

MORALITY AND CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

The highest function of human reason consists of dedicating itself to the service of faith. Hence, the ultimate goal of its scientific endeavours lies in a constantly renewed effort to place at the service of Sacred Doctrine a body of factual data and of solidly proved conclusions, which the latter will be able to utilize as a valuable, although not indispensable, source of documentation. Through the exploration of the various documents of faith and the systematic organization of interpretations aiming at making them more explicit, the theologian is pursuing his speculative attempt to grasp the revealed truth. For this purpose, his *fides quaerens intellectum* is unhesitatingly utilizing all the resources of logical and philosophical thinking as well as any reliable data supplied by the various historical methods. Now, when the time comes to propose to our conscience the ways and means through which man can reach his ultimate end together with the whole dynamics of our supernatural life, the approach remains quite similar. Fully aware of the fact that *gratia perficit naturam*, the theologian is again quite eager to draw from the biological, psychological, and social sciences whatever information is available concerning the subjective or circumstantial conditions, which ordinarily influence the course of free human activity and the processes regulating the acquisition and functioning of the natural virtues.

The immediate recall of these basic assumptions is particularly useful, since it provides the opportunity of dissipating an unfortunate misunderstanding too often found in the contemporary literature on this subject. Among those who raise claims for the recognition of a so-called *psychological morality*, it has become a commonplace statement that, while moralists are dealing with a concept of human nature, abstract and idealized to the point of neglecting the contingent vicissitudes and the subjective variations of moral conduct, the scientists are concentrating on the concrete evolution of the living man who is daily struggling to grasp an elusive ideal.

However, I am afraid that the accusation that the moralist deals

exclusively with human nature as though it were an abstract mental construct will appear at least surprising to him. Has he not, indeed, always insisted that, in any evaluation of a human act, consideration should be given, for instance, to its specific content and circumstances, to its multiple and often conflicting motivations, to the interference of sensuality with rational deliberation, to the distortions inflicted on prudential judgment by an erroneous conscience, to the persisting pressure of long acquired habits, and similar factors. Moreover, this initial surprise is bound to increase to the point of distress, when we are told that moral theology presents an idealized and rather unrealistic picture of human nature. Again, one should not forget that theology has always reminded us of the terrible wounds resulting from original and actual sin and of the subjectively unstable relationship, which exists between the sensual and rational parts of our personality and which, therefore, necessitates a painful and constant struggle for the acquisition and preservation of the moral virtues, a relentless straightening of hidden motivations, the healing intervention of divine grace, and the purifying and sustaining action of the sacraments.

It is clear, then, that the moralist focusses his attention on human conduct regulated by reason as also on the specific means, through which ultimate happiness can be secured or lost forever. He, above all, aims at providing the individual conscience with the enlightenment and guidance that it needs to orient the activities of a whole life toward the only supreme Good, namely, the creator and source of all grace. Moreover, he does not need to be reminded that the immediate principle of action is not to be found in human nature as such but in the individual, who is responsible for eliciting any particular act and for giving it a deliberate meaning—*actus sunt suppositorum*. Since the individual may be holy or wicked, puerile or mature, primitive or civilized, normal or neurotic, the moralist has always been anxious to learn from the empirical sciences how the general functioning of the individual's moral judgment is expected to be influenced by his particular condition. Resorting to the accumulated experience gained through centuries of pastoral and missionary work, he has been varying and adapting his approaches in accord with the whole range of the manifestations of human moral striving.

Needless to say, until very recently, the moralist could rely on practically no other valuable source of information. The observational sciences, being still in the infantile stage of their development, were not in a position to provide him with any scientifically reliable method for attempting a fully comprehensive and dynamic interpretation of human conduct on a moral level or on any other level. Although he often felt insecure when offering guidance to an intelligent, mature, and normal penitent or even to a well-advanced contemplative soul, this feeling was tolerable when compared with the uncertainty and embarrassment which became unavoidable when dealing with the obsessive or depressed scrupulous person, the pathological criminal, or the preliterate primitive. Actually, the theologian had to rely on little more than trial and error methods when he was confronted with the task of applying the various criteria of moral responsibility to the disturbed, distorted, or magical and superstitious conscience. Again, this inconvenience would be painfully felt whenever he would be expected to suggest the essential steps to be followed for effectively influencing a behavior, still hampered by "the fetters of the infantile, nonrealistic fog of a malfunctioning psychic apparatus," to conform to the unusually high standards of Christian morality, and for progressively subjecting it to the delicate complexity of an elaborate rational and virtuous regulation.

