

## Instincts and their Vicissitudes

*Sigmund Freud*

WE have often heard it maintained that sciences should be built up on clear and sharply defined basic concepts. In actual fact no science, not even the most exact, begins with such definitions. The true beginning of scientific activity consists rather in describing phenomena and then in proceeding to group, classify and correlate them. Even at the stage of description it is not possible to avoid applying certain abstract ideas to the material in hand, ideas derived from somewhere or other but certainly not from the new observations alone. Such ideas—which will later become the basic concepts of the science—are still more indispensable as the material is further worked over. They must at first necessarily possess some degree of indefiniteness; there can be no question of any clear delimitation of their content. So long as they remain in this condition, we come to an understanding about their meaning by making repeated references to the material of observation from which they appear to have been derived, but upon which, in fact, they have been imposed. Thus, strictly speaking, they are in the nature of conventions—although everything depends on their not being arbitrarily chosen but determined by their having significant relations to the empirical material, relations that we seem to sense before we can clearly recognize and demonstrate them. It is only after more thorough investigation of the field of observation that we are able to formulate its basic scientific concepts with increased precision, and progressively so to modify them that they become serviceable and consistent over a wide area. Then, indeed, the time may have come to confine them in definitions. The advance of knowledge, however, does not tolerate any rigidity even in definitions. Physics furnishes an excellent illustration of the way in which even ‘basic concepts’ that have been established in the form of definitions are constantly being altered in their content.<sup>1</sup>

A conventional basic concept of this kind, which at the

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [210](#)

1 [A similar line of thought had been developed in the paper on narcissism ([1914c](#), p. [77](#) above).]

- 117 -

moment is still somewhat obscure but which is indispensable to us in psychology, is that of an ‘instinct’.<sup>1</sup> Let us try to give a content to it by approaching it from different angles.

First, from the angle of *physiology*. This has given us the concept of a ‘stimulus’ and the pattern of the reflex arc, according to which a stimulus applied to living tissue (nervous substance) *from* the outside is discharged by action *to* the outside. This action is expedient in so far as it withdraws the stimulated substance from the influence of the stimulus, removes it out of its range of operation.

What is the relation of ‘instinct’ to ‘stimulus’? There is nothing to prevent our subsuming the concept of ‘instinct’ under that of ‘stimulus’ and saying that an instinct is a stimulus applied to the mind. But we are immediately set on our guard against *equating* instinct and

mental stimulus. There are obviously other stimuli to the mind besides those of an instinctual kind, stimuli which behave far more like physiological ones. For example, when a strong light falls on the eye, it is not an instinctual stimulus; it is one, however, when a dryness of the mucous membrane of the pharynx or an irritation of the mucous membrane of the stomach makes itself felt.<sup>2</sup>

We have now obtained the material necessary for distinguishing between instinctual stimuli and other (physiological) stimuli that operate on the mind. In the first place, an instinctual stimulus does not arise from the external world but from within the organism itself. For this reason it operates differently upon the mind and different actions are necessary in order to remove it. Further, all that is essential in a stimulus is covered if we assume that it operates with a single impact, so that it can be disposed of by a single expedient action. A typical instance of this is motor flight from the source of stimulation. These impacts may, of course, be repeated and summated, but that makes no difference to our notion of the process and to the conditions for the removal of the stimulus. An instinct, on the other hand, never operates as a force giving a *momentary* impact but always as a constant one. Moreover, since it impinges not from without but from within the organism, no flight can avail against it. A better term for an instinctual stimulus is a

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [211](#)

1 [*Trieb* in the original. See Editor's Note, p. [111](#).]

2 Assuming, of course, that these internal processes are the organic basis of the respective needs of thirst and hunger.

- 118 -

'need'. What does away with a need is 'satisfaction'. This can be attained only by an appropriate ('adequate') alteration of the internal source of stimulation.

Let us imagine ourselves in the situation of an almost entirely helpless living organism, as yet unorientated in the world, which is receiving stimuli in its nervous substance.<sup>1</sup> This organism will very soon be in a position to make a first distinction and a first orientation. On the one hand, it will be aware of stimuli which can be avoided by muscular action (flight); these it ascribes to an external world. On the other hand, it will also be aware of stimuli against which such action is of no avail and whose character of constant pressure persists in spite of it; these stimuli are the signs of an internal world, the evidence of instinctual needs. The perceptual substance of the living organism will thus have found in the efficacy of its muscular activity a basis for distinguishing between an 'outside' and an 'inside'.<sup>2</sup>

We thus arrive at the essential nature of instincts in the first place by considering their main characteristics—their origin in sources of stimulation within the organism and their appearance as a constant force—and from this we deduce one of their further features, namely, that no actions of flight avail against them. In the course of this discussion, however, we cannot fail to be struck by something that obliges us to make a further admission. In order to guide us in dealing with the field of psychological phenomena, we do not merely apply certain conventions to our empirical material as basic *concepts*; we also

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [212](#)

1 [The hypothesis which follows concerning the behaviour of a primitive living organism, and the postulation of a fundamental ‘principle of constancy’, had been stated in similar terms in some of the very earliest of Freud's psychological works. See, for instance, Chapter VII, Sections C and E, of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, 5, 565 ff. and 598ff. But it had been expressed still earlier in *neurological* terms in his posthumously published ‘Project’ of 1895 (1950a, Part I, Section 1), as well as, more briefly, in his lecture on the Breuer and Freud ‘Preliminary Communication’ (1893h) and in the penultimate paragraph of his French paper on hysterical paralyses (1893c). Freud returned to the hypothesis once more, in Chapters I and IV of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920g), *Standard Ed.*, 18, 1 ff. and 26 ff.; and reconsidered it in ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’ (1924c). Cf. footnote, p. 121 below.]

2 [See further below, p. 134 ff. Freud dealt with the subject later in his paper on ‘Negation’ (1925h) and in Chapter I of *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930a).]

