

Beyond the Pleasure Principle

I

In psychoanalytic theory we assume without further ado that the evolution of psychic processes is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle; that is to say, we believe that these processes are invariably triggered by an unpleasurable tension, and then follow a path such that their ultimate outcome represents a diminution of this tension, and hence a propensity to avoid unpleasure or to generate pleasure. When, in our study of psychic processes, we look at them with specific reference to this manner in which they evolve, we introduce the 'economic' perspective into our work. An account that pays due attention to this economic factor, as well as to the topical and dynamic aspects, seems to us to be the most complete kind that is presently conceivable, and to merit special distinction by use of the term *metapsychological*.¹

It is of no interest to us in any of this to investigate the extent to which, in postulating the pleasure principle, we have echoed or embraced any particular, historically established philosophical system. We have arrived at such speculative assumptions simply as a result of our efforts to give a description and account of the facts that we observe on a daily basis in our field of study. Being original or getting there first do not figure among the aims laid down for psychoanalytic inquiry, and the impressions on which the postulation of this principle is based are so obvious that it is scarcely possible to overlook them. On the other hand, we would gladly acknowledge our gratitude to any philosophical or psychological theory capable of revealing to us the *meaning* of these sensations

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of pleasure and unpleasure that are so imperative for us. In this respect, unfortunately, nothing of any use is available to us. This is the darkest and most impenetrable area of the psyche, and whilst we cannot possibly avoid touching upon it, it seems to me that we do best to offer only the most tentative of suppositions on the subject. After much consideration we are minded to posit a connection between pleasure/unpleasure and the quantity of excitation present – yet not annexed² in any way – within the psyche; a connection whereby unpleasure corresponds to an *increase* in that quantity, and pleasure to a *decrease*. We are not thinking here in terms of a simple relationship between the strength of the sensations and the quantitative changes that we are linking them to; least of all – in view of everything that psycho-physiology has taught us – are we thinking in terms of a directly proportional relationship. The key determining factor so far as the sensation is concerned is probably the intensity of the decrease or increase over a particular period of time. Experimentation may well have a part to play here: we analysts would certainly be well advised not to venture any more deeply into these problems until such time as we can be guided by very specific observations.

However, we cannot help but feel a certain excitement when we discover that such a penetrating scientist as G. T. Fechner advocated an interpretation of pleasure and unpleasure that accords in all essential respects with the one so forcefully suggested to us by our psychoanalytic work. Fechner's statement on the matter is contained in his brief study *Einige Ideen zur Schöpfungs- und Entwicklungs-geschichte der Organismen* [Some Ideas on the Origin and Evolution of Organisms] of 1873 (Section XI, supplementary note, p. 94), and reads as follows: 'Inasmuch as conscious impulses are always associated with pleasure or unpleasure, we may suppose that pleasure and unpleasure, too, are linked psycho-physically to conditions of stability and instability; and this gives grounds for a hypothesis that I shall develop in more detail elsewhere, namely that every psycho-physical motion that passes the threshold of consciousness involves pleasure to the degree that it moves beyond a certain point *towards* complete stability, and unpleasure to the

degree that it moves beyond a certain point *away from* that stability; whilst *between* these two points – which may be defined as the qualitative thresholds of pleasure and unpleasure – there is a certain margin of aesthetic indifference . . .

The facts that have caused us to believe in the dominion of the pleasure principle within the psyche also inform our assumption that one aspiration of the psychic apparatus is to keep the quantity of excitation present within it at the lowest possible level, or at least to keep it constant. The latter postulate is the same as the former, albeit expressed in different terms, for if the psychic apparatus is geared to minimizing the quantity of excitation, then anything tending to *increase* that quantity is bound to be experienced as counter-functional, and hence unpleasurable. The pleasure principle arose out of the constancy principle: in reality, however, the constancy principle was inferred from the same facts that compelled us to postulate the pleasure principle. We shall also discover on deeper consideration that the particular aspiration we attribute to the psychic apparatus is subsumable as a special case under Fechner's principle of 'the tendency to stability', to which he linked the sensations of pleasure and unpleasure.

