

## THE RESISTANCES TO PSYCHO-ANALYSIS - (1925)

A child in his nurse's arms will turn away screaming at the sight of a strange face; a pious man will begin the new season with a prayer and he will also greet the first fruits of the year with a blessing; a peasant will refuse to buy a scythe unless it bears the trade-mark that was familiar to his parents. The distinction between these situations is obvious and would seem to justify one in looking for a different motive in each of them.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to overlook what they have in common. In each case we are dealing with unpleasure of the same kind. The child expresses it in an elementary fashion, the pious man lulls it by an artifice, while the peasant uses it as the motive for a decision. The source of this unpleasure is the demand made upon the mind by anything that is new, the psychological expenditure that it requires, the uncertainty, mounting up to anxious expectancy, which it brings along with it. It would be interesting to devote a whole study to mental reactions to novelty; for under certain, no longer primary, conditions we can observe behaviour of the contrary kind - a thirst for stimulation which flings itself upon anything that is new merely because it is new.

In scientific affairs there should be no place for recoiling from novelty. Science, in her perpetual incompleteness and insufficiency, is driven to hope for her salvation in new discoveries and new ways of regarding things. She does well, in order not to be deceived, to arm herself with scepticism and to accept nothing new unless it has withstood the strictest examination. Sometimes, however, this scepticism shows two unexpected features; it may be sharply directed against what is new while it spares what is familiar and accepted, and it may be content to reject things before it has examined them. But in behaving thus it reveals itself as a prolongation of the primitive reaction against what is new and as a cloak for the retention of that reaction. It is a matter of common knowledge how often in the history of scientific research it has happened that innovations have met with intense and stubborn resistance, while subsequent events have shown that the resistance was unjustified and that the novelty was valuable and important. What provoked the resistance was, as a rule, certain factors in the subject-matter of the novelty, while, on the other side, several factors must have combined to make the irruption of the primitive reaction possible.

A particularly bad reception was accorded to psycho-analysis, which the present writer began to develop nearly thirty years ago from the discoveries of Josef Breuer (of Vienna) on the origin of neurotic symptoms. It cannot be disputed that it possessed the quality of novelty, even though it made use of plenty of material which was well known from other sources (quite apart from Breuer's discoveries), such as the lessons from the teachings of Charcot, the great neuropathologist, and impressions derived from the sphere of hypnotic phenomena. Its original significance was purely therapeutic: it aimed at creating a new and efficient method for treating neurotic illnesses. But connections which could not be foreseen in the beginning caused psycho-analysis to reach out far beyond its original aim. It ended by claiming to have set our whole view of mental life upon a new basis and

therefore to be of importance for every field of knowledge that is founded on psychology. After a decade of complete neglect it suddenly became a subject of general interest - and set loose a storm of indignant opposition.

The forms in which the resistance to psycho-analysis found expression need not now be considered. It is enough to say that the struggle over this innovation is by no means at an end, though it is already possible to see what direction it will take. Its opponents have not succeeded in suppressing the movement. Psycho-analysis, of which twenty years ago I was the only spokesman, has since attracted the support of numerous valuable and active workers, medical and non-medical, who make use of it as a procedure for the treatment of nervous diseases, as a method of psychological research and as an auxiliary instrument for scientific work in the most various departments of intellectual life. In the following pages our interest will be directed only to the motives of the resistance to psycho-analysis, with particular stress upon the composite character of that resistance and upon the differing amount of weight carried by its components.

From a clinical standpoint the neuroses must necessarily be put alongside the intoxications and such disorders as Graves' disease. These are conditions arising from an excess or a relative lack of certain highly active substances, whether produced inside the body or introduced into it from outside - in short, they are disturbances of the chemistry of the body, toxic conditions. If someone succeeded in isolating and demonstrating the hypothetical substance or substances concerned in neuroses, he would have no need to worry about opposition from the medical profession. For the present, however, no such avenue of approach to the problem is open. At the moment we can only start from the symptoms presented by a neurosis - symptoms which in the case of hysteria, for instance, consist of a combination of somatic and mental disturbances. Now Charcot's experiments as well as Breuer's clinical observations taught us that the somatic symptoms of hysteria are psychogenic too - that is, that they are precipitates of mental processes that have run their course. By putting a subject into a state of hypnosis it was possible at will to produce the somatic symptoms of hysteria artificially.

