

The composition of the ego in a determinist psychology

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Modern ego psychology regards it as one of its major achievements to have discarded Freud's early concept of ego-instincts, and to have substituted for it (following in the main the lines laid down by Hartmann shortly after Freud's death) the concept of an autonomous, 'conflict free' ego. Despite terminological preferences one can find this general trend of thought in, for example, Feller (1982), Gedo (1979), Kohut (1978) and Schaffer (1976). One noteworthy difference is that some of these authors specifically include the concept of personal agency as an unanalyzable primitive, a view foreign to the biological mode of thought that Hartmann was trying to maintain; however, this difference is more apparent than real, because, as I shall try to show, Hartmann's account of the ego's motivation leads inevitably to a similar conception. I base my discussion on Hartmann's work because the concepts I want to criticize find there a classical and fairly unambiguous exposition.

According to Hartmann, the ego develops independently of, and side by side with, the instincts of the id, and functions autonomously of the instincts or any biological motivational basis. It is in fact nothing but a set of functions, essentially those of perception (or reality-testing), memory, anticipation, rational planning, and control of motility. These disembodied functions are called apparatuses by Hartmann (Hartmann, 1958, 1964), a misleading usage, since 'apparatus' ordinarily means a piece of machinery whose functions we may or may not know, but Hartmann's apparatuses appear to be functions of no machinery or substantive entities whatever. The overall and indeed only goal of the ego is said to be adaptation; that is, the other two systems, id and superego, are to be adjusted to each other and to the demands of the life situation in such a way as to promote the individual's survival (e.g., Hartmann, 1964, pp. 43-44).

Two strains in Freud's thinking

This line of thought had actually been partially foreshadowed by Freud in the 1920s, and the two strains in his thinking about the ego appear strikingly within a single paragraph of *The ego and the id* (Freud, 1923). The remnants of the ego-instincts view can be found when he says that the ego is 'that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world' (Freud, 1923, p. 25). 'Since the mind at the beginning of life is described as "all id," which is to say, the complete set of instinctual drives and nothing else, then to say that the ego was originally a part of it suggests that the ego is a selection of the instinctual drives which have somehow separated from the remainder. But almost immediately we find Freud talking of the ego as if it were just a set of control functions, and saying that in the ego, perception "plays the part which in the id falls to instinct" (Freud, 1923, p. 25). That role would be to impel the organism to some specific course of action, which is easy to understand as far as the instinctual drives are concerned. Basically Freud thought of these as physiological mechanisms that were thrown into action by some combination of biochemical factors on the one hand and the perception of certain environmental facts on the other. To paraphrase his early views (Freud, 1905, 1915), each instinctual drive has a small number of wired-in action patterns, the 'specific actions,' incorporated into it; these are consummatory actions in that one or other of them must be performed if the accumulated tension of the instinctual drive is to be discharged, or, as one may reformulate this, if the biochemical input to the neurophysiological drive mechanism is to be terminated (Maze, 1983).

Perception alone cannot initiate action

The role of initiating directed behaviour cannot plausibly be attributed just to perception independent of the instinctual drives. Perception merely yields beliefs about matters of fact, and such factual beliefs cannot of themselves imply that any open programme of action should be carried out, however the word *should* is meant. Any piece of information which can be put into the form *X leads to Y* can be used either in promoting *Y* or in avoiding it (Maze, 1973). The belief, for example, that a certain diet will increase body weight may lead one either to adopt that diet or to avoid it, depending on one's already existing motives or drive state; it may produce opposing behaviours in the same person at different times. Thus, as it is identically the same belief operating in each case, it cannot be said to imply either policy. Factual information in itself is policy-neutral; it can initiate behaviour only if it is perceived as relevant to one of the person's existing policies – that is, as relevant to the success of some action pattern specific to a currently active drive state. Perception, then, cannot play the same role as

ing in its own right, because it predicts much of personality beyond the commonality of the drives

so to say.

the instinctual drives whether in the ego or anywhere else. Both drive and perception acting together are necessary for the production of any coherent action pattern.

