

principle. From this it would follow that every "pain" coincides with a heightening, every pleasure with a lowering, of the stimulus-tension existing in the mind; the Nirvana-principle (and the pleasure-principle which is assumed to be identical with it) would be entirely in the service of the death-instincts (the aim of which is to lead our throbbing existence into the stability of an inorganic state) and would have the function of warning us against the claims of the life-instinct, of the libido, which tries to disturb the course life endeavours to take. Unfortunately, this view cannot be correct. It seems that we experience the ebb and flow of quantities of stimuli directly in perceptions of tension which form a series, and it cannot be doubted that there is such a thing as both pleasurable tension and "painful" lowering of tension. The condition of sexual excitement is the most striking example of a pleasurable increase in tension of this kind, but it is certainly not the only one. Pleasure and "pain" cannot, therefore, be referred to a quantitative increase or decrease of something which we call stimulus-tension, although they clearly have a great deal to do with this factor. It seems as though they do not depend on this quantitative factor, but on some peculiarity in it which we can only describe as qualitative. We should be much farther on with psychology if we knew what this qualitative peculiarity was. Perhaps it is something rhythmic, the periodical duration of the changes, the risings and fallings of the volume of stimuli; we do not know.

Whatever it is, we must perceive that the Nirvana-principle, which belongs to the death-instincts, underwent a modification in the living organism through which it became the pleasure-principle, and henceforth we shall avoid regarding the two principles as one. It is not difficult to infer what force it was that effected this modification, that is, if one has any interest at all in following this argument. It can only be the life-instinct, the libido, which has thus wrested a place for itself alongside the death-instinct in regulating the processes of life. In this way we obtain a series, a small but an interesting one: the Nirvana-principle expresses the tendency of the death-instincts, the pleasure-principle represents the claims of the libido and that modification of it, the reality-principle, the influence of the outer world.

## XI

### The Economic Problem in Masochism<sup>1</sup> (1924)

WE HAVE A RIGHT to describe the existence of the masochistic trend in the life of the human instincts as from the economic point of view mysterious. For if mental processes are governed by the pleasure-principle, so that avoidance of "pain" and obtaining pleasure is their first aim, masochism is incomprehensible. If physical pain and feelings of distress<sup>2</sup> can cease to be signals of danger and be ends in themselves, the pleasure-principle is paralysed, the watchman of our mental life is to all intents and purposes himself drugged and asleep.

In this light, masochism appears to us as a great danger, which is in no way true of sadism, its counterpart. We feel tempted to call the pleasure-principle the watchman of our lives, instead of only the watchman of our mental life. But then the question of the relation of the pleasure-principle to the two varieties of instincts that we have distinguished, the death-instincts and the erotic (libidinal) life-instincts, demands investigation, and we can reach no further conclusion about the problem of masochism till we have answered this call.

As will be remembered,<sup>3</sup> we have conceived the principle which governs all mental processes as a special case of Fechner's *tendency to stability*, and consequently have ascribed to the mental apparatus the aim of extinguishing, or at least of maintaining at as low a level as possible, the quantities of excitation flowing into it. For this tendency that has been presumed by us Barbara Low has suggested the name Nirvana-principle, which we accept. But we have unquestioningly identified the pleasure-pain-principle with this Nirvana-

<sup>1</sup> First published in *Zeitschrift*, Bd. X., 1924. [Translated by Joan Riviere.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Unlust*, usually translated by "pain."—*Trans.*]

<sup>3</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure-Principle*.

None of these three principles can actually be put out of action by another. As a rule they know how to tolerate one another, although conflicts must occasionally arise from the various aims towards which each strives—a quantitative reduction of the stimulus-pressure on one side, on another side some qualitative feature in it, and lastly a postponement of the discharge of tension and a temporary acquiescence in “painful” tension.

The conclusion to be derived from these considerations is that a description of the pleasure-principle as the watchman over our lives cannot be altogether put aside.

