

FREUD

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A SPECIAL TYPE OF CHOICE OF
OBJECT MADE BY MEN
(CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF LOVE I)
(1910)

FREUD

EDITOR'S NOTE
BEITRÄGE ZUR PSYCHOLOGIE DES
LIEBESLEBENS I
ÜBER EINEN BESONDEREN TYPUS DER
OBJEKTAHL BEIM MANNE

(A) GERMAN EDITIONS:

- 1910 *Jb. psychoan. psychopath. Forsch.*, 2 (2), 389-97. ('Beiträge zur Psychologie des Liebeslebens' I.)
1918 *S.K.S.N.*, 4, 200-212. (2nd ed. 1922.)
1924 *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5, 186-97.
1924 *In Beiträge zur Psychologie des Liebeslebens*, Leipzig, Vienna and Zurich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag. (Pp. 3-14.)
1931 *Sexualtheorie und Traumlehre*, 69-80.
1943 *Gesammelte Werke*, 8, 66-77.

(B) ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS:

- 'Contributions to the Psychology of Love:
A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men'
1925 *Collected Papers*, 4, 192-202. (Tr. Joan Riviere.)
1957 *Standard Edition*, II, 163-75. (Tr. Alan Tyson.)

The present edition is a corrected reprint of the *Standard Edition* version, with a few editorial changes.

This and the two following papers, though they were written and published over a period of some years, were brought together by Freud in the fourth series of his shorter papers

(*Sammlung kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*, 4, 1918) under the collective title printed above. We learn from Ernest Jones (1955, 333) that Freud had announced his intention of writing some such work at a meeting of the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society on 28 November 1906. The gist of the present paper was given before the same society on 19 May 1909, and discussed a week later. But it was not actually written until the early summer of the following year.

A SPECIAL TYPE OF CHOICE OF OBJECT MADE BY MEN

(CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF LOVE I)

UP till now we have left it to the creative writer to depict for us the 'necessary conditions for loving' which govern people's choice of an object, and the way in which they bring the demands of their imagination into harmony with reality. The writer can indeed draw on certain qualities which fit him to carry out such a task: above all, on a sensitivity that enables him to perceive the hidden impulses in the minds of other people, and the courage to let his own unconscious speak. But there is one circumstance which lessens the evidential value of what he has to say. Writers are under the necessity to produce intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, as well as certain emotional effects. For this reason they cannot reproduce the stuff of reality unchanged, but must isolate portions of it, remove disturbing associations, tone down the whole and fill in what is missing. These are the privileges of what is known as 'poetic licence'. Moreover they can show only slight interest in the origin and development of the mental states which they portray in their completed form. In consequence it becomes inevitable that science should concern herself with the same materials whose treatment by artists has given enjoyment to mankind for thousands of years, though her touch must be clumsier and the yield of pleasure less. These observations will, it may be hoped, serve to justify us in extending a strictly scientific treatment to the field of human love. Science is, after all, the most complete renunciation of the pleasure principle of which our mental activity is capable.

In the course of psychoanalytic treatment there are ample opportunities for collecting impressions of the way in which neurotics behave in love; while at the same time we can recall having observed or heard of similar behaviour in people of average health or even in those with outstanding qualities. When the material happens to be favourable and thus leads to an accumulation of such impressions, distinct types emerge more clearly. I will begin here with a description of one such type of object-choice – which occurs in men – since it is characterized by a number of ‘necessary conditions for loving’ whose combination is unintelligible, and indeed bewildering, and since it admits of a simple explanation on psychoanalytic lines.

(1) The first of these preconditions for loving can be described as positively specific: wherever it is found, the presence of the other characteristics of this type may be looked for. It may be termed the precondition that there should be ‘an injured third party’; it stipulates that the person in question shall never choose as his love-object a woman who is disengaged – that is, an unmarried girl or an unattached married woman – but only one to whom another man can claim right of possession as her husband, fiancé or friend. In some cases this precondition proves so cogent that a woman can be ignored, or even rejected, so long as she does not belong to any man, but becomes the object of passionate feelings immediately she comes into one of these relationships with another man.

(2) The second precondition is perhaps a less constant one, but it is no less striking. It has to be found in conjunction with the first for the type to be realized, whereas the first precondition seems very often to occur independently as well. This second precondition is to the effect that a woman who is chaste and whose reputation is irreproachable never exercises an attraction that might raise her to the status of a love-object, but only a woman who is in some way or other of bad repute sexually, whose fidelity and reliability are open to some doubt.

This latter characteristic may vary within substantial limits, from the faint breath of scandal attaching to a married woman who is not averse to a flirtation up to the openly promiscuous way of life of a *cocotte* or of an adept in the art of love; but the men who belong to our type will not be satisfied without something of the kind. This second necessary condition may be termed, rather crudely, ‘love for a prostitute’.

