round him etc. etc.

In addition to the above, every infant experiences certain internal sensations: of the tongue moving in the mouth, of the act of swallowing, of the internal abdominal sensations associated with digestion and defecation etc.

A further dimension to the interior experience of everyone is provided by two factors: (a) what has actually happened to him as an individual in his early life, i.e. the actual outward facts of infantile history feeding, health or illness etc. etc. (b) As Dr Mead is studying, what type of cultural pattern the child grows up in.

To the totality formed by these three dimensions and the action of the Primary Observing Centre upon them, it has been the custom of the author to give the name of the Proto-System.