Certainly, we are all aware of the tremendous impact, which the recent discoveries, especially in the fields of dynamic psychology, social psychology, and cultural anthropology, may have upon the more comprehensive study, as well as upon the more effective directing of moral conduct. Yet, such materials cannot be incorporated into the field of morality in their crude original form. A broader and far more differentiated phenomenology than the one now furnishing the basis of our applied knowledge will have to be gathered, in the light of which these data will have to be refined and given an adequate significance reaching far beyond their present implications. Thereafter, an energetic creative effort will be required on our part, not to revise the whole structure of the magnificent synthesis expressing the unique wealth of our Christian ethical knowledge, as some seem to intimate, but rather to widen the realm of its applicability

to solving deep-rooted tensions of human conscience and helping innumerable souls heretofore necessarily neglected.

A careful analysis has revealed that the psychological mechanisms involved in the dynamics of mental functioning, which underlie the extreme diversity of behavior patterns, remain identical, whether such behavior is rational or irrational, normal or abnormal. Although its source and content are different, the anxiety of the saint confronted with the most crucial conflicts of his life mobilizes the same forces as the anxiety of the average man or of the neurotic overwhelmed by much more trivial situations. On a higher level of psychological integration, let us remember with Aquinas that even the infused virtues, although supernatural, function *modo humano*. It becomes evident, then, that the more detailed and precise knowledge of these mechanisms, now at our disposal, can be expected to contribute a great deal to a more adequate understanding of moral conduct as well as of human conduct in general. Moreover, as research progresses along this line, it becomes clear that one basic factor, which makes for the appearance of more or less differentiated patterns of behavior, lies in the variety of functional constellations governing the interplay of the above mentioned mechanisms in action. If one tries to anticipate the factors which will favor, or the handicaps which will interfere with, moral development in any particular case, familiarity with these specific constellations, whose functional structure depends on temperament, early fixations, personal history, and reactions to external and internal conflicts, will soon be realized to be of paramount importance.

Of course, the presentation of a fully integrated synthesis of these and the many other observational data with ethical knowledge certainly cannot be expected from me at this point. Such an achievement cannot even be dreamed of at this stage. After years of intensive work in this almost unexplored field of research, one must still be contented with a modest attempt to set up a few milestones which may indicate the path and stimulate further investigations.

THE OVERDETERMINATION OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

The theologian has always been aware, that almost every human action is the result of the complicated interplay of an unexpectedly

great multiplicity of motives. As a theorist, he has explicitly recognized this fact, while insisting on the basic connection, which underlies the extreme diversity of moral virtues and gives their functioning the characteristic unity of a spiritual organism. Every single moral act emanates from a free determination dictated by the simultaneous appeal of various ends. Hence, it may be regarded as the product of a whole constellation of virtues, whose dynamic interplay is liable to present varying patterns at different times and within different individuals. Also, when exercising the art of spiritual direction, the theologian knows that he is confronted with equally intricate complexity, oftentimes almost impossible to unravel. Even for the most generous soul, a thorough purification of intentions is usually attainable only through years of experienced guidance, leading to deep insights into a confused concatenation of motives, from which the most infantile, egoistic, or sensual ones will have to be eliminated or replaced by others, more mature, disinterested, and spiritual. Here, indeed, no serious progress can be made until, with the help of divine grace, strong resistances are broken down and certain unconscious barriers are overcome.

Unfortunately, the functional and dynamic interpretation of moral conduct, which is so much needed to help us in guiding others in their pursuit of spiritual perfection, is still based on little more than merely empirical observations. This, of course, explains why we so often feel perplexed at the difficulties met with, even in guiding souls which are characterized by the relative integration, that ordinarily follows upon the reinforcement of christian charity, and by the striving for the basic unity, which is achieved through subjecting sensuality to reason and reason to God. Now, as one can expect, the situation becomes much worse when we have to cope with the confusing disorganization introduced by sinful habits, or with the conflictual disharmony resulting from neurotic trends, or, occasionally, with both. Sinners and neurotics however, also turn to us for help and enlightenment in their spiritual and psychological misery. It is here, perhaps, that psychology may be enlisted and requested to supply us with effective principles of interpretation which, if rigorously applied, will eventually lead to a systematic

understanding of the most deep-seated problems met at the various levels of moral development.