- 119 -

make use of a number of complicated *postulates*. We have already alluded to the most important of these, and all we need now do is to state it expressly. This postulate is of a biological nature, and makes use of the concept of ‘purpose’ (or perhaps of expediency) and runs as follows: the nervous system is an apparatus which has the function of getting rid of the stimuli that reach it, or of reducing them to the lowest possible level; or which, if it were feasible, would maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition.<sup>1</sup> Let us for the present not take exception to the indefiniteness of this idea and let us assign to the nervous system the task—speaking in general terms—of *mastering stimuli*. We then see how greatly the simple pattern of the physiological reflex is complicated by the introduction of instincts. External stimuli impose only the single task of withdrawing from them; this is accomplished by muscular movements, one of which eventually achieves that aim and thereafter, being the expedient movement, becomes a hereditary disposition. Instinctual stimuli, which originate from within the organism, cannot be dealt with by this mechanism. Thus they make far higher demands on the nervous system and cause it to undertake involved and interconnected activities by which the external world is so changed as to afford satisfaction to the internal source of stimulation. Above all, they oblige the nervous system to renounce its ideal intention of keeping off stimuli, for they maintain an incessant and unavoidable afflux of stimulation. We may therefore well conclude that instincts and not external stimuli are the true motive forces behind the advances that have led the nervous system, with its unlimited capacities, to its present high level of development. There is naturally nothing to prevent our supposing that the instincts themselves are, at least in part, precipitates of the effects of external stimulation, which in the course of phylogenesis have brought about modifications in the living substance.

When we further find that the activity of even the most highly developed mental apparatus is subject to the pleasure principle, i.e. is automatically regulated by feelings belonging to the pleasure-unpleasure series, we can hardly reject the further hypothesis that these feelings reflect the manner in which the process of mastering stimuli takes place—certainly in the sense that unpleasurable feelings are connected with an increase

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page 213

1 [This is the ‘principle of constancy’. See footnote 1 above, p. 119].

and pleasurable feelings with a decrease of stimulus. We will, however, carefully preserve this assumption in its present highly indefinite form, until we succeed, if that is possible, in discovering what sort of relation exists between pleasure and unpleasure, on the one hand, and fluctuations in the amounts of stimulus affecting mental life, on the other. It is certain that many very various relations of this kind, and not very simple ones, are possible.<sup>1</sup>

If now we apply ourselves to considering mental life from a *biological* point of view, an 'instinct' appears to us as a concept

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [214](#)

1 [It will be seen that two principles are here involved. One of these is the 'principle of constancy' (see above, p. [120](#), and footnote [1](#), p. [119](#)). It is stated again in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, [1920g](#), Chapter I (Standard Ed., [18](#), [59](#)), as follows: 'The mental apparatus endeavours to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant.' For this principle Freud, in the same work (Standard Ed., [56](#)), adopted the term 'Nirvana principle'. The second principle involved is the 'pleasure principle', stated at the beginning of the paragraph to which this note is appended. It, too, is restated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Standard Ed., 7): 'The course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle.... [That course] takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with ... an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure.' Freud seems to have assumed to begin with that these two principles were closely correlated and even identical. Thus, in his 'Project' of 1895 (Freud, [1950a](#), Part I, Section 8) he writes: 'Since we have certain knowledge of a trend in psychical life towards avoiding unpleasure, we are tempted to identify that trend with the primary trend towards inertia [i.e. towards avoiding excitation].' A similar view is taken in Chapter VII (E) of *The Interpretation of Dreams* ([1900a](#)), *Standard Ed.*, [5](#), [598](#). In the passage in the text above, however, a doubt appears to be expressed as to the completeness of the correlation between the two principles. This doubt is carried farther in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*Standard Ed.*, [18](#), [8](#) and [63](#)) and is discussed at some length in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' ([1924c](#)). Freud there argues that the two principles cannot be identical, since there are unquestionably states of increasing tension which are pleasurable (e.g. sexual excitement), and he goes on to suggest (what had already been hinted at in the two passages in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* just referred to) that the pleasurable or unpleasurable quality of a state may be related to a *temporal* characteristic (or rhythm) of the changes in the quantity of excitation present. He concludes that in any case the two principles must not be regarded as identical: the pleasure principle is a *modification* of the Nirvana principle. The Nirvana principle, he maintains, is to be attributed to the 'death instinct', and its modification into the pleasure principle is due to the influence of the 'life instinct' or libido.]

on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.<sup>1</sup>

We are now in a position to discuss certain terms which are used in reference to the concept of an instinct—for example, its 'pressure', its 'aim', its 'object' and its 'source'.

By the pressure [Drang] of an instinct we understand its motor factor, the amount of force or the measure of the demand for work which it represents. The characteristic of exercising pressure is common to all instincts; it is in fact their very essence. Every instinct is a piece of activity; if we speak loosely of passive instincts, we can only mean instincts whose *aim* is passive.<sup>2</sup>

The aim [*Ziel*] of an instinct is in every instance satisfaction, which can only be obtained by removing the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct. But although the ultimate aim of each instinct remains unchangeable, there may yet be different paths leading to the same ultimate aim; so that an instinct may be found to have various nearer or intermediate aims, which are combined or interchanged with one another. Experience permits us also to speak of instincts which are 'inhibited in their aim', in the case of processes which are allowed to make some advance towards instinctual satisfaction but are then inhibited or deflected. We may suppose that even processes of this kind involve a partial satisfaction.

The object [*Objekt*] of an instinct is the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim. It is what is most variable about an instinct and is not originally connected with it, but becomes assigned to it only in consequence of being peculiarly fitted to make satisfaction possible. The object is not necessarily something extraneous: it may equally well be a part of the subject's own body. It may be

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [214](#)

1 [See the discussion in the Editor's Note, pp. [111-13](#). This last point also appears in the 1915 addition to the *Three Essays* (1905d), *Standard Edition*, 7, 168, and in Chapter II of the *Outline* (1940a), *ibid.*, 23, 148.]

2 [Some remarks on the active nature of instincts will be found in a footnote added in 1915 to Section 4 of the third of Freud's *Three Essays* (1905d), *Standard Ed.*, 7, [219](#).—A criticism of Adler for misunderstanding this 'pressing' characteristic of instincts appears at the end of the second Section of Part III of the 'Little Hans' analysis (1909b), *Standard Ed.*, 10, [140-1](#).]

