

Innate Defences

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This monograph deals with the origin and functioning of the most primitive levels of defence against anxiety. The phenomena which Freud treated as instinctive (and therefore not open to modification) are traced back to their source in the primal field. There is a clear description of the various mechanisms commonly employed to manage psychotic anxiety and the thesis is developed that such ‘normal’ behaviour is not instinctive but learned and therefore open to analysis and modification

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Introduction

The medieval linguistic roots of 'defence' are revealing. Coming to us via old French from the Latin, the word originally has the sense of something forbidden, that which is prohibited, the element that is not allowed, put under the ban, excluded, put beyond the pale. It is bidden to go forth. From that position the evil, unwanted, damaging thing, is itself perceived as threatening, that which was forbidden is seen to be forbidding and in anticipation casts foreboding. The boundary between the allowed and accepted and that which has been forbidden and sent forth requires management for the forbidden is now the threatening. Space from which the unwanted thing was exorcised has to be protected from re-invasion. The meaning of the word thus moved from that which was prohibited to the activity required in response to anticipated threat from the forbidden elements. Hence today's meaning of defence as protective action or armament, shielding from perceived threat or aggression which menaces from outside. The word hides the earlier insight that the threat was placed there by exclusive activity in the first place. As so often happens, linguistic evolution mirrors psychological process. So to defend is to fend off, to prohibit is to hold away, but both are subsequent to the projection or casting out.

Defences may be of two forms, quite apart from the active defence of casting out itself. Defensive behaviour may relate to externalised material, perceived as extra to the defenders, against which boundaries have to be maintained by whatever level of force is appropriate. Alternatively, defence may be internal (corresponding to law and order as distinct from the national frontier). Here defence takes the role of holding back, inhibition, repression, control, of the unwanted action, behaviour or parts, still perceived as internal to the boundary. So the process of defence is three-fold. It involves a clearance of unwanted material from the internal space, which may take the form either of throwing out (ejection, projection) or of control (prohibition, repression). From there on the external boundary, or frontier, of the space must be defended against threatening externalised badness. Finally, the internal boundaries must be defended against the irruption or re-emergence of the unwanted repressed material. The process of defence covers all three areas, but involves many different mechanisms.

1. Response to stress

Defence is invariably responsive. It presupposes aggression, or threat of aggression, real or imagined. The perceived threat is primary, the defensive response is secondary. It is reactive. The perceived threat, whether from within or without may be more or less real. In response, the defence is more or less appropriate, less or more neurotic. If some little incident gives one group the impression that another is

threatening it in some way, even if no threat was intended, then the first group will respond defensively. This action in itself is perceived by the second group as potentially threatening, in reaction to which the second group arms to defend itself, so confirming the first group's original impression and accelerating the process of defensive armament. The whole sequence can become self-generating and exponentially expanding to the point at which the opposing parties are draining high proportions of their wealth and energy into their armament. The situation moves from stability through a meta-stable position to instability in which the slightest spark can initiate conflagration. It is such fear-fed mechanisms which drive the arms race at a global level, but which also energise conflict and broken relationships at every point of the social system.

Threat begets anxiety, whether intrapersonal or social. The biochemical changes of hormone balance shift, act on muscle tissue, gastric process, circulatory system, problem-solving centres of the brain, etc. as all prepare for action. The mechanism is essential for survival, preparing the system for appropriate reaction in the crisis. The system, however, is unable to distinguish whether the biochemical hormone communication stems from a real threat, or from an imaginary one. The human organism in a state of angst responds as if threatened, whether or not the angst is a response to an actual threat. Anxiety and defensive behaviour may therefore be appropriate and functional, or inappropriate and dysfunctional. Anxiety is treated by the system as information about threat, action is brought into play to deal with the threat, to reduce the anxiety and to restore the biochemical system to its undisturbed stable state.

Stress responses are learned responses. Defences employed in the present have been learned from previous encounters with threat. Conversely, any event in the present which recalls stressful or threatening associations from the past, will trigger an anxiety response and defensive behaviour, whether or not the present event is threatening. The highly defended person or culture who responds in the present as if always under threat communicating levels of previous hurt and distress whose associations and learned responses persist. In acute cases we describe the system as 'paranoid', always at red alert, anticipating persecution and aggression at every point. In a condition of chronic anxiety the subject projects inner memories, imaginations, and phantasies, peopling its present world with its fearful past experience.

2. Instinctive Confusion

The more vulnerably dependent the person is the more he is at risk to environmental threat. The experience of helplessness in a malign environment is terrifying. If the environmental malignancy intensifies to the point of life-threat, stressing the dependent organism to the point of death, anxiety knows no bounds. If the organism can do nothing to change the external environment the only agenda open to it is the management of internal stress. Anxiety itself becomes the aggressor and psychic as well as physical survival depends on managing the anxiety response. It is in this matrix that defences against anxiety as characteristics of human behaviour are conceived. The kind of mechanisms used and the intensity of reaction to anxiety

depend on the life-threats to which the organism has been exposed and the stage in development at which those life-threats were experienced. Patterns of response to anxiety, the anxiety-defences, are normally found to be operative and formed in the new-born. This fact led analysts like Melanie Klein and others to describe them as 'innate' defences. They were patterns of response triggered by anxiety and therefore used as a way of reacting to any perceived threat. Confusion was confounded, however, when innate and instinctive were treated as interchangeable concepts. The word 'innate', while allowing that these defences are part of the datum, the given characteristics, of the human organism at birth, allows for the possibility that they are learned processes during and prior to birth. Once they are labelled 'instinctive' however, further analytic insight and access is blocked. The defences are perceived as unalterable, given, unlearned, characteristics, part of the inherited baggage which the new-born brings into the world and with which it is lumbered for the rest of life. Recent advances in primal analysis have disallowed the description 'instinctive' as applied to anxiety defences, while endorsing them as 'innate'. To be sure, extra defences may be brought into play subsequent to birth if the subject undergoes previously unexperienced levels of stress and threat. Even then, however, earlier learned patterns of anxiety response have laid down preferred paths, which are extrapolated to deal with the new situation. Man's fundamental response to environmental impingement or threat is laid down during the trauma of parturition and in the vulnerable helplessness of its preceding period of gestation.