But let us immediately define the limitations of this incursion of psychology into a field entirely different from its usual sphere of investigation. First, it is necessary to recall that moral achievement, as well as scientific discovery and artistic creation, finds an adequate explanation only in the dynamic orientation inherent in the human mind, precisely insofar as it is rendered productive by virtuous, scientific, and artistic habits. Thus, no amount of psychological insight will ever *explain* why a man lets himself be fascinated by goodness, truth, and beauty, and why he effectively contributes to their enhancement. The human mind is the fertile soil in which such spiritual life can germinate and develop according to laws of its own and is, therefore, to be interpreted in the light of its own specific nature and dynamism. Secondly, however, it seems just as necessary to recall that psychology also has here a vital, although too often neglected, contribution to make. As vegetative life cannot take roots in an earthly soil, which is not properly cultivated, so too moral life cannot really thrive in a mind overwhelmed by the pangs of anxiety, impoverished by a crippling regression, an encumbered by the weeds of wild disrupted instincts. While he is busy disentangling the complexities of an ill-integrated mental functioning, the psychologist then is, undoubtedly, accomplishing an essential task. Yet, just as the gardener, who is giving proper care to the soil, has to rely on biology for the understanding of even the simplest phenomena of life, the psychologist must look to moral science for the correct solution of inner moral crises and the adequate explanation of moral motivations and choices.

Since it grew in complete isolation from, and frequently in opposition to moral science, psychology has too often been satisfied with its own interpretation of moral behavior, reducing it, as it were, to the restricted frames of reference set up for its mechanistic analysis. If this powerful instrument is not to remain almost exclusively in the hands of those who, through ignorance or naturalistic conviction, are tempted to undermine morality in the hearts of the weak, it is high time that the moral theologian reassume his full responsibility toward the most distressed souls and be prepared to meet them on

the path of regression with appropriate means for understanding and helping them. If we neglect to develop enough knowledge and skill to relieve them from the basic mistrust, the depressive anxiety or the obsessive guilt, which keeps them away from the confessional and hampers their supernatural life, they will be only too inclined to believe those who accuse religion of being the main source of their unhappiness and lack of psychic equilibrium.

Since the principle of overdetermination is of primary importance for an adequate and useful interpretation of moral conduct, it is necessary to clarify its implications, not only as it applies at the level of rational and autonomous decisions, but also as it applies at the point where it interferes with them. We are then, confronted with the difficulty of understanding the malfunctioning of a moral judgment hampered by early fixations as well as by the motivations resulting from moral deviations which, in spite of sincere strivings, cannot be straightened out. In estimating the strength of the diverse motivational components, one cannot be satisfied with determining the objective value of subordinated specific goals, but must resort to the multidimensional approach which contemporary psychology is suggesting.

The first step, of course, consists in a clear-cut dynamic interpretation of the superficially more or less incomprehensible and confusing behavior. The obvious and easily available rational justification proving inadequate, the irrational quality of latently intervening forces will have to be carefully investigated. Action itself or its mode of performance may be characterized in varying degrees by a lack of proportion, by rationality, by mastery and by realism, and thus may evidence certain peculiarities which, despite every conscious effort to suppress them, are somewhat incompatible with the most evolved norms of morality. In this connection, the following observation must be made: a repressed drive, that is to say, a drive which, instead of having been displaced by some acceptable aim or intrinsically altered by deliberate rational elaboration, has simply been inhibited and rendered unconscious, does not disappear. It merely becomes imperceptible to the most experienced spiritual director, and—to complicate the situation completely—even “unthinkable” to the person in whose unconscious it now dwells and whose phantasies, attitudes, and behavior it may continue to permeate and to sway.

When one begins to extricate himself from this appalling motivational web, the next step will consist in a careful evaluation of the structural aspects which characterize the psychic apparatus of the particular individual and regulate its distinctive functioning. Thus, an appraisal of the relative strength of instinctual drives should become the object of immediate investigation. On the whole, they may appear to have been well oriented from the start and to be vigorously asserting themselves in the form of virtuous initiatives sustained by creative and original moral efforts. On the other hand, they may possibly be weaving a phantasy life with anxiety-laden imagery, constantly threatening to break out into forbidden action. In this connection, it is indispensable to give detailed consideration to the two early established automatic control systems, which are destined to become instrumental to reason and conscience—the so-called Ego and Superego. It is to be remembered, indeed that it is impossible for the virtue of prudence to play its integrative and dynamic role in normal moral development without mature and well differentiated psychological equipment. This equipment consists of adequate reality perception and testing, of correct estimation of past events and precise anticipation of future possibilities, of elaborate experience and logical reasoning, of sound sensitivity to guilt and efficacious inhibitive powers.