Let us return to masochism. It comes under our observation in three shapes: as a condition under which sexual excitation may be roused; as an expression of feminine nature; and as a norm of behaviour. According to this one may distinguish an *erotogenic*, a *feminine*, and a *moral* type of masochism. The first, the erotogenic masochism, the lust of pain, is also to be found at bottom in the other forms; the concept of it can be supported on biological and constitutional grounds; it remains incomprehensible unless one can bring oneself to make certain assumptions about matters that are wrapt in obscurity. The third, in certain respects the most important form in which masochism appears, has only lately, as a sense of guilt that is for the most part unconscious, been properly appreciated by psychoanalysis; it already admits, however, of full explanation and of co-ordination into our previous knowledge. Feminine masochism, on the other hand, is the form most accessible to observation, least mysterious, and is comprehensible in all its relations. We may begin our discussion with the material

In men (to whom for reasons connected with the material I shall limit my remarks) we know this kind of masochism sufficiently well from the phantasies of masochistic persons, who are often in consequence impotent; their phantasies either terminate in an onanistic act or else themselves constitute the sexual gratification. These phantasies are in complete accord with the real conditions sought by masochistic pervers, whether these situations are enacted as an end in themselves or serve to induce potency and lead up to sexual intercourse. In both cases—for the real situations are in fact only a kind of make-believe performance of the phantasies—

the manifest content is of being pinioned, bound, beaten painfully, whipped, in some way mishandled, forced to obey unconditionally, defiled, degraded. Far more rarely some kind of mutilation is also included in their content, but then only in a very restricted manner. The obvious interpretation, which is easily arrived at, is that the masochist wants to be treated like a little, helpless, dependent child, but especially like a naughty child. It is unnecessary to adduce case-material in this connection, for it is all so very much alike and is accessible to any observer, even to non-analysts. But if one has an opportunity of studying cases in which the masochistic phantasies have undergone specially rich elaboration, one easily discovers that in them the subject is placed in a situation characteristic of womanhood, *i.e.* they mean that he is being castrated, is playing the passive part in coitus, or is giving birth. For this reason I have called this form of masochism a *potiori* feminine, although so many of its features point to a childish life. This stratification in superimposed layers of the infantile and the feminine will later find a simple explanation. Castration, or the blinding which represents it, often leaves a negative trace in these phantasies by the condition that just the genitals or the eyes are not to be injured in any way. (Incidentally, masochistic tortures seldom convey an impression of such seriousness as the brutalities—phantasied or actual—of sadists.) Moreover, in the manifest content of the masochistic phantasies a feeling of guilt comes to expression, it being assumed that the subject has committed some crime (the nature of which is left uncertain) which is to be expiated by his undergoing the pain and torture. This looks like a superficial rationalization of the masochistic content of the phantasy, but behind it there lies a relation to infantile masturbation. On the other hand, this element of guilt takes us to the third, the moral type of masochism.

The feminine type of masochism described is based entirely on the primary erotogenic type, on the “lust of pain,” which cannot be explained without going very far back.

In my *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, in the section on the sources of infantile sexuality, I put forward the proposition that sexual excitation arises as an accessory effect of a large series of internal processes as soon as the intensity of

these processes has exceeded certain quantitative limits; indeed, that perhaps nothing very important takes place within the organism without contributing a component to the excitation of the sexual instinct. According to this, an excitation of physical pain and feelings of distress would surely also have this effect. This libidinal sympathetic excitation accompanying the tension of physical pain and feelings of distress would be an infantile physiological mechanism which ceases to operate later on. It would reach a varying degree of development in different sexual constitutions; in any case it would provide the physiological foundation on which the structure of erotic masochism is subsequently erected in the mind.