None of this should be taken as in any sense decrying the value or validity of reality-testing. If the concept of rational behaviour has any content apart from a moralistic one, then it means behaviour that is guided by a realistic apprehension of the conditions necessary for it to be effective, and of what its effects are likely to be, whether those conditions and consequences are altogether as one wishes, or not. But the *selection* of the effects aimed for is not itself the work of the reality-principle, but of its interaction with the primary drives.

The implicit moralism of 'adaptation'

The notion that the facts of the situation imply that any *right-thinking* person will act in a specific way can always be shown to conceal some moralism or other. It is simply another attempt to derive *ought* from *is*. Hartmann, correctly in my opinion, criticizes the concept of *reasonable behaviour* as being a relativistic moral one pretending to an objectivity it does not possess, yet in embracing the concept of adaptation as if it were objectively definable he allows the same kind of thinking to creep in (Hartmann, 1964, pp. 45–46). Adaptation is a relativistic concept. A condition of life which to one person seems a successful adaptation may be regarded as a fate worse than death by another. If, for example, an analyst should advocate one solution to a patient's problem of adaptation as being better than another in terms of some absolute standard rather than in relation to the analyst's special needs, that would be to impose a moralistic view of life upon the analysand. What such thinking appears to lead to in the practice of some psychoanalytic ego-psychologists is that they align themselves with the patient's superego and treat superego demands as part of the reality situation the patient must adapt to. In effect this means that the analyst is helping to re-establish the patient's repressions, presenting him or her with a new set of rationalizations. However, a radical critique of moral thought, a critique for which Freud provided the material, would present moralism as lacking any objective validity, arguing that there are no objective moral properties to be discovered. If so, a belief in their existence, leading to the acceptance of inscrutable moral imperatives, entails an abandonment of reality-testing (Maze, 1973). From this viewpoint, the most mentally healthy adjustment to the superego would be to dissipate it altogether – i.e., for the analysand to see through and be disburdened of a set of moral fictions.

The need for an account of ego-motivation

If reality-testing alone cannot account for the ego's motivation, what theoretical adjustments are necessary to do so? It is plain that the ego does have motives. Even the ego psychologists agree that it throws its weight sometimes on the side of the id and sometimes on that of the superego, or again that it pursues what they call its own *interests*. The impasse resulting from their discarding ego-instincts is epitomized by a phrase of Anna Freud's, quoted with approval several times by Hartmann, referring to the 'basic hostility of the ego toward the instincts' (Freud, A., 1946). The ego could only be hostile toward the instincts if their expression threatened its own interests – to be hostile is in itself to be motivated – but how to explain the basis of such ego interests if the ego is divorced from any physiological motivational basis (i.e., from the instinctual drives) is difficult to imagine.

Hartmann himself (1964, pp. 123, 152) inclines toward the Allport conception of the functional autonomy of motives (Allport, 1937) – the conception that although a mode of action may have been taken up originally in the service of a primary drive, in the course of time it can develop its own intrinsic motivation. That is, it can become, like virtue, its own reward, no longer being dependent on any primary drive gratification to maintain it. Apart from such difficulties as explaining why one action becomes functionally autonomous and another not – why a factory worker may perform the same action countless times and give it up the moment it is no longer necessary to earn a living – Allport's conception is rather like saying that the spinning of a record player turntable can become functionally autonomous of the electric motor which originally drove it, and of every other motor. Of course, in the case of human beings, the underlying notion is that they *choose* to continue certain occupations and cause themselves to do so – but such self-caused activities would be beyond the scope of scientific explanation, as argued below.

Incoherence of Freud's 'ego-libido'

Freud did realize, even after his shift of thought about the ego, that some motive force was required for it to perform certain acts, but the function of this force or energy was limited to the act of repression. He asked where the ego obtained the force necessary to oppose and repress the powerful instinctual impulses of the id (Freud, 1923). If he had retained the concept of ego-instincts, that question would have been unnecessary because, as we have seen, an instinctual drive is a mechanism that performs work. Having let them drop from sight, Freud was led into that sequence of theoretical constructions which even the most sympathetic of Freudians must find difficult to justify. The ego was said to offer itself as a love-object for the id, thus gaining control of a quantity of libido, just as a person gains control

over any one who loves him or her. This captured libido, now called ego-libido, was turned away from its sexual aims and used by the ego to combat the unregenerate object-libido of the id (Freud, 1923, p. 31 ff.). Here one sees a tendency that was later to become pronounced, the tendency to think of energy not as a machine doing work but as a kind of fluid or stuff which can be moved about and channelled in various directions.