At first glance, the two approaches just described may seem sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of personality difficulties. However, experience has revealed that in most cases, although they may allow us to reach far and deep, we are still left with a residue of unexplained behavioral components and/or peculiarities. The source of such deviations is usually twofold; but, being totally extraneous to our common sense oversimplified interpretations of human conduct, it is too easily disregarded.

Whether we are examining our own actions or those of others, it is our general inclination to look for some justification exclusively in terms of contemporary reasons and motives. We too easily tend to forget the important fact that the various phases of our individual history have left behind them layers of emotionally invested motivations. These, of course, even if they have long been overstepped, may either remain active, as intrinsically modified and well-integrated

partial components of more mature and sophisticated motivations, or they may be reactivated more or less in their primitive form and thus continue to exercise their influence independently of the ego-synthesis. That is to say, they may become so estranged from this actual synthesis, that their acceptance can depend only on extensive rationalizations, which, according to the ancient Aristotelean observation, will in turn contaminate our prudential reasoning. For all of us, it appears self-evident that the accumulated energy of past and frequently repeated ego-syntonic motivations, which have finally crystallized in the form of virtuous or vicious habits, may continue unconsciously to influence our free decisions by strengthening or weakening our will power. Unfortunately it very often remains obscure how an ego-asyntonic, a primitive and isolated impulse, successfully or unsuccessfully rationalized, may also permeate the exercise of free-will, even in the most virtuous man, to the point of *occasionally* suppressing it, or, at least, of depriving it of its integral rational character.

Finally, in the above mentioned situation, one must beware of another naive inclination, dangerously misleading in our interpretation of human conduct. It consists in providing a seemingly objective basis for actions which, unconsciously, are mainly intended to serve the cogent purpose of solving a personal intra-psychic conflict and of gratifying subjective needs emerging therefrom. In recent years, several pioneer researches have shed abundant light on the perturbed economy of a moral life which is generally or partially centered on some unsolved inward conflict. Its unsuspected distortions have been carefully traced and exposed while its disappointing inconsistencies or its compulsive rigidity was given a long-awaited explanation. However, from a moralist's viewpoint, just as important is another consequence of such painful inner tension, although it is rarely given heedful consideration. Here, then, I would like to point out that one cannot help being amazed by the dreadful effect of such prolonged concentration of energy toward solving a human conflict, even on an apparently quite satisfactory moral level. Indeed, one is immediately struck by the disheartening observation that, during this period, an almost complete arrest of moral development is the rule. Contrary to the widespread belief that growth is stimulated by inner

conflicts, there is ample empirical evidence for asserting that, even when such conflicts are finally outgrown, one is confronted with persisting infantilism. On strictly natural ground, it is to be expected that the progress toward spiritual maturity will be considerably delayed if not irretrievably jeopardized.

Sketchy as it is, this brief elucidation of the complexity of motivations which determine human conduct may serve to pave the way for further theological reflection and research in the field of morality. At this moment, however, we must abandon this line of investigation to attack a parallel problem, also arising from clinical observation.

MORALITY AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

It is generally recognized, that personality development is mainly characterized by a constant improvement in the use of the two specific functions, derived from man's spiritual nature, that is to say, of reason and will. Through the acquisition of cognitive habits, man becomes more and more capable of logical functioning on both theoretical and practical levels. Thus, rationality increasingly pervades his thought as well as his external behavior. Likewise, through the acquisition of virtuous habits, man becomes more and more capable of autonomous choice and of self-determination in his daily activities. Thus, he appears increasingly proficient in the exercise of freedom. On moral grounds, of course, this evidently implies a progressive awareness of personal responsibility and a growing willingness to assume it in full. The impact of this inner transformation for moral theology is such, that any clarification of the psychological processes involved—whether it is merely phenomenological or attempts to be explanatory in the restricted sense already defined—will certainly be welcome.

