

The Impact of the Defense Mechanisms  
on the Morality of the Human Act

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty  
Of the College of Liberal Arts of St. Meinrad Seminary  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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May, 1967  
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I Introduction

II Psychoanalytic Theory and the Defense Mechanisms

A. Psychoanalytic Theory

1. Psychic Conflict

2. Conscious, Pre-conscious and Unconscious

3. Ego, Id and Super-ego

B. The Operational Principle of the Defense Mechanisms  
- Pain and Pleasure

C. The Defense Mechanisms - Repression, Regression,  
Reaction-formation, Isolation, Undoing, Projection,  
Introjection, Turning Against the Self, Reversal,  
Sublimation

III Morality and the Defense Mechanisms

A. Free Will and Responsibility

B. Emotion and the Defense Mechanisms

C. Habit and the Defense Mechanisms

IV Conclusion

## Introduction

The psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud has delved into the area of basic motivations. It has not just concerned itself with overt behavior and external sensations of stimulus and response. As such, it deserves consideration in a philosophical inquiry of man and the psychology of man. The insights offered by Freud widen the spectrum of understanding the character development of the individual. It helps us to understand the basic motivations, both conscious and unconscious, which effect and affect human actions.

In studying man and his actions, we must be as aware as possible of all his facets. This Aristotle stated concerning the study of ethics.

...clearly the student of politics must know somehow the facts about the soul, as the man who is to heal the eyes or the body as a whole must know about the eyes or the body. 1

Science treats of the causes of things and philosophy of the ultimate causes of being. Within the realms of philosophy, ethics studies the human situation in terms of the morality of human acts. This human situation involves the awareness of self in the context of remembering the past, being aware of the present, and visualizing the future. Through imagination and reason man transcends the instinctive regulations of the animal to a plane where he has intellectual insight into his own psychic functioning. The individual is thereby aware of when

and where he is harming himself. Through psychoanalytic theory, the causes of neurotic behavior are uncovered. Ethically the individual must act to combat these neurotic forces and substitute constructive measures. He must strive to conduct his life in accordance with the faculty of reason.

It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of his self but that of something else. And what we said before will apply now; that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else is man. 2

### Psychoanalytic Theory and the Defense Mechanisms

In order to understand what the defense mechanisms are and how they operate, we must first briefly sketch some basic tenets of psychoanalytic theory and describe the Freudian concept of psychic functioning.

It is a basic premise of psychoanalytic theory that the psyche is divided into the conscious and the unconscious, and these two underlie all the processes of the mental life. The study of the unconscious psychic life in psychoanalysis is a study of repressed instinctual impulses, affects and phantasies. We get a picture of this Unconscious or Id through means of resistance to the repressed material on the conscious and pre-conscious level.

Something which is painful and disagreeable to a man's integrity, which he will not allow himself to think of consciously, is repressed from reaching consciousness. By this reaction the person has directly fled from the anxiety caused by this potential psychical adversary. During analysis a resistance can be perceived which attempts to keep hidden the material which has been repressed. The patient is not consciously aware that he is giving this resistance and further investigation on the part of the analyst uncovers a process which is operating with an unconscious force. Thus through the discovery of repression the Unconscious of psychoanalytic theory is uncovered.

The theory of repression is the pillar upon which the edifice of psychoanalysis rests. 3

By the various means of analytic techniques such as word association and dream analysis and in further investigating repression, psychoanalytic theory developed the concept of the Conscious, Pre-conscious and Unconscious.

Thus we obtain our concept of the unconscious from the theory of repression. The repressed is the prototype of the unconscious for us. We see, however, that we have two kinds of unconscious - the one which is repressed and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious. This piece of insight into psychical dynamics cannot fail to affect terminology and description. The latent, which is unconscious only descriptively, not in the dynamic sense, we call 'preconscious'; we restrict the term 'unconscious' to the dynamically unconscious repressed; so that now we have three terms, conscious (Cs.), pre-conscious (Pcs.), and unconscious (Ucs.), whose sense is no longer purely descriptive. 4

A further development of psychoanalytic theory postulates the three basic institutions of the psyche which operate within the realms of consciousness and unconsciousness. We uncover a distinction between the non-conscious part of the Ego, 'the Pre-conscious', and 'the Unconscious' itself. A brief sketch of how the three basic institutions (the Ego, the Id and the Super-ego) are structured and interrelated is necessary in order to understand the operation of the defense mechanisms and how the Unconscious, Pre-conscious and Conscious enter into the functioning of man's psychic life. It is the task of psychoanalysis

...to acquire the fullest possible knowledge of all the three institutions of which we believe the psychic personality to be constituted and to learn what are their relations to one another and to the ego, to explore its contents, its boundaries and its functions and to trace the influences in the outside world, the id and the super-ego by which it has been

shaped and, in relation to the id, to give an account of the instincts, i.e. of the id contents, and to follow them through the transformations which they undergo. 5