- 122 -

changed any number of times in the course of the vicissitudes which the instinct undergoes during its existence; and highly important parts are played by this displacement of instinct. It may happen that the same object serves for the satisfaction of several instincts simultaneously, a phenomenon which Adler [1908] has called a 'confluence' of instincts [*Triebverschränkung*].<sup>1</sup> A particularly close attachment of the instinct to its object is distinguished by the term 'fixation'. This frequently occurs at very early periods of the development of an instinct and puts an end to its mobility through its intense opposition to detachment.<sup>2</sup>

By the source [*Quelle*] of an instinct is meant the somatic process which occurs in an organ or part of the body and whose stimulus is represented in mental life by an instinct. We do not know whether this process is invariably of a chemical nature or whether it may also correspond to the release of other, e.g. mechanical, forces. The study of the sources of instincts lies outside the scope of psychology. Although instincts are wholly determined by their origin in a somatic source, in mental life we know them only by their aims. An exact knowledge of the sources of an instinct is not invariably necessary for purposes of psychological investigation; sometimes its source may be inferred from its aim.

Are we to suppose that the different instincts which originate in the body and operate on the mind are also distinguished by different *qualities*, and that that is why they behave in qualitatively different ways in mental life? This supposition does not seem to be justified; we are much more likely to find the simpler assumption sufficient—that the instincts are all qualitatively alike and owe the effect they make only to the amount of excitation they carry, or perhaps, in addition, to certain functions of that quantity. What distinguishes from one another the mental effects produced by the various instincts may be traced to the difference in their sources. In any event, it is only in a later connection that we shall be able to make plain what the problem of the quality of instincts signifies.<sup>3</sup>

What instincts should we suppose there are, and how many?

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [215](#)

1 [Two instances of this are given by Freud in the analysis of ‘Little Hans’ ([1909b](#)), *Standard Ed.*, **10**, [106](#) and [127](#).]

2 [Cf. below, p. [148](#).]

3 [It is not clear what ‘later connection’ Freud had in mind.]

- 123 -

There is obviously a wide opportunity here for arbitrary choice. No objection can be made to anyone's employing the concept of an instinct of play or of destruction or of gregariousness, when the subject-matter demands it and the limitations of psychological analysis allow of it. Nevertheless, we should not neglect to ask ourselves whether instinctual motives like these, which are so highly specialized on the one hand, do not admit of further dissection in accordance with the *sources* of the instinct, so that only primal instincts—those which cannot be further dissected—can lay claim to importance.

I have proposed that two groups of such primal instincts should be distinguished: the *ego*, or *self-preservative*, instincts and the *sexual* instincts. But this supposition has not the status of a necessary postulate, as has, for instance, our assumption about the biological purpose of the mental apparatus (p. [120](#)); it is merely a working hypothesis, to be retained only so long as it proves useful, and it will make little difference to the results of our work of description and classification if it is replaced by another. The occasion for this hypothesis arose in the course of the evolution of psycho-analysis, which was first employed upon the psychoneuroses, or, more precisely, upon the group described as ‘transference neuroses’ (hysteria and obsessional neurosis); these showed that at the root of all such affections there is to be found a conflict between the claims of sexuality and those of the ego. It is always possible that an exhaustive study of the other neurotic affections (especially of the narcissistic psychoneuroses, the schizophrenias) may oblige us to alter this formula and to make a different classification of the primal instincts. But for the present we do not know of any such formula, nor have we met with any argument unfavourable to drawing this contrast between sexual and ego-instincts.<sup>1</sup>

I am altogether doubtful whether any decisive pointers for the differentiation and classification of the instincts can be arrived at on the basis of working over the psychological material. This working-over seems rather itself to call for the application to the material of definite assumptions concerning instinctual life, and it would be a desirable

thing if those assumptions could be taken from some other branch of knowledge and carried over to psychology. The contribution which biology has to

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [216](#)

1 [See the Editor's Note, p. [115](#).]

- 124 -

make here certainly does not run counter to the distinction between sexual and ego-instincts. Biology teaches that sexuality is not to be put on a par with other functions of the individual; for its purposes go beyond the individual and have as their content the production of new individuals—that is, the preservation of the species. It shows, further, that two views, seemingly equally well-founded, may be taken of the relation between the ego and sexuality. On the one view, the individual is the principal thing, sexuality is one of its activities and sexual satisfaction one of its needs; while on the other view the individual is a temporary and transient appendage to the quasi-immortal germ-plasm, which is entrusted to him by the process of generation.<sup>1</sup> The hypothesis that the sexual function differs from other bodily processes in virtue of a special chemistry is, I understand, also a postulate of the Ehrlich school of biological research.<sup>2</sup>

Since a study of instinctual life from the direction of consciousness presents almost insuperable difficulties, the principal source of our knowledge remains the psycho-analytic investigation of mental disturbances. Psycho-analysis, however, in consequence of the course taken by its development, has hitherto been able to give us information of a fairly satisfactory nature only about the *sexual* instincts; for it is precisely that group which alone can be observed in isolation, as it were, in the psychoneuroses. With the extension of psycho-analysis to the other neurotic affections, we shall no doubt find a basis for our knowledge of the ego-instincts as well, though it would be rash to expect equally favourable conditions for observation in this further field of research.

This much can be said by way of a general characterization of the sexual instincts. They are numerous, emanate from a great variety of organic sources, act in the first instance independently of one another and only achieve a more or less complete synthesis at a late stage. The aim which each of them

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [217](#)

1 [See footnote, p. [78](#) above. The same point is made near the beginning of Lecture XXVI of the *Introductory Lectures* ([1916-17](#)).]

2 [This hypothesis had already been announced by Freud in the first edition of his *Three Essays* ([1905d](#)), *Standard Ed.*, 7, [216](#) n. But he had held it for at least ten years previously. See, for instance, Draft I in the Fliess correspondence ([1950a](#)), probably written in 1895.]

