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Overcoming Cultural Crisis

Otto Gross

1913

The psychology of the unconscious is the philosophy of revolution: i.e., this is what it is appointed to become because it ferments insurrection within the psyche, and liberates individuality from the bonds of its own unconscious. It is appointed to make us inwardly capable of freedom, appointed because it is the preparatory work for the revolution.

The incomparable revaluation of all values, with which the imminent future will be filled, begins in this present time with Nietzsche's thinking about the depths of the soul and with Freud's discovery of the so-called psychoanalytic technique. This latter is the practical method which for the first time makes it possible to liberate the unconscious for empirical knowledge: i.e., for us it has now become possible to know ourselves. With this a new ethic is born, which will rest upon the moral imperative to seek real knowledge about oneself and one's fellow men.

What is so overpowering in this new obligation to apprehend the truth is that until today we have known nothing of the question that matters incomparably above all others—the question of what is intrinsic, essential in our own being, our inner life, our self and that of our fellow human beings; we have

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never even been in a position to inquire about these things. What we are learning to know is that, as we are today, each one of us possesses and recognizes as his own only a fraction of the totality embraced by his psychic personality.

In every psyche without exception the unity of the functioning whole, the unity of consciousness, is torn in two, and the unconscious has split itself off and maintains its existence by keeping itself apart from the guidance and control of consciousness, apart from any kind of self-observation, especially that directed at itself.

I must assume that knowledge of the Freudian method and its important results is already widespread. Since Freud we understand all that is inappropriate and inadequate in our mental life to be the results of inner experiences whose emotional content excited intense conflict in us. At the time of those experiences-especially in early childhood-the conflict seemed insoluble, and they were excluded from the continuity of the inner life as it is known to the conscious ego. Since then they have continued to motivate us from the unconscious in an uncontrollably destructive and oppositional way. I believe that what is really decisive for the occurrence of repressions is to be found in the inner conflict.. rather than in relation to the sexual impulse. Sexuality is the universal motive for an infinite number of internal conflicts, though not in itself but as the object of a sexual morality which stands in insoluble conflict with everything that is of value and belongs to willing and reality.

It appears that at the deepest level the real nature of these conflicts may always be traced back to one comprehensive principle, to the conflict between that which belongs to oneself and that which belongs to the other, between that which is innately individual and that which has been suggested to us, i.e. that which is educated or otherwise forced into us.

This conflict of individuality with all authority that has penetrated into our own innermost self belongs more to the period of childhood than to any other time.

The tragedy is correspondingly greater as a person's individuality is more richly endowed, is stronger in its own particular nature. The earlier and the more intensely that the capacity to withstand suggestion and interference begins its protective function, the earlier and the more intensely will the self-divisive conflict be deepened and exacerbated. The only natures to be spared are those in whom the predisposition towards individuality is so weakly developed and is so little capable of resistance that, under the pressure of suggestion from social surroundings, and the influence of education, it succumbs, in a manner of speaking, to atrophy and disappears altogether—natures whose guiding motives are at last composed entirely of alien, handed-down standards of evaluation and habits of reaction. In such second-rate characters a certain apparent health can sustain itself, i.e., a peaceful and harmonious functioning of the whole of the soul or, more accurately, of what remains of the soul. On the other hand, each individual who stands in any way higher than this normal contemporary state of things is not, in existing conditions, in a position to escape pathogenic conflict and to attain his individual health, i.e., the full harmonious development of the highest possibilities of his innate individual character.

It is understood from all this that such characters hitherto, no matter in what outward form they manifest themselves—whether they are opposed to laws and morality, or lead us positively beyond the average, or collapse internally and become ill—have been perceived with either disgust, veneration or pity as disturbing exceptions whom people try to eliminate. It will come to be understood that, already today, there exists the demand to approve these people as the healthy, the warriors, the progressives, and to learn from and through them.

Not one of the revolutions in recorded history has succeeded in establishing freedom for individuality. They have petered out ineffectively, each time as precursors of a new bourgeoisie, they have ended with the precipitate desire of people to rein-

stall themselves in conditions generally agreed to be normal. They have collapsed because the revolutionary of yesterday carried authority within himself. Only now can it be recognized that the root of all authority lies in the family, that the combination of sexuality and authority, as it shows itself in the patriarchal family still prevailing today, claps every individuality in chains.

The times of crisis in advanced cultures have so far always been attended by complaints about the loosening of the ties of marriage and family life ...but people could never hear in this "immoral tendency" the life-affirming ethical crying out of humanity for redemption. Everything went to wrack and ruin, and the problem of emancipation from original sin, from the enslavement of women for the sake of their children, remained unsolved.

The revolutionary of today, who with the help of the psychology of the unconscious sees the relations between the sexes in a free and propitiol future, fights against rape in its most primordial form, against the father and against patriarchy.

The coming revolution is the revolution for matriarchy [mother right]. It does not matter under what outward form and by what means it comes about.