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The Promise of Psychoanalysis

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What is life about? Any response is difficult to formulate because we are so inextricably bound up in the bundle of life that we cannot achieve the answer by our separate selves. It is easier to state what life is not about. Certainly life should not be living as a secretly lonely millionaire, a hate-filled nationalist, or a power-hungry racist. Nor being a never-satisfied, avant-garde searcher after change for change's sake, or a tense executive on his way to a coronary thrombosis. And life is not about ignoring social evils and unmet community and world needs while safeguarding the luxury of private oases.

What life *is* about is the urge to develop our creative potentials for love and work, with and for each other. This arises in human response to the genuine security and valuation others have provided for us and permits and encourages us to pass on to others these priceless conditions of enjoyable and meaningful living. A psychoanalyst should be someone who can use his training, experience, and humanity to do this for those in dire need; his real reward is to grow with his patients. This is what life is about, in various ways, for all of us.

Surprisingly, within the field of psychotherapy, this idea is by no means generally accepted, a factor that contributes substantially to the contemporary doubts and questions that currently limit the status and influence of psychoanalysis.

A recent letter from America said: "Psychoanalysis is on the decline with fewer analysts and patients dedicated to the task." This is a representative obituary on the demise of psychoanalysis which is usually attributed to its lack of relevance, its costly and time-consuming demands, and its [045] leged frequent lack of success. In this essay I would like to examine the pessimism that informs this position and also to contrast the following point of view: a psychoanalysis which is closely related to the realities of everyday living, that penetrates to the depths of suffering human beings, has nothing to fear for the future and will nourish.

Such a therapy, in fact, has become indispensable not only for individuals in personal need of it, but also for the contribution it makes to those professions concerned with the fate of human beings in their struggles to maintain themselves as viable persons in stressful situations. However, psychoanalysis will hold the attention of the public only insofar as it speaks truly to the human condition, and insofar as people realize that the psychoanalyst should not be just a professional man with a theory—a psychotechnician—but a human being with a developing experience of understanding, able to help others with their struggles to be real persons living meaningful lives with their fellowmen.

This kind of psychoanalysis has been in the making but it still requires a certain evolution in theory and practice, an evolution that was actually implicit in Freud's own development. For


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beginning as a physician seeking to cure an illness, he started a process that is now carrying psychoanalysis far beyond the narrow medical model of a doctor treating a patient toward a relationship in which both participants explore together the meaning and value of living. (Freud's almost compulsive interest in religion and culture was not a sign of a simply speculative bent but was the inevitable development of his inquiry into human living, its mysteries and ultimate implications.)

These issues were central in my own development as an analyst. I began with a very thorough philosophical and theological education, which I would not have missed, but then decided to lay these subjects aside until I had a more adequate knowledge of "human nature," of what it means to be a "person" possessing intellectual curiosity, moral values, and the spiritual aspiration that life should be meaningful. Accordingly I studied with Professor J. C. Flugel, one of Britain's finest psychoanalysts, and Professor J. Macmurray, a penetrating "personal relations" philosopher. I had sensed the tension between these two points of view throughout the 1930s. Psychoanalysis was exploring the right approach to the study of personality but it was burdened by the weight of a physicalistic (instinctual) bias; Macmurray was unburdened by an instinctively based theory but lacked the dynamic grasp that psychoanalysis could supply.

I had sought to unite these two streams of thought, for the more I [046] delved into psychotherapy the more I felt that classical Freudian theory was insufficient to understand aspects of human suffering that went far deeper than the vicissitudes of instinctual drives and straightforward Oedipal phenomena. In the immediate postwar years I became familiar with the works of Sullivan, Horney, and Fromm, which greatly broadened my vista. A little later the work of Fairbairn further widened my scope of psychoanalysis and I saw it could continue, not as a mechanistic late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century psychobiology dealing with the two mighty, turbulent drives of sex and aggression, but as a fully psychological study of the profound intrapsychic and interpersonal problems of human beings living together.

Freud himself prepared the groundwork for this evolution when he defined psychoanalysis mainly in terms of transference and resistance when he wrote that "Any line of investigation, no matter what its direction, which recognizes transference and resistance, and takes them as the starting point of its work may call itself psychoanalysis, though it arrives at results other than my own" *(On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement,* 1914); thus his model of man changed in time from a biological machine toward that of a person engaged in relating with others and with himself. However, the intellectual outlook and the philosophy of science in Freud's era did not make possible the formulation of a thoroughly psycho-dynamic science; Jones, Kris, and Erikson to the contrary, I do not think that Freud ever resolved the conflict between physicalistic and psychological constructs in his thinking. In fact it still persists in the thinking of many of his followers and is implicit in Anna Freud's recent description of psychoanalysis as relating to man's struggle against himself (i.e., biological Id versus mental Ego).