3. Cause and Effect

During birth itself, anxiety may be internalised umbilically from the mother's blood stream, reflecting her own terror, or it may be a response to the physical threat of the process of birth itself, whether emanating from placental failure, oxygen starvation, or the experience of constriction, head-crushing, pinching with forceps, or other complications. In any case, birth represents that first major movement across a boundary from the known to the unknown, with concomitant loss of the familiar supportive environment, which provides the ground of all future experiences of loss, change, bereavement and death.

Without denying that birth is a fundamental stressor (and hence matrix of anxiety defences) for every person, it is now clear that for some at least, high levels of threat to the organism have been experienced prior to birth. In these cases the fundamental defences to anxiety have to do not with moving through the persecutory cervix, but rather with the suffused antagonism of a whole environment, incorporated placentally, and internalised through the umbilical into the foetal blood stream, from whence all kinds of secondary reactions within the biochemistry of the foetal glandular system are triggered. Some level of life-threat to the organism is experienced by every foetus from conception to birth, so laying down learned patterns of organic response to stress and anxiety. These differ from individual to individual according to the intrauterine history of the person concerned. The repertoire of available mechanisms would indeed appear to be instinctive and inherited, the levels and mode at which these responses are called into play and are therefore laid down as 'foetal software', or programmes called into effect in the handling of all subsequent

experiences of threat and angst, will depend on the individual stress patterns through which the foetus has passed. Where the intrauterine stressing has been intense, these deeper levels of defence dominate and form the pattern whereby the perinatal crisis is handled. It is these common mechanisms of proto-conscious anxiety defence which form the ground of those common, or social, defences against anxiety, which play such an important part in determining the irrational responses of adult communities under stress.

All angst generating experience receives a reaction made up of two distinct elements. There is the reality-oriented reaction to the actual threat itself and there is the defensive reaction responding to the experience of anxiety as such. It is this second element which is designated 'anxiety-defences'. The psycho-somatic organism responds to the experience of anxiety by bringing into play those mechanisms utilised in the earliest encounters with life threat, so generating a response to later experience which may be quite inappropriate. At a primitive level, anxiety begets the response (even in the adult) of a vitally threatened foetus, umbilically invaded or deprived within the intrauterine world, or crushed and blocked under pressure and head in to the cervix. The effects of these responses will be examined in detail later. It must be noted, however, that the innate anxiety defences distort subsequent reactions to environmental reality, partly by repressing certain areas of information which reverberate with primal experience, partly by generating reactions to later experiences as if these were recurrences of primal impingement and partly by repressing and sedating the appropriate levels of anxiety. They dull and inhibit appropriate responses, motivation and problem-solving when faced with change, deprivation, or threats to boundary or life itself. Because the defences stem from common experience they form the common characteristics of social response to change, threat and boundary management.

It must be stressed that the defences have to do with the management of anxiety itself and are quite distinct from reaction to the perceived threat or information generating the anxiety.

4. Idealisation

The most basic mechanism of defence is that of idealisation, or in its more acute form, splitting. As the containing environment of the organism moves across the spectrum from resourcefully life-supporting towards impingement and life-threat, so the fear of death (the core of anxiety) rises. The changes in blood chemistry of the foetus reflect in part hormone discharge within the maternal system and in part (depending on the levels of glandular development) changes in the hormone balance generated from within the foetal system itself. The initiator of the stress lies within the maternal system, communicated across the placental boundary and the umbilical to the symbiotic foetus. Foetal response is essentially reactive and precisely not initiative at this stage. The 'information' received indicates an environmental shift from good-enough towards not-good-enough. It is the same environment which provides both signals. It is the life-supportive womb-world which threatens to abort. The foetus is therefore subject to ambivalent inputs, generating ambivalent reactions.

Stress would appear to be a reflection of the gap, or difference, between the conflicting inputs. Small changes are occurring all the time and are quite easily tolerated. As the gap widens and the stress levels mount, anxiety responses rise, changing from mild to acute, to hyper-stress, to trauma, limited eventually by foetal death. The point at which the process of idealisation and response to anxiety becomes written in to the 'programme' of the developing person depends upon the stage of foetal development at which the threat is experienced and the level of threat encountered.

The primitive organism appears to have difficulty dealing with contradictory, paradoxical, or ambivalent data. As anxiety rises it is as if the whole data field becomes malignant. The good life-supportive elements begin to dim in significance and with rising stress are elided altogether. The experiential field is idealised into the bad position. Conversely, all minor life-threatening elements of the previously experienced supportive field are diminished in comparison with the distressing invasion of the present. With rising stress the bad elements of previous experience are also elided, generating an idealised good environment or experience in the past. Experience of stress and its concomitant anxiety (fear of death) therefore results in a polarisation of environmental perception into wholly good (from which all bad elements have been removed) and wholly bad (from which all good elements have been removed). The more primitive the organism, and the more intense the stressing, the more powerful is the splitting or idealisation involved. The mechanism reduces the anxiety of having to cope with opposites, so simplifying the information field by removing all disturbing elements tending to generate ambivalence and paradox. In this position, response can be unitary and total. As the levels of stressing approach the limits of survival of the foetal organism, so the idealisation process is absolutised. All negativities are suppressed from the positive field, which assumes that absolutely flawless characteristic of the heavenly holding environment than which no better can be conceived, while its antithesis suffers the exclusion of all positive material and an absolutising of its malignity into a hell than whose persecutory torments no worse fate can be contemplated. The foetal cosmos is split into polar antitheses, later to be symbolised as light and dark, good and evil, white and black, life and death, day and night, sun and moon, north and south, west and east, right and left, love and hate, salvation and condemnation, god and devil.