While the first precondition provides an opportunity for gratifying impulses of rivalry and hostility directed at the man from whom the loved woman is wrested, the second one, that of the woman’s being like a prostitute, is connected with the experiencing of *jealousy*, which appears to be a necessity for lovers of this type. It is only when they are able to be jealous that their passion reaches its height and the woman acquires her full value, and they never fail to seize on an occasion that allows them to experience these most powerful emotions. What is strange is that it is not the lawful possessor of the loved one who becomes the target of this jealousy, but strangers, making their appearance for the first time, in relation to whom the loved one can be brought under suspicion. In glaring instances the lover shows no wish for exclusive possession of the woman and seems to be perfectly comfortable in the triangular situation. One of my patients, who had been made to suffer terribly by his lady’s escapades, had no objection to her getting married, and did all he could to bring it about; in the years that followed he never showed a trace of jealousy towards her husband. Another typical patient had, it is true, been very jealous of the husband in his first love affair, and had forced the lady to stop having marital relations; but in his numerous subsequent affairs he behaved like the other members of this type and no longer regarded the lawful husband as an interference.

So much for the conditions required in the love-object. The following points describe the lover’s behaviour towards the object he has chosen.

(3) In normal love the woman’s value is measured by her

sexual integrity, and is reduced by any approach to the characteristic of being like a prostitute.¹ Hence the fact that women with this characteristic are considered by men of our type to be *love-objects of the highest value* seems to be a striking departure from the normal. Their love-relationships with these women are carried on with the highest expenditure of mental energy, to the exclusion of all other interests; they are felt as the only people whom it is possible to love, and the demand for fidelity which the lover makes upon himself is repeated again and again, however often it may be broken in reality. These features of the love-relationships which I am here describing show their *compulsive* nature very clearly, though that is something which is found up to a certain degree whenever anyone falls in love. But the fidelity and intensity that mark the attachment must not lead one to expect that a single love-relationship of this kind will make up the whole erotic life of the person in question or occur only once in it. On the contrary, passionate attachments of this sort are repeated with the same peculiarities – each an exact replica of the others – again and again in the lives of men of this type; in fact, owing to external events such as changes of residence and environment, the love-objects may replace one another so frequently that a *long series of them is formed*.

(4) What is most startling of all to the observer in lovers of this type is the urge they show to 'rescue' the woman they love. The man is convinced that she is in need of him, that without him she would lose all moral control and rapidly sink to a lamentable level. He rescues her, therefore, by not giving her up. In some individual cases the idea of having to rescue her can be justified by reference to her sexual unreliability and the dangers of her social position: but it is no less

1. [The German '*Dime*', here and in several other passages in this paper, is not well rendered by 'prostitute', which in English lays too much stress on the monetary side of the relation. 'Harlot' would give the sense better, if the word had not today acquired an antiquated and even Biblical colouring.]

conspicuous where there is no such basis in reality. One man of the type I am describing, who knew how to win his ladies by clever methods of seduction and subtle arguments, spared no efforts in the subsequent course of these affairs to keep the woman he was for the time being in love with on the path of 'virtue' by presenting her with tracts of his own composition.

If we survey the different features of the picture presented here – the conditions imposed on the man that his loved one should not be unattached and should be like a prostitute, the high value he sets on her, his need for feeling jealousy, his fidelity, which is nevertheless compatible with being broken down into a long series of instances, and the urge to rescue the woman – it will seem scarcely probable that they should all be derived from a single source. Yet psychoanalytic exploration into the life-histories of men of this type has no difficulty in showing that there is such a single source. The object-choice which is so strangely conditioned, and this very singular way of behaving in love, have the same psychical origin as we find in the loves of normal people. They are derived from the infantile fixation of tender feelings on the mother, and represent one of the consequences of that fixation. In normal love only a few characteristics survive which reveal unmistakably the maternal prototype of the object-choice, as, for instance, the preference shown by young men for maturer women; the detachment of libido from the mother has been effected relatively swiftly. In our type, on the other hand, the libido has remained attached to the mother for so long, even after the onset of puberty, that the maternal characteristics remain stamped on the love-objects that are chosen later, and all these turn into easily recognizable mother-surrogates. The comparison with the way in which the skull of a newly born child is shaped¹ springs to mind at this point: after a protracted labour it always takes the form of a cast of the narrow part of the mother's pelvis.

1. [In the editions before 1924 this read 'deformed'.]

We have now to show the plausibility of our assertion that the characteristic features of our type – its conditions for loving and its behaviour in love – do in fact arise from the psychical constellation connected with the mother. This would seem to be easiest where the first precondition is concerned – the condition that the woman should not be unattached, or that there should be an injured third party. It is at once clear that for the child who is growing up in the family circle the fact of the mother belonging to the father becomes an inseparable part of the mother's essence, and that the injured third party is none other than the father himself. The trait of overvaluing the loved one, and regarding her as unique and irreplaceable, can be seen to fall just as naturally into the context of the child's experience, for no one possesses more than one mother, and the relation to her is based on an event that is not open to any doubt and cannot be repeated.

If we are to understand the love-objects chosen by our type as being above all mother-surrogates, then the formation of a series of them, which seems so flatly to contradict the condition of being faithful to one, can now also be understood. We have learnt from psychoanalysis in other examples that the notion of something irreplaceable, when it is active in the unconscious, frequently appears as broken up into an endless series: endless for the reason that every surrogate nevertheless fails to provide the desired satisfaction. This is the explanation of the insatiable urge to ask questions shown by children at a certain age: they have one single question to ask, but it never crosses their lips.¹ It explains, too, the garrulity of some people affected by neurosis; they are under the pressure of a secret which is burning to be disclosed but which, despite all temptation, they never reveal.