That being so, however, we have to acknowledge that it is strictly speaking incorrect to say that the pleasure principle has dominion over the way in which psychic processes evolve. If this were the case, then the vast majority of our psychic processes would need to be accompanied by pleasure or lead to pleasure, whereas all common experience contradicts such a conclusion. The true situation, therefore, can only be that the pleasure principle exists as a strong *tendency* within the psyche, but is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot possibly always accord with the said tendency in favour of pleasure. Compare Fechner's remark in a similar context (*op. cit.*, p. 90) that 'the tendency to achieve a particular goal does not imply the actual achievement of that goal, and the goal may not be achievable at all except in approximate terms'. If we now turn to the question as to which circumstances are capable of preventing the pleasure principle from being carried into effect, we find ourselves back on

safe and familiar ground, and in seeking an answer we are able to draw on a rich profusion of psychoanalytical experience.

The primary example of the pleasure principle being thus inhibited is already familiar to us as a spontaneous and automatic process. We know that the pleasure principle belongs to a *primary* operational level of the psychic apparatus, and that so far as self-preservation is concerned it is never anything but useless, indeed highly dangerous, given the challenges posed by the external world. Thanks to the influence of the ego's self-preservation drive it is displaced by the *reality principle*,³ which, without abandoning the aim of ultimately achieving pleasure, none the less demands and procures the postponement of gratification, the rejection of sundry opportunities for such gratification, and the temporary toleration of unpleasure on the long and circuitous road to pleasure. This notwithstanding, the pleasure principle remains for a long period of time the vehicle of the much less 'educable' sexual drives, and there are countless occasions – be it on the basis of these latter drives, be it within the ego itself – where the pleasure principle overwhelms the reality principle, to the detriment of the entire organism.

There is no doubt, however, that displacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle can be held responsible for only a very few experiences of unpleasure, and for none whatever of the most intense ones. Another source of unpleasure, no less spontaneous and automatic, arises from the conflicts and divisions that occur within the psychic apparatus during the course of the ego's development to more highly composite forms of organization.⁴ Almost all the energy that fills the psychic apparatus stems from its innate drive-impulses, but not all of these are granted access to the same phases of development. As things evolve, so there are numerous occasions where individual drives, or elements of individual drives, prove to be incompatible in their aims and demands with all those others that are capable of joining together to yield the all-embracing unity of the ego. They are therefore separated off from this unified whole through the process of repression; they are restricted to lower levels of psychic development and, for the time being at least, cut off from any possibility of gratification. If

they subsequently manage by circuitous means to fight their way to some form of direct or surrogate gratification – as so easily happens in the case of repressed sexual drives – this success, which otherwise would have offered an opportunity for pleasure, is experienced by the ego as unpleasure. Because of the earlier conflict with its outcome in repression, the pleasure principle is once again confuted, right at the very time when various other drives are busy giving effect to it by occasioning new pleasure. The details of the process whereby repression converts an opportunity for pleasure into a source of unpleasure are not yet clearly understood, and cannot be described with any precision, but it is doubtless the case that *all* neurotic unpleasure is of this kind, that is to say, pleasure that cannot be experienced as such.⁵

The two sources of unpleasure identified here by no means account for the majority of our experiences of unpleasure, but of the remainder one can say with some semblance of justification that their existence does not contradict the dominion of the pleasure principle. After all, most of the unpleasure that we feel is *perceptual* unpleasure, involving perception of the turbid pressure of ungratified inner drives, or perception of *external* things; this latter perception may be unpleasant in itself, or it may provoke unpleasurable expectations within the psychic apparatus, and hence be recognized by the latter as a 'danger'. The reaction to these demands of the drives within and dangers posed from without – a reaction that manifests the proper activity of the psychic apparatus – may thus quite correctly be regarded as deriving from the pleasure principle or from its modifier,⁶ the reality principle. This being so, it might seem otiose to grant the existence of any further constraints upon the pleasure principle; yet it is precisely an investigation of the psyche's response to external dangers that affords new material and raises new questions concerning the problem at issue here.