- 125 -

strives for is the attainment of 'organ-pleasure'<sup>1</sup> only when synthesis is achieved do they enter the service of the reproductive function and thereupon become generally recognizable as sexual instincts. At their first appearance they are attached to the instincts of self-preservation, from which they only gradually become separated; in their choice of object, too, they follow

the paths that are indicated to them by the ego-instincts.<sup>2</sup> A portion of them remains associated with the ego-instincts throughout life and furnishes them with libidinal components, which in normal functioning easily escape notice and are revealed clearly only by the onset of illness.<sup>3</sup> They are distinguished by possessing the capacity to act vicariously for one another to a wide extent and by being able to change their objects readily. In consequence of the latter properties they are capable of functions which are far removed from their original purposive actions—capable, that is, of ‘sublimation’.

Our inquiry into the various vicissitudes which instincts undergo in the process of development and in the course of life must be confined to the sexual instincts, which are the more familiar to us. Observation shows us that an instinct may undergo the following vicissitudes:—

Reversal into its opposite.

Turning round upon the subject's own self.

Repression.

Sublimation.

Since I do not intend to treat of sublimation here<sup>4</sup> and since repression requires a special chapter to itself [cf. next paper, p. [146](#)], it only remains for us to describe and discuss the two first points. Bearing in mind that there are motive forces which

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [218](#)

1 [‘Organ-pleasure’ (i.e. pleasure attached to one particular bodily organ) seems to be used here for the first time by Freud. The term is discussed at greater length in the early part of Lecture XXI of the *Introductory Lectures* ([1916-17](#)). The underlying idea, of course, goes back much earlier. See, for instance, the opening passage of the third of the *Three Essays* ([1905d](#)), *Standard Ed.*, [7](#), [207](#).]

2 [Cf. ‘On Narcissism’, p. [87](#) above.]

3 [Standard Ed., p. [82](#) f. above.]

4 [Sublimation had already been touched upon in the paper on narcissism (pp. [94-5](#)); but it seems possible that it formed the subject of one of the lost metapsychological papers. (See Editor's Introduction, p. [106](#).)]

- 126 -

work against an instinct's being carried through in an unmodified form, we may also regard these vicissitudes as modes of *defence* against the instincts.

Reversal of an instinct into its opposite resolves on closer examination into two different processes: a change from activity to passivity, and a reversal of its content. The two processes, being different in their nature, must be treated separately

Examples of the first process are met with in the two pairs of opposites: sadism—masochism and scopophilia—exhibitionism. The reversal affects only the *aims* of the instincts. The active aim (to torture, to look at) is replaced by the passive aim (to be tortured, to be looked at). Reversal of *content* is found in the single instance of the transformation of love into hate.

The turning round of an instinct upon the subject's own self is made plausible by the reflection that masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject's own ego, and



that exhibitionism includes looking at his own body. Analytic observation, indeed, leaves us in no doubt that the masochist shares in the enjoyment of the assault upon himself, and that the exhibitionist shares in the enjoyment of [the sight of] his exposure. The essence of the process is thus the change of the *object*, while the aim remains unchanged. We cannot fail to notice, however, that in these examples the turning round upon the subject's self and the transformation from activity to passivity converge or coincide.

To elucidate the situation, a more thorough investigation is essential.

In the case of the pair of opposites sadism—masochism, the process may be represented as follows:

- (a) Sadism consists in the exercise of violence or power upon some other person as object.
- (b) This object is given up and replaced by the subject's self. With the turning round upon the self the change from an active to a passive instinctual aim is also effected.
- (c) An extraneous person is once more sought as object; this person, in consequence of the alteration which has taken place in the instinctual aim, has to take over the role of the subject.<sup>1</sup>

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [219](#)

1 [Though the general sense of these passages is clear, there may be some confusion in the use of the word 'subject'. As a rule 'subject' and 'object' are used respectively for the person in whom an instinct (or other state of mind) originates, and the person or thing to which it is directed. Here, however, 'subject' seems to be used for the person who plays the active part in the relationship—the agent. The word is more obviously used in this sense in the parallel passage on p. [129](#) and elsewhere below.]

- 127 -

Case (c) is what is commonly termed masochism. Here, too, satisfaction follows along the path of the original sadism, the passive ego placing itself back in phantasy in its first role, which has now in fact been taken over by the extraneous subject.<sup>1</sup> Whether there is, besides this, a more direct masochistic satisfaction is highly doubtful. A primary masochism, not derived from sadism in the manner I have described, seems not to be met with.<sup>2</sup> That it is not superfluous to assume the existence of stage (b) is to be seen from the behaviour of the sadistic instinct in obsessional neurosis. There there is a turning round upon the subject's self *without* an attitude of passivity towards another person: the change has only got as far as stage (b). The desire to torture has turned into self-torture and self-punishment, not into masochism. The active voice is changed, not into the passive, but into the reflexive, middle voice.<sup>3</sup>

Our view of sadism is further prejudiced by the circumstance that this instinct, side by side with its general aim (or perhaps, rather, within it), seems to strive towards the accomplishment of a quite special aim—not only to humiliate and master, but, in addition, to inflict pains. Psycho-analysis would appear to show that the infliction of pain plays no part among the original purposive actions of the instinct. A sadistic child takes no account of whether or not he inflicts pains, nor does he intend to do so. But when once the transformation into masochism has taken place, the pains are very well fitted to provide a

passive masochistic aim; for we have every reason to believe that sensations of pain, like other unpleasurable sensations, trench upon sexual excitation and produce a pleasurable condition, for the sake of which the subject will even willingly experience the unpleasure of pain.<sup>4</sup> When once feeling pains has become a masochistic aim, the sadistic aim of *causing* pains can arise also,

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [220](#)

1 [See last footnote.]

2 (*Footnote added* 1924:) In later works (cf. ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, [1924c](#)) relating to problems of instinctual life I have expressed an opposite view.

3 [The allusion here is to the voices of the Greek verb.]

4 [See a passage near the end of the second of the *Three Essays* ([1905d](#)), *Standard Ed.*, 7, [203-4](#).]

- 128 -

retrogressively; for while these pains are being inflicted on other people, they are enjoyed masochistically by the subject through his identification of himself with the suffering object. In both cases, of course, it is not the pain itself which is enjoyed, but the accompanying sexual excitation—so that this can be done especially conveniently from the sadistic position. The enjoyment of pain would thus be an aim which was originally masochistic, but which can only become an instinctual aim in someone who was originally sadistic.