Instead of saying that one part of the mind, the id, came to love another, the ego, Freud spoke of the ego itself as becoming filled with desexualized libidinal fluid, leading to the irresolvable puzzle about whether the id or the ego was the 'great reservoir of libido' (Bibring, 1941). That puzzle is irresolvable because of the ambiguity that developed in the concept of libidinal cathexis; it cannot really mean both that the id cathects the ego (that is, finds it a lovable object) and that the ego itself is charged with libidinal energy. This latter notion, not really understandable, is a remnant of the neurological theory embodied in the *Project* (Freud, 1895), when Freud thought of the ego as a specific set of neurons which could become charged with *cathected* *with* nervous energy. But even if we ignore the incoherence in the concept of ego-libido, Freud was not really addressing the central problem of the ego's motivation. He was asking merely how it obtained the power to carry out its policies, but the real question is, from what do its policies originate in the first place?

The explanatory value of ego-instincts

The solution lies ready to hand. It is to revive Freud's earlier concept of ego-instincts. There was never any good reason to abandon it. The behavioural observations which Freud appealed to did not require its abandonment. They were mainly concerned with narcissism; he saw that actions which at first glance seemed motivated by non-sexual needs sometimes turned out to be driven by narcissistic sexual motives (Freud, 1920). But that does not mean that hunger, for example, and its derivatives such as the impulse to accumulate material goods, is not a real motive force nor that it never functions independently of narcissistic libido.

Again, the supposed theoretical reason for becoming sceptical of ego-instincts, that they seemed able to be defined only by their aim and not by their source (Bibring, 1941), was not a sufficient one. It would indeed have been a substantial difficulty if it had been true, since it would have contravened Freud's sound deterministic principle that an instinct must be defined by its bodily source (Freud, 1915). That is, an instinct is defined or conceived as a functioning physiological entity of a specific kind, one that transforms chemical energy into mechanical action of a recognizable form. The only problem for psychology is that such entities cannot be inferred from behaviour alone, but must be identified by the methods of physiology. It is only the discovery of the structures whose functioning constitutes

behaviour that makes behaviour explicable; to neglect this fundamental requirement is to begin to slide into teleology – that is, allegedly to explain behaviour by reference to its adaptive effects rather than to its causes.

Ironically enough, however, it is food-hunger, whose physiological bases are well known, which is the leading contender for inclusion as an ego-instinct – better known even than sexuality, which is traditionally consigned to the id, its status as an instinct not being in dispute. If one includes, with hunger, thirst, respiration, and pain-avoidance, all of which have good physiological credentials (elimination perhaps being better treated as a set of reflexes), one is well on the way to a workable list of ego-instincts. None of these is to be thought of as defined by its aim, and certainly not by the aim of adaptation to the environment, or of simple survival. Temporarily to retain, for brevity, the language of *aim*, the aim of hunger is just *to eat*, of thirst to drink, and so on.

Ego psychologists, rejecting ego-instincts, talk of the ego's motivation as its *interests*, specifying these as various goal-directed strivings. Hartmann, for example, gives *egoism* and *striving for what is useful* as the central ego interests, and adds ethical values, religious values, and interest in intellectual activities as possible others (Hartmann, 1964, pp. 136–138). But that is to define motivational constructs *solely* by their aims, to base their diagnosis solely on observations of behaviour, and the difficulty with that procedure is that one can postulate as many of such motivational forces as one wishes; they can never be falsified because the behaviour which is supposed to originate from them is always observable. It is precisely that way of postulating instincts that has brought the entire concept of instinct into disrepute in academic psychology. The only useful way of conceiving instincts is as identifiable physiological mechanisms, as Freud was insisting in saying that they must be defined by their somatic sources.

