THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOLOGY—II

EVERYWHERE, when we study the mind deeply, we find the same characteristic alluded to in the last article, that there are hidden forces at work which manifest themselves in consciousness only in a distorted form, but these must be of enormous importance alike in the affairs of a family, a social community, a nation, a world of nations. If the mild symptoms of the psycho-neurotic are so unintelligible until they are related to hidden forces dating from childhood, is it not probable that those world forces which ultimately make for peace or for war are not revealed to the ordinary observer who takes no trouble to go below the surface? If one turns to recent discussions relating to disarmament and world peace, one finds even the non-psychologist becoming aware that fear is a fundamental cause of international misunderstanding and antagonism. But he has not yet begun to realise that fear itself is to a great extent secondary to deep-seated unconscious factors, unconscious impulses of greed and aggression. If the nations were free from these tendencies towards one another, the amount of conscious fear would be greatly diminished.

From the psychological point of view there is a real danger of treating symptoms instead of causes when applying ordinary common-sense psychology to these problems. The expert psychologist who has spent a long time in detailed analysis of individual minds is surely likely to have something further to say to us, but as yet he has never been encouraged to say it. The nearest approach to any improvement in that situation that I know is Freud’s latest book, Das Unbehagen in der Kultur, translated into English under the title, Civilisation and its Discontents. In that work he does emphasise the importance of the aggressive instinct or impulse in man and the need for its understanding and control.

Modern psychology, then, goes below the surface in its search for new facts as to the way in which the mind works. It is radical in the sense of finding out what the real forces are at the back of civilisation, beneath the formulated motives of men, deeper altogether than the generally accepted ethical and religious creeds. In that sense, of course, it is biological. If evolution worked simply by leaving the past behind as something that has become ineffective to the new occasion and superseded, there would not be the difficulty that we actually have at present. Our difficulties arise from the fact that we do carry our past along with us, and our past is affecting us—not only our past memories and our past acquisitions, but our more primitive mental tendencies. Like Kubla, we can

‘hear from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war.’

We are the sport of those forces which make themselves manifest in mass movements when war is declared. In that event we find people, even the most intelligent, acting in quite a different way from their normal behaviour. Something has surged up to the surface, they have become infected by war fever, by mass psychosis. Whole nations and peoples become so affected. We have propaganda started, directed to definite ends, and under the influence of mass emotion and mass suggestion the individual mind is almost helpless. It is helpless, not because of the impact of forces from without, but because there is a betrayal in the inner citadel of the unconscious. This the successful propagandist knows instinctively, though perhaps he may not know it scientifically, and plays up to it. The need is to know it scientifically, as a necessary preliminary to dealing with it in an adequate way.

Qua psychologist, however, one has no axe to grind either for or against pacifism or anything else. The psychologist is concerned to get to know the facts as fully as possible. Only within the last twenty years or so have we begun to get the facts in their right setting. Those of us who have spent a great amount of time analysing patients and others, and getting very deeply into their minds, are really surprised that things go as well as they do. Before the last war I had the privilege of a long talk with C. G. Jung, who said to me, ‘You know, civilisation is a thin veneer. You scratch the surface; and anything may happen. Look at the Messina earthquake, and what happened then under stress and strain; and he proceeded to tell me certain facts about that, and then, with prophetic insight he said, ‘If a conflagration occurs, anything may happen. Civilisation itself may break down.’ Those are platitudes now. Everyone is saying them.
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But, unfortunately, they are all out of date. People who are not psychologists, I contend, are all out of date, at any rate by a few years. They talk about fear, but years ago psychologists realised the importance of fear. What the psychologist realises now is that, besides fear, still deeper and more important as a cause of war, is greed and the aggressive tendency. Of course, there is no one cause of war, but an enormous number of different contributory causes, combining with and intensifying one another; but generalisation is necessary to organised thought, and, putting first things first, we do see now that the unconscious determines our actions very much more fundamentally than does anything in the conscious mind.

I am afraid that my remarks may seem portentous and rather meaningless; they cannot but appear like that to the reader unless he has some knowledge of deep analysis, and very few people can get the experience of such analysis. That is open, with few exceptions, only to the medical psychologist, and the non-medical psychologist's experience must necessarily be to some extent academic and on the surface. But the deep analysts are a harmonious family. It is true that they have their own conflicts, their differences of opinion, but anyone who has done any long analysis is certain of the existence of the unconscious mind as something with positive, not negative, characteristics and qualities only to be understood through such deep and prolonged analysis. Such observers regard the unconscious mind as something continually active, continually manifesting itself in indirect ways, betraying itself in dreams, in slips of speech, in involuntary actions, what Freud calls Psycho-Pathologie des Alltagslebens ("the psycho-pathology of every-day life"). It manifests itself with great force in mass movements under the influence of mass suggestion, and mass suggestion often means the cancelling out of conscious criticism and control, so that unconscious factors can manifest themselves.

From the point of view of world politics the importance of psychology is in its emphasis upon those unconscious forces which should be understood and controlled. It will be seen that such views of psychology tend to be antagonistic to the special doctrinaire theories of social reform, to abstract intellectual theories of various kinds, and emphasise the importance of taking human nature into the reckoning. But we go further: it has become almost a platitude to say that human nature never changes, that it remains always the same. In the domain of medical psychology it is perfectly obvious that there are deep-seated obsessions and functional disturbances which are removed by prolonged analysis, so that the individual becomes a different individual altogether, and it is found therefore more easy to believe that even the most normal being can be modified by deep analysis, helped to greater mental power and to relief of temperamental difficulties and defects, resulting in a difference to his own outlook and still more to the lives of those around him.