For the sake of completeness I may add that feelings of pity cannot be described as a result of a transformation of instinct occurring in sadism, but necessitate the notion of a *reaction-formation* against that instinct. (For the difference, see later.)<sup>1</sup>

Rather different and simpler findings are afforded by the investigation of another pair of opposites—the instincts whose respective aim is to look and to display oneself (scopophilia and exhibitionism, in the language of the perversions). Here again we may postulate the same stages as in the previous instance:—(a) Looking as *anactivity* directed towards an extraneous object. (b) Giving up of the object and turning of the scopophilic instinct towards a part of the subject's own body; with this, transformation to passivity and setting up of a new aim—that of being looked at. (c) Introduction of a new subject<sup>2</sup> to whom one displays oneself in order to be looked at by him. Here, too, it can hardly be doubted that the active aim appears before the passive, that looking precedes being looked at. But there is an important divergence from what happens in the case of sadism, in that we can recognize in the case of the

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [221](#)

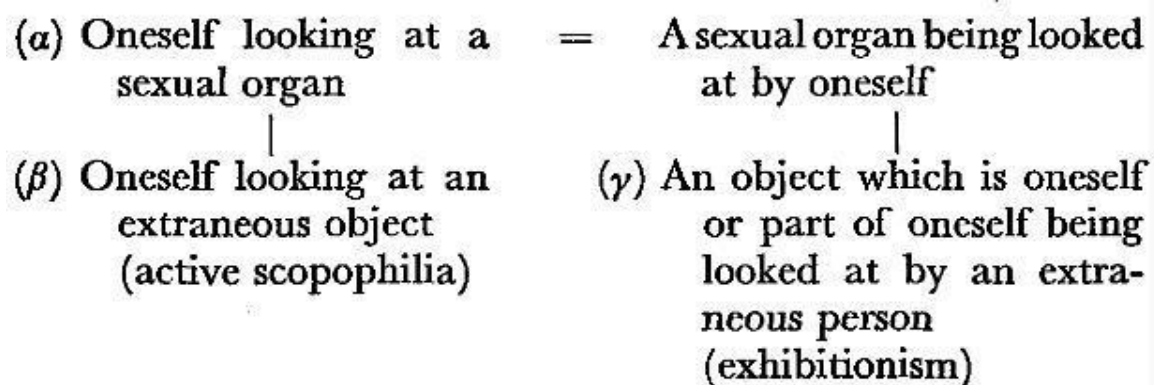
1 [It is not clear to what passage this is intended to refer, unless, again, it was included in a missing paper on sublimation. There is in fact some discussion of the subject in ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’ ([1915b](#)), p. [281](#) below. But this cannot have been what Freud had in mind, for it was originally published in a different volume. In a footnote added in 1915 (the year in which the present paper was written) to the *Three Essays* ([1905d](#)), Freud insists that sublimation and reaction-formation are to be regarded as distinct processes (*Standard Ed.*, 7, [178](#) n.).—The German word for ‘pity’ is ‘Mitleid’, literally ‘suffering with’,

‘compassion’. Another view of the origin of the feeling is expressed in the ‘Wolf Man’ analysis (1918b), *Standard Ed.*, 17, 88, which was actually written, in all probability, at the end of 1914, a few months earlier than the present paper.]

2 [I.e. agent; see footnote on pp. 127-8.]

- 129 -

scopophilic instinct a yet earlier stage than that described as (a). For the beginning of its activity the scopophilic instinct is auto-erotic: it has indeed an object, but that object is part of the subject's own body. It is only later that the instinct is led, by a process of comparison, to exchange this object for an analogous part of someone else's body—stage (a). This preliminary stage is interesting because it is the source of *both* the situations represented in the resulting pair of opposites, the one or the other according to which element in the original situation is changed. The following might serve as a diagrammatic picture of the scopophilic instinct:—



A preliminary stage of this kind is absent in sadism, which from the outset is directed upon an extraneous object, although it might not be altogether unreasonable to construct such a stage out of the child's efforts to gain control over his own limbs.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to both the instincts which we have just taken as examples, it should be remarked that their transformation by a reversal from activity to passivity and by a turning round upon the subject never in fact involves the whole quota of the instinctual impulse. The earlier active direction of the instinct persists to some degree side by side with its later passive direction, even when the process of its transformation has been very extensive. The only correct statement to make about the scopophilic instinct would be that all the stages of its development, its auto-erotic, preliminary stage as well as its final active or passive form, co-exist alongside one another; and the truth of this becomes obvious if we base our opinion, not on the actions to which the instinct leads, but on the mechanism of its satisfaction. Perhaps, however, it is permissible to look at the matter

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page 222

1 (Footnote added 1924:) Cf. footnote 2, p. 128.

- 130 -

and represent it in yet another way. We can divide the life of each instinct into a series of separate successive waves, each of which is homogeneous during whatever period of time it may last, and whose relation to one another is comparable to that of successive eruptions of

lava. We can then perhaps picture the first, original eruption of the instinct as proceeding in an unchanged form and undergoing no development at all. The next wave would be modified from the outset—being turned, for instance, from active to passive—and would then, with this new characteristic, be added to the earlier wave, and so on. If we were then to take a survey of the instinctual impulse from its beginning up to a given point, the succession of waves which we have described would inevitably present the picture of a definite development of the instinct.

The fact that, at this **1** later period of development of an instinctual impulse, its (passive) opposite may be observed alongside of it deserves to be marked by the very apt term introduced by Bleuler—‘ambivalence’ **.2**

This reference to the developmental history of instincts and the permanence of their intermediate stages should make the development of instincts fairly intelligible to us. Experience shows that the amount of demonstrable ambivalence varies greatly between individuals, groups and races. Marked instinctual ambivalence in a human being living at the present day may be regarded as an archaic inheritance, for we have reason to suppose that the part played in instinctual life by the active impulses in their unmodified form was greater in *primaevae* times than it is on an average to-day **.3**

We have become accustomed to call the early phase of the

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page **223**

1 [‘*Jener*’. In the first edition only, ‘*jeder*’, ‘every’.]