This concept, however, is already changing in contemporary psychoanalysis, with emphasis being placed on man's struggle to *be* himself. The argument is now likely to be raised that this is not the business of science. Why not? Science is knowledge, all knowledge, and the real question is not "Is psychoanalysis a science?" but "What kind of science is it?"

The views of many scientists have changed since Freud's time when Brucke's dictum, that "there are no other energies in the organism than physical and chemical ones" gave Freud no standing ground for the creation of what his own genius led him to: a fully psychodynamic science which could take man's physiological substrata for granted and devote its energies to the study of interpersonal relationships. Such a science would focus on our experiences of ourselves as persons emerging out of a social [047] field, beginning with the crucial mother-infant relationship. Even today Freudian theory implies too limited and too pessimistic a view of human nature, like those views expressed so clearly by St. Paul and Plato (views that are still important because they affect how we treat sex, aggression, and social violence). Freud's concepts of Ego and Id parallel St. Paul's concepts of the


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"Law of the Mind" and "Law of the Members," the lusts of the flesh which "are not subject to the law ... neither indeed can they be." Thus Freud believed that men are hostile to culture because it demands the renunciation of instinctual drives. But the hypothesis that a relaxation of sexual morality in society would diminish modern man's nervousness has been manifestly disproved.

Freud's prognostic statement that the outcome of psychoanalysis is limited where the quantitative factor of instinctual strength overpowers the efforts of the ego also parallels Plato's concept of human nature. Employing the metaphor of a chariot to describe personality, Plato viewed a charioteer of reason who used a courageous, spirited (aggressive) horse to hold back another horse, the beast of the passions. In *The Republic,* Glaucon and Adeimantus anticipate Freud in holding that men are violent and non-moral by nature, arguing that men submit to social control for convenience; Socrates responds with a social analysis of the Just State ruled by philosophers who forego personal gain (i.e., sublimate their instincts) and who have at their command the Soldiers (aggression) to ascertain that the Workers (their instincts unsublimated) are kept in a state of obedience: a blueprint for the totalitarian state.

What led men of the intellectual and personal stature of Plato, St. Paul, and Freud to take this hopeless view of human nature? In good measure it was a powerful theoretical assumption—one that appeared to be true on the surface—that human nature was dualistic, an imposition of an intellectual-spiritual mind on an impersonal, animal, passionate body; for Freud this translated into an ego with scientific reason struggling, and mostly failing, to master the turmoil of the biological id. Erikson's citing of the analogy of the Centaur with a human top and equestrian underpinnings is in the same spirit; but this is as impossible a view of the human evolutionary process as the traditional religious schema of man as born in sin and shaped in iniquity, doomed by biological inheritance to be lustful and destructive. So many educated people still hold roughly to this view that it is necessary to say that the natural sciences have outgrown such crude materialism and that contemporary psychoanalysis is also outgrowing the pessimistic Ego-Id dualism. [048]

However, this does not mean that one may not look at certain phenomena from different points of view. In this spirit Bronowski holds that because man is at once an organic machine and a self there are qualitatively different kinds of knowledge, knowledge of the machine, which constitutes physical science, and knowledge of the self, which constitutes psychodynamic science. Going back, then, to the question of what kind of science is psychoanalysis, we can benefit from Medawar's account of the scientific method and the hierarchical structure of knowledge. He likens knowledge to a building with a ground floor and a series of floors or tiers rising above it. The ground floor is physics and chemistry, the successive tiers rising above it are physiology, neurology and biology, then sociology. Medawar fails to add psychology as the topmost tier, but we must remedy his omission of the study of "personal mind" as the highest phenomenon of which we know—that without which the whole of science and culture, and Medawar himself, would not exist.

He writes (in *Induction and Intuition in Scientific Thought)* that, "In each plane or tier of the hierarchy new notions or ideas seem to emerge that are inexplicable in the language or with the conceptual resources of the tier below. We cannot 'interpret' sociology in terms of biology, or biology in terms of physics"—nor, we must add, psychology in terms of any lower-tier science. Were this view of scientific theory available to Freud, say in the 1920s, it might have allowed him to develop his approach to an ego psychology as a study not of drive control apparatuses, but of whole persons in intensely personal relationships. Thus sex would have been viewed not as an engine threatening to run out of control, but as one of the bodily "appetites" or needs, along with hunger, thirst, excretion, breathing, and sleep, all in the primary service of biological survival. And aggression would have been seen, not as an innate volcano that needs to be capped, but as a reaction to threat, above all the psychic threat to the integrity of our personality. (Naturally the *capacity* to respond to threat in an aggressive way is innate but this is quite different from holding that a

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storehouse of violence, per se, is built-in.) Man's antisocial hostility would then be seen as a secondary product of intense fears and frustrations, allowing for a more affirmative view of man than the pessimistic one of classical Freudian theory.

