

PHILASTER:

Oh but thou dost not know what 'tis to die.

BELLARIO: Yes, I do know, my lord:

'Tis less than to be born; a lasting sleep,

A quiet resting from all jealousy;

A thing we all pursue. I know besides,

It is but giving over of a game

That must be lost.

—Fletcher

A Game that must be Lost

THE AIMS of instinctual urges are never abandoned nor always reconciled under the pressure of reality: out of this situation there arise the developments and divisions of the psyche and the elaboration of the ego's defences. Are these vast, complicated structures, then, the fruit of so abridged a conflict, or is the incessant and always acute character of conflict due as well to an *absolute* opposition in the first place between basic drives themselves?

There is today no agreement over the matter: the disagreement is the principal cause for conflict in the psycho-analytic movement. I am on the side that favours an initial scene of inner conflict *per se*, in accordance with Freud's later theory. I suspect that even in the distant past, had there existed in the theory of conflict this stronger duality, neither Adler nor Jung could have driven monist paths at the edges of psycho-analytic understanding.

Do you conceive of pressures from the external world, from reality and the instinct of self-preservation, as the entire other term in conflict with the urges of the sexual instincts? There has been much attraction in this view: it appears that a more profound basis for inner conflict is a hesitant demand solely of psychology among the biological sciences. Yet libido as a whole, it seems to me, requires an inner opponent if we are to find good reason for the very existence of the ego itself, the hardened rind of the id that withstands the pressures, frustrations, and dangers of the external world. The role of the ego is often to take the long view. I put this question: If the interests of survival that the ego will serve, conflict with those of immediate satisfaction, how is the ego developed from the id, unless there be at work in the id another and negative principle that causes survival to declare itself as an immediate aim: can the instinct of self-preservation be viewed satisfactorily without a partner who typifies danger: in what school does the ego learn the postures of defence?

I myself cannot avoid the conclusion that the ego has been educated, and indeed initiated, in more than one school. Freud writes in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* 7: "Man does not seem to have been endowed, or has been endowed in but small measure, with an instinctive recognition of the dangers that threaten him from without." One might infer from this that Freud is attributing, even to the infant, an instinctive recognition of danger within. That danger will be projected. Would not the recognition of danger without depend partly, perhaps wholly, upon a dangerous inner situation?

We accept that there are positive instinctual responses to certain objects. The world is populated also by objects of menace, by hate, aggression, disease, and many kinds of physical threat. Are we to suppose that the organism contains nothing that matches menace; does the external world, in regard to menace, frustration, persecution, and all negative situations, simply impinge on the innocent psyche, or is there, as in positive situations, a part of us potentially at one with them? In a secondary sense, at any rate, there is some confirmation for the last alternative in view of the introjection of bad objects, a mechanism that does not vouch, however, for a primary correlation. After writing the above I have found that this same issue was far better formulated by Money-Kyrle in his paper of 1955, "An Inconclusive Contribution to the Theory of the Death Instinct".¹² I will have unconsciously remembered it. He asks the simple question: "Are we to attribute psychic equivalents only to the system-maintaining processes, and not to the disruptive processes they counteract?" Money-Kyrle's paper is a necessary starting-point for those who would discuss the death instinct. He concludes as follows: "It cannot be an instinct in the ordinary sense—something evolved in the interests of self- and species-preservation. It can therefore hardly be conceived except as a kind of psychic correlate of entropy—something prior to the instincts proper which were presumably evolved to counteract it."