On the other hand the second precondition for loving – the condition that the object chosen should be like a prostitute – seems energetically to oppose a derivation from the mother-

1. [This point is also made by Freud in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci (1910c), near the end of Chapter I.]

complex. The adult's conscious thought likes to regard his mother as a person of unimpeachable moral purity; and there are few ideas which he finds so offensive when they come from others, or feels as so tormenting when they spring from his own mind, as one which calls this aspect of his mother in question. This very relation of the sharpest contrast between 'mother' and 'prostitute' will however encourage us to enquire into the history of the development of these two complexes and the unconscious relation between them, since we long ago discovered that what, in the conscious, is found split into a pair of opposites often occurs in the unconscious as a unity.¹ Investigation then leads us back to the time in a boy's life at which he first gains a more or less complete knowledge of the sexual relations between adults, somewhere about the years of pre-puberty. Brutal pieces of information, which are undisguisedly intended to arouse contempt and rebelliousness, now acquaint him with the secret of sexual life and destroy the authority of adults, which appears incompatible with the revelation of their sexual activities. The aspect of these disclosures which affects the newly initiated child most strongly is the way in which they apply to his own parents. This application is often flatly rejected by him, in some such words as these: 'Your parents and other people may do something like that with one another, but my parents can't possibly do it.'²

As an almost invariable corollary to this 'sexual enlightenment', the boy at the same time gains a knowledge of the existence of certain women who practise sexual intercourse as a means of livelihood, and who are for this reason held in general contempt. The boy himself is necessarily far from feeling this contempt: as soon as he learns that he too can be initiated by these unfortunates into sexual life, which till then

1. [This fact had already been hinted at in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *P.F.L.*, 4, 429f., and explicitly mentioned in Chapter VI of his book on jokes (1905c), *P.F.L.*, 6, 231ff.]

2. [Cf. the last paragraph of Freud's paper on the sexual theories of children (1908c), p. 204 above.]

he accepted as being reserved exclusively for 'grown-ups', he regards them only with a mixture of longing and horror. When after this he can no longer maintain the doubt which makes his parents an exception to the universal and odious norms of sexual activity, he tells himself with cynical logic that the difference between his mother and a whore is not after all so very great, since basically they do the same thing. The enlightening information he has received has in fact awakened the memory-traces of the impressions and wishes of his early infancy, and these have led to a reactivation in him of certain mental impulses. He begins to desire his mother herself in the sense with which he has recently become acquainted, and to hate his father anew as a rival who stands in the way of this wish; he comes, as we say, under the dominance of the Oedipus complex.¹ He does not forgive his mother for having granted the favour of sexual intercourse not to himself but to his father, and he regards it as an act of unfaithfulness. If these impulses do not quickly pass, there is no outlet for them other than to run their course in phantasies which have as their subject his mother's sexual activities under the most diverse circumstances; and the consequent tension leads particularly readily to his finding relief in masturbation. As a result of the constant combined operation of the two driving forces, desire and thirst for revenge, phantasies of his mother's unfaithfulness are by far the most preferred; the lover with whom she commits her act of infidelity almost always exhibits the features of the boy's own ego, or more accurately, of his own idealized personality, grown up and so raised to a level with his father. What I have elsewhere² described as the 'family romance' comprises the manifold ramifications of

1. [This appears to be Freud's first published use of the actual term. The concept had, of course, long been familiar to him, and he had already spoken of the 'nuclear complex', e.g. in the paper referred to in the last footnote, see above, p. 192 and n. 1.]

2. In [a discussion included in] Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909) [Freud (1909c), p. 221ff. above].

this imaginative activity and the way in which they are interwoven with various egoistic interests of this period of life.

Now that we have gained an insight into this piece of mental development we can no longer regard it as contradictory and incomprehensible that the precondition of the loved one's being like a prostitute should derive directly from the mother-complex. The type of male love which we have described bears the traces of this evolution and is simple to understand as a fixation on the phantasies formed by the boy in puberty - phantasies which have later after all found a way out into real life. There is no difficulty in assuming that the masturbation assiduously practised in the years of puberty has played its part in the fixation of the phantasies.

To these phantasies which have succeeded in dominating the man's love in real life, the urge to *rescue* the loved one seems to bear merely a loose and superficial relation, and one that is fully accounted for by conscious reasons. By her propensity to be fickle and unfaithful the loved one brings herself into dangerous situations, and thus it is understandable that the lover should be at pains to protect her from these dangers by watching over her virtue and counteracting her bad inclinations. However, the study of people's screen-memories, phantasies and nocturnal dreams shows that we have here a particularly felicitous 'rationalization' of an unconscious motive, a process which may be compared to a successful secondary revision of a dream. In actual fact the 'rescue-motif' has a meaning and history of its own, and is an independent derivative of the mother-complex, or more accurately, of the parental complex. When a child hears that he *owes his life* to his parents, or that his mother *gave him life*, his feelings of tenderness unite with impulses which strive at power and independence, and they generate the wish to return this gift to the parents and to repay them with one of equal value. It is as though the boy's defiance were to make him say: 'I want nothing from my father; I will give him back all I have cost him.' He then forms the phantasy of *rescuing his father from*