As it was, it fell to Erich Fromm, a social psychologist trained in classical psychoanalysis, to make, in the 1930s and 1940s, the most trenchant criticisms of instinct theory in order to widen the purview of psychoanalysis. For example, he reinterpreted the Oedipus complex within [049] a much broader framework. Recognizing Freud's discovery of the central importance of the child's relationships with his parents as a primary determinant of personality development, Fromm went beyond a focus on the individual's sexual bonds with his parents as the main issue of living. Although sexual attraction does arise between parents and children and may result in neurotic conflicts, Fromm observed that this is not the essential aspect of child-parent relationships. Rather it is when the parents inhibit the child's development and thwart his growth so that the child is unable to stand on his own feet that the more basic issue arises—the conflict between remaining passively dependent on parents or other authorities versus the quest for independence and authenticity. Not sexual attachments, but the tension between wanting safety-through-submission on the one hand, and braving anxiety to achieve autonomy on the other, was seen by Fromm as the core struggle to keep oneself in being as an intact person, especially when no genuine or affirming relationships were experienced in the course of growing up.

As a consequence of such broader views, psychoanalysis today has a far clearer picture of how profoundly the day-in, day-out atmosphere of family life shapes the child's stability and approach to life. This has serious consequences for the goals of psychoanalysis. Of course, those who desire only a control of symptoms or a restoration to a pre-breakdown level of functioning may well benefit from such psychiatric treatments as electric shock or drugs which have made mental distress more manageable. But this does not lead to a creative maturing of the personality. (Following electric shock, one patient was relieved that his depression lifted but complained that his personality took on an "automatic" quality.) However, when psychoanalysis sets as a broader task the liberation of the person from the emotional traumata of the past and the development of his creative potentials, then the analytic work and the analytic relationship must set about to repair the damage done by past faulty relationships day by day, often from the very beginning.

To illustrate, a patient of mine began a lengthy psychoanalysis as a junior in his profession, then out of work, ill, exhausted, and suffering from poor sleep, waking up intermittently and screaming. He had had a psychotic mother who had literally terrorized his childhood. Though dead, she lived with him in his nightmares. As the analysis proceeded, he felt better and steadily rose to the top of his profession. He continued with analysis, however, because he still experienced a quite unrealistic apprehensiveness before any interview or meeting. But this problem, too, was fading away [050] when, in one session, he shut his eyes and fell silent for half an hour. Silence has so often been interpreted as resistance, and at times is; but I knew that this was not such an occasion. Finally he opened his eyes and said, "I felt I needed to relax. For a time there was a tight knot of tension behind my forehead. Gradually it died down and for some time I've forgotten all about you. Something new has happened. I feel free of something, and I know what it is. The old atmosphere of apprehension has gone and I feel safe at last."

I observed that he had slowly come to feel sufficiently sure of my positive feelings for him that he felt safe enough to be with me and yet forget all about me, something he had never dared to risk with his domineering and threatening mother. The internal atmosphere of apprehension of living with his mother had at last been dissipated; for the first time he felt safe and free to experience himself directly as a real person, achieving a new kind of self-discovery that no pill could have given. His newly won capacity to be alone without anxiety was the hallmark of his maturity. This experience my patient had of feeling real to himself, in a new way, goes deeper than an account of Oedipal dynam-

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ics would allow for.

At this point, a brief excursion into an object relations theory of psychoanalysis may serve to contrast the therapeutic approach I am referring to with the traditional; and, additionally, since object relations theory has become increasingly important in Great Britain as well as in South America and elsewhere, it seems timely to acquaint American readers with it. The central difference with Freudian theory is that the latter has regarded man primarily as a pleasure-seeker whose instincts need to be tamed, while the object relations view as developed by Fairbairn regards man as primarily in search of relatedness. As Fromm wrote in *The Art of Loving,*

> The deepest need of man, then, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness.