This is a more straightforward characterisation of duality than the one of Freud. I use the word "straightforward" because, perhaps without good reason, I put it at Freud's door that in rereading *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*⁸ I had to stop at several points to determine whether what he was saying referred to Eros or whether it referred to the death instincts. Though they are conceived in the maximum opposition, they are none the less given a

great deal in common. Thus Freud writes: "The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the 'Nirvana principle', to borrow a term from Barbara Low)—a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle; and our recognition of that fact is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of death instincts (pp. 55-6). And farther on: "But we still feel our line of thought appreciably hampered by the fact that we cannot ascribe to the sexual instinct the characteristic of a compulsion to repeat which first put us on the track of the death instincts" (p. 56). Elsewhere we are told that the sexual instincts are more *conservative* than other instincts. We know very well that from the *Project* onwards Freud invoked a leaning towards inertia (compare his use of Fechner's conception of constancy) for *all* the instincts and for the aim of the pleasure principle. "The pleasure principle," he wrote, "seems actually to serve the death instincts." On the other hand, at the beginning of the *Economic Problem of Masochism* (S.E. XIX) Freud specifically qualifies an identification of the pleasure with the Nirvana principle. The latter is a modification of the former.

But in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the Nirvana theme is not invoked for the death instincts more than for the other instincts. I believe there is often a simple misconception in this matter, in regard also to what Freud has said in this book concerning aggression. It seems sometimes to be assumed that the death instinct was introduced in order to award greater priority to aggression. Overtly at any rate, this is far from the truth: in fact there is only a little over a page in the Standard Edition given to discussing the possibility of an original sadism. "If such an assumption as this is permissible, then we have met the demand that we should produce an example of a death instinct—though, it is true, a displaced one. But this way of looking at things is very far from being easy to grasp and creates a positively mystical impression" (p. 54). According to Freud's editors of the Standard Edition, the problem of destructiveness makes in this passage a first explicit appearance. It was, of course, enlarged upon in subsequent papers and books, particularly, and in no uncertain terms, in Chapter 6 of *Civilization and its Discontents*,⁵ as we shall see, but otherwise not greatly nor consistently. The question of a primary aggression, as of the death instinct, was, so to say, forced upon him; he brought it into

relation with certain clinical problems only, not at all with his clinical findings as a whole. Thus, in a paper of 1922 and in a reference of 1923,⁴ paranoia is treated once again in accordance with his famous paper of 1911, fundamentally, that is, as a mechanism of repressed homosexuality. I would like to know whether any school of psycho-analysis today agrees with this general diagnosis and would omit reference to the force of a projected aggression with a far wider history than that of a homosexual relationship.

Freud was prepared to allow a disdain for the death instinct, even on the part of his most faithful followers. Some of us appear to think that we can best reproduce the hesitation and caution of Freud by rejecting his death instinct and in further emphasising clinically a role for aggression that is not merely reactive, being in some sense primary. The death instinct is traded for aggression: at the same time the disreputable link of aggression with the so-called death instinct serves as a reason for not stressing, not even recognising perhaps, a powerful destructive compulsion in the infant, especially since Freud did not allow for any such compulsion in the earliest infantile behaviour; as I have said, he did not overhaul his clinical findings except in some instances, but only the metapsychology, on the introduction of the death instinct.

It may be argued that Freud introduced the death instinct in order to explain repetition-compulsion. That mechanism was certainly the occasion or context. But Freud was much concerned from 1914 to 1920 with the theory of instincts. The duality that had served him from 1910, the duality of the sexual and ego instincts, was undermined by his own paper "On Narcissism" of 1914. This paper left the non-libidinal ego instincts, the opposition to the sexual instincts on which inner conflict had been based, a mere rump and, if the figure can be conceived, a shapeless rump, since it had always been impossible, he himself had said, to define and explore the so-called ego instincts. Six years after and several times later, he was careful to explain this incidence for the death instinct theory: he was careful to trace the evolution of his theory of instincts in order to show that the hypothesis was one he was unable to avoid rather than one he had rushed to embrace. And so, we read of the development of the classification of instincts twice in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in Chapter 6 of *Civilization and its Discontents*, and in Lecture 32 of the *New Introductory Lectures*.⁶