2 [The term ‘ambivalence’, coined by Bleuler (**1910b**, and **1911**, **43** and **305**), seems not to have been used by him in this sense. He distinguished three kinds of ambivalence: (1) emotional, i.e. oscillation between love and hate, (2) voluntary, i.e. inability to decide on an action, and (3) intellectual, i.e. belief in contradictory propositions. Freud generally uses the term in the first of these senses. See, for instance, the first occasion on which he seems to have adopted it, near the end of his paper on ‘The Dynamics of Transference’ (**1912b**), and later in the present paper (pp. **133** and **139**). The passage in the text is one of the few in which he has applied the term to activity and passivity. For another instance of this exceptional use see a passage in Section III of the ‘Wolf Man’ case history (**1918b**), *Standard Ed.*, **17**, **26**.]

3 [See *Totem and Taboo* (**1912-13**), *Standard Ed.*, **13**, **66**.]

- 131 -

development of the ego, during which its sexual instincts find auto-erotic satisfaction, ‘narcissism’, without at once entering on any discussion of the relation between auto-erotism and narcissism. It follows that the preliminary stage of the scopophilic instinct, in which the subject's own body is the object of the scopophilia, must be classed under narcissism, and that we must describe it as a narcissistic formation. The active scopophilic instinct develops from this, by leaving narcissism behind. The passive scopophilic instinct, on the contrary, holds fast to the narcissistic object. Similarly, the transformation of sadism into masochism implies a return to the narcissistic object. And in both these cases [i.e. in passive scopophilia and masochism] the narcissistic *subject* is, through identification, replaced by another, extraneous ego. If we take into account our constructed preliminary narcissistic stage of sadism, we shall be approaching a more general realization—namely, that the instinctual vicissitudes which consist in the instinct's being turned round upon the

subject's own ego and undergoing reversal from activity to passivity are dependent on the narcissistic organization of the ego and bear the stamp of that phase. They perhaps correspond to the attempts at defence which at higher stages of the development of the ego are effected by other means. [See above, pp. [126-7](#).]

At this point we may call to mind that so far we have considered only two pairs of opposite instincts: sadism—masochism and scopophilia—exhibitionism. These are the best known sexual instincts that appear in an ambivalent manner. The other components of the later sexual function are not yet sufficiently accessible to analysis for us to be able to discuss them in a similar way. In general we can assert of them that their activities are *auto-erotic*; that is to say, their object is negligible in comparison with the organ which is their source, and as a rule coincides with that organ. The object of the scopophilic instinct, however, though it too is in the first instance a part of the subject's own body, is not the eye itself; and in sadism the organic source, which is probably the muscular apparatus with its capacity for action, points unequivocally at an object other than itself, even though that object is part of the subject's own body. In the auto-erotic instincts, the part played by the organic source is so decisive that, according to a plausible suggestion of Federn ([1913](#)) and Jekels ([1913](#)), the form and

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [224](#)

- 132 -

function of the organ determine the activity or passivity of the instinctual aim.

The change of the *content* [cf. p. [127](#)] of an instinct into its opposite is observed in a single instance only—the transformation of *love into hate*.<sup>1</sup> Since it is particularly common to find both these directed simultaneously towards the same object, their co-existence furnishes the most important example of ambivalence of feeling. [See p. [131](#) n. 2.]

The case of love and hate acquires a special interest from the circumstance that it refuses to be fitted into our scheme of the instincts. It is impossible to doubt that there is the most intimate relation between these two opposite feelings and sexual life, but we are naturally unwilling to think of love as being some kind of special component instinct of sexuality in the same way as the others we have been discussing. We should prefer to regard loving as the expression of the *whole* sexual current of feeling; but this idea does not clear up our difficulties, and we cannot see what meaning to attach to an opposite content of this current.

Loving admits not merely of one, but of three opposites. In addition to the antithesis 'loving—hating', there is the other one of 'loving—being loved'; and, in addition to these, loving and hating taken together are the opposite of the condition of unconcern or indifference. The second of these three antitheses, loving—being loved, corresponds exactly to the transformation from activity to passivity and may be traced to an underlying situation in the same way as in the case of the scopophilic instinct. This situation is that of *loving oneself*, which we regard as the characteristic feature of narcissism. Then, according as the object or the subject is replaced by an extraneous one, what results is the active aim of loving or the passive one of being loved—the latter remaining near to narcissism.

Perhaps we shall come to a better understanding of the several opposites of loving if we reflect that our mental life as a whole is governed by *three polarities*, the antitheses

Subject (ego)—Object (external world),

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [225](#)  
1 [In the German editions previous to 1924 this reads ‘the transformation of *love and hate*’.]

- 133 -

The antithesis ego—non-ego (external), i.e. subject—object, is, as we have already said [p. [119](#)], thrust upon the individual organism at an early stage, by the experience that it can silence *external* stimuli by means of muscular action but is defenceless against *instinctual* stimuli. This antithesis remains, above all, sovereign in our intellectual activity and creates for research the basic situation which no efforts can alter. The polarity of pleasure—unpleasure is attached to a scale of feelings, whose paramount importance in determining our actions (our will) has already been emphasized [pp. [120-1](#)]. The antithesis active—passive must not be confused with the antithesis ego-subject—external world-object. The relation of the ego to the external world is passive in so far as it receives stimuli from it and active when it reacts to these. It is forced by its instincts into a quite special degree of activity towards the external world, so that we might bring out the essential point if we say that the ego-subject is passive in respect of external stimuli but active through its own instincts. The antithesis active—passive coalesces later with the antithesis masculine—feminine, which, until this has taken place, has no psychological meaning. The coupling of activity with masculinity and of passivity with femininity meets us, indeed, as a biological fact; but it is by no means so invariably complete and exclusive as we are inclined to assume. [1](#)

The three polarities of the mind are connected with one another in various highly significant ways. There is a primal psychological situation in which two of them coincide. Originally, at the very beginning of mental life, the ego is cathected with instincts and is to some extent capable of satisfying them on itself. We call this condition ‘narcissism’ and this way of obtaining satisfaction ‘auto-erotic’. [2](#) At this time the external world

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [226](#)  
1 [This question is discussed at much greater length in a footnote added in 1915 (the year in which the present paper was written) to the third of Freud's *Three Essays* ([1905d](#)), *Standard Ed.*, [7](#), [219](#) f.—See also p. [55](#) above.]