According to data supplied by systematic clinical observation, the crucial difficulty generally met in reaching a proficient exercise of freedom results from the frequently overwhelming anxiety provoked by the unfamiliar risks it inevitably entails. However rebellious he may feel toward the various expectations more or less rigidly imposed upon him by his environment, the human being who is just stepping over the threshold of moral life very soon perceives himself as frightfully unprepared to enjoy the judicious autonomy he is secretly

coveting. Abandoning the safe rule of conformity to ready-made standard moral judgments and taking the initiative and full responsibility of one's own spiritual destiny often appears, then, as equivalent to facing complete indeterminacy together with the upsetting insecurity which is its inescapable concomitant. As St. Thomas would put it, between the mere execution of requested virtuous acts and the virtuous execution of these same acts there is the tremendous distance which separates psychological passivity from the exercise of freedom. The leading of a life of freedom, that is to say, of a genuine virtuous and moral life, necessarily implies, besides its intrinsic difficulties which too readily monopolize all our attention, the initial risk of making one's own decisions and of accepting one's full responsibility for them and their possible consequences. While engaging in such a conceived life of freedom, there is no wonder that one feels the same hesitation, indecision, and anxiety, which would be normally aroused by the entrance into a pathless country, where one can rely only on his own judgment to orient himself, find his right way, and surmount the innumerable obstacles encumbering it. Let us recall, then, that it is only through the firm acquisition of the basic virtue of prudence, which makes us expert in taking the risks of freedom, that such paralyzing anxiety can be quieted down and that the temptation to fall back on careless passivity can be resisted.

Mainly preoccupied with the lofty task of teaching others the elaborate refinements entailed by the discriminately rational use of freedom, the theologian cannot but be vitally interested in knowing that clinical facts have finally revealed why and how man is constantly attempting to escape from freedom as well as from the spiritual demands inherent to its spontaneous assertion. No problem arises as long as this attempt expresses itself through the passive flow of natural inclinations; but the trouble begins when the pursuits of such inclinations, as involving the courageous attainment or realization of specifically human goods, are interfered with by inner or outer obstacles which cannot be eliminated without the full mobilization of aggressivity. As Aristotle noticed long ago, the purposeful and orderly handling of aggressivity—which is to be identified with daring and forceful initiative and not with hostility, as it is too often the case nowadays,—implying, not only the mere

deliberate acceptance of a reasonable inclination, but its well-measured reinforcement and controlled expression, necessarily rests on firmly established rationality. It cannot enter into play without the relative capacity for reality testing, self-mastery, and deliberate choice, which corresponds to the adequate exercise of prudence at any given phase of personality development. Indeed, when such functions remain inadequate, aggressivity has to be inhibited, and anxiety immediately appears. This is not surprising, since the blocking of the ways to normal and virtuous fulfillment of natural inclinations leaves us prey to such dangerous alternatives as vicious abuse, neurotic compromise, or irresponsible compulsive acting-out. In other words, clinical evidence tends to show that, without an adequately developed aggressivity, man is almost compelled to renounce his unique privilege of freedom, that is to say, to renounce the privilege of leading a really creative moral life, filled with original virtuous achievements and spiritual merits.

After such psychological analysis, one can hardly refrain from being amazed at the depth of insight which led the Christian tradition to insist on the necessity of putting, at the basis of the virtuous life, the strenuous efforts of an asceticism, conceived as a positive exercise in the overcoming of ever greater difficulties. It is only when the vigorous aggressivity, which later on may find its mature expression in the virtues of hope and fortitude, has been given its full strength, that man feels secure enough to accept all the risks and responsibilities of complete freedom and to enjoy the spontaneous, effortless, and pleasurable accomplishments of a genuine virtuous life.

THE VICISSITUDES OF MORAL CONSCIENCE

Until now, we have been attempting to cope with two psychological issues, which empirical science has shown to be basic for the full understanding of the organization, the rise, and mishaps, of moral life in general. It has become evident that, if we want to secure the progressive prevalence and assertion of rational motivations in the regulation of human conduct, the complexities of its inevitable overdetermination will have to be taken into account. Also, we have tried to make clear that, if the full exercise of freedom and the correlative readiness to assume moral responsibility are to be con-

quired, the overcoming of the infantile passivity, which is the result of a too rigid superego formation and of the inhibiting anxiety inherent in the original frightening indeterminacy of human will, has to be regarded as an initial essential step. Henceforth, we can devote all our attention to the more specific psychological issues, encountered in the careful analysis of the normal functioning of moral conscience.

