

I

When we are describing pathological phenomena, ordinary linguistic usage allows us to distinguish between 'symptoms' and 'inhibitions', but attaches no particular significance to this distinction. We ourselves would scarcely muster any interest in differentiating the concepts of 'inhibition' and 'symptom' from one another if we did not encounter cases of illness obliging us to attest that they display no symptoms, only inhibitions, and if we did not wish to know the conditions that give rise to this.

The two concepts have different provenances. 'Inhibition' relates particularly to function, and does not necessarily signify anything pathological; we can just as well describe any *normal* restraint of a function as an 'inhibition' thereof.¹ 'Symptom', on the other hand, means something like 'indicator of a disease process'. Thus an inhibition, too, can be a symptom. The standard practice, then, is to speak of 'inhibition' where there is a straightforward diminution of any given function, and 'symptom' where the function in question shows unusual changes or behaves in some new way. In many cases it appears to be a matter of purely arbitrary choice as to whether one stresses the positive or the negative side of the pathological process and characterizes its outcome as 'symptom' or as 'inhibition'.² All this is really very uninteresting, and the problem as we initially formulated it turns out to offer very little promise.

Since inhibition is so intimately linked to function, one might usefully entertain the idea of investigating the different ego functions with a view to establishing the ways in which the disturbance of any of these functions manifests itself in the various neurotic disorders. For the purposes of this comparative study we have chosen the

following areas: the sexual function, eating, locomotion, occupational work.

a) The sexual function is subject to disturbances of many different kinds, most of them displaying the characteristics of straightforward inhibitions. These are summarily termed 'psychic impotence'. The successful completion of normal sexual activity presupposes a highly complicated sequence of events, susceptible to disturbance at any point. In the male the principal manifestations of inhibition are successively as follows: blocking of the libido necessary for initiating the process (lack of desire at the psychic level); absence of physical preparedness (lack of erection); abbreviation of the act (premature ejaculation) – which can just as readily be described as a positive symptom; cessation of the act before its natural conclusion (lack of ejaculation); non-appearance of the appropriate psychic effect (i.e. of the pleasurable sensation of orgasm). Other disturbances result where the sexual function is combined with particular factors of a perverted or fetishistic nature.

It cannot escape our attention for very long that inhibition is related to fear.³ Numerous inhibitions clearly consist in relinquishing a particular function because fear would result if it were to be carried out. In women, direct fear of the sexual function is common. We class this as a form of hysteria, as we also do in the case of the defensive symptom of disgust, which initially sets in as a post factum reaction to the passively experienced sexual act, and subsequently appears whenever the sexual act is visualized. In addition, a large number of compulsive acts turn out to be precautions and safeguards against sexual experience, and are accordingly phobic in nature.

This really doesn't add very much to our understanding. All we can do is to note that a great variety of means are deployed to disrupt the sexual function: 1) straightforward blocking of the libido – which more readily than anything else appears to produce what we term a pure inhibition; 2) spoiling the actual execution of the function; 3) rendering the function more difficult by adding special conditions, or modifying it by reorienting it towards different objectives; 4) averting it by dint of protective measures; 5) in cases where its

inception can no longer be prevented: interrupting it by engendering fear; and finally 6) in cases where, despite everything, the function is carried through to its conclusion: provoking a post factum reaction that protests against what has occurred and seeks to undo it.

b) The most common disruption affecting the eating function is lack of interest in food due to withdrawal of libido. An *increased* interest in food is also not uncommon; the compulsion to eat is motivated by fear of starvation, and has been little researched. The symptom of vomiting is familiar to us as a hysterical defence against eating. Refusal to eat as a result of fear is a characteristic of psychotic states (delusional fear of poisoning).

c) Locomotion is inhibited in some neurotic disorders, both by lack of interest in walking and by physical weakness related specifically to walking. The disability is hysterical in nature, and operates by either paralysing the motor function of the leg muscles or inducing a specific suspension of this particular function (abasia). Especially characteristic is the process whereby locomotion is rendered more difficult by the introduction of special conditions, the non-fulfilment of which gives rise to fear (phobia).

d) Inhibitions affecting the ability to work – which so often present for treatment as an isolated symptom – reveal themselves to us in the form of diminished pleasure, inferior performance, or reactive phenomena such as tiredness, vertigo, nausea in cases where the person is forced to carry on working. Hysteria forces the person to stop working altogether by paralysing organs and functions in a way that makes it impossible for the work to be carried out. Obsessional neurosis disrupts the work process by making the person prone to constant distractions, and making him waste time by repeating and dwelling on things unnecessarily.