In the Freudian interpretation a person comes into the world with a mental life called 'the Id' which is disorganized and chaotic. There is present a psychic energy which drives the Id to alleviate the needs of hunger, self-preservation and preservation of the species. When the child begins to grow, he becomes aware of others around him and he differentiates an external reality other than himself. Through this contact the child learns that there is a self and other. This self or 'Ego', having an awareness of its external environment, then tries to modify and curb the libidinal, lawless impulses of the Id into conformity with reality (different instinctual impulses are perpetually forcing their way from the Id into the Ego where they gain access to the motor apparatus by which they obtain gratification through overt activity). The Ego, having derived from the Id, is differentiated from it but still draws all its energy from it. Although the Ego is thought of as being the conscious part of the psyche,

...large portions of the ego-institutions are themselves unconscious and require the help of analysis in order to become conscious. 6

Within the unconscious realm of the Ego lies the process of the defense mechanisms and latent ideas.

Experience goes to show that a psychical element (for instance an idea) is not as a rule conscious for a protracted length of time...We can say that it was latent, and by this we mean that it is capable of becoming conscious at any time. Or, if we say that it was unconscious, we shall also be giving a correct

description of it. 7

Out of the Ego develops the Super-ego, which is the internalization of authority. This third branch of the personality is the moral system containing the Ego-ideal (the standards and values instilled by the parents as they reward good deeds) and the conscience (the result of their punishments).

We thus have three aspects of the personality: 1) The Id - guided by the pleasure-principle in always seeking the release of tension and the avoidance of pain by irrational and amoral strivings; 2) The Ego - the medium by which the Id can work through to the real world to find its satisfaction in objects or events. The Ego is governed by the reality-principle in that it must modify the demands of the Id through its knowledge of the demands of reality so that the tension can be relieved without any danger of repercussions from the environment around it; 3) The Super-ego - the 'watchdog' of the psyche which sees to it that the Ego does not allow libidinal impulses to attain gratification against the social mores and against the demands of authority.

Whenever a person comes upon a threat and conflict, a growth situation is availed him. He can recognize the 'pain' caused by psychical factors just as a person who is afflicted by some physical illness is warned of it through physical pain. The person in the physical illness is cured through proper treatment and care and the pain is eliminated; so also in psychical illnesses. The individual can face up to the causes of the illness, i.e. get to the source of conflict and resolve it. The



subsequent 'pain' is not only alleviated but done away with entirely. On the other hand, he can anesthetize the 'pain' (by running away from it) through the defense mechanisms, but the cause still remains present. Just as in physical illness, ignoring the danger signals of pain can be fatal, so also in psychological conflicts. The individual either remains the same or regresses to a worse state. His Ego is weakened and he does not grow.

Neurotic symptoms, like the symptoms of a physical sickness, are the expression of the fight which the healthy part of the personality puts up against the crippling influences directed against its unfolding. 8

Running away from the 'pain' of conflict within the three psychological institutions is not a health-producing process in mental behavior and as such is the occasion for malfunctioning (neurosis). The principle of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain cannot be a criterion in human acts. As we shall see later, moral responsibility implies the higher faculties of reason in man and, for this reason, he cannot act on instinctual impulse. If he does, he is not properly utilizing this aspect of his nature. He is running away from a resolution of a moral conflict and relegating himself to a behavior which is not worthy of his rationality.

The problem of psychic health and neurosis is inseparably linked up with that of ethics. It may be said that every neurosis represents a moral problem... In a more specific sense many neuroses are the expression of moral problems, and neurotic symptoms result from unsolved moral conflicts. 9

The ability of the person to unconsciously escape mental 'pain' was unearthed by Bruer in the 1880's. He had a case

which he cured by hypnotism. He enabled his patient to verbalize the unconscious affects and subsequently cured her.

A common feature of all the symptoms consisted in the fact that they had come into existence in situations in which an impulse to do something had to be forgone because other motives suppressed it. The symptoms appeared as a substitute for the unperformed act. 10

Freud expanded and elaborated on this phenomenon in his psychoanalytic theory. As explained earlier, through free association, dream interpretation, interpretation of symbols, parapraxes and transference, he uncovered what is known as the Unconscious. The sovereign principle which governs this psychic process is that of obtaining pleasure. However, in the Ego the instinctual impulses of the Unconscious are required to respect the demands of reality and to conform to ethical norms and moral laws. By these norms and laws the Super-ego seeks to control the behavior of the Ego. Thus the Ego is in conflict with the Id. The Id wants irrational gratification. The Ego also is in conflict with the Super-ego in that the Super-ego modifies the impulses of the Id to ethical and moral laws. Likewise the Ego conflicts with the restrictions and censures of reality. Thus the impulse is modified or changed so that conflicts and anxiety from these three areas can be eliminated.