5. Denial

Fundamentally bound up with the process of idealisation is a second defensive mechanism which has already been described in action, though not as yet named. In its mature form it emerges as the all-too familiar phenomenon of repression, or denial. In its most mild and primitive presentation it is represented by the diminution of significance of disturbing material, whether this lowered significance is attributed to good elements generating ambivalence within an otherwise bad field, or of bad elements causing similar problems within a basically good environment. As stress levels rise and the process of idealisation intensifies, the strength of denial increases. There is a sense in which repression is the fundamental mechanism whose operation generates the unified, idealised character of the experienced field, so giving rise to

idealisation and splitting as an effect. The greater the level of stress and the higher the level of consequent anxiety, the greater is the energy vested in the process of denial. Not that the information is actually lost. All experience imprints within the developing organism. It is simply that certain parts of that information are associated with such intolerable levels of stress that their recall generates inadmissibly high levels of anxiety and is consequently blocked. The process is similar to the placing of no-recall flags around certain data fields within a computer memory, except that within the complex carbon module which constitutes the organic data store, high levels of energy have to be vested in sustaining the repressive mechanism, so rendering the organism less able to engage authentically with its environment. It is at this point that the nature of the mechanisms as specifically defences against anxiety becomes clearer. The processes involved serve to preserve the organism from the experience of stress and anxiety associated with the recall of intolerable material or the juxtaposition of intolerably contradictory signals. The defences are anxiolytic mechanisms. They serve to relieve anxiety, either during the experience itself, in which the defensive mechanisms are laid down as programmatic procedures, or subsequently in defending the organism from recall and therefore abreaction of the intolerably stressful experience. It is this process which leads some practitioners to speak of 'buried pain' as the base of the matter, the denial or repression of which lies at the heart of all subsequent defensive developments.

The mechanism of denial is not limited simply to mismatched elements within a particular field. It may also apply to the total field itself. The process is familiar from study of reaction to severe accidents in later life. At one level the person concerned may be able to recall the event, but describes it almost as if it were happening to a third party. No pain was felt, the shock was such as to induce a sense of complete numbness at the emotional level. Some will describe it as if they were standing beside themselves or above themselves, in some way dissociated from the body, watching it all happen. Here the denial of the pain and suffering is absolute and higher orders of splitting and dissociation are also brought into play (see below). At another level of trauma, however, recall of the event itself may be completely blocked out. The subject may comment, 'I can remember what I was doing up until a certain stage, and then my memory went a complete blank, the next thing I can remember is finding myself in a hospital bed (or whatever)'. Such statements may be made even though the person appeared to remain conscious throughout the process. It is simply that recall of the experience still evokes such a high level of trauma and shock that the psychic organism cannot tolerate the material in consciousness at all. It is as if the event had not happened. Subsequent behaviour, however, gives the lie to this apparent lack of memory in that the person may well develop disturbances of behaviour, sleep and relationships, or neurotic responses to associated phenomena which indicate that the intolerable material persists in memory at some level, however strong the repression.

Returning to the primal field, the life-threat may become so intense that not only is the process of idealisation absolutised but one pole of the split field is itself subject to repression of a more or less intense nature. If, as is more common, it is the negative field which suffers repression, the subject presents a world-view corresponding to the intensely idealised good field, which alone remains conscious. Its presence, however, is evidence of its buried antithesis, which in turn acts as a disturbing influence on the

system's subsequent behaviour, much as a black hole within a galaxy is not directly observable but its presence exercises a very marked influence on the behaviour of all other material within its vicinity.

In certain conditions of prolonged or chronic high intensity stress it is the good idealised field which suffers repression and denial and the organism presents as if in an unrelievedly persecutory environment. For such life is hell, and hell is other people. Death is a release from the intolerable stress of living. It is these processes of intrauterine development which present as the innate defences against anxiety, wrongly identified by Sigmund Freud as 'instincts'. In particular we have here the origin of the 'life instinct' and 'death instinct', opposition between which Freud postulated as the ground of all anxiety and of the subsequent defences. With access to the primal field blocked by the trauma of post-natal circumcision as well as the hyper-stress experienced within the process of birth itself, Freud (in common with Melanie Klein and many other post-Freudian, classical analysts) was unable to penetrate to the origin of the phenomena which he encountered and was therefore limited to describing them as distinct, independent, instinctive, unlearned (and therefore unmodifiable) elements of the human psyche.

Birth itself commonly constitutes an experience of hyper-stress, leading to idealisation and denial, in which process the previously experienced intrauterine world is elevated to the position of idealised good, while the crushing, evicting, persecutory, experience of parturition is split off into the idealised bad position and subsequently denied. Perhaps this is why birthdays are times of celebration. Anything which threatens to resonate with the buried material so leading to a weakening of the repressive defences and threatening the irruption of intolerable angst previously held at bay, must be met with massive defence reinforcement.