Our first concern, here, must be centered around the major conflict with which human conscience is confronted, as soon as it begins to assert itself, the adequate practical solution of which is an indispensable condition for the attainment of full moral maturity.

The following is an attempt to state in its simplest terms this dramatic conflictual situation, which appears so essential for the further long-term development of individual morality. Everyone is quite aware of the fact that, during the whole period of life while the heteronomous regulation of conduct is still the only one possible or remains generally prevalent, some definitely narcissistic criteria are utilized for the discrimination of good and evil. Indeed, when he tries to evaluate his particular behavior, the child must rely mainly on the fact that it brings him either reward or punishment, praise or blame, love or rejection. There is no wonder, then, that "good" becomes intimately connected with satisfaction, appreciation, and/or affection, and "bad" with deprivation, humiliation, and/or hostility. In this early phase of development, no other educational procedure is available, and thus it is highly commendable provided that the educators use sound discrimination as to the kind of behavior which is qualified as good or evil.

The overstressing of such procedure, however, may involve a very serious handicap: i. e., the indefinitely prolonged overlapping of infantile, interested, and narcissistic morality with adult, disinterested, and objective morality. Actually, the age of reason is reached when the child forms the concept of goodness as an absolute motive of action, independently of all its inherent possibilities for self-gratification, and becomes capable of identifying it with God as the supreme goal of his total life's moral strivings. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go before he becomes enough detached from himself to overlook the *bonum delectabile* or the *bonum utile* for the sake of the

bonum honestum in his daily decisions, and before he adopts the latter as a decisive criterion for the motivating evaluation of his actions.

As it can be easily foreseen, sooner or later, a most disturbing clash is bound to occur between the two above-mentioned tendencies. What may appear as an imperative dictate from the rational tendency, will possibly provoke a reverse attack of depressive guilt on the part of the more primitive one or *vice versa*. Thus, as St. John of the Cross has already observed with amazing shrewdness, it is a common occurrence that the progressing soul, which has heroically renounced all egoistic human gratifications for the sake of adhering more closely to the unique absolute Good, falls temporarily in the throes of "melancholy". While all the expectations of a highly spiritual vocation are courageously fulfilled in accord with the demands of an inspired rational conscience, a still unconsciously operating superego, failing to discover any good in conduct which deprives one of all rewarding gratifications and is frowned upon by the wise of this world, may precipitate overwhelming pangs of neurotic guilt as well as a state of depression. The ability to trace back to this formidable conflict the source of so many apparently unexplainable spiritual failures certainly represents a valuable contribution to the art of spiritual direction, and may clear the way for a fresh attack, on the part of the theologian, upon the innumerable problems, connected with the functioning of human conscience.

The careful examination of this fundamental issue has led us to the discovery of another unexpected threat to the normal growth of moral conscience, as it struggles still rather unskillfully to impose necessary restrictions on instinctual demands. Since time immemorial, the experienced theologian has observed that unbalanced ascetic practices soon give rise to feelings of sadness and despondency, and he has voiced his repeated warnings against the hazardous hedonistic greediness it is liable to produce, a greediness that will result in breaking down a nascent spiritual equilibrium. For his own part, the clinician could not be satisfied with supporting these merely empirical views which, in spite of their prudential value, remained too undetermined to supply us with a satisfactory interpretation of the psychological processes involved and with definite criteria for

precise and truly discerning spiritual guidance. A thorough comparative study revealed that the course of events was identical even in the most varied circumstances. Thus, he observed that an exaggeratedly frustrated child could be expected to burst into a temper tantrum after a few moments of sulkiness; that an adolescent, sunk into stuporous mental inertia after attempting a complete repudiation of his feared instinctual impulses, would soon awkwardly drop his diehard ascetic attitude to give free rein to his exacerbated greediness; that an adult, who was consciously or unconsciously inhibiting an unacceptable impulse, would hardly resist the urge, after an interval of boring or saddening tension, to offer it an outlet through the unrestrained gratification of a substitute impulse or through the distorted derivatives resulting from a neurotic compromise.