If the instinct could achieve gratification in spite of opposition by the super-ego or the outside world, the result would, indeed, be primarily pleasure but secondarily 'pain', either in consequence of the sense of guilt emanating from the unconscious or the punishments inflicted by the outside world. Hence, when instinctual gratification is warded off from one another of these two motives, the defence is undertaken in accordance with the reality-principle. Its main purpose is to avoid the secondary pain. 11

Even if the instinctual impulse can be admitted by the Ego, it makes this decision by the 'pleasure-principle' - if the affects are pleasurable then it allows gratification.

This pleasure principle in psychoanalysis appears to be comparable to the Hedonistic philosophy of Aristippus in that the criteria for the Id is the attainment of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. But the Ego puts an Epicurean qualification to this pleasure-principle in that, although the aim of the psychic life is pleasure, the 'right' pleasure must be chosen. Because of socialization, the libidinal forces are modified by the reality-principle of the Ego in conformity to socially acceptable overt activity. For Epicurus the right pleasure is conducive to living wisely, well and righteously and to a great extent this is interpreted by social mores (the reality-principle). Whether man must operate on this pleasure-principle will be dealt with later. The point here is that, as far as the use of the defense mechanisms is concerned, there is necessarily involved the principle of pleasure and pain. Just as for the early Epicureans true pleasure consisted in serenity of mind and the absence of fear, so also in the psychic conflict this same state is obtained through the use of the defense mechanisms.

The majority of our daily conflicts and frustrations are solved by facing up to them and solving them on the conscious level. But not all conflicts and frustrations are on the conscious level. The unconscious anxiety that arises is dealt with by a defensive system of the psyche which is the system of defense mechanisms.

The unconscious elements which have been demonstrated through psychoanalysis are brought into consciousness by the analyst. As has been explained, these unconscious elements are found in both the Ego and the Super-ego as well as the Id, and the Ego's defense mechanisms operate within its unconscious aspect. The Id impulses are naturally seeking gratification and the analyst reinforces this thrust. The Ego regards him as an adversary upsetting the controls which it has over these impulses and certain defense mechanisms come to the fore to combat the reinforcement. Thus certain mechanisms and combinations of mechanisms are recognized and have been categorized.

In view of the differences in terminology and classification that appear in various treatises on this matter we will use that categorization set down by Anna Freud in her work: The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence. It is hoped that a description of each of these listed below will allow for a basic understanding of the general operations of the defense mechanisms. The major defense mechanisms according to Anna Freud are:

Regression, repression, reaction-formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self and reversal; we must add a tenth, which pertains rather to the study of the normal than to that of neurosis: sublimation, or displacement of instinctual aims. 12

Repression is the cornerstone upon which rest the other defense mechanisms. It leads to the psychoanalytic theory and to an understanding of Ego defensive operations.

One is confronted with a resistance which opposes and blocks the analytic work by causing failures of memory...The theoretical value of the fact, that this resistance is connected with an amnesia, leads unavoid-

ably to that concept of unconscious psychic activity which is peculiar to psychoanalysis and distinguishes it markedly from the philosophical speculations about the unconscious. 13

Thus the mechanism of the defenses of the Ego is set into motion by the appearance of an anxiety-producing situation which the individual does not wish to face up to, and so he subsequently represses it. As stated before, it should be noted that this process occurs completely within the realm of unconsciousness. It is not a suppression of a conscious confrontation, but rather a repression by the unconscious part of the Ego back into the unconscious Id. Repression is one of the most powerful and effective defensive measures. It need only act once since, although the repressed material will emerge again, it will not emerge from the Unconscious in the same form.

This repressed material retains its impetus to penetrate into consciousness. It reaches its aim when three conditions are present: (1) When the strength of counter-cathexis is diminished by an illness which acts on the Ego itself, or through a different distribution of cathexis in the Ego, as happens regularly during sleep. (2) When those instincts attached to the repressed material become strengthened. The processes during puberty provide the best example for this. (3) Whenever recent events produce impressions or experiences which are so much like the repressed material that they have the power to awaken it. Thus the recent material gets strengthened by the latent energy of the repressed, and the repressed material produces its effect behind the recent material and with its help. In none of the three cases does the material that had been repressed succeed in reaching consciousness unimpeded or without change. It must always undergo distortions which bear witness to the not entirely overcome resistance derived from the counter-cathexis, or else to the modifying influence of a recent experience, or to both. 14

Since this repressed libidinal urge does not go out of existence, it continues to seek gratification. The Ego, in an

attempt to keep a balance between the various psychical institutions, will allow it to re-emerge after it has been modified into conformity with reality and with the Super-ego.

Regression is a defensive technique by which the person returns to an earlier level of adaptation. He copes with problems on a less mature level. He reacts to conflicts as he did when he was younger. We see this in persons who display a very childish attitude towards a situation. Instead of reacting to a situation in a mature manner, he becomes quite illogical and emotional about it.