In *Civilization and its Discontents* he wrote: "I know that we have always had before our eyes manifestations of the destructive instinct fused with emotion directed outwards and inwards in sadism and masochism; but I can no longer understand how we could have overlooked the universality of non-erotic aggression and destruction, and could have omitted to give it its due significance in our interpretation of life." But he goes on: "I can remember my own defensive attitude when the idea of an instinct of destruction first made its appearance in psycho-analytical literature and how long it took until I became accessible to it." Freud had written in 1914 in the polemical paper "On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement" (1, p. 58): "The view of life which is reflected in the Adlerian system is founded exclusively on the aggressive instinct." I am struck also by references to Jung's monist libido theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Since it had become necessary to extend vastly the sphere of the Freudian libido, he had felt that it might be thought to approximate to Jung's mystical and boundless instinctual force. But, says Freud at the end of this passage in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: "Our views have from the very first been *dualistic*, and today they are even more definitely dualistic than before—now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego instincts and sexual instincts but between life instincts and death instincts. Jung's libido theory is on the contrary *monistic*" (3, p. 53).

It is perhaps possible that Freud's last metapsychology which he started to build with the paper "On Narcissism"² reflects awareness of a grain of truth in his lost adherents, pertaining to tendencies or parts of attitudes that he now incorporated in a system with even less appeal to them. I have suggested that had this last system been evolved earlier, red herrings drawn across the path of psychoanalysis might have been in shorter supply. (As a result of the present rejection of Freud's last dualism, these may yet be taken out of store.)

On the other hand, doubtless Freud continued to feel, as perhaps do we—and this, I think, is the source of recurrent confusion—that all his great discoveries were the fruit of utter loyalty to the supremacy of an erotic element even in the most contradictory or paradoxical situations, whereby he swept aside age-old underestimations of the sexual component in experience and behaviour. As soon as an inner threat of a kind that is unrelated in the first

instance even to the external threat of reality has been admitted, the purity of the psycho-analytic approach is in danger of tarnish: consequently, the permeation of experience by sexuality and the compulsions of the pleasure principle may be held to be qualified, and a mystical element introduced; whereas when we contemplate the genius of Freud we are likely to think first of the catharsis of an erotic element that he discovered in neurotic symptom or in anxiety dream. All his great discoveries, I repeat, lie in these astonishing paradoxes that he so clearly demonstrated: over and over again matters that seemed utterly to rule out any element of sexuality, fell comfortably into this complex net, arousing the rage and resistance of opponents. Resistance is not always difficult to identify as a negative confirmation of the truth: Freud remained at all times loathe to connect repression, at any rate, with opposition to urges other than those of the sexual components. Had it been otherwise, how could he have traced the liquid, permeating power of sexuality? It has seemed to me that the beauty of psycho-analytic thought lay, and still lies, in this unwavering tide attributed to the sexual instincts, suggesting an undertow that has honeycombed submerged barriers, to appear beyond them contrary to the expectation of a superficial viewer.

It is the more astonishing, therefore, that Freud recast his theory of conflict, at any rate for his wider sweeps, and committed himself, though unwillingly, to a belief in an instinctual force as negative as Eros is positive. We are not disloyal to his genius in following him here as well, in enlarging upon a negative pull, unconnected originally with resistance and repression, in a way that preserves all he held most certain. I do not think that we should suffer much confusion because in his later writings Freud has so restricted the implications of his own metapsychological formulation. We ourselves do not have to fight his original battles.

I must show further what I mean by restrictions. Even in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* itself we read: "Nevertheless we are justified in saying that the old formula which lays it down that psychoneuroses are based on a conflict between ego instincts and sexual instincts contains nothing that we need reject today. . . . And in particular it is still true that the transference neuroses, the essential subject of psycho-analytic study, are the result of a conflict between the ego and the libidinal cathexis of objects" (p. 52). It appears that in this passage the term "ego instincts" has no