We could extend this brief survey to other functions as well, but we could not reasonably expect to gain anything by so doing, as we would not succeed in penetrating beyond the outer surface of things. Let us therefore settle without further ado on a hypothesis that rids the concept of inhibition of almost all its mystery. An inhibition is the manifestation of a *restriction of function in the ego*, which can

itself have a whole variety of different causes. We are already very familiar with one general tendency displayed by this abnegation of function, and with some of its mechanisms.

The said tendency is more readily identifiable in the various specific inhibitions. In cases where piano-playing, writing and even walking are affected by inhibitions, psychoanalysis shows that this is caused by excessive eroticization of the organs involved, namely the fingers and the feet. We have already come to appreciate on a more general level that the ego function of an organ is impaired if there is an increase in its erogeneity, its sexual significance. If we might venture to use a somewhat farcical comparison: it behaves like the family cook who refuses to carry on working at the kitchen stove because the master of the house has started an affair with her. If writing – which consists in letting fluid flow from a tube onto a sheet of white paper – has acquired the symbolic significance of coitus, or if walking has become a symbolic surrogate for stamping on the body of mother earth, then both activities, writing and walking, are abandoned, since it would otherwise seem as if one were performing the forbidden sexual act. The ego abnegates its due functions in order to avoid having to carry out a fresh act of repression, in order to *avoid a conflict with the id.*

Other inhibitions clearly serve the purposes of self-punishment, as is not infrequently the case with those affecting work activities. These are things that the ego is not allowed to do because they would bring advantage and success, something that the stern super-ego has forbidden. The ego therefore refrains from these activities too – *in order not to enter into conflict with the super-ego.*

The more generalized inhibitions of the ego are subject to a different, very straightforward mechanism. If the ego is put under strain by particularly severe demands on the psyche, such as sorrow^d for example, or a major suppression of emotion, or the need to stifle a constant welling of sexual fantasies, then it is left with so little spare energy that it has to stop expending it at numerous places all at once, like a speculator who is short of cash because he has tied it all up in his various projects. I was able to observe an instructive instance of such generalized inhibition, brief but intense, in the case

of a patient suffering from obsessional neurosis, who fell into a paralysing torpor lasting anything from a day to several days in circumstances that clearly *ought* to have given rise to an explosion of rage. This must surely open the way to an understanding of the kind of generalized inhibition that characterizes depressive states, notably the most severe of these: melancholia.

By way of conclusion, therefore, we can say of inhibitions that they constitute a restriction of ego function, occurring either as a precautionary measure, or because so much energy has already been used up elsewhere. It is now easy to see in what way an inhibition differs from a symptom; and a symptom can clearly no longer be described as a process operating within, or acting upon, the ego.

II

We long ago made a study of the essential elements of symptom-formation, and offered a description of them that we hope is incontestable. On this view, a symptom is both sign and surrogate of a drive that has remained ungratified; it is a product of the repression process. The latter emanates from the ego, which – perhaps at the behest of the super-ego – refuses to go along with a drive-cathexis instigated within the id.⁵ Repression enables the ego to prevent the notion serving as the vehicle of the disagreeable⁶ impulse from entering consciousness – though psychoanalysis often shows it to have survived as an unconscious formation.⁷ Everything seems clear enough up to this point; but as soon as we venture beyond it we encounter unresolved difficulties.

In our earlier descriptions of the repression process we emphatically stressed its success in keeping things from consciousness, but left various other matters open to doubt. One question that arose was this: what happens to drive-impulses activated within the id that seek gratification as their goal? Our answer was an indirect one, to the effect that the process of repression transforms the expected *pleasure* of gratification into *unpleasure*; and this left us facing the problematic question as to how the gratifying of a drive can possibly result in unpleasure. In the hope that this will clarify matters, we wish to argue in no uncertain terms that as a result of repression the excitatory process originally intended within the id does not in fact take place at all; the ego succeeds in inhibiting or deflecting it. If this is so, then we need no longer be puzzled by the 'transformation of affect'⁸ brought about by repression. But at the same time we have conceded that the ego can exert a very considerable influence

on events in the id, and we must accordingly learn to understand the means by which the ego is able to achieve this surprising degree of power.