The defences associated with perinatal trauma are sufficiently common to constitute the ground of social collusion in the common maintenance of social defences against anxiety and in particular with the common repression and denial of intrauterine and perinatal stress. The effects of these collusional defences can be seen in repeated distortion and re-repression of the material within the psychoanalytic field. Those initially breaking through to the material found their insights at first cautiously welcomed, then typically raising a storm of protest, leading to the suppression of the material, eviction of the researchers concerned from psychoanalytic institutes, followed in some cases by professional execution, to the point of litigation, destruction of research data and the subsequent breakdown of some of the most creative workers in the field. Clearly anyone seeking to raise to consciousness that which is commonly repressed as intolerable to social consciousness, becomes the object of common social retaliation appropriate as reaction to the original stressing situation itself. In these and similar ways, the common social defences against anxiety are maintained, so defending society from the irruption of psychotic angst, in defence against which the mechanisms are in place. It is this area of social behaviour which generates those 'many and powerful constraints' which Freud experienced as blocking his ability to make connections between psychoanalytic insight and the more developed phenomena of contemporary religion.

6. Projection

As has already been indicated, material which is denied does not simply disappear. If the associated anxieties are too intense the, now internalised, ideal, bad experience may be displaced, dumped or projected into some safe area or container, from which the subject then splits away and against contact with which defensive behaviour is brought into play. For example, when a particular episode of environmental threat is passed, the experience has been internalised (introjected). The imprinted, unresolved stress, buried by the process of idealisation and repression, persists internally to the organism as a potential threat. It continues to give signals to the organism appropriate to severe environmental attack, even though the environment may no longer be malignant. In response to these internally generated signals, the organism reacts as if still under environmental threat, so generating an unreal, or phantasy, environment, which acts as a contemporary mirror of the internalised trace of past experience. It is as if the organism is a complex recording medium onto which the information is coded and which subsequently projects the recording back into the environment. The process is analogous to a video recording of the live event, the imprint of which is stored in the electromagnetic medium (introjection). Under certain conditions the material can be reactivated and displayed in sight and sound, so creating an image of the original event (projection). To take the analogy one step further, we may think of a combination of video recording and video projection equipment linked together. In which case any event in the environment is recorded, subsequently projected into the environment and re-recorded, together with other developments and events which are environmentally generated. Introjection and projection are followed by re-introjection of previously projected material, alongside genuine environmental data. This mixture is again introjected and reprojected in a continuous process. It is in some such manner that the mechanism of projection distorts reality perception, so that the perceived information is always a mixture of raw data and projected phantasy.

7. Displacement

If we now bring together our understanding of idealisation, denial and projection, it is possible to grasp the way in which the displacement of idealised and denied material takes place. Once the traumatic life-threat has occurred and left behind its deposit of repressed, anxiety-generating experience, subsequent data from the environment is confused by re-introjection of previously projected intolerable material. Through an iterative process of selection, denial and idealisation, good elements or life-supportive facets of the environmental field may be denied and cut out, leaving a perceived signal dominated by the idealised bad field, that is containing the idealised bad, phantasy material projected and re-introjected, together with the actual bad elements or life-threat material which is still present within the real environment. In this way the environmental perception is split into good and bad and in this particular case, the good side of the split is repressed or denied. In this position the organism, having typically denied and repressed the bad elements within itself, together with the good elements of its environment, perceives itself as an idealised good being in an idealised

bad (or threatening) environment. This is the ground of subsequent paranoid presentation in later life. In this condition, the organism reacts to the environment as if still under threat, the material has been displaced.

Three other patterns of displacement are generated by this level of defence. In the previous example the bad self and good environment are denied and the subject lives with the perception of good self in bad environment. The antithetical position involves the repression of good elements in the self and bad elements in the environment. Here, typically, after the initial environmental threat has been experienced and passed, the organism acts as if it was the causal or deserving origin of the threat, internalising the bad material, whose experience has overwhelmed and repressed any sense of good or wellbeing within consciousness. With the idealised bad field vested in the self, the idealised good or life supportive environmental data may be projected back into the environment from which all life-threatening signals are subsequently filtered out and denied. In this position the organism presents as a bad self within a good environment, and in later life behaves apologetically as if being the only blot in a perfect world, the guilty sinner deserving of death and feeling that their continued life pollutes the world in which they live and move.

In other circumstances, the same pole of the idealised split is repressed in both self and environment, leading in the first case to a self perception as the best possible person in the best of all possible worlds, and in its antithesis to the unutterably bad self within an unmitigatedly persecutory environment. In the first instance it is the idealised bad material of both self and environment which has been repressed and denied, and conversely in the second case the life-supportive, or good, elements leading to the sense of wellbeing of self in environment are repressed and denied. If the first position is that of the perfected saint in heaven, the second is that of the condemned sinner in hell. A great gulf is fixed between the two and yet the split is only a hair's breath in width, for both represent opposite sides of the same coin.

8. Conversion Reaction

If at some later stage of development the person is again subjected to a similar level of environmental stressing to that which originally laid down the defences, then the mechanisms may become unstable, or undergo some form of conversion reaction. The secondary stressing may occur later in the intrauterine period, at birth following an earlier intrauterine trauma, or at any subsequent stage in life. Under such conditions a denied element may irrupt and become dominant, while the previously conscious material reverses into a denied, repressed, position. In its simplest form a conversion reaction affects only one element of the field, representing for instance a transition from position two to position one, in which previously denied good elements of the self emerge dominantly, while previously dominant idealised bad feelings about the self are denied. The result is a release from guilt and unworthiness and an experience of forgiveness, acceptance, wellbeing and joy. It is this kind of modulation of the innate primal defences which underlies religious conversion.

A more complex reversal would be represented by movement from position one to position four. During this conversion reaction the previously denied idealised bad fields of both self and environment emerge, while the previously dominant idealised good material becomes denied and repressed. The result is a conversion from the position of religious euphoria to one of despairing paranoia, each position representing the denied phase of the other. A total of twelve conversion reactions, each with infinite variation of intensity are possible within this field. Conversion reactions are comparatively unstable discontinuities in primal defence between positions of much greater stability. Current developments in the application of catastrophe theory are providing powerful tools for the representation and modelling of such discontinuities in psychic process. Conversion reactions do not alter the kind of defence, simply its form of presentation. The more complex the defence structure becomes (see below) the more varied are the conversion reactions available to the system.