reference to aggression or to a death instinct. Six years later, in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*,⁷ he wrote: "The aggressive impulse flows mainly from the instinct of destruction; and we have always believed that in a neurosis it is against the demands of the libido and not against those of any other instinct that the ego is defending itself." "A sadistic cathexis of an object may legitimately claim to be treated as a libidinal one." It appears for this reason only that "an aggressive impulse against the father can just as well be subjected to repression as a loving impulse towards the mother." It seems true to say that according to this view all the defences of the ego are directed solely against certain demands of the libido. Meanwhile, though not happily for the terms of the sentences I have just quoted, the battlefield or area of conflict had been far better defined by the ideas set forth in *The Ego and the Id*⁴ of 1923. As well as the outside world and the id, the ego faces a third front, the superego. This abstruse battlefield is now sometimes spoken of as the root of conflict. Whereas in Chapter 2 of the posthumous *Outline of Psycho-Analysis*,⁸ there appears a reaffirmation of the death instinct, motive and behaviour thereafter are discussed solely in the terms of pleasure, unpleasure, and the demands of the external world: psychical conflict appears to be conceived not only as acted out in, but initiated by, the clashes of one part of the psyche with another.

How do we get, I repeat, these divisions of the psyche, meta-psychologically speaking, and how do we get guilt: why should the psyche work so badly to the end of pleasurable catharsis, why the self-impediment, the obstruction to immediate catharsis? Before the introduction of the death instinct the answer—and Freud made use of no other, though it may well be he was not at all happy with it—is in terms of survival, in terms of the instinct of self-preservation that in the period of the ego instincts had been visualised as the first opposition to the sex instincts. I quote from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: "We know that the pleasure principle is proper to a primary method of working on the part of the mental apparatus, but that, from the point of view of the self-preservation of the organism among the difficulties of the external world, it is from the outset inefficient and even highly dangerous" (3, p. 10). And from "On Narcissism" in regard to sexuality: "The individual does actually carry on a twofold existence: one to serve his own purposes and the other as a link in a chain, which he serves against

his will, or at least involuntarily" (2, p. 78), as a carrier, that is, as a propagator, of the species. Thereafter, of course, in Freud's theory, the instinct of self-preservation joins the sex instincts as part of the libido. He felt, he had always felt, the need of a larger root for conflict, larger than for the conflict of instincts within the same group. We are back at the point where the death instinct will be introduced, though seldom employed.

Before offering very tentatively a construction that is novel in some particulars, I want to recall the burden of *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*; and then, since I have looked up "death" in a dictionary of quotations, to reproduce a few.

By his second theory Freud brought anxiety into close relation with loss of the object, with the loss at birth of the pre-natal state, in infancy with the disappearances of the mother, and later with the fear of castration which would also be, Ferenczi had suggested, a loss of a tie with the mother. More generally, Freud associated anxiety in this book with helplessness or with an expectation of helplessness. But he denied that there was any concept of annihilation in the id: had he been inclined to take a different view, he might have felt it as a threat to the supremacy of the sexual instincts from which had come his incontrovertible discoveries and the distinctive opposition to them. "If anxiety is a reaction of the ego to danger," he writes, "we shall be tempted to regard the traumatic neuroses, which so often follow upon a narrow escape from death, as a direct result of a fear of death (or fear for life) and to dismiss from our minds the question of castration and the dependent relationships of the ego. Most of those who observed the traumatic neuroses that occurred during the last war took this line, and triumphantly announced that proof was now forthcoming that a threat to the instinct of self-preservation could by itself produce a neurosis without any admixture of sexual factors and without requiring any of the complicated hypotheses of psycho-analysis." Freud goes on to say that in any case his introduction of narcissism had emphasised the libidinal character of the instinct of self-preservation. Of course he objected to a conception of neurosis that could allow of its presence as a result solely of an objective danger, "Without," he says, "any participation of the deeper levels of the mental apparatus." Although six years earlier in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he had brought traumatic experience into relationship with an internal qualification of the whole libidinal organisa-

tion, he does not enlarge upon it in this vital context; indeed, he goes to some lengths to preserve a greater part of the position in this matter as it existed before the introduction of the death instinct. From another angle, however—and that is why I have drawn attention to *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*—I do not consider it inapt to point to some equation between this fear of loss and a fear of an instinctual pull towards dying that I am about to assume.