2 Some of the sexual instincts are, as we know, capable of this auto-erotic satisfaction, and so are adapted to being the vehicle for the development under the dominance of the pleasureprinciple [from the original ‘reality-ego’ into the ‘pleasure-ego’] which we are about to describe [in the next paragraphs of the text]. Those sexual instincts which from the outset require an object, and the needs of the ego-instincts, which are never capable of auto-erotic satisfaction, naturally disturb this state [of primal narcissism] and so pave the way for an advance from it. Indeed, the primal narcissistic state would not be able to follow the development [that is to be described] if it were not for the fact that every individual passes through a period during which he is helpless and has to be looked after and during which his pressing needs are satisfied by an external agency and are thus prevented from becoming

greater.—[This very condensed footnote might have been easier to understand if it had been placed two or three paragraphs further on. It may perhaps be expanded as follows. In his paper on the ‘Two Principles of Mental Functioning’ (1911b) Freud had introduced the idea of the transformation of an early ‘pleasure-ego’ into a ‘reality-ego’. In the passage which follows in the text above, he argues that there is in fact a still earlier *original* ‘reality-ego’. This original ‘reality-ego’, instead of proceeding directly into the *final* ‘reality-ego’, is replaced, under the dominating influence of the pleasure principle, by a ‘pleasure-ego’. The footnote enumerates those factors, on the one hand, which would favour this latter turn of events, and those factors, on the other hand, which would work against it. The existence of auto-erotic libidinal instincts would encourage the diversion to a ‘pleasure-ego’, while the *non*-auto-erotic libidinal instincts and the self-preservative instincts would be likely instead to bring about a direct transition to the final adult ‘reality-ego’. This latter result would, he remarks, in fact come about, if it were not that parental care of the helpless infant satisfies this second set of instincts, artificially prolongs the primary state of narcissism, and so helps to make the establishment of the ‘pleasure-ego’ possible.]

- 134 -

is not cathected with interest (in a general sense) and is indifferent for purposes of satisfaction. During this period, therefore, the ego-subject coincides with what is pleasurable and the external world with what is indifferent (or possibly unpleasurable, as being a source of stimulation). If for the moment we define loving as the relation of the ego to its sources of pleasure, the situation in which the ego loves itself only and is indifferent to the external world illustrates the first of the opposites which we found to ‘loving’.<sup>1</sup>

In so far as the ego is auto-erotic, it has no need of the external world, but, in consequence of experiences undergone by the instincts of self-preservation, it acquires objects from that world, and, in spite of everything, it cannot avoid feeling internal instinctual stimuli for a time as unpleasurable. Under the

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [227](#)

1 [On p. [133](#) Freud enumerates the opposites of loving in the following order: (1) hating, (2) being loved and (3) indifference. In the present passage, and below on pp. [136](#) and [139](#), he adopts a different order: (1) indifference, (2) hating and (3) being loved. It seems probable that in this second arrangement he gives indifference the first place as being the first to appear in the course of development.]

- 135 -

dominance of the pleasure principle a further development now takes place in the ego. In so far as the objects which are presented to it are sources of pleasure, it takes them into itself, ‘introjects’ them (to use Ferenczi’s [\[1909\]](#) term<sup>1</sup>); and, on the other hand, it expels whatever within itself becomes a cause of unpleasure. (See below [pp. [184](#) and [224](#)], the mechanism of projection.)

Thus the original ‘reality-ego’, which distinguished internal and external by means of a sound objective criterion,<sup>2</sup> changes into a purified ‘pleasure-ego’, which places the characteristic of pleasure above all others. For the pleasure-ego the external world is divided into a part that is pleasurable, which it has incorporated into itself, and a remainder that is extraneous to it. It has separated off a part of its own self, which it projects into the external

world and feels as hostile. After this new arrangement, the two polarities coincide once more: the ego-subject coincides with pleasure, and the external world with unpleasure (with what was earlier indifference).

When, during the stage of primary narcissism, the object makes its appearance, the second opposite to loving, namely hating, also attains its development.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen, the object is brought to the ego from the external world in the first instance by the instincts of self-preservation; and it cannot be denied that hating, too, originally characterized the relation of the ego to the alien external world with the stimuli it introduces. Indifference falls into place as a special case of hate or dislike, after having first appeared as their forerunner. At the very beginning, it seems, the external world, objects, and what is hated are identical. If later on an object turns out to be a source of pleasure, it is loved, but it is also incorporated into the ego; so that for the purified pleasure-ego once again objects coincide with what is extraneous and hated.

Now, however, we may note that just as the pair of opposites love—indifference reflects the polarity ego—external world, so the second antithesis love—hate<sup>3</sup> reproduces the polarity pleasure—unpleasure, which is linked to the first polarity. When

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [228](#)

1 [This seems to be the first occasion on which Freud himself used the term. Cf. the footnote on p. [241](#) below.]

2 [See above p. [119](#) and footnote [2](#). The ‘reality-ego’ and the ‘pleasure-ego’ had already been introduced in the paper on the two principles of mental functioning ([1911b](#)).]

3 [See footnote [1](#), p. [135](#).]

- 136 -

the purely narcissistic stage has given place to the object-stage, pleasure and unpleasure signify relations of the ego to the object. If the object becomes a source of pleasurable feelings, a motor urge is set up which seeks to bring the object closer to the ego and to incorporate it into the ego. We then speak of the ‘attraction’ exercised by the pleasure-giving object, and say that we ‘love’ that object. Conversely, if the object is a source of unpleasurable feelings, there is an urge which endeavours to increase the distance between the object and the ego and to repeat in relation to the object the original attempt at flight from the external world with its emission of stimuli. We feel the ‘repulsion’ of the object, and hate it; this hate can afterwards be intensified to the point of an aggressive inclination against the object—an intention to destroy it.

