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THE EGO AND THE MECHANISMS OF DEFENSE

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CHAPTER 9

Identification with the Aggressor

It is comparatively easy to discover the defense mechanisms to which the ego habitually resorts, so long as each is employed separately and only in conflict with some specific danger. When we find denial, we know that it is a reaction to external danger; when repression takes place, the ego is struggling with instinctual stimuli. The strong outward resemblance between inhibition and ego restriction makes it less certain whether these processes are part of an external or an internal conflict. The matter is still more intricate when defensive measures are combined or when the same mechanism is employed sometimes against an internal and sometimes against an external force. We have an excellent illustration of both these complications in the process of identification. Since it is one of the factors in the development of the superego, it contributes to the mastery of instinct. But, as I hope to show in what follows, there are 109
occasions when it combines with other mechanisms to form one of the ego's most potent weapons in its dealings with external objects which arouse its anxiety.

August Aichhorn relates that, when he was giving advice on a child guidance committee, he had to deal with the case of a boy at an elementary school, who was brought to him because of a habit of making faces. The master complained that the boy's behavior, when he was blamed or reproved, was quite abnormal. On such occasions he made faces which caused the whole class to burst out laughing. The master's view was that either the boy was consciously making fun of him or else the twitching of his face must be due to some kind of tic. His report was at once corroborated, for the boy began to make faces during the consultation, but, when master, pupil, and psychologist were together, the situation was explained. Observing the two attentively, Aichhorn saw that the boy's grimaces were simply a caricature of the angry expression of the teacher and that, when he had to face a scolding by the latter, he tried to master his anxiety by involuntarily imitating him. The boy identified himself with the teacher's anger and copied his expression as he spoke, though the imitation was not recognized. Through his grimaces he was assimilating himself to or identifying himself with the dreaded external object.

My readers will remember the case of the little girl who tried by means of magic gestures to get over the mortification associated with her penis envy. This child was purposely and consciously making use of a mechanism to which the boy resorted involuntarily. At home she was afraid to cross the hall in the dark, because she had a dread of seeing ghosts. Suddenly, however, she hit on a device which enabled her to do it: she would run across the hall, making all sorts of peculiar gestures as she went. Before long, she triumphantly told her little brother the secret of how she had got over her anxiety. "There's no need to be afraid in the hall," she said, "you just have to pretend that you're the ghost who might meet you." This shows that her magic gestures represented the movements which she imagined ghosts would make.

We might be inclined to regard this kind of conduct as an idiosyncrasy in the two children whose cases I have quoted, but it is really one of the most natural and widespread modes of behavior on the part of the primitive ego and has long been familiar to those who have made a study of primitive methods of invoking and exorcizing spirits and of primitive religious ceremonies. Moreover, there are many children's games in which through the metamorphosis of the subject into a dreaded object anxiety is converted into pleasure, security. Here is another angle from which to study the games of impersonation which children love to play.

Now the physical imitation of an antagonist represents the assimilation of only one part of a composite anxiety experience. We learn from observation that the other elements also have to be mastered.

The six-year-old patient to whom I have several times alluded had to pay a series of visits to a dentist. At first everything went splendidly; the treatment did not hurt him and he was triumphant and made merry over the idea of anyone's being afraid of the dentist. But there came a time when my little patient arrived at my house in an extremely bad temper. The dentist had just hurt him. He was cross and unfriendly and vented his feelings on the things in my room. His first victim was a piece of India rubber. He
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wanted me to give it to him and, when I refused, he took a knife and tried to cut it in half. Next, he coveted a large ball of string. He wanted me to give him that too and painted me a vivid picture of what a good lease it would make for his animals. When I refused to give him the whole ball, he took the knife again and secured a large piece of the string. But he did not use it; instead, he began after a few minutes to cut it into tiny pieces. Finally, he threw away the string too, turned his attention to some pencils and went on indefatigably sharpening them, breaking off the points, and sharpening them again. It would not be correct to say that he was playing at “dentists.” There was no actual impersonation of the dentist. The child was identifying himself not with the person of the aggressor but with his aggression.