I believe that the ego derives this influence from its very close links to the perceptual system, which indeed constitute its essence, and the grounds for its differentiation from the id. The function of this *Pcpt-Cs* system,⁹ as we have termed it, is connected to the phenomenon of consciousness. The system receives excitations from within, as well as from without, and on the basis of the sensations of pleasure/unpleasure reaching it from that quarter it attempts to control the evolution of *all* psychic events in accordance with the pleasure principle. We so readily imagine the ego as being powerless against the id, but whenever it wants to resist a drive process within the id it need only give out a *signal of unpleasure* in order to achieve its ends, thanks to the assistance of the almost all-powerful agency of the pleasure principle. To consider this circumstance in isolation for a moment, we can illustrate it with an example borrowed from a different sphere. Let us suppose that in some state or other a certain clique is opposed to a measure which, if passed, would perfectly accord with the desires of the masses. This minority grouping therefore takes control of the press, uses it to manipulate 'public opinion' as the supreme political force, and thereby succeeds in ensuring that the proposed measure is not brought in.

This answer, however, raises further questions. Where does the energy come from that is used to generate the signal of unpleasure? We are offered a pointer by the notion that an unwanted process *within* is probably blocked in much the same way as a stimulus from *without*; that the ego takes the same course in defending itself against inner dangers as it does against external ones. In the case of external danger, living organisms do whatever they can to escape from the threat. First of all, they withdraw cathexis from their physical perception of the danger; then later they realize that a more effective remedy is to activate their muscles in such a way that perception of the danger, even supposing they choose not to shut it out, is no longer possible – in other words they retreat from the danger area. Repression, too, amounts to a similar attempt to escape

from danger. The ego withdraws (pre-conscious) cathexis from the drive-representamen¹⁰ that it wants to repress, and uses it to release unpleasure (fear). The question as to how fear arises in repression is doubtless not a simple one; none the less we can justifiably adhere to the notion that the *ego* is the true locus of fear, and reject the earlier view that it is the cathectic energy of the repressed impulse that is automatically transformed into fear. If I have expressed this view myself in the past, it is because I was offering a phenomenological rather than a metapsychological description.

On the basis of what has been said so far, a new question immediately presents itself: how is it possible, in terms of economy, for a mere withdrawal or release process such as that involved in the retracting of pre-conscious ego-cathexis to produce unpleasure or fear, which – according to all our assumptions – can only result from an *increase* in cathexis? My answer is that the explanation for this cause-effect relationship is not to be found in the economic realm at all; in repression, fear is not produced anew, but is reproduced as a state of affect on the basis of a pre-existing memory-image. However, with the further question as to the *origin* of this fear – and of affects in general – we leave the realm that incontestably pertains to psychology, and enter the neighbouring terrain of physiology. States of affect are innate in the human psyche as the residue of primal traumatic experiences, and in analogous circumstances they are reawakened as memory-symbols. I believe that I was not mistaken when I equated them to attacks of hysteria, which arise at a later stage and on an individual basis, and when I described them as the normal paradigms for such attacks. In the case of humans and related species it appears to be the birth process which, as each individual's first experience of fear, gives the actual *expression* of the affect of fear its characteristic form. We must not attach undue importance to this nexus, however, and in acknowledging it we must not overlook the fact that an affect-symbol is a biological imperative for danger situations, and would have been created in any event. I also believe that there is no justification for supposing that in the case of every single attack of fear something occurs in the psyche amounting to a reproduction of the birth experience. It is not

even certain whether attacks of hysteria, which start as traumatic reproductions of this kind, permanently retain this characteristic.

I have argued elsewhere that most repressions that we encounter in our therapeutic work are cases of *secondary* repression. They presuppose *primal* repressions that have taken place at an earlier stage and which exert a magnetic influence on the subsequent process. As yet far too little is known about these background factors and preliminary stages in respect of repression. One all too readily runs the risk of over-estimating the role of the super-ego in repression. It is currently impossible to judge whether it is not perhaps the emergence of the super-ego that marks the dividing line between primal and secondary suppression. One thing that is clear is that the first attacks of fear – which are extremely intense – occur *before* the super-ego differentiates. It is altogether plausible that *quantitative* factors, such as the excessive strength of an excitation and a sudden breaching of the protective barrier, constitute the most immediate cause of primal repressions.

Mention of the protective barrier serves as a cue reminding us that repressions occur in two different situations: when a disagreeable drive-impulse is aroused by perception of something *external*; and when it emerges *internally* without any such provocation from without. We shall return to this difference later on. Let us note, however, that the barrier gives protection only against external stimuli, not against internal pressures exerted by drives.

If we continue to focus our attention on the ego's attempts to escape from danger, we shall not get very far with respect to symptom-formation. A symptom arises out of a drive-impulse that has been obstructed by a repression. If by use of the unpleasure signal the ego achieves its goal of suppressing the drive-impulse completely, then we learn nothing about how this process happens. We can learn only from cases where the repression can be said to have *failed* to some greater or lesser degree.