It is further to be remarked that regression plays a no less important part in the theory of the formation of neurotic symptoms than it does in that of dreams. Three kinds of regression are thus to be distinguished: (a) topographical regression, in the sense of the schematic picture of the  $\Psi$ -system...; (b) temporal regression, in so far as what is in question is a harking back to older psychical structures; and (c) formal regression, where primitive methods of expression and representation take the place of the usual ones. All these three kinds of regression are, however, one at bottom and occur together as a rule; for what is older in time is more primitive in form and in psychical topography lies nearer to the perceptual end. 15

Reaction-formation - At times when the Ego is confronted with unconscious libidinal impulses which are repugnant to it, anxiety and guilt over such impulses arise. The individual on the unconscious level transforms these impulses into socially acceptable and commendable reactions which are completely opposite of the original impulses. Thus a person feeling jealousy and envy emanating from the Id may find this an unacceptable way of acting; he overtly acts in an unselfish manner and consequently covers his guilt feelings with a feeling of thoughtful-

ness for others. Examples of this type of reaction would be some of the enthusiastic crusaders who vigorously lash out against certain evils in the world. Unconsciously they have the impulse to perform the evil themselves, but the impulse is repressed back into the Id and emerges into consciousness as a crusading mentality. They advocate the virtue combating the vice which they originally felt like doing. In the Freudian theory these libidinal impulses originated in infancy through sexual longings for the parent, usually of the opposite sex.

Thus Reaction-formation occurs when

The sexual feelings of these infantile years...would as such be perverse, as they would emanate from erogenous zones and from impulses which in the individual's course of development could only evoke a feeling of displeasure. They, therefore, awaken psychic counterforces (feelings of reaction), which build up the already mentioned psychical dams of disgust, shame and morality. 16

Isolation is another form of defense. Through Isolation the person insulates guilt-producing acts from the rest of his life by repressing any value judgements concerning them. The Ego alienates itself against the Super-ego; intimate friends can become strangers because of the pre-pubertal reality anxiety which arises from the Super-ego. By establishing a dichotomy between what he does do and what he should do, the guilt feelings cannot consciously arise. An example of this type of reaction can be seen in those who go to church every Sunday, but yet do not in any way practice their religious beliefs during the week. Practicing their belief would hinder them and give rise to guilt feelings. Consequently, they do not consider the issues at all, preferring to leave the conflicting matters

isolated from one another.

Withdrawal and indifference can, but need not, be conscious; as a matter of fact, in our culture they are mostly covered up by a superficial kind of interest and sociability. 17

Undoing is a ritualistic type of reaction. The person symbolically acts out in reverse something he has already done or thought about which has resulted in anxiety. Through this behavior he attempts to eradicate the offending act which is unacceptable to the Ego or to society. An example of this behavior would be the mother who, having punished her child, feels guilty and tries to undo the punishment by behaving over affectionately toward the child.

It is a kind of negative magic which by means of a motor symbolism would 'blow away', as it were, not the consequences of an event (an impression, an experience), but the event itself. 18

Projection is another technique used by the Ego. It operates in the reverse manner from that of Introjection. In Projection the ideas or affects are expelled from the Ego and relegated to the outside world. It provides a relief from guilt feelings by ascribing the guilt to some object other than self.

This unknown hostility, of which we are ignorant and of which we do not wish to know, is projected from our inner perception into the outer world and is thereby detached from our own person and attributed to the other. 19

Projection has been proposed by psychoanalysts as a source of apparent altruism. The individual surrenders his instinctual wishes to an object better qualified to fulfill them. In extreme cases the individual projects his instinctual feelings on to other people so much so that he loses, to a great extent,



concern for himself. Instead he experiences an excessive concern and anxiety for the lives of the 'objects' he has projected himself out to. We must remember that this action, although it is an escape mechanism, is not the only basis for an altruistic action. In fact, it hinders an attempt at a true self-less act.

The man who has the best of 'altruistic' intentions, but fails to liberate himself psychically from himself, does not possess a healthy natural basis from which the 'moral sense' of altruism or charity can reach a full and perfect flowering. 20

Introjection, or Identification, is a mechanism which introjects the outside world into the Ego. This assimilation of some characteristic of an anxiety object allows the individual to transform himself into the reality making the threat. In other words, he fights against being the passive object of threat by projecting himself into the active role. This process of identification is the development of the Super-ego. The social mores are introjected from the parents into the individual. Thus he accepts reprisals of the outside world as a basis for the conscience on which he now acts. This mechanism is very evident in adolescence where we see the person going through role-playing.

It enables patients to express in their symptoms not only their own experiences but those of a large number of other people; it enables them, as it were, to suffer on behalf of a whole crowd of people and to act all the parts in a play single-handed. 21

Turning Against the Self is another Ego technique. This is a masochistic phenomena where the individual punishes himself in some way for the guilt feelings he has.