9. Regression

A life-threatening trauma is typically experienced as a temporary disturbance of a comparatively life-supportive condition. In its simplest form the process moves from the undisturbed life-supportive position, through the on-set of stress, rising to a peak followed by a decrease in stress to the original stable position. It has already been noted that the levels of anxiety defence resulting from such an experience depend upon the point in foetal development at which the stress occurs, and the intensity of the peak stress. To this must be added the question of duration of peak stress, the occurrence of several waves or peaks, separated by periods of comparative relief and finally, changes of state between the initial stable position and the second, post-trauma field. Shock from a near miss in a road accident in the third month of pregnancy might provide an example of the simple, acute, single-peak stressing, with no change in the underlying position. While a prolonged and difficult birth, with waves of increasingly excruciating compression, interrupted by periods of comparative rest, leading to a massive change of state between the intrauterine world and post-natal nursing, could provide an example of the more complex stress situation. In each case, however, except in that of chronic stress from the point of conception onwards, the time-trace divides into three distinct periods: before, during and after the experience of stress. The period during which stress is experienced may also itself be subdivided into the three periods of: onset, peak and recovery. Depending on the intensity of stress and the point of development of the foetus concerned, the life-threat and concomitant angst is more or less acute. As limits of toleration are approached and idealisation or splitting comes into play, the present is experienced as ideally bad, in contrast to which the past is 'remembered' as ideally good. (We are familiar with the reaction in later life in conditions of bereavement within marriage in which the remaining partner may look back and idealise the dead mate, retaining in conscious memory only the good things about the relationship. A similar but antithetical position occurs in some divorces, in which the previous partner is anathematised and the marriage, idealised into a bad position, is remembered only as hell on earth.)

In so far as the past is perceived as ideally good and the present as ideally bad, the organism tends to back off the experience in an attempt to put time into reverse, so retracing steps or regressing into the previous safe position. In so far as the stress became intolerable, the organism may have backed off completely and have lived through the trauma as if still contained in the idealised good field, so denying and repressing the idealised bad experience of the present. In this sense, we may treat energy vested in defence mechanisms as operating with reversed time, mirrored backwards into the past from the point of traumatic impingement. The trauma is never reached, but is in some way by-passed by means of a tunnel effect, through which the organism emerges into the post-traumatic period with part of its being living in reverse from then on. The greater the intensity of impingement and stress, the greater the energy vested in the time-reversed behaviour. If the stressing reaches sufficiently traumatic proportions, the reversed energy becomes dominant and the main drive of the organism moves from survival and life-affirming into a destructive and death seeking mode. This can be understood in terms of the inability of the organism to tolerate the forever unreached frontier of the traumatic impingement, while yet knowing that life, organically speaking, passed that way. The dominance of the 'death instinct' (as Freud described it) represents the breakdown of hope, or the repressive denial of the idealised good past, which effectively blots out any signals received in the future which might generate hope of life. The subject is caught and trapped in an experience of unrelieved malignity of the environment introjected and identified with the unrelievedly bad self.

The past is preserved in the idealised good position and in so far as the stress is temporary and limited and the post-stress period approximates to the pre-stress conditions, then future experience is identified with the idealised past. The organism continues to live and move in an environment which contains a mixture of life-supportive and life-threatening elements, yet reacts as if the life-threatening elements have been completely elided. The position is dysfunctional in that information about imminent threat to the organism in later life is filtered out of the data field, rendering the person particularly vulnerable to and unconscious of the negativities of life, until they build up to the point at which they break through the defence, often triggering a reversal, or conversion reaction, and unleashing quite inappropriate levels of over-reaction. Anxiety defences operate as information filters, so lowering the organism's ability to interact effectively with its environment, or to adapt to environmental change. In so far as the defences are common social phenomena, just so far does society itself operate with lower levels of environmental awareness and inadequate capacity to handle environmental change in a functional or realistic way.

Regression as a defence against encountering stress in the here-and-now in later life represents a re-enactment of primal stressing in which the past holding environment, perceived as ideally good, is used as a retreat or refuge, a place of flight from impending threat. Once this time-split is in place, post-trauma behaviour becomes an attempt to regain the idealised pre-trauma conditions. This behaviour is particularly intense if the post-trauma context is markedly different from the pre-trauma environment. In which case, however distressing the event may have been, it also and in addition marks a point of change and loss for the organism concerned. This is, of course, fundamentally and universally true of birth, but for certain individuals may

also be experienced in terms of change of state within the intrauterine period, or alterations in the nursing and nurturing relationships of the postnatal period.

10. Loss

It must, of course, be remembered that change in the environment is an existential concept. There may in fact be no change, but because of projected and re-introjected material, the environment may be perceived as having changed by the subject concerned. The experience of change and loss is geared to the existential perception rather than to the objective realities. Whether real or phantasised the change of state is experienced as loss and in so far as that which was lost is the idealised good holding environment, just so far is the loss idealised and unbearable and the grief inconsolable. In this, birth itself is the prototype of all future experiences of loss, including in prospect the loss of life itself. Future reactions to change and bereavement, loss and death, represent points of primal recapitulation. The experience of loss resonates with the primal loss and at the same time raises the spectre of primal impingement, life-threat and anxiety, which accompanied the archetypal loss. Death is as much taboo as birth, and for precisely the same reason.