Notes

1. [The terms 'economic', 'dynamic' and 'topical' are all used by Freud in a special sense within the context of his 'metapsychological' system. Cf. the opening paragraphs of Chapters II and IV of *The Unconscious*, New Penguin Freud, 2005]
2. [See below, Section IV, note 5.]
3. [The 'reality principle' – one of Freud's central notions – may be defined as 'the regulatory mechanism that represents the demands of the external world, and requires us to forgo or modify gratification or postpone it to a more appropriate time. In contrast to the pleasure principle, which . . . represents the id or instinctual impulses, the reality principle represents the ego, which controls our impulses and enables us to deal rationally and effectively with the situations of life.' (*The Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry*)]
4. [Before acquiring its more modern senses, the word 'organization' (*Organisation* in Freud's German) related chiefly to 'organ', 'organism', etc.; cf. the *OED* entry for 'Organization': 'The action of organizing, or condition of being organized, as a living being'; 'An organized structure, body, or being; an organism' (etc.)]
5. [*Addition 1925*:] The essence of the matter is presumably that pleasure and unpleasure, being conscious sensations, are tied to the ego. [See the first few paragraphs of Chapter II of *Inhibition, Symptom, and Fear* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (New Penguin Freud, 2003) – which Freud wrote in the same year in which he added this footnote.]
6. [Freud uses the word *modifizieren*, and clearly intends the less common meaning that occurs in both languages, and which in the case of English 'modify' is defined thus in the *OED*: 'To alter in the direction of moderation or lenity; to make less severe, rigorous, or decided; to qualify; tone down, moderate'.]

II

A condition consequent upon severe mechanical shock, train crashes, and other life-threatening accidents has long since been identified and described – a condition that has come to be known

as 'traumatic neurosis'. The terrible war that has only just ended' gave rise to a great many such disorders, and did at least put an end to the temptation to attribute them to organic impairment of the nervous system brought about by mechanical force.² The clinical picture presented by traumatic neurosis is not unlike that of hysteria in its plethora of similar motor symptoms, but generally goes well beyond it in the very marked signs of subjective suffering that it displays – not unlike those in hypochondria or melancholia – and in the clear evidence it affords of a far more comprehensive and generalized enfeeblement and attrition of the individual's psychic capabilities. As yet, no one has managed to attain to a full understanding of either the neuroses of war or the traumatic neuroses of peacetime. In the case of the war neuroses, it seemed on the one hand illuminating, yet simultaneously baffling, that the self-same clinical picture occasionally arose *without* the involvement of any raw mechanical force. In the case of ordinary traumatic neurosis, two features stand out very clearly, and have proved a useful starting point for further thought: first, the fact that the key causative element appeared to lie in the surprise factor, the *fright* experienced by the victim; and second, the fact that if any physical wound or injury was suffered at the same time, this generally inhibited the development of the neurosis. The words 'fright', 'dread' and 'fear' are wrongly used as interchangeable synonyms, for they can be easily differentiated from each other in their relationship to danger.³ 'Fear' represents a certain kind of inner state amounting to expectation of, and preparation for, danger of some kind, even though the nature of the danger may well be unknown. 'Dread' requires a specific object of which we are afraid. 'Fright', however, emphasizes the element of surprise; it describes the state that possesses us when we find ourselves plunged into danger without being prepared for it. I do not believe that fear can engender a traumatic neurosis; there is an element within fear that protects us against fright, and hence also against fright-induced neurosis. We shall return to this proposition later on.

The study of dreams may be regarded as the most reliable approach route for those seeking to understand the deep-level

processes of the psyche. Now it is a distinctive feature of the dream-life of patients with traumatic neurosis that it repeatedly takes them back to the situation of their original misadventure, from which they awake with a renewed sense of fright. People have shown far too little surprise at this phenomenon. The fact that the traumatic experience repeatedly forces itself on the patient even during sleep is assumed to be proof indeed of just how deep an impression it made. The patient is assumed to be, so to speak, psychically fixated⁴ on the trauma. Such fixations on the experience that first triggered the illness have long been familiar to us in the context of hysteria. Breuer and Freud expressed the view in 1893 that hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences. In the case of war neuroses, too, observers such as Ferenczi and Simmel have been able to explain various motor symptoms as arising from a fixation on the moment of trauma.