"What have we done to Death that we must die?" wrote Wilfrid Blunt. If we look up "death" in a dictionary of quotations, I think we shall conclude that the most common tenor is concerned with debt. "The slender debt to Nature's quickly paid, Discharged, perchance, with greater ease than made." "Death is a debt we must all pay." "A fair death honours the whole of life." "He that dies pays all debts." "He that dies this year is quit for the next." It would be superficial to isolate the invocations of guilt and punishment in these contexts. I recall that Melanie Klein has said that a considerable part of the death instinct drive is lodged in the superego.¹¹ Freud had said the same in regard to the melancholic (*The Ego and the Id*).

Many quotations reveal a more complicated attitude vested in the distinction between "death" and "dying". For the most part dying is hard but death is called friend by a multitude of poets. "A dying man can do nothing easy." Edward Young wrote: "The knell, the shroud, the mattock, and the Grave; The deep damp vault, the darkness, and the worm; These are the bugbears of a winter's eve, The terrors of the living, not the dead."

The saddest of all sentences is Pascal's "Je mourrai seul". Dying completes separation, the darkness without companion. But death itself, "This king of terrors is the prince of peace." "How glad would lay me down, As in my mother's lap!" wrote Milton. "Good is death which destroys the evils of life." And Swinburne: "Peace, rest, and sleep are all we know of death." And Alexander Smith: "That sleep the loveliest, since it dreams the least." Sterne wrote: "Death opens the gate of Fame, and shuts the gate of Envy after it."

There are many quotations that treat of dying as inseparable from our birth. "Death borders upon our birth, and our cradle stands in the grave," wrote Bishop Hall in the seventeenth century. "The world's an inn and death the journey's end," is a famous quotation from Dryden. And Beaumont and Fletcher before him:

"This world's a city, full of straying streets, And death's the market place, where each one meets." "What new thing then is it," said Seneca, "For a man to die, whose whole life is nothing else but a journey to death?" "Nothing is dead, but that which wished to die," wrote Edward Young in the early eighteenth century. "Death has moulded into calm completeness The statue of his life." Finally, in *Antony and Cleopatra* we read: "If thou and nature can so gently part, The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, Which hurts and is desired."

The fear of death appeared above as the panic of a winter's eve. "The pomp of death alarms us more than death itself." Death is "but giving over of a game that must be lost." This image, from Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*, involves death with life best of all. A game that must be lost, the undertone of every occasion.

Ageing tends to bring a decreasing range of objects and probably a decreasing intensity, except in the manner of a clinging, a primitive clinging, in those ties that remain. Dying figures the losing of all objects, the negation of the Eros drive whose character is object-seeking. In regard to the theory of guilt as well as of anxiety, the threat of loss of objects, of their absence, is crucial. An aim of the present paper is to keep in mind this connexion between the threat of loss and aggression, and further to suggest that the sense of loss, before it is associated with anxiety, aggression, and guilt (and eventually the later integrative processes), brings with it a taste of death, since it is the first libidinal reaction to the pull of death. I think that if one posits a pull towards death, one must find an imago for it, even though it can appear only under the aegis of Eros, corresponding to the imago of the breast as the original good object. I have in mind as the representative content a feeling of emptiness or absence that, upon projection, enormously aggravates the deprivations of hunger and thus endows the frustrating breast with a virulent badness or power of persecution. It seems to me that to posit a projection of a sense of absence stimulated by the pull of death, in association with hunger, clarifies the incidence as well as the huge power of persecutory anxiety: it means that two kinds of lack coincide, the psychological sense of absence and a somatic emptiness. This sense of absence, though dormant only, will have preceded hunger, or, at least, it will not have come about solely at the behest of hunger: and since it is the libidinal response to a deadly refusal to entertain objects, this sense of absence will

stimulate as a rule a psychological hunger for the object. The component of a basic refusal is therefore the more unlikely to mitigate the somatic hunger. I can imagine, though, that in the wilting of some infants the issue may have been otherwise. But usually the fear of object-absence will have reinforced hunger, the sense of deprivation, and so initiated the sense of persecution, which in turn calls forth an aggression associated with the instinct of self-preservation. However small the willed component, a partly willed deprivation must be felt as a greater threat to the organism than a starvation solely physiological.