Conflict of instincts

By tidying up some of Freud's hints (Freud, 1905), the following picture of the developed mental structure emerges. In the course of socialization, the instinctual drives are set in opposition to one another through the application of rewards and punishments. One cannot decide arbitrarily what will function as a reward and what as a punishment; that is determined by the nature of the creature one is dealing with. A reward can only be the gratification of a primary drive (or some associated token that it will be gratified, a *secondary reinforcer*) and a punishment can only be the frustration of one (similarly qualified) – e.g., corporal punishment directly frustrates the pain-avoidance drive. In every culture, socialization is directed to the suppression of particular instinctual impulses – in most cases, of pregenital and incestuous sexual impulses and of aggressive impulses against authority figures. The suppression of a forbidden impulse is brought about by threats

that its expression will be punished – that is, that some other instinctual impulse will be frustrated. In this way the drives, or some of them, are set in competition with one another. To give an over-simplified example, if a child is made to believe that giving vent to certain sexual impulses means that it will no longer be fed, then hunger is being set in opposition to sexuality. Each instinctual drive must be thought of as an information-registering entity, retaining, predominantly, information relevant to its own gratification. Thus hunger, in this example, is learning that one instrumental act necessary for its own gratification is the prevention of sexuality's gratification, which is what is meant by a conflict between drives. The conventional notion, of course, is that it is the *person* who learns, and who uses the information in order to gratify hunger. But that raises the same problems about the *person's* motivation as I have raised about the *ego's*.

Separation of ego from id

The conflict situation is further complicated by the fact that not only are children not allowed to *do* certain things, they are not even *supposed to wish to do* them. The consequence is repression rather than suppression; the child comes to deny the reality of some of its own impulses, a serious distortion of its development. Those impulses or drives whose expressions are socially acceptable remain unexpressed and come to constitute the child's ego. They declare themselves and speak up as if they were the whole person – *I*. The unacceptable ones now constitute the id. However, relationships are actually more complex than that. Although according to the classical canon sexuality and aggression are id instincts (in the theory which accepts aggression as an independent drive), nevertheless certain alignments of the sexual instinct are admitted to the ego as socially acceptable; in our society, sexual interest in a human being of the opposite sex and of a suitable age, provided there are no barriers of marriage or blood, is defined as legitimate. Again, aggression is not only permitted but demanded in certain situations against certain objects. Thus, the repressing instincts do not forbid all recognition or expression of the repressed; under special circumstances some sexual and aggressive impulses are allowed temporary membership of the ego. In the other direction, although hunger is ordinarily legitimate, in most societies hunger for human flesh is not, so that in situations which tempt to cannibalism, no other food being available, hunger might temporarily be forced into the id by other threatened drives. The basic point remains that at any particular time, depending on the prevailing conditions, certain instinctual tendencies would be dominant, and, functioning as ego, would claim to constitute the entire person, the remainder being disowned as foreign, i.e., as id.

The superego as a modification of the ego

It is not necessary and would not express the facts to think of the superego as a third set of instinctual drives. Rather, the superego consists of the set of moral prohibitions that have been imposed on the ego. As Freud says, it is a modification of the ego. These prohibitions become introjected, that is, become accepted as moral truths by the ego, and are made binding by the fears of punishment if they are contravened. These fears become unconscious for a number of reasons: for one, that if their origin were remembered then the forbidden wishes would also be remembered; for another, if the fears of punishment remained conscious then the person would suffer the pain of knowing that the parents' love had been only conditional, and that he or she had been defeated in the struggle for self-expression. To avoid that humiliating memory, the growing person comes to believe that superego-derived behaviour is done in the name of virtue, and that fears of punishment have nothing to do with it. The introjected moral beliefs stand as internal barriers constraining the ego-instincts in their efforts to achieve their own gratification. It is their fears of being frustrated which determine their policies and provide the motive force for repression.