On the other hand, however, I am not aware that those suffering from traumatic neurosis are very much preoccupied in their *waking* life with memories of their misadventure. Perhaps, rather, they are at pains *not* to think of it. To take it for granted that night-time dreams automatically thrust them back into the situation that provoked their illness would be to misunderstand the nature of dreams. It would be rather more in the nature of dreams to conjure up pictures from the time when the patient was healthy, or else pictures of the return to health that is hoped for in the future. If the dreams of those with accident-induced neurosis are not to make us start doubting the wish-fulfilling tendency of dreams in general, then we might have recourse to the explanation that in this disorder the dream-function, like so much else, is thrown into disarray and distracted from its proper purposes; or we might have to turn our minds to the mysterious *masochistic* tendencies of the ego.⁵

I should now like to suggest that we leave the dark and dismal topic of traumatic neurosis and study the workings of the psychic apparatus by reference to one of its earliest forms of *normal* activity. I mean the play of children.

The various theories of children's play have only recently been

collated and psychoanalytically evaluated by S[igmund] Pfeifer in *Imago* (vol. V, no. 4), and I would refer readers to this paper. These theories seek to divine the motive forces behind children's play, but they do so without paying sufficient attention to the *economic* perspective: the concern of the individual to gain pleasure. Without wishing to embrace the whole gamut of these phenomena, I took advantage of an opportunity that happened to present itself to me in order to elucidate a game played by a one-and-a-half-year-old boy, the first that he had ever invented for himself. It was more than a fleeting observation, as I lived under the same roof as the child and his parents for several weeks, and it was quite some time before the puzzling and constantly repeated behaviour of the child yielded up its meaning to me.

The child was by no means precocious in his intellectual development; at one and a half he spoke only a few intelligible words, and in addition had a small repertoire of expressive sounds comprehensible to those around him. But he had a good rapport with his parents and the family's one maid, and was praised for being a 'good boy'. He didn't disturb his parents during the night; he conscientiously heeded injunctions not to touch certain things and not to enter certain rooms; above all, he never cried when his mother left him for hours at a time, even though he was fondly attached to her, she having not only fed him herself, but also cared for him and looked after him without any outside help. However, this good little boy had the sometimes irritating habit of flinging all the small objects he could get hold of far away from himself into a remote corner of the room, under a bed, etc., so that gathering up his toys was often no easy task. While doing this he beamed with an expression of interest and gratification, and uttered a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o-o' sound, which in the unanimous opinion of both his mother and myself as observer was not simply an exclamation but stood for *fort* ('gone'). I eventually realized that this was probably a game, and that the child was using all his toys for the sole purpose of playing 'gone' with them. Then one day I made an observation that confirmed my interpretation. The child had a wooden reel with some string tied around it. It never crossed

his mind to drag it along the floor behind him, for instance, in other words to play toy cars with it; instead, keeping hold of the string, he very skilfully threw the reel over the edge of his curtained cot so that it disappeared inside, all the while making his expressive 'o-o-o-o' sound, then used the string to pull the reel out of the cot again, but this time greeting its reappearance with a joyful *Dal* ('Here!'). That, then, was the entire game – disappearing and coming back – only the first act of which one normally got to see; and this first act was tirelessly repeated on its own, even though the greater pleasure undoubtedly attached to the second.⁶

The interpretation of the game readily presented itself. It was associated with the child's immense cultural achievement in successfully abnegating his drives (that is, abnegating the gratification thereof) by allowing his mother to go away without his making a great fuss. He compensated for it, so to speak, by *himself* re-enacting this same disappearance–reappearance scenario with whatever objects fell to hand. So far as the affective evaluation of this game is concerned, it is of course immaterial whether the child invented it himself or adopted it in response to a cue from someone else. What interests us is a different point altogether. The going away of the mother cannot possibly have been pleasant for the child, nor even a matter of indifference. How then does his repetition of this painful experience in his play fit in with the pleasure principle? One might wish to reply that the mother's departure would need to be re-enacted in the game as the precondition of her happy return, and that this latter event was its real purpose. Such a view would be contradicted by the evident fact that Act One, the departure, was played as a game all on its own, indeed vastly more often than the full performance with its happy conclusion.

The analysis of a single case such as this cannot resolve the issue with any certainty; but the impression gained by an unprejudiced observer is that the child had a different motive in turning the experience into a game. The experience affected him, but his own role in it was passive, and he therefore gave himself an active one by repeating it as a game, even though it had been unpleasurable.