Psycho-analysis took hold of this new realization and began to consider the problem of the nature of the psychical processes which led to these unusual consequences. But the direction taken by this enquiry was not to the liking of the contemporary generation of physicians. They had been brought up to respect only anatomical, physical and chemical factors. They were not prepared for taking psychical ones into account and therefore met them with indifference or antipathy. They obviously had doubts whether psychical events allowed of any exact scientific treatment whatever. As an excessive reaction against an earlier phase during which medicine had been dominated by what was known as the 'philosophy of Nature', they regarded such abstractions as those with which psychology is obliged to work as nebulous, fantastic and mystical; while they simply refused to believe in remarkable phenomena which might have been the starting-point of research. The symptoms of hysterical neuroses were looked upon as shamming and the phenomena of hypnotism as a hoax. Even the psychiatrists, upon whose attention the most unusual and astonishing mental phenomena were constantly being

forced, showed no inclination to examine their details or enquire into their connections. They were content to classify the variegated array of symptoms and trace them back, so far as they could manage, to somatic, anatomical or chemical aetiological disturbances. During this materialistic or, rather, mechanistic period, medicine made tremendous advances, but it also showed a short-sighted misunderstanding of the most important and most difficult among the problems of life.

It is easy to understand why doctors, with an attitude of this kind towards the mind, should have had no liking for psycho-analysis and should have demurred to its demand for learning many things afresh and for seeing many things in a different light. But as a compensation it might be supposed that the new theory would be all the more likely to meet with applause from philosophers. For philosophers were accustomed to putting abstract concepts (or, as unkind tongues would say, hazy words) in the forefront of their explanations of the universe, and it would be impossible that they should object to the extension of the sphere of psychology for which psycho-analysis had paved the way. But here another obstacle arose. The philosophers' idea of what is mental was not that of psycho-analysis. The overwhelming majority of philosophers regard as mental only the phenomena of consciousness. For them the world of consciousness coincides with the sphere of what is mental. Everything else that may take place in the 'mind' - an entity so hard to grasp - is relegated by them to the organic determinants of mental processes or to processes parallel to mental ones. Or, more strictly speaking, the mind has no contents other than the phenomena of consciousness, and consequently psychology, the science of the mind, has no other subject-matter. And on this point the layman's view is the same.

What, then, can a philosopher say to a theory which, like psycho-analysis, asserts that on the contrary what is mental is in itself unconscious and that being conscious is only a quality, which may or may not accrue to a particular mental act and the withholding of which may perhaps alter that act in no other respect? He will naturally say that anything both unconscious and mental would be an impossibility, a *contradictio in adjecto*, and he will fail to observe that in making this judgement he is merely repeating his own definition of what is mental, a definition which may perhaps be too narrow. It is easy for philosophers to feel this certainty, since they have no acquaintance with the material whose investigation has compelled analysts to believe in unconscious mental acts. Philosophers have never taken account of hypnosis, they have not concerned themselves with the interpreting of dreams - on the contrary, like doctors, they regard dreams as the meaningless products of reduced mental activity during sleep - they are scarcely aware that there are such things as obsessions and delusions and they would find themselves in a most embarrassing situation if they were asked to explain them on the basis of their own psychological premisses. Analysts, too, refuse to say what the unconscious is, but they can indicate the domain of phenomena whose observation has obliged them to assume its existence. Philosophers, who know no kind of observation other than self-observation, cannot follow them into that domain.

So it comes about that psycho-analysis derives nothing but disadvantages from its middle position between medicine and philosophy. Doctors regard it as a speculative system and refuse to believe that, like every other natural science, it is based on a patient and tireless elaboration of facts from the world of perception; philosophers, measuring it by the standard of their own artificially constructed systems, find that it starts from impossible premisses and reproach it because its most general concepts (which are only now in process of evolution) lack clarity and precision.