Inability to tolerate loss mobilises the defences of denial, in that the subject persists as if the loss or change had not taken place. The lost, idealised, good environment, is projected back, post-loss, into the current environment, which in phantasy becomes that which was lost. The bereaved organism lives in a phantasy womb for the rest of its life. Much energy in later existence is devoted to attempts to generate compensatory environments which approximate as closely as possible to the lost idealised womb-world. In so far as reality refuses to be conformed to such an image, the person stays in a condition of search or hope, always seeking, yet never finding that heavenly haven, to admit the non-existence of which would be to encounter the convulsive grief of primal loss. Centres of dependency, places of worship, sacred symbols, religious rituals, and their mirrors in articulate theology, are all reifications within the adult world of this unresolved position of primal search. The time reversal is clear, the idealised holding environment existed in the past but is sought in the future, as if that part of the being is actually oriented in inverse time back from the here and now toward conception.

Loss of paradise occurs at any point of impingement in which the past holding environment is subjected to idealisation into the good field. From that point on, even if after the stressing, conditions return to the stable equilibrium very similar to that which prefigured the stressor, the subject perceives the new state as in some way 'fallen', the world has split into good and evil. The mechanism is not limited to birth, but is, of course, universally common at birth. The safe period then subjected to idealisation into heaven may represent the total duration of gestation, or if the stressor occurs earlier in the intrauterine period, it may simply be limited to that earlier field. Apart from the common experiences of loss of the womb-world, some subjects also appear to present symptoms of loss of the placenta as representing part of the self which was left behind. This element of loss is also presented in acute form by some twins, whose primal environment is inhabited by an other, also sharing the symbiotic

relationship with the mother. Intrauterine death of one twin, even at a very early stage in gestation, leaves a sense of asymmetry, disturbance and loss within the primal environment which perseveres throughout the life of the survivor.

Denial of loss of the idealised good holding environment with its accompanying orientation of search and compensation, reinforces the dynamics of regression as a defence against anxiety. This provides the most common and powerful response to subsequent anxiety in terms of regression into and dependency upon the idealised good holding environment of a phantasy womb. In that drive lies the origin of incestuous desire, whose arche so eluded Freud that he categorised that also as 'instinctive'.

Every point of regression, however, threatens to disrupt the repression of that primal impingement which laid down the original splitting. In so far as regression occurs therefore, fear of impingement also threatens to irrupt, with its concomitant talion rage and terror of death. Both regressive desire and talion dread are focused upon the same primal environment and events, giving rise to the ground of ambivalence as well as the terror of annihilation. It is in this way that primal analysis of anxiety defences lays bare the connections of the otherwise disconnected elements of the Oedipus complex, the analysis of whose causal origin Freud was unable to complete.

11. Complex splitting

Two further mechanisms of splitting and displacement serve to complete the description of normal, or common, innate defences against anxiety. The processes of idealisation and denial split the experiential field into two antithetical zones, access to one of which is blocked because of the acute anxiety generated by its recall and subsequent integration with the rest of the experience.

a) Conscious/Unconscious

The splitting of the proto-conscious memory, that biochemical imprint retained within the organism, which forms the basic data field for all subsequent developing awareness, would appear to be the foundation of the split between conscious and unconscious fields of the human psyche. Intolerable material is held in the unconscious and the boundary between unconscious and conscious realms is managed by the anxiety defences. Precise brain behaviour involved is as yet unclear. It may have something to do with the blocking of access to the speech centres for all angst triggering data. The material is clearly present in some form providing the ground for dream content, artistic, symbolic, poetic, mythological constructs and for unconscious behavioural dynamics at all levels of the social system. Energy vested in maintaining the boundaries of the unconscious field and hence the opaqueness to analysis and recall of unconscious content is determined by the level of life-threatening stress and the point in development at which it was experienced. The more intense the impingement, the more primitive the stage of development at which it was experienced, the more intense is the repression and the more impervious to insight is the unconscious material.

b) Right/Left

If the information field is split into conscious and unconscious zones, the physical body mirrors this splitting in the division between right and left. Conscious articulate material is associated with left brain activity, unconscious, symbolic, intuitive processes are more characteristic of right brain functions. With this perspective, anxiety defences may be described as gating controls, managing communication between the two hemispheres of the brain. Motor controls for the left side of the body are managed by the right hemisphere and, conversely, motor controls for the right side of the body are managed by the left hemisphere of the brain. This may well reflect a fundamental displacement of negativities in the form of the idealised bad, denied field of experience into the right brain/left body pair, contrasted with the unrepressed idealised good field being associated with ease of conscious access in the left brain/right body system. Certainly, initial experience of primal analysis and integration points to the recovery of access to intuitive symbolic areas of right brain problem-solving, matched by increased motor access control of the left side of the body. In other words, there is an increase in rational/intuitive integration matched by increasing ambidexterity. (It is interesting to note the linguistics involved. We have no word that signifies right-and-left-handedness but have to describe it as both hands acting as right hands. Similarly in classical Hebrew, there is no word for left-handedness. The left-handed person is described as 'bound in the right hand'. The common defences reified in linguistic usage cannot admit the left to conscious significance.)

Writing quite independently, the late Dr. Frank Lake noted on the basis of his wide research experience of primal analysis, "Invariably, when the foetus in recoiling from maternal distress, splits vertically down the body, the bad side into which the sinister input is being displaced is the left side. The good side, separated from the bad at times hidden and kept safe, is felt to be strong and potentially dextrous in combat. This is 'in the right' and is always placed on the right. So this right/left, good/bad, dextrous/sinister division is a basic one." [F. Lake, *With Respect: A Doctor's Response to a Healing Pope*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982, p.4]. The symbolic separation of good and bad, positive and negative, light and darkness, white and black, rational and intuitive, male and female, blessing and curse, heaven and hell, life and death, etc. are consistently portrayed in terms of right and left differentiation, whether in drama, symbolic art, architecture, myth and ritual, or political and social institutions. Any culture with a common spatial orientation develops a sense of impending threat coming from the left with a stable, dependable, conservative culture to the right. So in the common east-facing cultures of the fertile crescent, we find the various Semitic languages linking the concepts of left, north, north wind, and unlucky with the same basic root word. North is to the left of the east-facing culture. If overwhelming evil within the international context is feared, then it will come from the north.