danger and saving his life; in this way he puts his account square with him. This phantasy is commonly enough displaced on to the emperor, king or some other great man; after being thus distorted it becomes admissible to consciousness, and may even be made use of by creative writers. In its application to a boy's father it is the defiant meaning in the idea of rescuing which is by far the most important; where his mother is concerned it is usually its tender meaning. The mother gave the child life, and it is not easy to find a substitute of equal value for this unique gift. With a slight change of meaning, such as is easily effected in the unconscious and is comparable to the way in which in consciousness concepts shade into one another, rescuing his mother takes on the significance of giving her a child or making a child for her – needless to say, one like himself. This is not too remote from the original sense of rescuing, and the change in meaning is not an arbitrary one. His mother gave him a life – his own life – and in exchange he gives her another life, that of a child which has the greatest resemblance to himself. The son shows his gratitude by wishing to have by his mother a son who is like himself: in other words, in the rescue-phantasy he is completely identifying himself with his father. All his instincts, those of tenderness, gratitude, lustfulness, defiance and independence, find satisfaction in the single wish *to be his own father*. Even the element of danger has not been lost in the change of meaning; for the act of birth itself is the danger from which he was saved by his mother's efforts. Birth is both the first of all dangers to life and the prototype of all the later ones that cause us to feel anxiety, and the experience of birth has probably left behind in us the expression of affect which we call anxiety. Macduff of the Scottish legend, who was not born of his mother but ripped from her womb, was for that reason unacquainted with anxiety.¹

1. [*Macbeth*, V, 7. This is Freud's first extended allusion to the relation between birth and anxiety. He dealt with it again at some length near the beginning of Lecture XXV, of the *Introductory Lectures* (1916-17), *P.F.L.*, I, 444-5. But his longest discussion of it will, of

Artemidorus, the dream-interpreter of antiquity, was certainly right in maintaining that the meaning of a dream depends on who the dreamer happens to be.² Under the laws governing the expression of unconscious thoughts, the meaning of rescuing may vary, depending on whether the author of the phantasy is a man or a woman. It can equally mean (in a man) making a child, i.e. causing it to be born, or (in a woman) giving birth oneself to a child. These various meanings of rescuing in dreams and phantasies can be recognized particularly clearly when they are found in connection with water. A man rescuing a woman from the water in a dream means that he makes her a mother, which in the light of the preceding discussion amounts to making her his own mother. A woman rescuing someone else (a child) from the water acknowledges herself in this way as the mother who bore him, like Pharaoh's daughter in the legend of Moses (Rank, 1909). At times there is also a tender meaning contained in rescue-phantasies directed towards the father. In such cases they aim at expressing the subject's wish to have his father as a son – that is, to have a son who is like his father.³

It is on account of all these connections between the rescue-motif and the parental complex that the urge to rescue the loved one forms an important feature of the type of loving which I have been discussing.

I do not feel that it is necessary for me to justify my method of work on this subject; as in my presentation of anal erotism [*Freud* (1908*b*), see above, p. 209ff.], so here too I have in the first place aimed at singling out from the observational

course, be found in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926*d*), especially in Chapters II, VIII and XI, A (b), where his former opinions are largely revised.]

1. [Cf. a passage in Chapter II of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900*a*), and a footnote to it added in 1914, *P.F.L.*, 4, 171 and n. 2.]

2. [Dreams of rescuing are mentioned in a paragraph added in 1911 to Chapter VI (E) of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *P.F.L.*, 4, 529.]

material extreme and sharply defined types. In both cases we find a far greater number of individuals in whom only a few features of the type can be recognized, or only features which are not distinctly marked, and it is obvious that a proper appreciation of these types will not be possible until the whole context to which they belong has been explored.¹

1. [In a paper (1920^d) written many years after the present one, Freud demonstrated the occurrence of precisely the same type of object-choice in a homosexual girl.]

ON THE UNIVERSAL TENDENCY
TO DEBASEMENT IN THE SPHERE
OF LOVE
(CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF LOVE II)
(1912)

EDITOR'S NOTE

BEITRÄGE ZUR PSYCHOLOGIE DES
LIEBESLEBENS II

ÜBER DIE ALLGEMEINSTE ERNIEDRIGUNG DES
LIEBESLEBENS

(A) GERMAN EDITIONS:

- 1912 *Jh. psychoan. psychopath. Forsch.*, 4 (1), 40-50. ('Beiträge zur Psychologie des Liebeslebens' II.)
1918 S.K.S.N., 4, 213-28. (2nd ed. 1922.)
1924 *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5, 198-211.
1924 In *Beiträge zur Psychologie des Liebeslebens*, Leipzig, Vienna and Zurich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag. (Pp. 15-28.)
1931 *Sexualtheorie und Traumlehre*, 80-95.
1943 *Gesammelte Werke*, 8, 78-91.

(B) ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS:

- 'Contributions to the Psychology of Love:
The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life'
1925 *Collected Papers*, 4, 203-16. (Tr. Joan Riviere.)
1957 *Standard Edition*, II, 177-90. (Tr., with a different title 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love', Alan Tyson.)

The present edition is a corrected reprint of the *Standard Edition* version, with some editorial changes.