The formation of relationships, not the reduction of pain, is the primary struggle of man. On this basis there is no theoretical requirement for the concept of an Id; impulse tensions arising in the course of searching for relatedness account for motivational forces. Another difference is that object relations theory regards development as determined not by stages in instinct maturation (from oral to anal to genital), but by the changing quality of the growing child's relationship with others. Neuroses are seen as arising out of the difficulty of moving from infantile to adult modes of relating. Object relations theory has its beginnings in Freud's concept of the [051] superego which is based on an internal, psychic representation of the parents. Melanie Klein developed this approach into a broader phenomenology of intrapsychic life, regarding the psyche as an inner world where the ego was deeply involved in enduring and patterned relationships with internal "objects" or representations. This internal stage—as distinct from the outer world—became central to her thinking, and was the point of departure for Fairbairn.

He never regarded the ego as developing out of discrete nuclei, but as a global whole at the outset, which then became increasingly differentiated as a result of interpersonal experiences. For him psychoanalysis was predicated on the idea that the ego cannot develop, in fact becomes "lost" in schizoid withdrawal, without sufficient experiencing of good relationships. When the child experiences the mother as frustrating, his helpless, weak ego splits the object into two parts and internalizes them as a way of mastering them. The experience of the parent has been divided into an Exciting Object—that part of the parent that has aroused feelings and needs in the infant—and into a Rejecting Object—the unsatisfactory and hated aspects of the parent. The ego splits to relate to these internalized objects. Specifically, these are now a thwarted, hungry Libidinal Ego that continues to struggle for life, and an Antilibidinal Ego that gives up and fails to grow. The Antilibidinal Ego is also called the Internal Saboteur because it is related to the Rejecting Object through identifying with it; this unholy alliance jointly attacks or condemns the Libidinal Ego (which is similarly allied to the Exciting Object through hope of sustenance). All of this occurs out of range of awareness. However, on the conscious level, a Central Ego emerges as that portion of the personality that carries on the daily life of the person in the outer world, while unconsciously the person is radically divided against himself.

Thus, in the analysis of the intrapsychic world in terms of object relations, self-hatred is understood as the Antilibidinal Ego and Rejecting Object constantly attacking the Libidinal Ego which grips on to life at the expense of suffering. Here is the hard core of neurosis, the unconscious sadomasochistic dynamic from which numerous symptoms arise. In the course of therapy the Antilibidinal Ego shifts from an allegiance to the Rejecting Object to an alliance with the accepting analyst, allowing the split ego to move toward a healing integration and wholeness. This is why psychoanalysis should not be so strongly focused on repressed drives and hidden memories; the crucial issue is to develop the immature ego which is fighting to preserve its psychic existence. Certainly the control of antisocial [052] impulses is socially necessary, but this is a secondary matter compared to the fundamental growth of the ego.

It can now be seen why analysis is of necessity a slow process. The relationship must gradually develop so that it is secure enough to permit the patient to live through the traumatic


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early disturbances again, so as to resolve them within the new relationship, which affords the needed mothering and fathering that foster growth. Analysis is also difficult because, through his Antilibidinal Ego, the child identifies with a powerful albeit persecutory figure and—in the closed system of his neurotic unconscious—is unwilling to give up this protection. Additionally, the person may suffer at the hands of his bad objects, but he at least has a relationship; better a persecutory relationship than none at all. No wonder that the resistance to change is usually intense.

Many diverse dramas are enacted on the inner stage, with front row seats provided by dreams which I believe are usually not wish fulfillments but direct views and insights into the endopsychic situation. For example, one patient dreamed of looking on helplessly while a male horse slashed with a knife at a female horse who just endured it. A primal scene interpretation had little effect. The important point was that his Central Ego, the observer, was helpless to halt a cruel inner conflict. After the patient had shown much progress, he dreamed of an angry man shouting harshly at a terrified boy. Then the man was friendly and said, "I know you're nervous but you hold my hand," and the boy lost his fear. As the patient said, "The harsh chap is the attitude I've always had to myself and the friendly man is your attitude to me which I'm slowly adopting."

To summarize, the first ego split leaves a Central Ego to cope with the outer world while a Libidinal Ego retreats to an inner world, out of consciousness, where it deals with its internalized objects. This inner ego has been divided by conflicts between its needs and fears into an oral, needy Libidinal Ego relating to an Exciting Object to keep it going, and an Antilibidinal Ego which is identified with, and relates to, a persecutory Rejecting Object. In addition, I have found that the Libidinal Ego may be so assailed by anxiety that it makes a further withdrawal, this time from bad internal object relations, and a third and final ego split occurs. I refer to this last split-off portion as the Regressed Libidinal Ego which seeks a passive security in a womblike state.

