

# Protest and Morality in the Unconscious

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"Therefore whoever slayeth Cain," according to the Scriptures, "vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." There can be only one interpretation of this verse: Cain is worth any seven men as a result of his act. However, only the destructive aspect of this act is stressed and special emphasis is put on the senseless-primitive character of its conscious motivation, which hardly occurred to the perpetrator himself. *For this act is the birth of revolutionary protest.* Not eternal hope, as according to the Greek tradition, but eternal discontent had come into the debased world as the only good thing. And behind this apparently senseless, evil act which emerges with enigmatic abruptness out of the dark unconscious, the eternal moment of that *unforgettable and unrelinquishable* good manifests itself as the profoundest reality.

The psychology of the unconscious now reveals to us the area of hidden values which, pre-formed in human disposition but repressed from consciousness through the psychic pressure of education and all forms of authoritarianism, are being methodically restored to consciousness. These values enable us to produce *an image of man closer to the original with his potentials, his innate characteristics and his primary determined-ness by means of his disposition itself*, as opposed to the accepted norms and their effects. *The psychology of the unconscious thereby offers us the first substratum for a questioning of the value of values-the starting point of revolutionary thinking. The demand for revolution as a result of the psychology of the unconscious becomes absolute as soon as it is demonstrated that the repression of these predisposed values means sacrificing the greatest human potential.*

For this reason the psychoanalytic school and its great founder Sigmund Freud stopped short, just before this became evident. No one on his own and alone on such far-advanced roads to knowledge is capable of breaking through the blockades that surround the value and validity of a principle which is so intimately bound up with one's own personality. The limits of classical psychology are drawn just before the discoveries through which all traditional authority is called into question and which shake the basis of existence of those who feel safe and secure in the authority of the existing order. Thus, its important revelatory work ended with the disclosure of that level in the unconscious which *covers* the most deeply repressed psychic elements, the innate characteristics, and whose content can be empirically demonstrated to be a *chaotic perversity of impulses and emotions*. This *hideousness of motives in the unconscious* seemed to justify the existing authority principle, the oppression of the individual and the accepted norms. Consequently, in classical psychoanalysis psychotherapy could restrict itself to purposely controlling the negative

character of the revealed impulses and to correct and suppress them according to the governing norms of the unconscious.

We, however, maintain that a consistent and unrestricted psychology of the unconscious reveals *the exact opposite* as its most significant discovery. For us, the terrible distortions and degradations of impulses and emotions, which, pent up behind the borders of consciousness, sabotage all psychic events, are the normal aberrations and fits of despair of a psyche that is already broken and alienated by external constraints and inducements. The repression of its own power of orientation, its innate value system, is the prerequisite for this condition of the psyche. Behind every inner strife we see the irreconcilability of innate and alien motives. It is obvious to us that all predispositions are necessarily unified, and it seems absurd not to recognize the obvious purposefulness of the innate and predisposed as a harmony, a preformed-harmonious working together. We assume that the innate impulses are purposeful, not only in the sense of an individual but also, and above all, a *social purposefulness*. This sovereign predisposed-social and innate-ethical propensity, which we are now in a position to recover from a state of repression by using the methods of the psychology of the unconscious, has already been made known to us in the discoveries of Kropotkin: the inborn "*instinct to help each other*." By means of a comparative biological proof of this instinct, Kropotkin has begun to establish the basis for a *genuine ethics* as both a genetically-founded and normative discipline.

We are now capable of penetrating the unconscious all the way down to the basic values of disposition itself, to the most deeply repressed motives, and we are able to do this by means of a technical utilization of our new premises about the repressed ethical dispositions which become a specific principle of psychoanalytic work. The phenomenon of the *indestructibility*, or better, the *unrelinquishability of the elementary symptoms of neurosis*, which has been so enigmatic until now, *can be traced back to the fact that every single symptom, no matter how frightening, hideous or grotesque it may be, is firmly attached to a deeprooted, original motive—a motive that will always belong to the unrelinquishably good and which, therefore, can never be cut off, Only by separating this motive from the associations fixed to it and by enabling it to perform its unique function in a free act of consciousness will the previously fixated symptom disappear through which this distorted, malformed and paradoxical motive forged its way to life and expression.* In this way, the masochistic attitude of many women can be overcome by making them aware of the underlying desire for motherhood; negatively distorted self-isolation can be overcome by exposing a certain, morally required defense mechanism, etc. Innumerable cases of pathological sabotage to oneself and to others can be resolved by *releasing an impulse for revolutionary protest and by the situational moral projection of both the instinct for the preservation of one's own psychic character and the instinct to help each other.*

Through the methods of the psychology of the unconscious we are capable of releasing a virtually immeasurable abundance of very positive psychic power—a possibility never before available to an era. We can, therefore, prepare ourselves with new hope and responsibility for the crisis which we will have to endure and which has previously brought catastrophe to every culture at this same point in its development.