A careful analysis of such conflictual situations has led to the highly consequential discovery of the two basic psychological mechanisms which are at work therein, before all the other mechanisms which are involved in a particular neurotic syndrome enter into action. First, the mechanism of introversion was identified. It became apparent that the withdrawal of emotional energy from a discarded external object, in which it was invested, usually induced a proportionate increase of narcissistic energy, that is to say, a reinforcement of egoistic drives which had, perhaps, long been inactive. Secondly, the so comprehensively explicative mechanism of regression was put into light, and made to serve as a basis for all further interpretative approaches utilized in so-called depth psychology. Thus, it was gradually perceived that the emotional energy, which could no longer be invested in objects of the outside world and was being accumulated within the self, tended to discharge itself in more primitive channels and, for that purpose, to revive neutralized infantile complexes. Moreover, a sufficiently precise knowledge of the character structure of an individual made it possible to predict, with reasonable certainty, which paths this regression would follow, or if it would take place at all. Then it became quite obvious that, unless ways and means could be found to prevent, neutralize, or compensate for the disintegrating effect of such mechanisms, such psychological equilibrium as had been achieved was put in a precarious condition and threatened with eventual breakdown.

Since it raises the whole problem of the proper handling of inhibited instinctual impulses, it is self-evident that this exceptionally important psychological discovery is bound to have tremendous implications for moral theology. Let us immediately state that no one today turns to sublimation as a satisfactory answer to this re-emerging problem, which, as yet, no scientific investigation has been able to tackle successfully on a concrete practical level, and which remains a scientific mystery. As is generally admitted, sublimation implies nothing more than the orientation of instinctual drives in directions favoring their expression in accord with socially acceptable norms, without inducing any intrinsic modification of such expression. This, indeed, if we overlook the substitute aim which renders it permissible, remains just as primitive, rigid, and automatic, as any other mechanisms-regulated behavior, and easily lays the way open to regression, whenever the external situation begins to appear less rewarding or involves unexpected pressure.

Surely, it is a commonplace statement in contemporary psychological literature, that the aim of educational counseling, as well as of therapeutic measures, consists in rendering more and more rational an instinct-ridden behavior. However, to my knowledge, no one has satisfactorily explained, as yet, through which psychological processes such transformation can be accomplished. Here, though, we must acknowledge our debt to moral theology for providing us with a solid basis for developing further working hypotheses, and with some definite criteria for evaluating our tentative insights into the dynamics of such complicated moral behavior. Undoubtedly, the theory of *instrumental causality* is to be considered as the cornerstone on which should rest our diversified empirical approach to the comprehensive study of virtuous conduct, that is to say, of the dynamic and deeply transforming integration of the whole sensuality apparatus within the global unfolding of rational processes. Moreover, when we undertake to test the validity of our hypothetical interpretations, we shall certainly keep in mind the two methods through which, according to St. Thomas, reason exercises its ascendancy over sensuality. As the theologian knows only too well, the first one, implying that sensuality submits to reason under duress, is extremely imperfect and ordinarily gives rise to tension and unhappiness. On

the other hand, the second one, implying that the influence exerted by reason becomes a quality inherent to sensuality itself and permeates all its manifestations, is declared the adequate one and, also, the only one to deserve the name of virtue, since it allows our instinctual drives an easy, pleasurable, and well-regulated outlet. From this starting point, it may be hoped that empirical research will be carried on with ample possibility of opening still newer horizons for theological reflection, and of enriching the art of spiritual guidance with more diversified and farther-reaching techniques, for the greatest benefit of Christian souls.

CONCLUSION

As everyone will realize, to try to summarize within the restricted space of a few pages all the major contact points between psychology and moral theology is almost an impossible *tour de force*. So, I am confident that the unavoidable shortcomings and obscurities of the present essay will be easily pardoned. For raising many more problems than I had solutions to propose, my only justification is, that this is a research paper, in which I endeavored to suggest new lines of investigation, worthy of consideration either by the theologian or the psychologist.

Perhaps, I may be allowed one more concluding remark. Nowadays, it is quite frequent to hear the most disparaging criticisms about the decline of modern and contemporary moral theology. Repeated attacks are made against its juridical bias and its casuistical approach. It is interesting to notice that psychology, too, has been exposed to identical assaults. Many openly despise its propensity for standardized statistical procedures and its growing preoccupation with individual differences. To those who are fully aware of the amazing complexity of human conduct, this parallel evolution of two disciplines, which are struggling strenuously to grasp it in all its most significant dimensions, will certainly be no surprise at all. It simply reveals, once more, that our knowledge of man is still fragmentary, and that only the joint efforts of closely related disciplines,

representing widely diversified methodological approaches, can justify our hope for the attainment of a synthesis, satisfying for our mind and illuminating for our action.