The right hand is the hand of blessing (see Genesis 48.8 f .), while the pithy, epigrammatic saying of the preacher (Ecclesiastes 10.2) reads, "A wise man's heart inclines him toward the right, but a fool's heart toward the left". The writer has already identified wisdom with light and folly with darkness. This good/bad,

left/right split is also exemplified in the phrase to 'distinguish right from left' as indicating the age of ethical maturity in which the subject knows right from wrong, good from evil (see Didache 12.1 and compare Jonah 4.11).

Significantly the culture of higher latitudes tends to be south-oriented, since it is the seasonal variation which governs fertility and survival (in cultures nearer the tropics the seasonal variation is less significant and the sun is sought in its eastward, rising, position, after the little death of night). So it is that as the centres of international culture and power shifted from the Fertile Crescent towards northern Europe the archaic split of north and south has given way to the contemporary division between east and west. The eastern block is identified with left-wing politics and perceived to be revolutionary, potentially disruptive and anarchically threatening. There is, of course, a mirror defence within the southern hemisphere, detectable but suppressed, partly because of the much smaller land areas involved, partly because dominant cultures in the southern hemisphere have been imposed from the north European power base and reflect a south-facing, northern hemisphere, defensive orientation. There is, however, a fundamental mismatch between the social defences against anxiety in the south, which are oriented 180° out of phase to those of the northern hemisphere. Thus in so far as the southern part of the globe develops its own distinct political entity one would expect the west to be identified with the political left and the east with the political right. As the global community becomes more unified in its dynamic behaviour it is to be expected that the east-facing equatorial and near-tropical regions would identify with the cause of the south in conflict with the perceived evil influences of the north, while the northern hemisphere would reflect an east/west split mirrored into a west/east division of the south.

One of the most telling comments, made quite unconsciously, comes from Elicott's notes on Matthew 25.33, in which Jesus portrays the scene of final judgement as a separation between the left, characterised by goats - who are cursed and bidden to depart, to be tortured by fire, ruled by the devil in the place of eternal punishment - and the right, characterised by sheep - who are blessed, and requested to come into the Kingdom ruled by the Father in eternal life. Elicott comments, "The right hand and the left are used according to the laws of what we might almost call a natural symbolism, as indicating respectively good and evil, acceptance and rejection". [Elicott, New Testament Commentary, Vol. 1, p.156] In all these instances we are dealing with the displacement into the adult social environment of the polarities of idealisation, emanating from primal impingement and presenting in the innate defences against anxiety.

Inability to analyse the origin of social splitting, followed by inevitable collusion reinforcement of the displacement have led to foetal (if not fatal) flaws in the work of Karl Marx and of his forerunner Ludwig Feuerbach. The ground of alienation, or oppressive suffering, generating inconsistencies within the social system is displaced as far as possible from its primal origin into the macro socio-political and economic structures controlling the means of production. Man is at all stages of his development a dependent organism, struggling for survival in the womb of Mother Earth, the ecological environment which is both life-supportive and life-threatening and is subject, associationally, to precisely that idealisation, splitting, denial, displacement and projection with which man handled his archetypal intrauterine

environment. This is not the place for a detailed critique of Marxism, which must be dealt with elsewhere, but in passing it must be noted that the system is essentially an attempt to regain the idealised good field through a process of defence conversion, which solves no problems, but merely redistributes the pain of oppression and denial from one side of the social split to the other.

12. Other Dimensions of Splitting

Up to this point we have been dealing with the common, or normal, innate defences against anxiety, representing the peak of the statistical distribution of primal stressing within society. Some individuals experience significantly lower levels of stressing and present comparatively mild levels of anxiety defence as a result. On the other hand, some will have experienced abnormally severe stressing, requiring more complex levels of defence in order to sustain repression and denial of the threatening imprinted material. The more abnormally stressed the person is, the more significant their defences become for the classical, or therapeutically-oriented, analyst and the more disturbed their presenting behaviour is seen to be. A brief description of the more complex levels of splitting and displacement is essential as background to understanding the matrix of Christianity, whether in terms of the formation, ministry and teaching of Jesus, or of the founding, development, mission, leadership and institutional dynamics of the Christian church.

a) Psyche/Soma

If bodily pain reaches levels of hyper-stress, the organism may cut off somatic information, in defence against being overwhelmed by the anxiety and life-threat to which the body is temporarily subject. It would appear that this mechanism is a response to boundary stress comparatively late in the period of gestation, or at the point of birth itself. The organism withdraws to the mental world from the bodily. In effect the idealised bad environment is perceived to have invaded the organism and taken over the somatic region, while the idealised good environment mirrored into an idealised good self, is sustained within the psyche. The psyche/soma split therefore manages a similar boundary to the conscious/unconscious split previously described. Such people tend to live in their head, with low levels of body awareness, suppression of emotional material, and high levels of intellectual activity. Thought is omnipotent and replaces the deed in the management of life. Touch and intimacy at the body boundary tends to reverberate the repressed somatic pain and distress, so that the subject presents reversed boundaries and compulsively ‘keeps their distance’ from others.