We might at a pinch say of an instinct that it ‘loves’ the objects towards which it strives for purposes of satisfaction; but to say that an instinct ‘hates’ an object strikes us as odd. Thus we become aware that the attitudes<sup>1</sup> of love and hate cannot be made use of for the relations of *instincts* to their objects, but are reserved for the relations of the *total ego* to objects. But if we consider linguistic usage, which is certainly not without significance, we shall see that there is a further limitation to the meaning of love and hate. We do not say of objects which serve the interests of self-preservation that we *love* them; we emphasize the fact that we *need* them, and perhaps express an additional, different kind of relation to them by using words that denote a much reduced degree of love—such as, for example, ‘being fond of’, ‘liking’ or ‘finding agreeable’.



Thus the word 'to love' moves further and further into the sphere of the pure pleasure-relation of the ego to the object and finally becomes fixed to sexual objects in the narrower sense and to those which satisfy the needs of sublimated sexual instincts. The distinction between the ego-instincts and the sexual instincts which we have imposed upon our psychology is thus seen to be in conformity with the spirit of our language. The fact that we are not in the habit of saying of a single sexual instinct that it loves its object, but regard the relation of the ego

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [229](#)

1 [German '*Beziehungen*', literally 'relations'. In the first edition this word is printed '*Bezeichnungen*', 'descriptions' or 'terms'—which seems to make better sense. The word 'relations' in the later part of the sentence stands for '*Relationen*' in the German text.]

- 137 -

to its sexual object as the most appropriate case in which to employ the word 'love'—this fact teaches us that the word can only begin to be applied in this relation after there has been a synthesis of all the component instincts of sexuality under the primacy of the genitals and in the service of the reproductive function.

It is noteworthy that in the use of the word 'hate' no such intimate connection with sexual pleasure and the sexual function appears. The relation of *unpleasure* seems to be the sole decisive one. The ego hates, abhors and pursues with intent to destroy all objects which are a source of unpleasurable feeling for it, without taking into account whether they mean a frustration of sexual satisfaction or of the satisfaction of self-preservative needs. Indeed, it may be asserted that the true prototypes of the relation of hate are derived not from sexual life, but from the ego's struggle to preserve and maintain itself.

So we see that love and hate, which present themselves to us as complete opposites in their content, do not after all stand in any simple relation to each other. They did not arise from the cleavage of any originally common entity, but sprang from different sources, and had each its own development before the influence of the pleasure—unpleasure relation made them into opposites.

It now remains for us to put together what we know of the genesis of love and hate. Love is derived from the capacity of the ego to satisfy some of its instinctual impulses auto-erotically by obtaining organ-pleasure. It is originally narcissistic, then passes over on to objects, which have been incorporated into the extended ego, and expresses the motor efforts of the ego towards these objects as sources of pleasure. It becomes intimately linked with the activity of the later sexual instincts and, when these have been completely synthesized, coincides with the sexual impulsion as a whole. Preliminary stages of love emerge as provisional sexual aims while the sexual instincts are passing through their complicated development. As the first of these aims we recognize the phase of incorporating or devouring—a type of love which is consistent with abolishing the object's separate existence and which may therefore be described as ambivalent.<sup>1</sup> At the higher stage of the pregenital sadistic-anal

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [230](#)

1 [Freud's first published account of the oral stage was given in a paragraph added to the third (1915) edition of his *Three Essays, Standard Ed.*, 7, 198. The preface to that edition is dated 'October 1914'—some months before the present paper was written. See also below, p. 249 ff.]

- 138 -

organization,<sup>1</sup> the striving for the object appears in the form of an urge for mastery, to which injury or annihilation of the object is a matter of indifference. Love in this form and at this preliminary stage is hardly to be distinguished from hate in its attitude towards the object. Not until the genital organization is established does love become the opposite of hate.

Hate, as a relation to objects, is older than love. It derives from the narcissistic ego's primordial repudiation of the external world with its outpouring of stimuli. As an expression of the reaction of unpleasure evoked by objects, it always remains in an intimate relation with the self-preservative instincts; so that sexual and ego-instincts can readily develop an antithesis which repeats that of love and hate. When the ego-instincts dominate the sexual function, as is the case at the stage of the sadistic-anal organization, they impart the qualities of hate to the instinctual aim as well.

The history of the origins and relations of love makes us understand how it is that love so frequently manifests itself as 'ambivalent'—i.e. as accompanied by impulses of hate against the same object.<sup>2</sup> The hate which is admixed with the love is in part derived from the preliminary stages of loving which have not been wholly surmounted; it is also in part based on reactions of repudiation by the ego-instincts, which, in view of the frequent conflicts between the interests of the ego and those of love, can find grounds in real and contemporary motives. In both cases, therefore, the admixed hate has as its source the self-preservative instincts. If a love-relation with a given object is broken off, hate not infrequently emerges in its place, so that we get the impression of a transformation of love into hate. This account of what happens leads on to the view that the hate, which has its real motives, is here reinforced by a regression of the love to the sadistic preliminary stage; so that the hate acquires an erotic character and the continuity of a love-relation is ensured.

The third antithesis of loving, the transformation of loving into being loved,<sup>3</sup> corresponds to the operation of the polarity

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page 231

1 [See 'The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis' (1913i).]

2 [See footnote 2, p. 131.]

3 [See footnote 1, p. 135.]

- 139 -

of activity and passivity, and is to be judged in the same way as the cases of scopophilia and sadism.<sup>1</sup>

We may sum up by saying that the essential feature in the vicissitudes undergone by instincts lies in *the subjection of the instinctual impulses to the influences of the three great polarities that dominate mental life*. Of these three polarities we might describe that of activity—passivity as the *biological*, that of ego—external world as the *real*, and finally that of pleasure—unpleasure as the *economic* polarity.

The instinctual vicissitude of *repression* will form the subject of an inquiry which follows [in the next paper].

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page [232](#)  
1 [The relation between love and hate was further discussed by Freud, in the light of his hypothesis of a death-instinct, in Chapter IV of *The Ego and the Id* (1923b).]