Theodore Reik, a distinguished psychotherapist, be-

lieves that there is a universal unconscious urge to confess forbidden impulses. He suggests this urge stems from a desire to be punished and so to relieve feelings of guilt and anxiety. 22

Reversal is another way of combating the Ego's anxiety. In Reversal the individual's feelings towards another person are 'reversed' in that the individual projects into the other person feelings which in reality he (the other) does not actually possess. He thus reverses his own feelings towards another since he cannot admit that these are his own feelings. For instance, it is painful for some individuals to admit that they have come to feel hatred for a close friend. They reverse the feelings and become convinced that the close friend hates them while they still feel no animosity. This paranoia eliminates the individual's feeling of guilt.

...but it is also frequently a product of wish-fulfillment, for wish-fulfillment consists in nothing else than a replacement of a disagreeable thing by its opposite...if I am a master of dissimulation, I shall assume the opposite affect - smile when I am angry and seem affectionate when I wish to destroy. 23

Sublimation is a positive and constructive mechanism. When the defensive system breaks down and sublimation becomes impossible, the symptoms of personality disorder appear. Sublimation is not a single technique. It is applied to the efficacy and acceptability of the overall defensive system of the personality. It is the channeling of the libidinal energies into socially acceptable activities. Sublimation may be effected through a profession, hobby, sports, an interest in the church and religion or any of a number of personal interests and activities. This mechanism is the diverting of the sexual instinctual forces

of Freudian theory from the sexual aims to new directions.

Accomplishments of man arise from perverse sexual strivings.

They are a development of germs all of which are contained in the undifferentiated sexual disposition of the child and which, by being suppressed or by being diverted to higher asexual aims - by being 'sublimated' - are destined to provide the energy for a great number of our cultural achievements. 24

Morality and the Defense Mechanisms

As we have seen, all of the defense mechanisms operate within the unconscious activity of the Ego. They are all means of modifying impulses so that they can be acceptable to the demands of reality, authority (Super-ego), and the person's self-ideal. Since they are unconscious, they are not directly voluntary. We must examine closer, however, whether there is any degree of responsibility for indirect volition, or responsibility for the correction of the harmful influences which these mechanisms exert. Naturally the obligation of rectification would arise when an awareness of the use of these mechanisms enters into the conscious, rational capabilities of the individual.

In an investigation of the responsibility of an individual, it must be established whether there is free will in the choice. When discussing the concept of the morality of the human act especially in view of the defense mechanisms, consideration must be given to the concept of free will and choice in relation to the concept of determinism.

Determinism, according to some psychologists and philosophers, is the belief that a man's character has been irrevocably established in his early years of life by external forces over which he as a child had no control. This character is maintained through out life and man does not have the power of self-determination or free choice. If this is the case, then the

defensive techniques which we all develop to some extent in childhood would necessarily always determine how we would react. It would be a matter of stimulus-response.

Others maintain, however, that man has a free will, and, as such, is responsible for the final decision in a human act even if there are present external and psychological conditions.

It can be shown by psychologists that factors of heredity and environment are causes of a man's actions. Obviously certain factors of heredity and environment do determine actions. But the question is whether these factors are the principal and necessitating causes. Is it absolutely necessary that a man must act in a certain way when these causes are present? Can man's actions be simply defined in terms of stimulus-response? Or is man free to make his choices at will? Is man completely free in all or any of his actions?

We can see by observation of ourselves and others that men apparently do make decisions that go completely contrary to what would be expected from the contributing factors. On the other hand, we also can observe that certain causes do produce the predicted response.

The answer seems to lie in a middle position. The issue resolves itself into a 'moderate indeterminism'. In moderate indeterminism it is postulated that it is the Ego or self that is the cause which determines which of the factors or motives shall prevail. It does not deny that man is motivated in some of his actions. It merely states that when man is determined by motives to act in some way, it is the man himself who chooses

which of these motives shall prevail. It is a matter of acting under a system of values and it is the values which give these motives their impetus.

When we enter the realm of psychoanalytic theory, the clear line of distinction between voluntary acts and non-voluntary ones becomes obscure. The concept of the unconscious Id and the pre-consciousness of the Ego bring to the fore contributing factors of motivation over which the individual may or may not have control.

We have direct control when we consciously and explicitly choose to do something with awareness of its moral nature... Besides this direct control we have indirect control in cases in which the good or evil results from some other previous decision of ours. 25

Because of the importance of psychoanalytic theory we must appreciate in our concept of man the effects of the unconscious. Since there is an active influence of repressed material on conscious conduct we cannot discount it. We do perform many actions 'naturally' and unconsciously, but the question is whether all our actions are 'determined' by unconscious motivation. Most of our tendencies arise from unconscious needs. They emerge into the conscious Ego and we feel drawn to perform an act in pursuance of satisfaction of this need. The important factor is how the need influences behavior as well as whether it is conscious or unconscious. There is a free act when the individual confronts motives as elements of value which he has intellectually recognized. He can transcend the here and now experience and give it a value in accordance with the value system which makes up his personality. In this respect man is free

to choose what will determine his actions. The ability to choose determines the motive. It can be agreed with the determinist that every effect has a cause, but distinction must be made between efficient and final causality. Man is determined to act in a certain way, but it is he himself by means of his will who determines efficiently how he shall be determined finally. As far as the effect of the defense mechanisms on the human act is concerned, the action must be in this context of freedom of choice since a 'human act' is one which involves freedom. The question of whether these defensive techniques originated from conscious activity or whether the person can become 'consciously' aware of his defense system is the aspect that we must look at in the context of human motivation.