This endeavour could be attributed to an instinctive urge to assert control that operates quite independently of whether or not the memory as such was pleasurable. But we can also try another interpretation. The act of flinging away the object to make it 'gone' may be the gratification of an impulse on the child's part – which in the ordinary way of things remains suppressed – to take revenge on his mother for having gone away from him; and it may thus be a defiant statement meaning 'Alright, go away! I don't need you; I'm sending you away myself!' This same child whose game I had observed when he was one and a half had the habit a year later of flinging down any toy that had made him cross and saying 'Go in war!' At the time he had been told that his absent father was away in the war, and he didn't miss his father in the least, instead giving out the clearest indications that he did not want his exclusive possession of his mother to be disrupted.⁷ We know from other children, too, that they are capable of expressing similar hostile impulses by flinging away objects in place of people.⁸ One accordingly begins to have one's doubts as to whether the urge to psychically process powerful experiences, to achieve full control over them, is capable of manifesting itself on a primary level, independently of the pleasure principle. After all, in the case discussed here the child may well only have been able to repeat an unpleasant experience in his play because the repetition was associated with a different but direct gain in pleasure.

Even if we proceed further with our examination of children's play, this does not resolve our uncertainty as to which of the two postulates to adopt. It is plainly the case that children repeat everything in their play that has made a powerful impression on them, and that in so doing they abreact the intensity of the experience and make themselves so to speak master of the situation. On the other hand, however, it is equally clear that all their play is influenced by the one wish that is dominant at that particular age: the wish to be grown up, and to be able to do the things that grown-ups do. It is also an observable fact that the unpleasurable nature of an experience does not always render it unusable for play purposes. If a doctor examines a child's throat or performs some

minor operation on him, we can be quite sure that this frightening experience will become the content of his next game – but the gain in pleasure from a different source is plain to see. Exchanging his passive role in the actual experience for an active role within the game, he inflicts on his playmate whatever nasty things were inflicted on him, and thus takes his revenge by proxy.

One thing that *does* emerge from this discussion is that there is no need to posit a specific imitative drive as the motive force behind children's play. We might also bear in mind that the form of play and imitation practised by adults, which in contradistinction to that of children is directed at an audience, does not spare its spectators the most painful of experiences, for instance in the performance of tragedies, and yet may none the less be regarded by them as something supremely enjoyable. This encourages us in the conviction that even under the dominion of the pleasure principle there are ways and means enough for turning what is essentially unpleasurable into something to be remembered and to be processed in the psyche. Some economically oriented aesthetic theory may wish to concern itself with these cases and situations where unpleasure leads ultimately to a gain in pleasure; for our particular purposes, however, they are of no value at all, for they presuppose both the existence and the dominion of the pleasure principle, and offer no evidence for the prevalence of tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle; tendencies, that is, that are arguably more primal than the pleasure principle, and quite independent of it.

Notes

1. [First World War.]
2. Cf. *Zur Psychoanalyse der Kriegsneurosen* [*Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*]. With contributions by Ferenczi, Abraham, Simmel and E. Jones (1919). [Freud wrote the Introduction to this volume.]
3. [The original words are respectively *Schreck*, *Furcht* and *Angst*. The distinctions that Freud draws are lexically somewhat specious – particularly

the purported distinction between *Furcht* and *Angst* – and this speciousness is duly reflected in the translation. See also *Inhibition, Symptom, and Fear*, Chapter XI, Addendum B: 'Fear: Supplementary Remarks'.]

4. [*fixate* . . . to cause (a person) to react automatically to stimuli in terms which relate to a previous strong emotional experience; to establish (a response) in this way. (OED).]

5. [The final clause of this sentence (from 'or' to 'ego') was added by Freud in 1921.]

6. This interpretation was then fully confirmed by a further observation. One day when the child's mother had been absent for many hours, she was greeted on her return with the announcement 'Bebi o-o-o-o!', which at first remained incomprehensible. It soon turned out, however, that while on his own for this long period of time the child had found a way of making himself disappear. He had discovered his reflection in the full-length mirror reaching almost to the floor, and had then crouched down so that his reflection was 'gone'.

7. When the child was five and three-quarters his mother died. Now that she was really and truly 'gone' (o-o-o), the boy showed no signs of grief. However, a second child had been born in the meantime, provoking the most intense jealousy in him.