DIGEST OF THE DISCUSSION

Father Edmond Benard: I wonder if you would take a few minutes to explain, in general terms, the notion of the *unconscious*, as it is used by the psychologist today?

Father Mailloux: This word, of course, has several meanings. Here, it is intended to qualify an impulse which has been cut off from its meaning, as it is usually expressed in words. Such an impulse finds a more primitive representation in fantasy, which is merely pictorial and often so close to action—exercised or imagined—as to be confused with it. Thus, becoming “unthinkable” to the subject, it easily slips out of consciousness. For example, the dreamer, who is acting out in fantasy an intense need for refreshment while busily engaged in reaching a source of cool water, will have to wake up, that is to say, to become conscious, before he will be in a condition to realize that he is actually “thirsty.” Also, the one who is imagining himself in honorable and powerful positions in his endless daydreaming, remains oftentimes unaware of his desire to overcome his frustrating passivity and to surpass the envied successes of his rivals. If he is too suddenly confronted with an explicit formulation of such aspirations, he may even be tempted to deny their “reality”.

Father Benard: May I follow with another question in the same direction, namely, what are the direct implications of this for the confessor?

Father Mailloux: Not to say anything of neurotic reactions or symptoms, it is well known that the confessor will not hold any one morally responsible for his dreams or for actions performed under the helpless sway of fantasy. As St. Thomas has observed, a reliable evaluation of reality becomes impossible in these circumstances and our judgment is forcibly inadequate.

Father Francis Connell (Catholic University): Must we not remember in discussing these notions, that great insistence should

be placed on divine grace and prayer. Don't you think we are apt to forget these influences, and should not these influences be well considered by a confessor in dealing with such problems as you have discussed here today?

Father Mailloux: One can never insist enough on the necessity of divine grace and on the rôle of prayer in the successful development of one's moral life. This is why I stressed this point in the first part of this essay, where I discussed the complicated problem of motivation and of the purification of intentions. However, I am glad that you have raised this question again! It gives me another opportunity to repeat that whatever information the psychologist, as a natural scientist, is able to supply about temperamental or characterological dispositions, it should be used by the moral theologian as a starting point for a deeper and more adequate study of human conduct. Psychological data will always, in themselves, remain incomplete and will certainly have to be integrated in such comprehensive interpretation of human conduct as only theology can be expected to achieve.

Father John Harvey, O.S.F.S.: When a psychologist helps a person who has a bad habit to understand a conflict, does that understanding generally help him to overcome that bad habit or conduct? Can one understand the conflict and yet not be able to do anything about it? Could there not be other factors that enter into the solution of a problem than merely understanding what the conflict is?

Father Mailloux: To give a satisfactory answer to this question would require nothing less than a thorough clarification of the whole therapeutic process as well as a clear explanation of all the intricacies of depth reeducation. So, I hope you will pardon me for limiting myself, during the few minutes at my disposal, to the formulation of the following helpful remarks:

1. It is necessary to recall the basic difference which exists between what is technically called a conflict and what may be considered as the alternatives with which we are confronted in our daily moral decisions. An alternative is always conscious and, once well formulated, leaves one free to choose one way or the other, although some emotional disposition may incline one to choose one way rather than the other. On the other hand, a psychological conflict involves some intra-psychic and

utterly unconscious tension which, certainly, cannot be reduced through some merely intellectual interpretations. The knowledge of all that psychopathology has to say about personal conflicts is insufficient to produce the type of insight which will lead to an expected change.

2. Contemporary psychology tends more and more to recognize the validity, on this level, of the old Aristotelean principle which is so familiar to the moralist: *Qualis est unusquisque, talis videtur ei finis!* Therefore, it is now generally admitted that the whole process of psychological insight involves a deep emotional experience as well as a revised comprehension of one's motivations and of various reality situations. Some do not hesitate to say further that one does not change because he understands, but that one does understand mostly because he has already undergone a deep transformation in his personal attitudes.

3. In this specific context, then, it seems quite clear that insight or comprehension cannot be regarded as the equivalent of mere intellectual understanding or learning, but as a unique experience terminating a long educational process. It is also generally admitted that the final emergence of the solution into consciousness after a long struggle presupposes the surmounting of persistent resistances and the developing of more mature emotional attitudes.

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