The inadequacy of this explanation is seen, however, in that it throws no light on the regular and close connection of masochism with sadism, its counterpart in the life of the instincts. If we go a step further back to our hypothesis of the two varieties of instincts which we believe to be active in animate beings, we come to another conclusion which, however, does not contradict the one just mentioned. In the multicellular living organism the libido meets the death or destruction instinct which holds sway there, and which tries to disintegrate this cellular being and bring each elemental primary organism into a condition of inorganic stability (though this again may be but relative). To the libido falls the task of making this destructive instinct harmless, and it manages to dispose of it by directing it to a great extent and early in life—with the help of a special organic system, the musculature—towards the objects of the outer world. It is then called the instinct of destruction, of mastery, the will to power. A section of this instinct is placed directly in the service of the sexual function, where it has an important part to play: this is true sadism. Another part is not included in this displacement outwards; it remains within the organism and is "bound" there libidinally with the help of the accompanying sexual excitation mentioned above: this we must recognize as the original erotogenic masochism.

We are entirely without any understanding of the physiological ways and means by which this subjugation of the death-instinct by the libido can be achieved. In the psycho-analytical world of ideas we can only assume that a very

extensive coalescence and fusion, varying according to conditions, of the two instincts takes place, so that we never have to deal with pure life-instincts and death-instincts at all, but only with combinations of them in different degrees. Corresponding with the fusion of instincts there may under certain influences occur a "defusion" of them. How large a part of the death-instincts may refuse to be subjugated in this way by becoming attached to libidinal quantities is at present not possible to ascertain.

If one is willing to disregard a certain amount of inexactitude, it might be said that the death-instinct active in the organism—the primal sadism—is identical with masochism. After the chief part of it has been directed outwards towards objects, there remains as a residuum within the organism the true erotogenic masochism, which on the one hand becomes a component of the libido and on the other still has the subject itself for an object. So that this masochism would be a witness and a survival of that phase of development in which the amalgamation, so important for life afterwards, of death-instinct and Eros took place. We should not be astonished to hear that under certain conditions the sadism or destruction instinct which has been directed outwards can be introjected, turned inward again, regressing in this way to its earlier condition. It then provides that secondary masochism which supplements the original one.

The erotogenic type of masochism passes through all the developmental stages of the libido, and from them it takes the changing shapes it wears in the life of the mind. The fear of being devoured by the totem-animal (father) is derived from the primitive oral stage of libido-organization; the desire to be beaten by the father from the next-following sadistic-anal stage; castration, although it is subsequently denied, enters into the content of masochistic phantasies as a residue from the phallic stage;<sup>4</sup> and from the final genital stage are derived of course the situations characteristic of womanhood, namely, the passive part in coitus and the act of giving birth. The part played by the nates in masochism is also easily intelligible,

<sup>4</sup> See "The Infantile Genital Organization of the Libido," *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, Collier Books edition BS 192V.

apart from its obvious foundation in reality. The nates are the special erotogenic bodily regions which have preference in the sadistic-anal stage, as the nipple in the oral stage and the penis in the genital stage.

The third form of masochism, the moral type, is chiefly remarkable for having loosened its connection with what we recognize to be sexuality. To all other masochistic sufferings there still clings the condition that it should be administered by the loved person; it is endured at his command; in the moral type of masochism this limitation has been dropped. It is the suffering itself that matters; whether the sentence is cast by a loved or by an indifferent person is of no importance; it may even be caused by impersonal forces or circumstances, but the true masochist always holds out his cheek wherever he sees a chance of receiving a blow. One is much tempted, in explaining this attitude, to leave the libido out of account and to confine oneself to an assumption that here the instinct of destruction is again turned inwards and is now raging against the self; yet there should be some meaning in the usage of speech, which has not ceased to connect this norm of behaviour in life with erotism and calls these maimers of themselves masochists too.