The discussion of the two sexual currents in the earlier part of the present paper is in effect a supplement to the *Three Essays*

(1905*d*), in the 1915 edition of which, indeed, a short summary of it was included (see p. 119 above). The analysis of psychical impotence, which occupies the central section of the paper, is Freud's principal contribution to that topic. The last part of the paper is one of the long series of his elaborations of the theme of the antagonism between civilization and instinctual life. His fullest arguments on the subject will be found in the paper on "'Civilized" Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness' (1908*d*) and in the very much later *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930*a*).

ON THE UNIVERSAL TENDENCY TO DEBASEMENT IN THE SPHERE OF LOVE

(CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF LOVE II)

I

If the practising psychoanalyst asks himself on account of what disorder people most often come to him for help, he is bound to reply – disregarding the many forms of anxiety – that it is psychical impotence. This singular disturbance affects men of strongly libidinous¹ natures, and manifests itself in a refusal by the executive organs of sexuality to carry out the sexual act, although before and after they may show themselves to be intact and capable of performing the act, and although a strong psychical inclination to carry it out is present. The first clue to understanding his condition is obtained by the sufferer himself on making the discovery that a failure of this kind only arises when the attempt is made with certain individuals; whereas with others there is never any question of such a failure. He now becomes aware that it is some feature of the sexual object which gives rise to the inhibition of his male potency, and sometimes he reports that he has a feeling of an obstacle inside him, the sensation of a counter-will which successfully interferes with his conscious intention. However, he is unable to guess what this internal obstacle is and what feature of the sexual object brings it into operation. If he has had repeated experience of a failure of this kind, he is likely, by the familiar process of 'erroneous connection', to decide that the recollection of the first occasion evoked the disturbing anxiety-idea

1. ['*Libidinös*']. Here 'libidinous', as contrasted with the technical 'libidinal'.]

and so caused the failure to be repeated each time; while he derives the first occasion itself from some 'accidental' impression.

Psychoanalytic studies of psychical impotence have already been carried out and published by several writers.¹ Every analyst can confirm the explanations provided by them from his own clinical experience. It is in fact a question of the inhibitory influence of certain psychical complexes which are withdrawn from the subject's knowledge. An incestuous fixation on mother or sister, which has never been surmounted, plays a prominent part in this pathogenic material and is its most universal content. In addition there is the influence to be considered of accidental distressing impressions connected with infantile sexual activity, and also those factors which in a general way reduce the libido that is to be directed on to the female sexual object.²

When striking cases of psychical impotence are exhaustively investigated by means of psychoanalysis, the following information is obtained about the psychosexual processes at work in them. Here again – as very probably in all neurotic disturbances – the foundation of the disorder is provided by an inhibition in the developmental history of the libido before it assumes the form which we take to be its normal termination. Two currents whose union is necessary to ensure a completely normal attitude in love have, in the cases we are considering, failed to combine. These two may be distinguished as the *affectionate* and the *sensual* current.

The affectionate current is the older of the two. It springs from the earliest years of childhood; it is formed on the basis of the interests of the self-preservative instinct and is directed to the members of the family and those who look after the child. From the very beginning it carries along with it contributions from the sexual instincts – components of erotic interest – which can already be seen more or less clearly even

1. Steiner (1907), Stekel (1908), Ferenczi (1908). [Freud had written a preface to Stekel's book (Freud, 1908f).]

2. Stekel (1908, 191ff.).

in childhood and in any event are uncovered in neurotics by psychoanalysis later on. It corresponds to *the child's primary object-choice*. We learn in this way that the sexual instincts find their first objects by attaching themselves to the valuations made by the ego-instincts, precisely in the way in which the first sexual satisfactions are experienced in attachment to the bodily functions necessary for the preservation of life.¹ The 'affection' shown by the child's parents and those who look after him, which seldom fails to betray its erotic nature ('the child is an erotic plaything'), does a very great deal to raise the contributions made by eroticism to the cathexes of his ego-instincts, and to increase them to an amount which is bound to play a part in his later development, especially when certain other circumstances lend their support.

These affectionate fixations of the child persist throughout childhood, and continually carry along with them eroticism, which is consequently diverted from its sexual aims. Then at the age of puberty they are joined by the powerful 'sensual' current which no longer mistakes its aims. It never fails, apparently, to follow the earlier paths and to cathect the objects of the primary infantile choice with quotas of libido that are now far stronger. Here, however, it runs up against the obstacles that have been erected in the meantime by the barrier against incest; consequently it will make efforts to pass on from these objects which are unsuitable in reality, and find a way as soon as possible to other, extraneous objects with which a real sexual life may be carried on. These new objects will still be chosen on the model (*imago*²) of the infantile ones, but in the course of time they will attract to themselves the affection

1. [The 'attachment' (or 'anaclitic') type of object-choice was discussed more fully in Freud's later paper on narcissism (1914c).]

2. [This term was not often used by Freud, especially in his later writings. He attributed it to Jung (1911, 164), in which passage Jung in turn says he partly chose the word from the title of a novel by the Swiss writer Carl Spitteler. The psychoanalytic journal *Imago* also owed its title to the same source, according to its co-founder, Hanns Sachs (1945, 63).]

that was tied to the earlier ones. A man shall leave his father and his mother – according to the biblical command – and shall cleave unto his wife; affection and sensuality are then united. The greatest intensity of sensual passion will bring with it the highest psychical valuation of the object – this being the normal overvaluation of the sexual object on the part of a man.