This state of affairs is enough to account for the reluctant and hesitant reception of analysis in scientific quarters. But it does not explain the outbursts of indignation, derision and scorn which, in disregard of every standard of logic and good taste, have characterized the controversial methods of its opponents. A reaction of such a kind suggests that resistances other than purely intellectual ones were stirred up and that powerful emotional forces were aroused. And there are indeed plenty of things to be found in the theory of psycho-analysis calculated to produce such an effect as this upon the passions of men of every kind and not of scientists alone. Above all there is the very important place in the mental life of human beings which psycho-analysis assigns to what are known as the sexual instincts. Psycho-analytic theory maintained that the symptoms of neuroses are distorted substitutive satisfactions of sexual instinctual forces, the direct satisfaction of which has been frustrated by internal resistances. Later on, when analysis had extended beyond its original field of work and began to be applied to normal mental life, it sought to show that these same sexual components, which could be diverted from their immediate aims and directed to other things, made the most important contributions to the cultural achievements of the individual and of society. These views were not entirely new. The incomparable significance of sexual life had been proclaimed by the philosopher Schopenhauer in an intensely impressive passage. Moreover, what psycho-analysis called sexuality was by no means identical with the impulsion towards a union of the two sexes or towards producing a pleasurable sensation in the genitals; it had far more resemblance to the all-inclusive and all-preserving Eros of Plato's Symposium.

But the opponents of psycho-analysis forgot its illustrious forerunners; they fell upon it as though it had made an assault upon the dignity of the human race. They accused it of 'pan-sexualism', though the psycho-analytic theory of the instincts had always been strictly dualistic and had at no time failed to recognize, alongside the sexual instincts, others to which it actually ascribed force enough to suppress the sexual instincts. (These mutually opposing forces were described to begin with as the sexual instincts and the ego instincts. A later theoretical development changed them into Eros and the instinct of death or destruction.) The suggestion that art, religion and social order originated in part in a contribution from the sexual instincts was represented by the opponents of analysis as a degradation of the highest cultural values. They emphatically declared that men have other interests besides this eternal one of sex, overlooking in their zeal the fact that animals too have other interests - indeed they are subject to sexuality, not permanently like men, but only in bouts occurring at specific periods - overlooking, too, the fact that

the existence of these other interests in men had never been disputed and that nothing can be altered in the value of a cultural achievement by its being shown to have been derived from elementary animal instinctual sources.

Such a display of unfairness and lack of logic cries out for an explanation. Its origin is not hard to find. Human civilization rests upon two pillars, of which one is the control of natural forces and the other the restriction of our instincts. The ruler's throne rests upon fettered slaves. Among the instinctual components which are thus brought into service, the sexual instincts, in the narrower sense of the word, are conspicuous for their strength and savagery. Woe, if they should be set loose! The throne would be overturned and the ruler trampled under foot. Society is aware of this - and will not allow the topic to be mentioned.

But why not? What harm could the discussion do? Psycho-analysis has never said a word in favour of unfettering instincts that would injure our community; on the contrary it has issued a warning and an exhortation to us to mend our ways. But society refuses to consent to the ventilation of the question, because it has a bad conscience in more than one respect. In the first place it has set up a high ideal of morality - morality being restriction of the instincts - and insists that all its members shall fulfil that ideal without troubling itself with the possibility that obedience may bear heavily upon the individual. Nor is it sufficiently wealthy or well-organized to be able to compensate the individual for the amount of his instinctual renunciation. It is consequently left to the individual to decide how he can obtain, for the sacrifice he has made, enough compensation to enable him to preserve his mental balance. On the whole, however, he is obliged to live psychologically beyond his means, while the unsatisfied claims of his instincts make him feel the demands of civilization as a constant pressure upon him. Thus society maintains a condition of cultural hypocrisy which is bound to be accompanied by a sense of insecurity and a necessity for guarding what is an undeniably precarious situation by forbidding criticism and discussion. This line of thought holds good for all the instinctual impulses, including, therefore, the egoistic ones. The question whether it applies to all possible forms of civilization, and not merely to those which have evolved hitherto, cannot be discussed here. As regards the sexual instincts in the narrower sense, there is the further point that in most people they are tamed insufficiently and in a manner which is psychologically wrong and are therefore readier than the rest to break loose.

Psycho-analysis has revealed the weaknesses of this system and has recommended that it should be altered. It proposes that there should be a reduction in the strictness with which instincts are repressed and that correspondingly more play should be given to truthfulness. Certain instinctual impulses, with whose suppression society has gone too far, should be permitted a greater amount of satisfaction; in the case of certain others the inefficient method of suppressing them by means of repression should be replaced by a better and securer procedure. As a result of these criticisms psycho-analysis is regarded as 'inimical to culture' and has been put under a ban as a 'social danger'. This resistance cannot last for ever. No human institution can in the long run escape the influence of fair criticism; but men's attitude to psycho-analysis is still dominated by

this fear, which gives rein to their passions and diminishes their power of logical argument.