8. Cf. 'Eine Kindheitserinnerung aus *Dichtung und Wahrheit*' (1917) ['A Childhood Recollection from [Goethe's] *Dichtung und Wahrheit*'].

III

Twenty-five years of intensive work have meant that the immediate aims of psychoanalytic practice are completely different today from what they were at the beginning. At first, the analysing physician could hope to do no more than construe the unconscious of which the patient himself was quite unaware, put the various elements together into a coherent picture, and communicate this to the patient at the appropriate time. Psychoanalysis was above all an art of interpretation. As the therapeutic need was not met by this process, the next task that immediately arose was to compel the patient to confirm the analyst's interpretation on the basis of his own memory. In this enterprise the emphasis lay chiefly on the

patient's resistances. The art at this juncture was to uncover these resistances as rapidly as possible, make them clear to the patient, and then induce him to relinquish them by bringing one's influence to bear on a directly human level (this being the point where suggestion¹ plays its part, operating in the form of 'transference').

It then became increasingly clear, however, that the intended aim of making the patient conscious of his unconscious could not be fully achieved even by this means. The patient is unable to remember all that is repressed within him, especially perhaps its most essential elements, and thus fails to be convinced that the interpretation presented to him is the correct one. Instead he is driven to *repeat* the repressed matter as an experience in the present, instead of *remembering* it as something belonging to the past, which is what the physician would much rather see happen.² The content of these all-too-accurate reproductions of the past is always a particular element of infantile sexual life, namely the Oedipus complex and its offshoots, and they always take place within the ambit of the transference process, that is to say of the relationship with the physician. Once the treatment has reached this point, one may reasonably say that the original neurosis has been replaced by a brand-new transference neurosis – the physician having done his best to limit the scope of this transference neurosis as much as possible, to force as much as possible into the realm of memory, to allow as little as possible to come out in the form of repetition. The ratio as between remembrance and repetition varies from case to case. As a rule the physician cannot spare the patient this phase of the treatment; he must necessarily make him re-experience a certain portion of his past life, and must see to it that he remains to some degree above it all so that he remains cognizant at every turn that what appears to be reality is in truth the refracted image of a forgotten past. If the physician manages to achieve this, then the battle is won: the patient accepts the validity of the interpretation, and the therapy – which wholly depends on this acceptance – can be successfully concluded.

If we are to stand a better chance of understanding this 'compulsion to repeat' that manifests itself during the psychoanalytic

treatment of neurotics, we must above all free ourselves of the mistaken idea that in combating the resistances within a patient we are dealing with resistance on the part of the 'unconscious'. The unconscious, that is, the 'repressed',³ offers no resistance whatever to the endeavours of the therapy: indeed it has but a single aim itself, and that is to escape the oppressive forces bearing down on it, and either break through to consciousness, or else find release in some form of real action. The resistance that manifests itself in the course of treatment derives from the same higher levels and systems of the psyche that effected the repression in the first place. However, since experience tells us that patients undergoing treatment are initially not conscious of the motive forces behind the resistances, or indeed of the resistances themselves, we would do well to amend our inappropriate terminology. We make things much clearer if we posit an antithesis not between the conscious and the unconscious, but between the coherent *ego* and the *repressed*. Much of the *ego* is itself no doubt unconscious – especially the part we may term its nucleus⁴ – and only a small portion of that is covered by the term 'pre-conscious'. Once we have thus substituted a systematic or dynamic definition for what was merely a descriptive one, we can say that the patient's resistance stems from his *ego*,⁵ and we then immediately realize that the compulsion to repeat is attributable to the unconscious *repressed* within him. It seems likely that this compulsion to repeat can only manifest itself once the patient's treatment has had the necessary benign effect of loosening the grip of the repression.⁶

There can be no doubt that the resistance of the conscious and pre-conscious *ego* serves the interests of the pleasure principle; it seeks after all to forestall the unpleasure that would be caused if the repressed part of the psyche were to break free – whereas our own efforts are all directed at opening the way to just such unpleasure by calling upon the reality principle. But what of the compulsion to repeat, the slow of strength put on by the repressed part of the psyche: how does *that* stand in relation to the pleasure principle? It is plain that most of what the compulsion to repeat makes the patient relive necessarily causes the *ego* unpleasure, since it

brings out into the open the workings of repressed drive-impulses; but, as we have already seen, this is unpleasure of a kind that does not conflict with the pleasure principle, for though it constitutes unpleasure for the one system, it simultaneously constitutes gratification for the other. The new and remarkable fact that we now have to report, however, is that the compulsion to repeat *also* brings back experiences from the past that contain no potential for pleasure whatever, and which even at the time cannot have constituted gratification, not even in respect of drive-impulses that were only subsequently repressed.