Two factors will decide whether this advance in the developmental path of the libido is to fail. First, there is the amount of *frustration in reality* which opposes the new object-choice and reduces its value for the person concerned. There is after all no point in embarking upon an object-choice if no choice is to be allowed at all or if there is no prospect of being able to choose anything suitable. Secondly, there is the amount of *attraction* which the infantile objects that have to be relinquished are able to exercise, and which is in proportion to the erotic cathexis attaching to them in childhood. If these two factors are sufficiently strong, the general mechanism by which the neuroses are formed comes into operation. The libido turns away from reality, is taken over by imaginative activity (the process of introversion), strengthens the images of the first sexual objects and becomes fixated to them. The obstacle raised against incest, however, compels the libido that has turned to these objects to remain in the unconscious. The masturbatory activity carried out by the sensual current, which is now part of the unconscious, makes its own contribution in strengthening this fixation. Nothing is altered in this state of affairs if the advance which has miscarried in reality is now completed in phantasy, and if in the phantasy-situations that lead to masturbatory satisfaction the original sexual objects are replaced by different ones. As a result of this substitution the phantasies become admissible to consciousness, but no progress is made in the allocation of the libido in reality. In this way it can happen that the whole of a young man's sensuality becomes tied to incestuous objects in the unconscious, or to put it another way, becomes fixated to unconscious incestuous

phantasies. The result is then total impotence, which is perhaps further ensured by the simultaneous onset of an actual weakening of the organs that perform the sexual act.

Less severe conditions are required to bring about the state known specifically as psychical impotence. Here the fate of the sensual current must not be that its whole charge has to conceal itself behind the affectionate current; it must have remained sufficiently strong or uninhibited to secure a partial outlet into reality. The sexual activity of such people shows the clearest signs, however, that it has not the whole psychical driving force of the instinct behind it. It is capricious, easily disturbed, often not properly carried out, and not accompanied by much pleasure. But above all it is forced to avoid the affectionate current. A restriction has thus been placed on object-choice. The sensual current that has remained active seeks only objects which do not recall the incestuous figures forbidden to it; if someone makes an impression that might lead to a high psychical estimation of her, this impression does not find an issue in any sensual excitation but in affection which has no erotic effect. The whole sphere of love in such people remains divided in the two directions personified in art as sacred and profane (or animal) love. Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love. They seek objects which they do not need to love, in order to keep their sensuality away from the objects they love; and, in accordance with the laws of 'complexive sensitiveness'¹ and of the return of the repressed, the strange failure shown in psychical impotence makes its appearance whenever an object which has been chosen with the aim of avoiding incest recalls the prohibited object through some feature, often an inconspicuous one.

The main protective measure against such a disturbance which men have recourse to in this split in their love consists in a *psychical debasement* of the sexual object, the overvaluation

1. [This term is borrowed from Jung's word-association experiments (Jung, 1906, 1909).]

that normally attaches to the sexual object being reserved for the incestuous object and its representatives. As soon as the condition of debasement is fulfilled, sensuality can be freely expressed, and important sexual capacities and a high degree of pleasure can develop. There is a further factor which contributes to this result. People in whom there has not been a proper confluence of the affectionate and the sensual currents do not usually show much refinement in their modes of behaviour in love; they have retained perverse sexual aims whose non-fulfilment is felt as a serious loss of pleasure, and whose fulfilment on the other hand seems possible only with a debased and despised sexual object.

We can now understand the motives behind the boy's phantasies mentioned in the first of these 'Contributions' (above, p. 238), which degrade the mother to the level of a prostitute. They are efforts to bridge the gulf between the two currents in love, at any rate in phantasy, and by debasing the mother to acquire her as an object of sensuality.

2

In the preceding section we have approached the study of psychical impotence from a medico-psychological angle of which the title of this paper gives no indication. It will however become clear that this introduction was required by us to provide an approach to our proper subject.

We have reduced psychical impotence to the failure of the affectionate and the sensual currents in love to combine, and this developmental inhibition has in turn been explained as being due to the influences of strong childhood fixations and of later frustration in reality through the intervention of the barrier against incest. There is one principal objection to the theory we advance; it does too much. It explains why certain people suffer from psychical impotence, but it leaves us with the apparent mystery of how others have been able to escape this disorder. Since we must recognize that all the relevant

factors known to us – the strong childhood fixation, the incest-barrier and the frustration in the years of development after puberty – are to be found in practically all civilized human beings, we should be justified in expecting psychical impotence to be a universal affliction under civilization and not a disorder confined to some individuals.

It would be easy to escape from this conclusion by pointing to the quantitative factor in the causation of illness – to the greater or lesser extent of the contribution made by the various elements which determine whether a recognizable illness results or not. But although I accept this answer as correct, it is not my intention to make it a reason for rejecting the conclusion itself. On the contrary, I shall put forward the view that psychical impotence is much more widespread than is supposed, and that a certain amount of this behaviour does in fact characterize the love of civilized man.