In such cases it generally transpires that, despite the repression, the drive-impulse contrived to come through in surrogate form – but a severely stunted, displaced, inhibited one. Furthermore there is no hint of gratification about this surrogate. No sensation of

pleasure is produced when it is carried into effect; instead, this latter event exhibits the character of a compulsion. In the course of thus debasing the gratification process to the level of a mere symptom, however, repression demonstrates its power in another respect as well. Wherever possible, the surrogation process is prevented from achieving release through motor activity; and even where it is not so prevented, it is forced to use up all its energy procuring changes within the body, and is not permitted to extend its activities to the world outside; it is denied any opportunity to convert itself into action. As we know, in repression the workings of the ego are subject to the influence of external reality, and it therefore ensures that any successes of the surrogation process do not obtrude upon that reality.

It is the ego that determines what enters consciousness, and likewise determines what makes the transition into action *vis-à-vis* the external world – and in repression it deploys its power in *both* directions. This exercise of its power is felt on the one hand by the drive-representamen, on the other by the drive-impulse itself. This being so, it is apposite for us to ask how this acknowledgement of the might of the ego can possibly accord with the description of the ego's status that we adumbrated in our study *The Ego and the Id*. In that work we depicted the ego's dependence on both the id and the super-ego; we exposed its impotence and its apprehensiveness *vis-à-vis* both, and its travails in maintaining its air of superiority. This view has since met with a highly positive response in psychoanalytical literature. Numerous voices have emphatically stressed the weakness of the ego *vis-à-vis* the id, of rationality *vis-à-vis* the daemonic element within us, and are busily turning this theory into one of the central pillars of a psychoanalytical 'world view'. Shouldn't their sheer awareness of how repression actually works deter psychoanalysts in particular from so enthusiastically embracing such an extreme and partisan position?

I am not at all in favour of concocting world views.¹¹ This is a preoccupation best left to philosophers, who avowedly find it impossible to accomplish life's journey without a Baedeker¹² of this sort to guide them at every turn. Let us humbly accept the scorn with which philosophers look down upon us from their vantage point

of superior exigence.¹³ Since we too can no more deny our narcissistic pride than anyone else, we shall seek consolation in the thought that all these grand 'Guides to Life' rapidly go out of date; that it is precisely our own myopically narrow focus on small details that makes it necessary for them to be rewritten; and that even the most modern of these Baedekers are merely attempts at filling the shoes of the old, so comfortable, so all-embracing catechism. As we well know, science has so far managed to shed precious little light on the riddles of the world, and philosophers for all their sound and fury will change this not one jot; the only thing that can slowly, steadily procure change is patient perseverance in the kind of work that subordinates everything to the single imperative of certainty. When the traveller sings in the night he may well close his eyes to his anxiety¹⁴ – but it certainly doesn't help him to see things more clearly.

III

To return to the problem of the ego: our sense of a contradiction arises from the fact that we are too rigid in our approach to abstractions, and in the face of complex arguments have eyes now for this side, now for that, but never for both. Distinguishing the ego from the id appears entirely justified, indeed various circumstances compel us so to do; on the other hand, however, the ego is part and parcel of the id, being simply a specially differentiated portion thereof. Supposing that in our mind we envisage this part in contradistinction to the whole, or supposing that the two have split apart in actual reality, then the weakness of the ego is instantly evident to us. But if the ego remains at one with the id, and indistinguishable from it, then its strength is immediately apparent. Much the same is true of the ego's relationship to the super-ego. In many contexts we see the two as blending into each other; generally speaking we can only distinguish one from another when a tension or conflict has arisen between them. So far as repression is concerned, the decisive factor is that the ego is an organization,¹⁵ whereas the id is not; in fact the ego is the organized part of the id. It would be quite wrong to imagine the ego and the id as being like two opposing armies, as if a repression entailed the ego setting out to squash a section of the id, whereupon the remainder of the id comes rushing to the rescue and pits its strength against the ego. Things may often end up this way, but it is certainly not the situation when the repression first begins; as a rule the drive-impulse that is due to be repressed remains completely isolated. While the act of repression shows us the strength of the ego, it bears witness at the same time to its impotence, and its inability to influence or control any of the id's

individual drive-impulses; for once the process has been turned into a symptom by the repression, it henceforth carries on its existence *outside* the ego-organization, and independently of it. And this same privilege of what we might term 'exterritoriality' is enjoyed not only by the process itself, but also by any offshoots that it subsequently produces; and it seems altogether conceivable that if these latter happen through association to come into contact with elements of the ego-organization, they will win them over to their own side and, thus fortified, expand at the ego's expense. To use an analogy familiar to us from the past: we can think of a symptom as resembling a foreign body that constantly generates stimuli and reactions in the tissue in which it has become embedded. It is true that the attempt to fight off the disagreeable drive-impulse is sometimes brought to a successful conclusion by symptom-formation (so far as we can see, this occurs most readily in conversion hysteria). As a rule, however, things take a very different course: after the initial act of repression a protracted or indeed never-ending sequel ensues in which a battle against the symptom carries on where the battle against the drive-impulse left off.