Some degree of volition in a human act is necessary in order to term it morally good or bad. With regard to how free this volition is, much depends on the character of the individual. As far as the defense mechanisms are concerned, the aspects of ignorance or compulsion arise. When we act out of ignorance or compulsion, we act involuntarily since we fail to will as we should or could. By compulsion is meant that the will does not concur with the resultant action. Thus in moral violence, where there is compulsion from emotion (passion), the agent is over-powered. But this is not the basis for a final judgement on the action. This is a matter of acting incontinently.

Incontinence in a person's character structure arises from the fact that he repressed his feelings. He denied that some

aspect of his real-self exists in order to maintain his self-esteem and retain his present self-concept. But repression is an unstable mechanism and any breakthrough of a person's repressed impulses (passions) can be quite disconcerting to him. These intense feelings and impulses can arise under the right conditions and in this moment of passion an immoral act may be performed. An extreme reaction of this type would be illustrated by an incident where the 'nice' person suddenly commits some uncontrolled act of violence. But we cannot judge this act merely on the basis of the resultant overt activity. We must go back to the motivation.

By his nature, man is emotional. These emotions arise naturally without the necessity of prior reasoning. When a man is physically threatened, he doesn't reason to the fact that he is afraid. He sees the danger and, by previous conditioning, fear arises. Afterwards he may reason to the circumstances of the act, but at the time it occurred, it was strictly a natural emotional experience.

As far as human morality is concerned, we must ascertain whether there is involved a natural reaction as in the example above, or whether this reaction has been conditioned by prior rationalization of the individual. An individual can have an immediate reaction of anger, for instance. This is a natural reaction. The question is: what are the circumstances which lead up to this anger, since a crucial factor is how the person interprets and defines the conflictual situation. This interpretation is definitely affected by whether the person rational-



ized the situation or whether the anger arises as a perfectly acceptable reaction to an unreasonable attack on his integrity. If he has unreasonably allowed himself to rationalize himself into a situation where there is an 'imagined' attack on his integrity, then the subsequent anger and defensive reactions are his responsibility.

In regard to the immediate reaction to a 'real' situation, there is a question of responsibility as to how the individual deals with this situation. After the initial anger, he may act 'reasonably' with the situation or he may escape it by repressing the anger altogether. In this case, by repressing he is relegating the problem to the Unconscious and as such, he abrogates any reasonable consideration of the matter. If he has habituated such an activity, then he is responsible for the fact that he uses defensive techniques when such situations arise.

It is apparent that there is no 'direct' willing of these incontinent acts since they are performed out of a passion which suspended the will.

And the incontinent man knowing that what he does is bad, does it as a result of passion, while the continent man knowing that his appetites are bad, refuses on account of his rational principle to follow them. 26

It is rather a matter of whether there is involved an indirect control. This control of the act would involve the degree of responsibility that the person had in the development of this part of his character and whether these states of character arise out of habitual activity.

By doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly...Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. 27

In the Freudian theory of personality development, the character of a person arises from the Ego. The Ego, which is in conflict with the Id, the Super-ego and reality strives to defend itself and preserve unchanged its own existence. The character of the individual develops during infancy. When the person becomes more and more aware of reality, the Ego comes into conflict with it. A strong character results from facing reality squarely. Avoiding the problem through the defense mechanisms weakens the Ego and results in a weakened character.

The efforts of the infantile ego to avoid "pain" by directly resisting external impressions belong to the sphere of normal psychology. Their consequences may be momentous for the formation of the ego and of character, but they are not pathogenic. 28

Thus by means of his environment man comes into conflict and how he resolves these conflicts helps to determine habits for future actions. He is confronted with the pressures and mores of society. Primarily through his parents he learns about what is acceptable and what is not. How his Ego acts to bring the irrational impulses of the Id into conformity with his environment sets up patterns of behavior that will carry over into the rest of his life. These patterns become relatively permanent and difficult to change. This is in conformity to Aristotle's ideas on habit and character.

It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth;

it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference. 29

Thus we learn by doing and become by doing. The virtuous man becomes virtuous by practicing virtuous acts; the evil man by performing evil acts.

The will is not necessitated by reason nor the passions. If a man has not acquired the habit of obeying his reason in ordering the conduct of his passions, he is more likely to do wrong.