*At a particular stage in its development, namely, with the full maturation of urban culture, every society is confronted with the alternative of downfall or change.* The sovereignty of the city in the cultural life of a society and its prerequisite—a civilized form of life—means the complete displacement of a long period in which *living from the soil determined the elementary units of the organization of labor and, within this organization, the basic form of personal relations.* The

economic unit of man-wife-children carried out the shared tasks posed by working the soil, and *patriarchy was the typical basic organization suited to agriculture.*

The transition to urban life terminates this bond of existence and the adaptation of all important things to the soil and its cultivation. *With this deliverance from the soil comes a new awakening of expansive vitality-like that which existed before man was bound to the soil.*

This renewal of surging inner life mobilizes an immense amount of creative powers and makes these times of approaching decision into one of those typical high periods of chaotically spurting re-formation.

*On this level of development there occurs in every culture, without exception, a crisis in sexual morality.* The irreversible process of disintegration in the area of morality demonstrates the complete obsolescence of this institution. In the period when agriculture dominated it was still viable as an agro-economic institution, but from the moment of total severance from the soil it is as alien to man in the new period as it was to primitive man.

The patriarchal family, severed from the soil, loses its economic value of relative suitability-the only thing that alleviated the intolerable character of such unnatural relations-and now becomes economically oppressive as well, burdening the individual. The only good quality it retains is the *social assurance of financial responsibility for each child.* The individual's human protest against meaningless pressure that restricts and distorts the individual, can no longer be suppressed without increasing the stress of internal conflict. The dissonance between a new inwardness and the increasingly baseless tradition will become ever greater. The efforts to over-compensate with "morality," characteristic of such times, are obviously, and without exception, vain attempts to replace or supplement the inadequate motives of the old norms, and to restore the old power by means of an inevitable and empty propaganda. Morality always tends to burden private life, at times even to encroach on it. This in turn stimulates the development of the diametrically opposite phenomenon which is incomparably more significant and more influential for the cultural life of such phases-namely, *immorality* as a principle. Immorality is the manifestation of the deep-seated, latent helplessness in such critical times; it results from a confusion of the existing morality, which is in itself and from the outset extremely relative and now totally obsolescent, with the concept and possibility of ethical values and norms as such. A misreading of the signs of the time lies at the base of both immorality and morality. *For "moral decay" points to the necessity of replacing the old norms by new ones.*

Thus, this stage of our development, through which we have to go, is set. It is the same stage which has brought crisis and catastrophe to every culture. Never before has the fateful challenge of this moment been sufficiently met: *the challenge to create and realize in a productive way something completely new, a new institution and new values, values that this time will be more faithful to the human psyche and will help solve the still remaining and very important problem: the problem of giving women the economic capability of taking on the tasks of motherhood.* This alone is the true social and ethical question, the first and most pressing question for society. If this question is posed with conviction and understanding in this decisive time, then the answer can be postulated automatically: *it is society's obligation to protect mothers financially and to provide for the upbringing of children.* Thereby, the law will be realized according to which all significant reforms are recurrences of initial forms on a higher level and order. Severance from the soil leads all forms of experience and demands as well as the inner comprehension of the world, fellow human beings and one's own self and the claims on society, its perpetuating forces, its institutions and values, back to the freedom of primitive times, but the level of differentiation has been raised consider-

ably as a result of endlessly endured suffering and the vastly increased power of revolutionary protest.

The time itself provides the immeasurable inner force which, as spirit and destruction, desire and rage, presses chaotically forward towards change or downfall. The greatest part of this force is dissipated by internal conflict with the accepted norms and is pent up in the unconscious. *Whatever stands ready in this area of the repressed-the innate, eternal values as well as the regenerating forces of this transitional period- we are in a position today to make available to resolute utilization.* This we have finally attained as our hope and our responsibility to all other times; it is a task that requires unceasing effort and devoted attention to detail. Above all, primary importance must be accorded it in our *educational system so that we can find the way to the psyche of each individual human being.* And it must be carried through without restraints, by accepting all consequences, and with the full awareness of the *absolute, irreconcilable opposition to everything and anything that today in the name of authority, institution, power and custom, stands in the way of the fulfillment of mankind.*

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Otto Gross  
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