This secondary defensive battle shows us two distinct faces – bearing contradictory expressions. On the one hand, the very nature of the ego obliges it to undertake what we can only regard as an attempt at restoration or reconciliation. The ego is an organization; its very essence lies in the fact that all its component elements enjoy freedom of movement and scope to influence each other; its desexualized energy declares its origins not least in its constant striving to bind and to unify – and the stronger the development of the ego, the stronger this synthesizing compulsion becomes. Thus we can readily understand the fact that the ego *also* attempts to put an end to the alien and isolated status of the symptom, by exploiting every possible opportunity to bind it to itself in some way, and by means of such bonds incorporate it into its own organization. We know that this kind of aspiration is already at work in the very act of symptom-formation. A classic instance of this is afforded by those symptoms of hysteria that we have come to realize constitute a compromise between the need for gratification and the need for

punishment. In as much as they fulfil a demand made by the super-ego, such symptoms are part and parcel of the ego from the outset – while at the same time they also signify the positions taken up by whatever has been repressed, and the breaches through which it has made incursions into the ego-organization; they are, so to speak, border-posts occupied by troops from both sides. Whether all primary symptoms of hysteria are formed in this way is a question that merits careful examination.

As regards the subsequent course of events, the ego behaves as if guided by the reflection that 'Like it or not, the symptom is there and can't be got rid of; the best thing now is to learn to like the situation, and extract the maximum possible advantage from it.' The ego does something that it normally only achieves in respect of the objective world without: it adjusts to the alien element *within* that is represented by the symptom. There is never any shortage of opportunities for so doing. The existence of the symptom may result in a certain reduction in performance, which can prove useful in mitigating any requirement imposed by the super-ego or rejecting any demand asserted by the external world. Thus the symptom is gradually entrusted with the task of representing important interests; it comes to play a considerable role in the assertion of the self, merges ever more intimately with the ego, and becomes ever more indispensable to it. Only in very rare instances does the process of assimilating a foreign body meet with this kind of success. It is also quite easy to exaggerate the significance of this secondary process of adjustment to the symptom by asserting that the ego only procured the symptom in the first place in order to enjoy the advantages it brings. That is just as right or just as wrong as arguing that the wounded soldier only had his leg shot off in the war so that he could live off his disability pension and avoid having to work.

Other symptom types, namely those of obsessional neurosis and paranoia, prove themselves particularly valuable to the ego not because they bring advantages, but because they bring narcissistic gratification that otherwise it has to go without. The systems that typically form in obsessional neurotics flatter their self-love by giving them the illusory belief that they are better than other people by

virtue of being especially clean or especially conscientious; the delusions of paranoia give the wit and imagination of the patient a whole new realm of activity for which no substitute can easily be found. The outcome of all these various factors is the phenomenon known to us as the (secondary) *illness-gain*¹⁶ of neurosis. This gain helps the ego in its efforts to incorporate the symptom, and reinforces the latter's fixation. If we then attempt in the course of psychoanalysis to assist the ego in its battle against the symptom, we find that these reconciliatory bonds between the ego and the symptom operate to the advantage of the resistances – and that it is by no means easy for us to undo them. It is indeed the case that the ego's two methods of dealing with the symptom directly contradict one another.

The second method is less cordial in nature, for it consists in continuing along the very same course as the repression. It seems clear, however, that it would not be right for us to accuse the ego of behaving inconsistently. The ego is peaceable, and seeks to incorporate the symptom, to absorb it into its own system. It is the *symptom* that causes the problem: as the fully fledged surrogate and offshoot of the repressed impulse it carries on playing the latter's role, again and again renewing its bid for gratification, and thus forcing the ego to give out a signal of unpleasure and to adopt an aggressively defensive stance.

The secondary battle against the symptom takes many forms, takes place on many different levels, and uses a multiplicity of means. We will not be able to say very much about it unless we focus our investigation on individual instances of symptom-formation. In the process we shall have occasion to discuss the problem of fear, which we have long felt to be lurking in the background. We do best to begin with the symptoms brought about by hysterical neurosis – for we are not yet in a position to appreciate the prior conditions that are necessary for symptom-formation to take place in the case of obsessional neurosis, paranoia and other neuroses.