Acute oxygen starvation at the point of birth, either through placental failure, the impeding of umbilical circulation or ‘strangled birth’ in which the umbilical cord is wound tightly around the neck, so inhibiting circulation to the brain and preventing the onset of breathing immediately after birth, may also result in a closing down of the soma as the brain struggles for survival under conditions of reduced oxygen. It is as if the neuro-muscular system is abandoned, passivity is the order of the day, since any action uses up some of the precious supplies, whose attenuation threatens

existence. In this case similar patterns of heightened intellectual activity and extremely low body awareness are characteristic, though intimacy, touch, and emotional involvement give rise not so much to reverberative somatic pain as to the sense of panicky suffocation, breathlessness, asthma, bronchial spasm and claustrophobia.

b) Soma/Psyche

In certain situations of acute pain to the head during birth there is a conversion of the psyche/soma split in which the idealised bad field is displaced into the head, while the idealised good field is identified with the body. For such people problems are solved by activity, while intellectual effort produces a 'pain in the head'. It is this kind of material which lies behind the reports of Dr. David Boadella, a Reichian analyst, that certain subjects present in phantasy as if the head is the womb, containing the body as foetus, while some others reverse the position, perceiving the head as the foetal self, contained in, but dissociated from, the somatic womb.

c) Foetus/Placenta

One subject with whose analysis I was briefly involved presented a placenta/foetal reversal. Stressing to the total foetal being had become so great that the foetal organism as a whole had become identified with the idealised bad field, and denied, while the idealised good field had been displaced into the placental system, separation from which had been subsequently denied, leading to presentation within the adult state of sustained regression in identification with the placental part of the foetal organism as the only safe (i.e. adequately defended) position.

d) Part/Whole

More common is the substitution of part of the anatomy for the whole, a mechanism which has been extensively treated in previous papers on castration anxiety. Typically in the male the phallus in phantasy takes the place of the self, while the remainder of the body acts as the environment. In this position, masturbation may be caring (phallus = idealised good self) or masochistically punitive (phallus = idealised bad self). In the first case the body holds by displacement the idealised good caring environment and in the second the idealised bad persecutory environment. Similar, though less pronounced, forms of displacement appear to take place in female masturbation.

Coitus itself represents a mutual primal regression in which the male genital seeks to return to the idealised good holding environment while the male provides precisely the same context for the female as person. From the female perspective the whole body is identified as the contained self, while the genital in phantasy becomes the containing environment. For the male the whole body is the containing environment while the genital represents the contained foetal self. Re-emergence of the bad idealised denied field within the coital experience underlies much masochistic conversion and rape.

e) Reversal

Severe stressing in second stage labour, possibly reinforcing deeper intrauterine hyper-stress, appears to generate not only the life/death reversal but also the sexual reversals underlying the homosexual and lesbian positions of later development.

13. Multi-level Splitting

Like the conscious/unconscious split, and the right/left divide, the psyche/soma, soma/psyche, foetal/placenta and part-to-whole splits represent internalised reflections of the complete self and environment dipole and are of course subjected to similar conditions of idealisation into good and bad, together with the denial and repression of one side or other of the field. Higher levels of stress may lead to multiple splits, with complex interplay of repression, displacement and conversion reactions. There may be a dissociation of the psyche into several comparatively water-tight compartments with inter-departmental boundaries managed by defensive repression and gating, similar to that between right and left brain function in the lower level presentation. The next increase of complexity is marked by the development of dual centres to the psyche, each of which may have its own orbital system of departments. In this case the subject presents as a form of dual personality (Jekyll and Hyde) in which one or other is repressed at any given time, although conversion reactions may occur in which behaviour characteristics of the alter-ego emerges as dominant. Even more intense stress may result in a shattering of the psyche into multiple centres. The person presents as a colony (legion) requiring some kind of coalition government within the internal pantheon of split parts if any sense of coherent action or communication is to be achieved. Primal stressing which generates this kind of damage is very close to the limits of physical toleration of the human organism and death is the ultimate solution to the problem of intolerable conditions for survival.

14. Projected internal defence

The various splits within the psyche and their associated patterns of denial or acceptance, good and bad are mirrored across the boundary of the self into the environment which is perceived in phantasy (i.e. by projection and re-introjection) as equally distorted, shattered and disintegrated as the existential self. Commonly, the internal chaos is denied and projected onto the cosmos and the subject subsequently lives and reacts within the chaoticised world. This is a perfectly understandable solution to the problem of living, but presents to others with differently damaged environmental perception as bizarre or abnormal behaviour, which threatens to raise to consciousness the intolerable split off parts of the self. Such persons and behaviour are therefore subjected to a common enactment of defensive retaliation, resulting in the repression of the behaviour and the splitting off of such disturbed persons from the rest of society, so maintaining the common social defences against anxiety in undisturbed collusion operation.

Whatever the map of primal impingement, the fundamental defences against re-invasion by the intolerable levels of associated anxiety are in place in the new-born. It is these defences which, in the absence of the previously known intrauterine environment, are projected and displaced into the encountered objects and relations of the new world, so forming the ground of interaction between the nursing infant and its mother, or other carers, and forming the matrix of all subsequent oral, anal and genital development in the nursing phase. This field is well known from the writings of D.W. Winnicott and Melanie Klein, or the more recent protagonists of the object-relations school of psychoanalysis. As the child develops from object-relations through to the phase of personal relations, with the integration of parts of the persons into whole people, the splits and phantasies of the primal defences are mirrored into the self/environment transactional map of the developing person, eventually forming the ground of the unconscious dynamics of adult behaviour, with its institutional, familial and political roles and relationships, its self-image and world-view. In particular its ideological or philosophical framework represents as boundary conditions to the cosmos those deep intrauterine and perinatal boundary transactions, frozen in primal trauma, patterned in innate defences and projected to the limits of the known world.

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