As we have said above, habit implies a disposition in relation to a thing's nature, and to its operation or end, by reason of which disposition a thing is well or ill disposed there to. 30

We observe a person's habits through his character traits. These character traits are revealed through a person's actions. But in judging the morality of an act we must make a further inquiry into the underlying unconscious motivations and into the responsibility of their habituation. Since the defense mechanisms are altered forms of underlying motivation, it would be quite easy to attribute an act as virtuous and moral which in actuality is quite selfish and destructive. An example of this would be using the defensive technique of Reaction-formation. The individual would have feelings of jealousy or hatred towards another. Since these feelings are unacceptable, he consequently feels a guilt. This guilt is alleviated by an apparent thoughtfulness for the hated person. But the overt behavior does not correspond with the initial motivating factor of hatred and anger. Although this act is objectively good, the true motivation subjectively modifies this act into a selfish one.

Projection could also result in an apparent altruistic concern for another's good, but the underlying motivation again is that of self-gratification by using others. The individual may appear to be promoting the good of another, but basically he is only promoting his own good by using another more capable of acquiring the desired results.

The defense mechanisms arise as a result of a sequence of reactions in the individual. Their actuation is a result of a conflict and frustration which have the psychological consequence of some emotional reaction. This reaction could be one of jealousy, inferiority, shame, fear, etc. These emotional reactions result in overt behavior. The type of overt behavior is partly dependent on the emotion which instigates it (anger, for instance, is more likely to result in aggressive behavior). But the more important determining factor of behavior is that of the individual's adjustive habits and by the way he interprets the situation. These adjustive habits could be any of the defense mechanisms. Past experience and the prevailing social situation determine which mechanism or mechanisms should prevail. This past experience concerns the acquisition of a defensive technique.

Within the context of environmental and psychical affects, there is a question of the degree of the individual's responsibility. Psychology has rather firmly established the fact that the early period of infancy is quite important in regard to the personality development of the individual. This personality is defined by Erich Fromm as:

...the totality of inherited and acquired psychic qualities which are characteristic of one individual and which make the individual unique. 31

The inherited qualities include temperament and character.

Temperament is the mode of reaction while character refers to the acquired psychic qualities formed from experience.

As far as the development of habits within the period of infancy and of childhood is concerned, we cannot hold the individual directly responsible since he has not yet developed an adequate use of his reason in controlling or modifying his environmental situation. Responsibility enters when the person capable of reasoning reacts in a conflictual situation. Since some defensive techniques may have been established in the early years of life and since they are unconscious, we cannot hold the person responsible for their use. But, the demands of life and the concepts of the person change as he grows older. He comes across new conflicts which are not comparable to those situations of childhood. Some of the defense mechanisms developed in childhood no longer are needed and hence new ones come to the fore. Here enters the question of the degree of the individual's culpability in so far as he allows his emotions to take hold so that anxiety feelings are produced and subsequently repressed. If there is a conflict producing anger, for instance, there may be an immediate arousal of an emotion of rage. The person may either continue and reinforce this emotion or he may immediately repress this emotional feeling. This repressed reaction will then arise in an adapted form that may not even have any indication of anger.

A man must feed a habit of virtuous action by free acts which promote its growth. He succeeds in virtuous activity to the extent that he succeeds in forming a habit of character which will well dispose him to something. Since habit is a disposition for man to use his powers in a determined manner, it is of utmost importance that he strive to keep his activity on a conscious level. On this level he can act in a manner worthy of his dignity as a rational being.

### Conclusion

Man by reason of his rationality and will is responsible for the formation of his character. By means of judging his character we can determine to what extent he has realized his potentiality. If he is basically neurotic, relying on a system of ego defenses, we can judge that somehow he has weakened his character and allowed the unconscious mechanisms to handle his problems for him. He has allowed them to determine his course of action.

From what has been said about the defense mechanisms, there emerges what seems like a pessimistic picture in regard to virtuous activity. The consequent overt activity may be objectively good and meritorious, but the underlying motivation of the Id is selfish and strictly operating on the aim of pleasurable gratification. But this is not the whole picture. First of all the defense reactions are not healthy in themselves. They are the operation of neurosis. To the degree that they are used they indicate the weakness of the person in facing up to reality. The defense mechanisms are operating analogously to the instincts of animals. If a man operates on this level, he is not doing justice to his dignity as a rational creature. The ability of a man to use his reason and will to mold his own destiny obligates him to rise above the animal level. Man can understand the forces to which he is subjected, and he can strive to constructively use these forces.

The beginning of his character state is under his control. He has the power to act in this way or not to act in this way and his subsequent character state is determined by these actions.

This question of responsibility for human acts in the context of defensive behavior is one of degree. The complexity of environmental conditioning and genetic factors limit the scope of freedom in which he can act. We can only judge that reason is an essential part of man's functioning and as such, the circumstances surrounding 'reasonable' activity can greatly modify its functioning. Consequently, we can only propose that in certain actions a man is freer than in others. We can judge as to the objective morality of human acts, but subjectively the responsibility for these actions are a matter of degree.