True to a habit which has grown out of our technique, let us first consider the extreme, undeniably pathological form of this masochism. I have described elsewhere<sup>5</sup> how in analytic treatment we come across patients whose behaviour in regard to the effects of the analysis compels us to ascribe to them an "unconscious" feeling of guilt. I there mentioned the trait by which these people are recognized (the "negative therapeutic reaction"), and I did not conceal the fact that a strong feeling of this kind amounts to one of the most difficult resistances and the greatest menace to the success of our medical or educative aims. The gratification of this unconscious sense of guilt is perhaps the strongest item in the whole "advantage through illness" (which is as a rule composed of many different gains), i.e. in the sum-total of the forces which oppose the cure and struggle against relinquishing the neurosis; the suffering that the neurosis involves is the very element which

<sup>5</sup> *Das Ich und das Es*.

makes it of value to the masochistic trend. It is instructive, too, to find, against all theory and expectation, that a neurosis which has defied every therapeutic effort may vanish when the person has become involved in the misery of an unhappy marriage, has lost his fortune, or has developed a dangerous organic disease. The one form of suffering has then given way to another, and all that mattered, as we see, was that a certain level of suffering should be maintained.

Patients do not easily believe what we tell them about an unconscious sense of guilt. They know well enough by what torments (pangs of conscience) a conscious feeling of guilt, the consciousness of guilt, can express itself, and so they cannot admit that they could harbour entirely analogous feelings in themselves without observing a trace of them. I think we may meet their objection by abandoning the term "unconscious feeling of guilt," which is in any case an incorrect one psychologically, and substitute for it a "need for punishment" which describes the state of things observed just as aptly. We cannot, however, let ourselves be prevented from judging and localizing this unconscious feeling of guilt in the same way as we do the conscious variety.

We have ascribed to the super-ego the function of the conscience and have recognized the consciousness of guilt as an expression of a tension between ego and super-ego. The ego reacts with feelings of anxiety (pangs of conscience) to the perception that it has failed to perform the behests of its ideal, the super-ego. Now we want to know how the super-ego came to play this exacting part and why the ego has to fear a difference of opinion with its ideal.

We have said that the function of the ego consists in uniting with one another the claims of the three powers it serves, in reconciling them; and we can add that it has in the super-ego a model for this which it can strive to emulate. This super-ego is in fact just as much a representative of the *id* as of the outer world. It originated through the introjection into the ego of the first objects of the libidinal impulses in the *id*, namely, the two parents, by which process the relation to them was desexualized, that is, underwent a deflection from direct sexual aims. Only in this way was it possible for the child to overcome the Oedipus-complex. Now the super-ego has re-

tained essential features of the introjected persons, namely, their power, their severity, their tendency to watch over and to punish. As has been set forth elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> it is quite conceivable that this severity becomes intensified through the "defusion" of the instincts which takes place along with this incorporation into the ego. The super-ego, the conscience at work in it, can then become harsh, cruel and inexorable against the ego which is in its charge. The categorical imperative of Kant is thus a direct inheritance from the Oedipus-complex.

These same persons, however, whose effect persists as the power of conscience after they have ceased to be objects of libidinal impulses in the *id*, belong also to the real outer world. This is where they came from; their power, behind which lie concealed all the influences of the past and of tradition, was one of the most acutely-felt manifestations of reality. In virtue of their coincidence the super-ego, which replaces the Oedipus-complex, becomes also a representative of the real outer world and is thus a model for the ego's endeavours.

In this way the Oedipus-complex proves itself, as has already been suggested on an historical basis,<sup>7</sup> to be the origin of morality in each one of us. In the course of development through childhood which brings about an ever-increasing severance from the parents, their personal significance for the super-ego recedes. To the imagos they leave behind are then linked on the influences of teachers, authorities, of self-chosen models and heroes venerated by society; these persons need no longer be introjected by the ego, which has now become much more resistant. The last figure in the series beginning with the parents is that dark supremacy of Fate, which only the fewest among us are able to conceive of impersonally. Little can be said against the Dutch writer, Multatuli,<sup>8</sup> when he substitutes the divine pair *Logos kai Anankē* for the *Moira* of the Greeks; but all those who transfer the guidance of the world to Providence, to God, or to God and Nature, rouse a suspicion that they still look upon these farthest and remotest

<sup>6</sup> *Das Ich und das Es*.

<sup>7</sup> Freud, *Totem und Tabu*, Abschnitt IV.