Life itself, of course, is a form of psycho-analysis. Each one of us, with varied experiences and reactions, has to come to grips with certain problems, but very much more can be done in terms of deep analysis, in controlling the unconscious by bringing it up into consciousness.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that psychology has very important bearings upon the problems of history, politics, economics, and it is no exaggeration to claim that the next generation, or, let us say, the next century will be the century of psychology. Further advances will have been made in all these directions. Psychology, therefore, should be an essential part of the equipment of every educated person. The difficulty in the past has been its formal and academic character, its lack of practical application; but the characteristic of psychology now is that it is essentially practical. Its modern triumphs have all been triumphs of practice. Practice, in a way, has superseded theory. It is because the psychologist is practically using his knowledge in mental testing for vocational guidance and so forth that experimental psychology has received a newness of life and has made rapid advance. It is because psychology has proved itself indispensable in medicine that its theoretical advance is sure. During the war the treatment of shell-shock by non-psychological methods was found to be ineffective, and very soon the military medical authorities discovered that it was necessary to establish shell-shock centres for psychological treatment, both in the field and at the base. The results from the military point of view at once justified this departure.

With regard to insanity, we must admit that the statistics show at present no great improvement, but the reason is not far to seek. Mental hospitals are overcrowded and under-staffed, and the amount of psychological treatment, itself necessarily lengthy, which can be given to severe mental cases must be still extremely small. The same is true of the out-patient departments in the general hospitals, there are large numbers of cases and few doctors, and each case needs long treatment. But the knowledge to be gained by detailed intensive treatment of special cases can be applied to a larger
circle of patients. The central difficulty here all through is that if the unconscious is so important and its disclosure takes such a long time, it is not easy to see how much improvement is to be obtained in that way. The enthusiasts among us would say that it is almost the duty of everyone who takes up psychology, pure or applied, to be analysed himself, and to have direct first-hand knowledge of how these forces work in the unconscious, as well as experience in analysing others. A time may come when that will be possible. At present it is possible only or mainly for the medically qualified, which is a very great handicap, and has prevented these facts being more widely known.

Some surprise may be felt that it should be suggested that the facts are not widely known, in view of the enormous publicity which psycho-analysis has received of recent years, and the tremendous space of elementary text books of all kinds from the printing press. My reply is that most of these are misleading and inaccurate. Popular knowledge of deep mental analysis and its results is hopelessly inadequate. Freud has been completely misunderstood in all sorts of ways. He has been cited in support of views and theories and of moral standpoints for which he is in no way responsible. His views have now been long enough before the world to have received the corrective of criticism. There are not very many people who accept every word of his doctrine, but most of those competent to judge who know his work acclaim him as the leading psychological genius of the age.

Evidently, then, modern psychology must allow great place for his work and for the consideration of the practical implications of his theories. When I speak of practical implications I do not necessarily mean the support of one particular view as against another. It is for ethics and for normative science to pass opinions. Psychology, like history, merely states the facts, and if the psychologist passes an opinion on what should be done in world politics he is passing that opinion not as a psychologist—though he may be passing it on what his psychological study has taught him—but as a politician or political scientist or economist.

Almost nothing has been said so far about the relationship of psychology to ethics. But if my argument is sound, the relationship must be very close. It must be of great importance to modern ethics to allow for the possibilities of unconscious motives and their conflicts, not only in explaining behaviour, but in throwing light upon the nature of conscience and moral obligation.

In religion, too, modern psychology has important facts to bring to notice. Certain religious mani-

festations, or manifestations of an apparently religious nature may be explicable in terms of unconscious activity, and the surging up of unconscious mental forces may be of importance in judging the ultimate value of those experiences. Psychology, as such, can obviously pass no criticism upon religion. I say that is obvious; nevertheless one mentions the obvious because in certain quarters attempts have been made to explain away religious experiences in psychological terms. Even Freud himself has made such an attempt in his book, Die Zukunft einer Illusion ('The Future of an Illusion'). But while denying any justification for attack from the psychological point of view, one may and should emphasise the importance of facts of unconscious activity and of the knowledge of the activity of the unconscious in the adequate consideration and summing up or valuation of manifestations in the religious domain, emotional or other.

Psychology has no quarrel with philosophy. Rightly understood, philosophical questions only arise in the domain of mind when psychology has had its say. If we compare the present outlook in psychology with the outlook at the end of the last century, we can understand, on the one hand, the doubt and distrust of the science at that time and the philosopher's contempt for it, and also, on the other hand, the large degree of independence that exists at present between the two points of view. That is really the situation at the moment. At the end of the last century the subject was academic, abstract, and formal. Now psychology has won its spurs in the realm of practice, it has accumulated a huge mass of material, it has built up numerous theories, sometimes enforcing, sometimes conflicting with one another, and it is so independent of general philosophical discussion that the philosopher no longer recognises any great duty towards it or responsibility for it. On the other hand, in a University like Oxford the other sciences are struggling for their own foothold, and feel no special call to help it, and it must get along as best it can. Fortunately, it can look after itself, because as a practical science it has become indispensable, and whether people like it or not, they have to make use of it.

WILLIAM BROWN.