If the concept of psychical impotence is broadened and is not restricted to failure to perform the act of coitus in circumstances where a desire to obtain pleasure is present and the genital apparatus is intact, we may in the first place add all those men who are described as psychanaesthetic: men who never fail in the act but who carry it out without getting any particular pleasure from it – a state of affairs that is more common than one would think. Psychoanalytic examination of such cases discloses the same aetiological factors as we found in psychical impotence in the narrower sense, without at first arriving at any explanation of the difference between their symptoms. An easily justifiable analogy takes one from these anaesthetic men to the immense number of frigid women; and there is no better way to describe or understand their behaviour in love than by comparing it with the more conspicuous disorder of psychical impotence in men.¹

1. I am at the same time very willing to admit that frigidity in women is a complex subject which can also be approached from another angle. [The question is examined at length in 'The Taboo of Virginity' (1918a), p. 274ff. below.]

If however we turn our attention not to an extension of the concept of psychical impotence, but to the gradations in its symptomatology, we cannot escape the conclusion that the behaviour in love of men in the civilized world today bears the stamp altogether of psychical impotence. There are only a very few educated people in whom the two currents of affection and sensuality have become properly fused; the man almost always feels his respect for the woman acting as a restriction on his sexual activity, and only develops full potency when he is with a debased sexual object; and this in its turn is partly caused by the entrance of perverse components into his sexual aims, which he does not venture to satisfy with a woman he respects. He is assured of complete sexual pleasure only when he can devote himself unreservedly to obtaining satisfaction, which with his well-brought-up wife, for instance, he does not dare to do. This is the source of his need for a debased sexual object, a woman who is ethically inferior, to whom he need attribute no aesthetic scruples, who does not know him in his other social relations and cannot judge him in them. It is to such a woman that he prefers to devote his sexual potency, even when the whole of his affection belongs to a woman of a higher kind. It is possible, too, that the tendency so often observed in men of the highest classes of society to choose a woman of a lower class as a permanent mistress or even as a wife is nothing but a consequence of their need for a debased sexual object, to whom, psychologically, the possibility of complete satisfaction is linked.

I do not hesitate to make the two factors at work in psychical impotence in the strict sense – the factors of intense incestuous fixation in childhood and the frustration by reality in adolescence – responsible, too, for this extremely common characteristic of the love of civilized men. It sounds not only disagreeable but also paradoxical, yet it must nevertheless be said that anyone who is to be really free and happy in love must have surmounted his respect for women and have come

to terms with the idea of incest with his mother or sister. Anyone who subjects himself to a serious self-examination on the subject of this requirement will be sure to find that he regards the sexual act basically as something degrading, which defiles and pollutes not only the body. The origin of this low opinion, which he will certainly not willingly acknowledge, must be looked for in the period of his youth in which the sensual current in him was already strongly developed but its satisfaction with an object outside the family was almost as completely prohibited as it was with an incestuous one.

In our civilized world women are under the influence of a similar after-effect of their upbringing, and, in addition, of their reaction to men's behaviour. It is naturally just as unfavourable for a woman if a man approaches her without his full potency as it is if his initial overvaluation of her when he is in love gives place to undervaluation after he has possessed her. In the case of women there is little sign of a need to debase their sexual object. This is no doubt connected with the absence in them as a rule of anything similar to the sexual overvaluation found in men. But their long holding back from sexuality and the lingering of their sensuality in phantasy has another important consequence for them. They are subsequently often unable to undo the connection between sensual activity and the prohibition, and prove to be psychically impotent, that is, frigid, when such activity is at last allowed them. This is the origin of the endeavour made by many women to keep even legitimate relations secret for a while; and of the capacity of other women for normal sensation as soon as the condition of prohibition is re-established by a secret love affair: unfaithful to their husband, they are able to keep a second order of faith with their lover [cf. 'The Taboo of Virginity', p. 276 below].

The condition of forbiddensness in the erotic life of women is, I think, comparable to the need on the part of men to debase their sexual object. Both are consequences of the long period of delay, which is demanded by education for cultural

reasons, between sexual maturity and sexual activity. Both aim at abolishing the psychical impotence that results from the failure of affectionate and sensual impulses to coalesce. That the effect of the same causes should be so different in men and in women may perhaps be traced to another difference in the behaviour of the two sexes. Civilized women do not usually transgress the prohibition on sexual activity in the period during which they have to wait, and thus they acquire the intimate connection between prohibition and sexuality. Men usually break through this prohibition if they can satisfy the condition of debasing the object, and so they carry on this condition into their love in later life.

In view of the strenuous efforts being made in the civilized world today to reform sexual life, it will not be superfluous to give a reminder that psychoanalytic research is as remote from tendentiousness as any other kind of research. It has no other end in view than to throw light on things by tracing what is manifest back to what is hidden. It is quite satisfied if reforms make use of its findings to replace what is injurious by something more advantageous; but it cannot predict whether other institutions may not result in other, and perhaps graver, sacrifices.

3

The fact that the curb put upon love by civilization involves a universal tendency to debase sexual objects will perhaps lead us to turn our attention from the object to the instincts themselves. The damage caused by the initial frustration of sexual pleasure is seen in the fact that the freedom later given to that pleasure in marriage does not bring full satisfaction. But at the same time, if sexual freedom is unrestricted from the outset the result is no better. It can easily be shown that the psychical value of erotic needs is reduced as soon as their satisfaction becomes easy. An obstacle is required in order to heighten libido; and where natural resistances to satisfaction have not

been sufficient men have at all times erected conventional ones so as to be able to enjoy love. This is true both of individuals and of nations. In times in which there were no difficulties standing in the way of sexual satisfaction, such as perhaps during the decline of the ancient civilizations, love became worthless and life empty, and strong reaction-formations were required to restore indispensable affective values. In this connection it may be claimed that the ascetic current in Christianity created psychical values for love which pagan antiquity was never able to confer on it. This current assumed its greatest importance with the ascetic monks, whose lives were almost entirely occupied with the struggle against libidinal temptation.