Socrates says that no man in judging acts against what he judges best, and that when he performs an evil act, he does so only by reason of ignorance. This statement can be applied to the resultant morality of an act which is instigated within the framework of the defense mechanisms. Because the resultant overt behavior of an individual, instigated by the libidinal impulses of the Id, is but a disguise for its true intention, we can say that the person is not conscious of the real reason for the act and hence he is acting out of ignorance.

But this can be modified. Man, being a rational animal, even though he must react to the laws of his animal nature, should obey the laws of his rational nature.

The character system can be considered the human substitute for the instinctive apparatus of the animal. 32



He then is leading a life which contains a balance of these two elements. Freud posits the motivating energy, the libido, as the essence of human activity. Although the motivating energy may be unconscious, still human activity is 'governed' by reason. Granted that the unconscious plays a great part in our lives, yet in human acts the will follows reason and commands the lower appetites even though they may hinder the degree of latitude in regard to freedom. Although Freud's basic theory of the unconscious is held in psychology today, there is the question of how far can we ascribe man's actions as being unconsciously motivated. Freud's deterministic philosophy in his psychoanalytic theory is not universally accepted. In fact, modern psychology has expanded on his theories and modified them in some areas.

The basic theory of defense mechanisms relegates them to the unconscious level of the Ego, and, as such, a man could not have direct control over them. But the question remains as to how responsible was the individual in forming his character in such a way that he now relies on the defense mechanisms rather than directly confronting and resolving a conflict. There is also the question of how responsible is man for changing his character structure. The solution is not easy. It is difficult to determine to what degree the individual had control in forming his character and in adopting defensive measures. It is also difficult to say to what degree a man can change his unconscious motivations.

Insofar as a man is ignorant of the circumstances of his

actions and subsequently has no control over them, he cannot be directly held responsible for them. The human act involves volition and knowledge. The area of the unconscious presents a problem to a theory involving rational control. Nevertheless, if a man's character state is defective, he still has an obligation to attempt to change it, if he becomes aware of this defect in his behavior.

...once a defensive person recognizes he is being defensive against some threatening impulse or feeling, he may achieve voluntary control over his defensive behavior. 33

Thus if a man comes to the knowledge that he is utilizing the defense mechanisms, it follows that he must strive to face the consequences of life as much as he can on the conscious level. Thereby he may eventually establish a habit of rational confrontation of conflicts.

It can be said that, from youth to death, man is master of his actions when he has the knowledge of the circumstances of his life. He can use this knowledge to rectify what is wrong and promote the good.

Growth demands adjustment, but the person who refuses to change in deference to his present self ceases to grow. We all have the potential to development and perfection. We do not come into this world as a completed real-self. By an ongoing process we actualize our potential into a healthy personality. This personality is actualized to the extent that we realistically confront the problems of the world around us; to the extent that we develop a character which can meet the demands of

life. How well we develop our character determines how we carry out our moral responsibilities. Therefore, we cannot leave man completely irresponsible for his state of life. Rather we must place on him the obligation of living in accordance with his nature in that he must unfold his potentiality and grow through the use of his rational faculties.

Footnotes

1. Aristotle, The Basic Works of Aristotle, p. 950, 1102a 17.
2. Ibid., p. 1105, 1178a 3.
3. Sigmund Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p. 939.
4. Sigmund Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 25.
5. Anna Freud, The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence, pp. 4&5.
6. Ibid., p. 26.
7. Sigmund Freud, The Ego and the Id, p. 23.
8. Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 222.
9. Ibid., pp. 225 & 226.
10. Sigmund Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p. 7.
11. Anna Freud, op. cit., p. 65.
12. Ibid., p. 47.
13. Sigmund Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p. 939.
14. Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism, p. 150.
15. Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 548.
16. Sigmund Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p. 856.
17. Erich Fromm, op. cit., p. 115.
18. Sigmund Freud, Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, p. 162.
19. Sigmund Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p. 856.
20. Joseph Nuttin, Psychoanalysis and Personality, p. 243.
21. Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 149.
22. George Kisker, The Disorganized Personality, p. 143.
23. Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 471.
24. Sigmund Freud, The Case of Hysteria, p. 50.

25. James V. McGlynn and Jules J. Toner, Modern Ethical Theories, p. 142.
26. Aristotle, op. cit., p. 1037, 1145b 12.
27. Ibid., p. 953, 1103b 14.
28. Anna Freud, op. cit., p. 75.
29. Aristotle, op. cit., p. 953, 1103b 24.
30. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I, II, q. 49, a. 4.
31. Erich Fromm, op. cit., p. 59.
32. Ibid., p. 59.
33. Sidney M. Jourard, Personal Adjustment, p. 196.

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MEMORANDUM

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you of the results of the investigation conducted by the Special Agent in Charge, [redacted], on [redacted] at [redacted].

2. The investigation was conducted in accordance with the instructions of the [redacted] and the [redacted].

3. The results of the investigation are as follows:

4. [redacted]

5. [redacted]

6. [redacted]

7. [redacted]

8. [redacted]

9. [redacted]

10. [redacted]

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