Of course, it sounds strange to talk of a person as consisting of a small community of instinctual drives each of which is a knower and a doer; however, some pluralistic conception is required for any serious attempt at a deterministic account of mental life. To anticipate a common criticism, it is *not* the case that the instinctual drives are homunculi; unlike the whole person, each has, in effect, only one motive, never restrains itself from seeking satisfaction, knows only a portion of the aggregate body of information, and suffers no internal conflict. An instinctual drive can no more restrain itself from working than any motor can, once the switches are thrown. If its operation is to be arrested, then that must be through some influence external to itself – in the case of repression, from other instinctual drives. It is through their interaction that the phenomena of inhibition and repression come about, and it is from their own inbuilt action programmes, not from some indivisible source of agency, that the person's behaviour comes.

Incompatibility of agency and determinism

To say that in the long run it is *I* that originates my acts (rather than that it is the causal interaction of my parts) is either an uninformative tautology – *my acts are mine* – or it is the postulation of a self-changing being, and that is just as uninformative, because if such an entity can change itself in any of its possible ways at any time, then it is in principle impossible to explain or predict its doing any specific thing at any specific time. The only conception

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of causality that is of any use in the natural sciences is one which assumes that any change in an entity is produced by the impact on it of some stimulus external to it. Both the intrinsic properties of the entity and those of whatever arrives at it are relevant to the change (Anderson, 1962). In psychology, the main relevant intrinsic properties of the organism will be its motivational or drive state, and its acquired beliefs about the nature of the stimulating object and what the outcome of various actions in the prevailing circumstances may be. (It hardly need be said that there are also general conditions such as its physical and sensory capabilities, and so on.) Given all these conditions, the organism is caused to behave, which is to say that its parts are caused to move in a characteristic way, such that more or less predictable effects are produced in the environment (this likelihood being increased by sensory and perceptual feedback). The behaviour will be a learned modification of one of the wired-in action patterns specific to the instinctual drive which is regnant at the time. In that way, once we have a complete specification of the instinctual drives and their specific actions, then the explanation of any action becomes possible in principle, if we can gain sufficient information about the organism's learning experiences.

But if an organism could initiate its own behaviour, could change itself, then no explanation of the causal kind (or indeed of any other) would be possible for such behaviour. There would be no necessary and sufficient set of antecedent conditions, the observation of which would enable us to predict or explain the behaviour. An organism so conceived would carry the potency for self-change with it all the time, and it would then be impossible to explain why it exercised this power at one time rather than another. One could only say that it *chose* to do so. Examples of this kind of thinking may be found in Harré (1983) and Rychlak (1979, 1981). Rather than accept such mysteries, it seems scientifically much more fruitful to elaborate and capitalize upon Freud's dictum that we are lived by our instincts.

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John Anderson: implications of his philosophical views for psychology

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Since the early years of this century many psychologists have taken a positive pride in refusing to expose themselves to what they take to be the dangerous *a priori*ism of philosophical argument, preferring to proceed with the empirical collection of what they fondly believe to be presuppositionless data. Of course there can be no such things and every psychologist makes presuppositions of a philosophical kind even in specifying what he is going to accept as data. Such unavoidable philosophising is probably more native to psychology than to any of the other sciences, and when psychologists function as amateur philosophers they tend to reinvent for themselves philosophical conceptions which have been repeatedly exposed in the history of thought as self-defeating, so that their self-insulation from philosophy proper has been thoroughly detrimental to the progress of their science. In Sydney that insulation was overcome in good measure by the mutual respect between John Anderson and W. M. O'Neil, during the latter's headship of the Department of Psychology, and since then there has remained a tradition of openness to critical argument within the department. But within the orthodoxy of the psychological establishment of the wide world, such radical criticism as Anderson's does not find a ready welcome, and there has been a profusion of misconceived experimentation and speculation which might conceivably have been avoided if Anderson's views on epistemology, on determinism, and on ethics could have achieved a wider currency. At the beginning of his paper 'Mind as Feeling' (1934) Anderson refers to the traditional threefold classification of the characteristics of mind as the cognitive, the conative, and the affective, or as knowing, striving, and feeling, and since he found that a satisfactory framework for his discussion there, I shall take it as a convenient one for surveying the implications of his work for current psychological theory.

Concerning the psychology of cognition, one could say that until the early years of this century, academic psychologists had taken it that the