One's first inclination is no doubt to trace back the difficulties revealed here to universal characteristics of our organic instincts. It is no doubt also true in general that the psychical importance of an instinct rises in proportion to its frustration. Suppose a number of totally different human beings were all equally exposed to hunger. As their imperative need for food mounted, all the individual differences would disappear and in their place one would see the uniform manifestations of the one unappeased instinct. But is it also true that with the satisfaction of an instinct its psychical value always falls just as sharply? Consider, for example, the relation of a drinker to wine. Is it not true that wine always provides the drinker with the same toxic satisfaction, which in poetry has so often been compared to erotic satisfaction – a comparison acceptable from the scientific point of view as well? Has one ever heard of the drinker being obliged constantly to change his drink because he soon grows tired of keeping to the same one? On the contrary, habit constantly tightens the bond between a man and the kind of wine he drinks. Does one ever hear of a drinker who needs to go to a country where wine is dearer or drinking is prohibited, so that by introducing obstacles he can reinforce the dwindling satisfaction that he obtains? Not at all. If we listen to what our great alcoholics, such as

Böcklin,¹ say about their relation to wine, it sounds like the most perfect harmony, a model of a happy marriage. Why is the relation of the lover to his sexual object so very different?

It is my belief that, however strange it may sound, we must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realization of complete satisfaction. If we consider the long and difficult developmental history of the instinct, two factors immediately spring to mind which might be made responsible for this difficulty. Firstly, as a result of the diphasic onset of object-choice, and the interposition of the barrier against incest, the final object or the sexual instinct is never any longer the original object but only a surrogate for it. Psychoanalysis has shown us that when the original object of a wishful impulse has been lost as a result of repression, it is frequently represented by an endless series of substitute objects none of which, however, brings full satisfaction. This may explain the inconsistency in object-choice, the 'craving for stimulation'² which is so often a feature of the love of adults.

Secondly, we know that the sexual instinct is originally divided into a great number of components – or rather, it develops out of them – some of which cannot be taken up into the instinct in its later form, but have at an earlier stage to be suppressed or put to other uses. These above all the coprophilic instinctual components, which have proved incompatible with our aesthetic standards of culture, probably since, as a result of our adopting an erect gait, we raised our organ of smell from the ground.³ The same is true of a large portion of the sadistic urges which are a part of erotic life. But all such developmental processes affect only the upper layers of the

1. Floerke (1902, 16).

2. ['*Reizhunger*']. This term seems to have been introduced by Hoche and Bloch. See Freud's *Three Essays* (1905f), p. 63 n. 2 above.]

3. [Cf. two long footnotes to Chapter IV of *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930g), in which this idea is explored in greater detail.]

complex structure. The fundamental processes which produce erotic excitation remain unaltered. The excremental is all too intimately and inseparably bound up with the sexual; the position of the genitals – *inter urinas et faeces* – remains the decisive and unchangeable factor. One might say here, varying a well-known saying of the great Napoleon: 'Anatomy is destiny.'¹ The genitals themselves have not taken part in the development of the human body in the direction of beauty: they have remained animal, and thus love, too, has remained in essence just as animal as it ever was. The instincts of love are hard to educate; education of them achieves now too much, now too little. What civilization aims at making out of them seems unattainable except at the price of a sensible loss of pleasure; the persistence of the impulses that could not be made use of can be detected in sexual activity in the form of non-satisfaction.

Thus we may perhaps be forced to become reconciled to the idea that it is quite impossible to adjust the claims of the sexual instinct to the demands of civilization; that in consequence of its cultural development renunciation and suffering, as well as the danger of extinction in the remotest future, cannot be avoided by the human race. This gloomy prognosis rests, it is true, on the single conjecture that the non-satisfaction that goes with civilization is the necessary consequence of certain peculiarities which the sexual instinct has assumed under the pressure of culture. The very incapacity of the sexual instinct to yield complete satisfaction as soon as it submits to the first demands of civilization becomes the source, however, of the noblest cultural achievements which are brought into being by ever more extensive sublimation of its instinctual components. For what motive would men have for putting sexual instinctual forces to other uses if, by any distribution of those forces, they could obtain fully satisfying pleasure? They would never abandon that pleasure and they

1. [This paraphrase appears again in 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' (1924d), below, p. 320.]

would never make any further progress. It seems, therefore, that the irreconcilable difference between the demands of the two instincts – the sexual and the egoistic – has made men capable of ever higher achievements, though subject, it is true, to a constant danger, to which, in the form of neurosis, the weaker are succumbing today.

It is not the aim of science either to frighten or to console. But I myself am quite ready to admit that such far-reaching conclusions as those I have drawn should be built on a broader foundation, and that perhaps developments in other directions may enable mankind to correct the results of the developments I have here been considering in isolation.

THE TABOO OF VIRGINITY
(CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF LOVE III)
(1918 [1917])