Whereas it has been customary to derive the sense of persecution from deprivation by the object and from the vengeful return of the aggression that had been directed against it, in the above theoretical construction the sense of persecution first arises out of the sense and fear of object-absence, and is therefore prior to that aggression with which it is welded in accordance with the instinct of self-preservation. The first aim, then, of that aggression is to enforce the absence of an undesired object. While holding aggression in contact with paranoid anxiety and the pull towards object-absence, this construction avoids the awkwardness of identifying aggression, an instrument also of self-preservation, directly with the passive workings of a death instinct.

But aggression is immediately bound up with loss also: the destroyed object is often the good object attacked in greed, or in envy, the supreme expression of the desire for object-absence fused with libido, since this persecution by the object issues from its very goodness coveted by the subject. A sense of loss at once assumes the acute form known to us clinically in the terms of depressive anxiety which is inspired, not simply by the losing of what is good, but by the way the loss is felt to have occurred, namely through one's own aggression against the object. Melanie Klein on whom, it is obvious, I have relied, has often argued that at a later stage these depressive feelings are so unbearable that some reversion at least to a paranoid position and to primary modes of splitting serve again as the necessary defence.

Freud showed that the Thanatos principle as a rule operates in a close fusion with Eros: masochism was his touchstone. I have found it necessary to imagine that in all life-giving and life-preserving responses there is mingled an impulse, however faint, of refusal, in virtue of which no creature needs to be taught about

death. The sense of loss and anxiety that arises out of threats, are thereby seen as the libidinal response to an innate refusal. I think that from the beginning the impulse of refusal is felt within other instinctual responses and tends to increase them, as might a slowly departing train the response of a man who would catch it. "In play," wrote Byron, "there are two pleasures for your choosing. The one is winning, and the other losing." I submit again, then, that the compulsion towards survival, whether of the self or of the species, is always associated with the recoil from an instinctive refusal that is so menacing as generally to make it an aim for us to survive at the cost of any other immediate satisfaction.

In novels and autobiographies as well as poems we read of moments of "realisation", enlightenment, a sense of completeness, physical, intellectual, emotional, so perfect that the writer is apt to exclaim that that would have been the best of all occasions on which to die. It appears the thought of death is least unwelcome at the very moment of a consummation that seems as inexhaustible as the good breast. We have in this experience, we retain, all we ever want—so we feel—and we know that thereafter we shall strive but to reach a similar fulfilment. I think most of us would agree that the furniture, as it were, the *mise-en-scène* of such a situation's various embodiment, entails the harmonious postures, the perfect health and security of internal objects, probably achieved at great cost. Under any other conditions we are to some extent lost, lonely, feeling that we shall die in partial misery, whereas if we die at the moment of perfect realisation, it will be *we* who leave a scene which is not itself thereby disturbed. True, we no longer then perceive it, but like Berkeley's table it is not dependent for existence on our perception—so it is felt—if we ourselves absorb, as it were, the temporal role in taking leave of it.

A similar analysis has often been advanced in interpreting one aspect of the suicide's state of mind: he saves good objects by his act. I agree entirely, but I do not agree to the usual corollary that there is no need to introduce the consideration of a pull towards death. The goodness of our good objects—they will, of course, usually include our descendants—is an end in itself: that is to say, we demand no further object. Apparently, these objects have always been in danger, injured or lost. Such is the scale of danger; it cannot but mean that there are equally powerful bad objects and that they embody a negative principle, an inevitable partner of our

love: if life, love and the connective object-harbouring role of Eros are inextricable conceptions, so too are those of hate, persecution, disintegration, and death.

Such fine words are out of place. It would be convenient if we could envisage one force only, with both a positive and a negative direction that exist together in changing proportions. Unfortunately, such a hypothesis cannot have biological appeal inasmuch as the presence of the negative component is believed to declare itself in positive situations by a greater strength only of the positive drive, an assumption for which there can be no testing nor proof. But since, as I have said, it seems that psychology alone tends to demand an inner basis for conflict, the hypothesis, ridiculous as it may seem, could prove to be the happiest available; though appearing to be useless to biology, it is not necessarily biological nonsense.

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