The early florescence of infantile sexuality is doomed to come to nothing because a child's desires are incompatible with reality, and its physical development insufficiently advanced. Its demise is brought about in the most harrowing circumstances, and accompanied by intensely painful emotions. The loss of love and the failure that this represents leave an enduring legacy of diminished self-feeling amounting to a narcissistic scar; in my experience, as also corroborated by the findings of Marcinkowski (1918), this contributes more than any other factor to the 'feeling of inferiority' so common in neurotics. Sexual exploration, necessarily circumscribed by the child's state of physical development, cannot be brought to any gratifying conclusion; hence the lament later on that 'I can't accomplish anything, I can't succeed in anything'. The child's bond of intimacy, usually with the parent of the opposite sex, is killed off by disappointment, by the vain wait for gratification, by jealousy at the birth of a sibling – an event that unambiguously demonstrates the infidelity of the loved one. The child's attempt – undertaken with tragic solemnity – to produce such a baby himself is a humiliating failure. The ever-diminishing affection shown to the child, the ever-increasing demands of his upbringing, the reprimands, the occasional punishments – all ultimately reveal to him the full measure of the rejection that it has fallen to him to suffer. There is a fairly small and regularly recurring range of ways in which the love so typical of this phase of childhood is brought to an end.

All these unwelcome circumstances and painful layers of emotion

are accordingly repeated by neurotic patients in the transference process, and are brought back to life with immense ingenuity. They seek to break off the treatment in mid-stream; they contrive to rekindle their vivid sense of rejection, and to goad the physician to harsh words and a cold demeanour; they find suitable objects for their jealousy; in place of the passionately desired child of yore they offer the prospect or promise of some grandiose gift, the latter mostly just as unreal as the former had been. None of this was capable of bringing pleasure in the past – and one might reasonably suppose that it would bring less unpleasure in the present if it were to emerge in memories or dreams, rather than reconstituting itself as a lived experience. It is a question, of course, of the action of drives that were supposed to lead to gratification. However, the patient's experience of the fact that then, too, they brought unpleasure instead of gratification makes not a scrap of difference: the action is repeated regardless. The patient is driven to this by a compulsion.

The same thing that psychoanalysis makes manifest in the transference phenomena exhibited by neurotic patients can also be found in the lives of people who are *not* neurotic. In their case it takes the guise of an ineluctable fate dogging their every step, a daemonic current running through their whole existence, and from its earliest beginnings psychoanalysis has regarded such semblances of fate as being largely self-engendered, and determined by experiences in early infancy. The compulsion that reveals itself in these cases is no different from the neurotic's compulsion to repeat, even though such people have never shown the telltale signs of a neurotic conflict resolved as a result of symptom-formation. Thus we all know people whose human relationships invariably end in the same manner: benefactors who are angrily abandoned after a certain period by each of their protégés in turn, no matter how much these may otherwise differ from one another, and who thus seem destined to drink the cup of ingratitude to its bitter dregs; men whose every friendship ends in betrayal; others who in the course of their lives repeatedly elevate some individual to the status of Great Authority for themselves or even for society at large, and then in due course

bring them crashing down in order to replace them by someone else; lovers whose every intimate relationship with a woman goes through the selfsame phases and leads to the selfsame outcome. We are never particularly surprised at this 'eternal recurrence of the same' when it involves *active* behaviour on the part of the individual concerned, and when we recognize the unchanging character trait that defines his being, and that necessarily finds expression in the repetition of similar experiences. We are much more strongly affected by cases where people appear to be the *passive* victim of something which they are powerless to influence, and yet which they suffer again and again in an endless repetition of the same fate. One need only think, for instance, of the story of the woman who married three men in succession, each one of whom soon fell ill and had to be nursed until finally he died.⁷ The most moving poetical depiction of such a predisposition to fate is given by Tasso in his romantic epic *Gerusalemme liberata*. The hero Tancred unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda, she having done battle with him in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he penetrates the strange charmed forest that so frightens the army of crusaders. There he smites a tall tree with his sword, but blood gushes from the wound, and the voice of Clorinda, whose spirit has magically entered into that very tree, accuses him of yet again doing harm to his beloved.