By its theory of the instincts psycho-analysis offended the feelings of individuals in so far as they regarded themselves as members of the social community; another branch of its theory was calculated to hurt every single person at the tenderest point of his own psychical development. Psycho-analysis disposed once and for all of the fairy tale of an asexual childhood. It demonstrated the fact that sexual interests and activities occur in small children from the beginning of their lives. It showed what transformations those activities pass through, how at about the age of five they succumb to inhibition and how from puberty onwards they enter the service of the reproductive function. It recognized that early infantile sexual life reaches its peak in what is known as the Oedipus complex (an emotional attachment of the child to the parent of the opposite sex accompanied by an attitude of rivalry to the parent of the same sex) and that at that period of life this impulsion extends uninhibited into a straightforward sexual desire. This can be confirmed so easily that only the greatest efforts could make it possible to overlook it. Every individual has in fact gone through this phase but has afterwards energetically repressed its purport and succeeded in forgetting it. A horror of incest and an enormous sense of guilt are left over from this prehistoric epoch of the individual's existence. It may be that something quite similar occurred in the prehistoric epoch of the human species as a whole and that the beginnings of morality, religion and social order were intimately connected with the surmounting of that *primaeval* era. To adults their prehistory seems so inglorious that they refuse to allow themselves to be reminded of it: they were infuriated when psycho-analysis tried to lift the veil of amnesia from their years of childhood. There was only one way out: what psycho-analysis asserted must be false and what posed as a new science must be a tissue of fancies and distortions.

Thus the strongest resistances to psycho-analysis were not of an intellectual kind but arose from emotional sources. This explained their passionate character as well as their poverty in logic. The situation obeyed a simple formula: men in the mass behaved to psycho-analysis in precisely the same way as individual neurotics under treatment for their disorders. It is possible, however, by patient work to convince these latter individuals that everything happened as we maintained it did: we had not invented it ourselves but had arrived at it from a study of other neurotics covering a period of twenty or thirty years. The position was at once alarming and consoling: alarming because it was no small thing to have the whole human race as one's patient, and consoling because after all everything was taking place as the hypotheses of psycho-analysis declared that it was bound to.

If we cast our eyes once again over the various resistances to psycho-analysis that have been enumerated, it is evident that only a minority of them are of the kind which habitually arise against most scientific innovations of any considerable importance. The majority of them are due to the fact that powerful human feelings are hurt by the subject-matter of the theory. Darwin's theory of descent met with the same fate, since it tore down the barrier that had been arrogantly set up between men and beasts. I drew attention to this analogy in an earlier paper,<sup>1</sup> in

which I showed how the psycho-analytic view of the relation of the conscious ego to an overpowering unconscious was a severe blow to human self-love. I described this as the psychological blow to men's narcissism, and compared it with the biological blow delivered by the theory of descent and the earlier cosmological blow aimed at it by the discovery of Copernicus.

<sup>1</sup> 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis' (1917a).0

Purely external difficulties have also contributed to strengthen the resistance to psycho-analysis. It is not easy to arrive at an independent judgement upon matters to do with analysis without having experienced it oneself or practised it on someone else. Nor can one do the latter without having acquired a specific and decidedly delicate technique, while until recently there was no easily accessible means of learning psycho-analysis and its technique. This position has now been improved by the foundation (in 1920) of the Berlin Psycho-Analytic Clinic and Training Institute, and soon afterwards (in 1922) of an exactly similar institute in Vienna.

Finally, with all reserve, the question may be raised whether the personality of the present writer as a Jew who has never sought to disguise the fact that he is a Jew may not have had a share in provoking the antipathy of his environment to psycho-analysis. An argument of this kind is not often uttered aloud. But we have unfortunately grown so suspicious that we cannot avoid thinking that this factor may not have been quite without its effect. Nor is it perhaps entirely a matter of chance that the first advocate of psycho-analysis was a Jew. To profess belief in this new theory called for a certain degree of readiness to accept a situation of solitary opposition - a situation with which no one is more familiar than a Jew.