<sup>8</sup> Ed. Douwes Dekker (1820-1887).

powers as a parent-couple—mythologically—and imagine themselves linked to them by libidinal bonds. In *Das Ich und das Es* I have made an attempt to derive the objective fear of death in mankind also from the same sort of parental conception of Fate. It seems to be very difficult to free oneself from it.

After these preliminaries we can return to our consideration of the moral type of masochism. We said that the persons in question, by their behaviour—in the treatment and in their lives—make the impression of being morally inhibited to an excessive degree, of being dominated by an especially sensitive conscience, although they are not at all conscious of any such ultra-morality. On close inspection we can surely see the distinction which divides this kind of unconscious development of morality from the moral type of masochism. In the first, the accent falls on the heightened sadism of the super-ego to which the ego subjects itself; in the last, it falls instead on the masochism in the ego itself, which seeks punishment, whether from the super-ego within or from parental authorities without. It may be excused us that we confounded them to begin with, for in both cases it is a question of a relation between the ego and the super-ego or the powers equivalent to it; in both cases there is a craving which is satisfied by punishment and suffering. It is hardly an insignificant detail then that the sadism of the super-ego is for the most part acutely perceived consciously, while the masochistic impulse of the ego as a rule remains hidden from the person and must be inferred from his behaviour.

The unconsciousness of the moral form of masochism guides us to a near clue. We have translated the words "unconscious feeling of guilt" as meaning a need for punishment by some parental authority. Now we know that the wish to be beaten by the father, which is so common, is closely connected with the other wish, to have some passive (feminine) sexual relations with him, and is only a regressive distortion of the latter. If we introduce this explanation into the content of moral masochism, its hidden meaning becomes clear to us. Conscience and morality arose through overcoming, desexualizing, the Oedipus-complex; in moral masochism morality becomes sexualized afresh, the Oedipus-complex is reacti-

vated, a regression from morality back to the Oedipus-complex is under way. This is to the advantage neither of the person concerned nor of morality. An individual may, it is true, preserve the whole or a certain amount of his morality alongside his masochism, but, on the other hand, a good part of his conscience may become swallowed up by his masochism. Further, the masochism in him creates a temptation to "sinful acts" which must then be expiated by the reproaches of the sadistic conscience (as in so many Russian character-types) or by chastisement from the great parental authority of Fate. In order to provoke punishment from this last parent-substitute the masochist must do something inexpedient, act against his own interests, ruin the prospects which the real world offers him, and possibly destroy his own existence in the world of reality.

The revulsion of sadism against the self regularly occurs under the condition of civilized suppression of the instincts, which withholds a great part of the destructive instinctual components from being exercised in life. One can imagine that this backward-flowing part of the instinct of destruction comes to expression in the ego as an intensified masochism. The manifestations of conscience allow us to infer, however, that the destructiveness rebounding from the outer world is also absorbed by the super-ego without any such transformation and increases its sadism against the ego. The sadism of the super-ego and the masochism of the ego supplement each other and combine to produce the same effects. In my opinion it is only in this way possible to understand how it is that a feeling of guilt ensues—frequently or even quite generally—from a suppression of instinct and how it is that the more anyone refrains from aggressiveness towards others the more strict and sensitive his conscience becomes. One might expect that a person who knows himself to be in the habit of avoiding aggressions that are regarded as undesirable by civilization would have a good conscience as a result and would therefore watch over his ego less suspiciously. The situation is generally represented as though the requirements of social life came first and the instinctual renunciation were its consequence. The origin of morality remains then unexplained. The actual state of things seems to be a reversal of this: the first renuncia-

tion of instinctual gratification is enforced by external powers, and it is this that creates morality, which expresses itself in conscience and exacts a further renunciation of instinct.

Moral masochism thus becomes the classical piece of evidence for the existence of "instinctual fusion." Its dangerousness lies in its origin in the death-instinct and represents that part of the latter which escaped deflection on to the outer world in the form of an instinct of destruction. But since, on the other hand, it has the value of an erotic component, even the destruction of anyone by himself cannot occur without gratification of the libido.