Taking due account of such observations of the way patients behave in the transference process and of the kinds of fate that befall people in ordinary life, we shall dare to postulate that within the psyche there really is a compulsion to repeat that pays no heed to the pleasure principle. We shall accordingly also be disposed to relate both the dreams of patients with accident-induced neurosis and the play-urge of children to this same compulsion. At the same time, though, we do need to bear in mind that only on rare occasions will we be able to catch the compulsion to repeat operating purely on its own, without the interaction of other motive forces. In the case of children's play we have already emphasized that its emergence lends itself to a variety of different interpretations. The compulsion to repeat, and the direct and pleasurable gratification

of drives, seem here to interconnect with each other in an intimate mutuality. The phenomena of transference clearly serve the interests of the resistance offered by the ego, which remains bent on repression; the compulsion to repeat, which the therapy sought to divert to its own ends, is so to speak enlisted by the ego in its determination to hold fast to the pleasure principle. As for what one might term the 'fate compulsion', much of it seems on rational consideration to be comprehensible, so that we see no need to posit some new and mystical motive force behind it. The case that least arouses our suspicions is perhaps that of dreams recalling accidents; but on closer reflection one really does have to admit that in the other examples, too, the facts of the matter are not fully accounted for by the effect of the motive forces currently known to us.⁸ Sufficient evidence remains to justify the hypothesis of a compulsion to repeat; and this compulsion appears to us to be more primal, more elemental, more deeply instinctual than the pleasure principle, which it simply thrusts aside. But if there is indeed such a compulsion to repeat in the psyche, then we should like to know something about it. We should like to know what function it corresponds to, what circumstances it can arise in, and what relationship it bears to the pleasure principle – to which, after all, we have hitherto attributed sole dominion over the manner in which excitational processes develop within the psyche.

Notes

1. [See Freud's footnote below, note 6.]
2. See *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through* (1914) [for example, pp. 394ff. in this volume].
3. [*das Verdrängte*; the inverted commas are Freud's.]
4. [Freud radically altered his view on this matter. In this context, it might be noted that this phrase ('especially the part we may term its nucleus') did not figure at all in the original edition of the essay. The rest of the sentence *did* appear, but in somewhat different terms: 'Much of the ego may itself be unconscious, and probably only part of that is covered by the term "pre-conscious".']

5. [Freud will explicitly modify his position in *Inhibition, Symptom, and Fear*; see Chapter XI, Section A, Sub-section (a): 'Resistance and counter-cathexis'.]
6. [*Addition 1923*:] I have made the point elsewhere that the compulsion to repeat is aided here by the 'suggestion effect' in psychoanalytic therapy, that is, by that amenability to the physician that has its roots deep in the patient's unconscious parent-complex. [Compare 'Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream-Interpretation' (1923), Chapter VII and (especially) VIII.]
7. Cf. the apt remarks of C. G. Jung in his essay 'Die Bedeutung des Vaters für das Schicksal des Einzelnen' ['The Significance of the Father in the Destiny of the Individual'] (1909).
8. [This sentence is faithful to the original in its less than perfect clarity and logic!]

IV

What now follows is speculation, often quite extravagant speculation, which readers will regard or disregard according to their own particular standpoint. For the rest, it is an attempt to follow an idea right through to its logical conclusion, undertaken out of sheer curiosity as to where this will lead.

Psychoanalytic speculation takes its impetus from the strong impression conveyed by the study of unconscious processes, that consciousness surely cannot constitute the universal character of psychic processes, but can only be one particular function of them. To express it in metapsychological terms: such speculation asserts that consciousness is the product of a particular system that it terms Cs. Since consciousness chiefly delivers perceptions of excitations emanating from the external world, and feelings of pleasure and unpleasure that can come only from within the psychic apparatus, a specific locus can be attributed to the *Pcpt-Cs* system:¹ it must lie at the border between the external and the internal; it must face out towards the external world, and simultaneously embrace the other psychic systems. We might note at this point that in