No psychoanalysis can be complete unless this regressed part of the personality is reached so as to turn regression into regrowth. This requires that the patient face his ultimate fears and flight from life. However, the [053] patient also hates his Regressed Ego for its weakness and he is, at times, going to hate the analyst who seeks to help it. Equally important, the patient is deadly afraid that his Regressed Ego, if given any acceptance in the context of the analytic relationship, will lure and betray him into abject infantile dependence. The only solution is to endure and outgrow these fears of a good object relationship with the analyst.

As Fromm wrote, the goal of psychoanalysis should include "freedom from" emotional conflicts but go beyond it to achieve "freedom to" develop our potentialities to their maximum. He talked about the discovery of the "true self." Today, Winnicott writes of the "true self put into cold storage" when a baby is born into a family environment that fails to nourish it. The child, then, must grow "a false self on a conformity basis" or on "a rebellion basis." Getting a start at all in the growth of a real self depends initially on the warmth, interest, and constancy flowing to the baby in the mother relationship. Thus Winnicott holds that the experience of relationship is earlier and far stronger than the experience of the satisfaction of bodily needs, so that the true model for psychotherapy is the mother-child relationship, not a tension-reduction model. In a related vein, Fairbairn held that the origin of all personality problems lies in the inability of "the parents to get it across to the child that he is loved for his own sake, as a person in his own right"; therapy, perforce, involves the patient's working through unrealistic transference relations to the analyst, to arrive at a mature, realistic relationship in which he finds his authentic self. In this context, Balint distinguished two different levels of psychoanalysis—the level of the "Basic Fault" and the Oedipal level— ascribing to the former the necessity to deal with the patient's earliest failures to attain the foundations of a secure personality within the pre-Oedipal, mother-infant matrix. The patient must reexperience this level in order to make "a new beginning"; but if he merely regresses to seek endless satisfactions for unmet early needs, then the regression becomes malig-


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nant and may not lead to cure. Benign regression, on the other hand, is essentially a search for recognition as a person by the analyst; this is what leads to a cure.

The work of Fromm, Winnicott, Fairbairn, and Balint illustrates the way psychoanalysis is now in process of transformation from a theory and analysis of "instinctual frustration and control" into a theory and therapy that encourage the rebirth and growth of an authentic self within an authentic relationship. Here the demands of the patient are understood less as a craving for immediate gratification and more as a need for a real [054] person to begin to relate to, and to be real with—a need that is basically psychological not physiological. Clearly, this is not to deny the fact that man's total biological and psychological nature inherently provides the conditions for the experience of relatedness to occur.

It is true that things can go wrong even after a good start with reliable mothering, but not so seriously wrong. The growing child is certainly helped or hindered by the extent to which he finds good or bad relationships in the community, but if a sound foundation has been laid, it is astonishing what stresses can be taken in adult life. What compelled me to focus increasingly on these issues was the fact that many analyses that had moved along on a conventional Oedipal level eventually betrayed signs that Oedipal dynamics concealed far deeper problems which involved the patient feeling himself to be insignificant, a nonperson as it were, whom no one could like or respect. These more basic issues—intractable to analyses of ego inhibition and superego tyranny—clearly required reparative experiences to offset the person's inability to get off to a proper start in self-formation within a destructive family atmosphere: not the patient's "reparation" for his destructive impulses (see Melanie Klein), but the analyst's "repairing" the mother's failure to give basic ego support.

This discussion brings us back to the opening theme. Freud began as a physician seeking to cure an illness but he initiated a thrust that is now carrying psychoanalysis from a medical treatment model to a relationship in which both participants explore living. The way in which analysis is developing into a deepening study of how we succeed or fail in emerging as persons in the media of good or bad personal relations again raises the issue of goals and the ultimate questions of life. Certainly the traditional notion of "cure" becomes increasingly irrelevant in comparison with such concepts as self-discovery and self-realization, with the person no longer bound by unrealistic anxieties but affirmed in rewarding relationships. We all know implicitly that every human being needs and seeks to be validated by others. Thus a tough young psychopath in group therapy shouted, "Look at me when you speak to me! I don't want to be treated as if I wasn't here!" He absolutely needed someone's recognition of his presence; otherwise he had to act out violently to escape a fall into a vacuum of schizoid isolation.

As I stated at the outset, a psychoanalysis that comes to grip with these concerns, that is not parochial, that addresses itself to the human condition, is here to stay. It is of no importance whether it waxes or wanes in popularity in any given period. Psychoanalysis will decline only if it [055] becomes a closed society of the initiated defending an older, undeveloping theory as dogma. Nor is it crucial that there can never be enough psychoanalysts to meet the needs for individual analysis; for our ultimate aim must be one of prevention, through the acquisition of a body of knowledge and experience that helps us to understand how to live and be truly human.