On another occasion this little boy came to me just after he had had a slight accident. He had been joining in an outdoor game at school and had run full tilt against the fist of the games master, which the latter happened to be holding up in front of him. My little patient’s lip was bleeding and his face tear-stained, and he tried to conceal both facts by putting up his hand as a screen. I endeavored to comfort and reassure him. He was in a woebegone condition when he left me, but next day he appeared holding himself very erect and dressed in full armor. On his head he wore a military cap and he had a toy sword at his side and a pistol in his hand. When he saw my surprise at this transformation, he simply said, “I just wanted to have these things on when I was playing with you.” He did not, however, play; instead, he sat down and wrote a letter to his mother: “Dear Mummy, please, please, please, please send me the pocketknife you promised me and don’t wait till Easter!” Here again we cannot say that, in order to master the anxiety experience of the previous day, he was impersonating the teacher with whom he had collided. Nor, in this instance, was he imitating the latter’s aggression. The weapons and armor, being manly attributes, evidently symbolized the teacher’s strength and, like the attributes of the father in the animal fantasies, helped the child to identify himself with the masculinity of the adult and so to defend himself against narcissistic mortification or actual mishaps.

The examples which I have so far cited illustrate a process with which we are quite familiar. A child introjects some characteristic of an anxiety object and so assimilates an anxiety experience which he has just undergone. Here, the mechanism of identification or introjection is combined with a second important mechanism. By impersonating the aggressor, assuming his attributes or imitating his aggression, the child transforms himself from the person threatened into the person who makes the threat. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) the significance of this change from the passive to the active role as a means of assimilating unpleasant or traumatic experiences in infancy is discussed in detail. “If the doctor looks down a child’s throat or carries out some small operation, we may be quite sure that these frightening experiences will be the subject of the next game; but we must not in that connection overlook the fact that there is a yield of pleasure from another source. As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the disagreeable experience to one of his playmates and in this way revenges himself on a substitute” (p. 17).

What is true of play is equally true of other behavior in children. In the cases of the boy who made faces and the
the analyst. He carried a rod about with him and played at “Krampus,” i.e., he laid about him with it on the stairs, in his own house, and in my room. His grandmother and mother complained that he tried to strike them in the face. His mother’s uneasiness reached its climax when he took to brandishing kitchen knives. Analysis showed that the child’s aggressiveness could not be construed as indicating that some inhibition on his instinctual impulses had been lifted. The release of his masculine tendencies was still a long way off. He was simply suffering from anxiety. The bringing into consciousness and the necessary confession of his former and recent sexual activities aroused in him the expectation of punishment. According to his experience, grown-up people were angry when they discovered a child indulging in such practices. They shouted at him, checked him sharply with a box on the ears or beat him with a rod; perhaps they would even cut off some part of him with a knife. When my little patient assumed the active role, roaring like a lion and laying about him with the rod and the knife, he was dramatizing and forestalling the punishment which he feared. He had introjected the aggression of the adults in whose eyes he felt guilty and, having exchanged the passive for the active part, he directed his own aggressive acts against those same people. Every time that he found himself on the verge of communicating to me what he regarded as dangerous material, his aggressiveness increased. But directly his forbidden thoughts and feelings broke through and had been discussed and interpreted, he felt no further need of the “Krampus” rod, which till then he had constantly carried about with him, and he

1 Presented at the Vienna Seminar on child analysis (see Hall, 1946).

2 A devil who accompanied St. Nicholas and punished naughty children.—Translator’s note.
left it at my house. His compulsion to beat other people disappeared simultaneously with his anxious expectation of being beaten himself.

In “identification with the aggressor” we recognize a by no means uncommon stage in the normal development of the superego. When the two boys whose cases I have just described identified themselves with their elders’ threats of punishment, they were taking an important step toward the formation of that institution: they were internalizing other people’s criticisms of their behavior. When a child constantly repeats this process of internalization and introjects the qualities of those responsible for his upbringing, making their characteristics and opinions his own, he is all the time providing material from which the superego may take shape. But at this point children are not quite whole-hearted in acknowledging that institution. The internalized criticism is not yet immediately transformed into self-criticism. As we have seen in the examples which I have given, it is dissociated from the child’s own reprehensible activity and turned back on the outside world. By means of a new defensive process identification with the aggressor is succeeded by an active assault on the outside world.

Here is a more complicated example, which will perhaps throw light on this new development in the defensive process. A certain boy, when his oedipus complex was at its height, employed this particular mechanism to master his fixation to his mother. His happy relations with her were disturbed by outbursts of resentment. He would upbraid her passionately and on all sorts of grounds, but one mysterious accusation invariably recurred: he persistently complained of her curiosity. It is easy to see the first step in the working over of his prohibited affects. In his fantasy his mother knew of his libidinal feeling for her and indignantly rejected his advances. Her indignation was actively reproduced in his own fits of resentment against her. In contrast to Jenny Waelder’s patient, however, he did not reproach her on general grounds but on the specific ground of curiosity. Analysis showed that this curiosity was an element not in his mother’s instinctual life but in his own. Of all the component instincts which entered into his relation with her, his scoptophilic impulse was the most difficult to master. The reversal of roles was complete. He assumed his mother’s indignation and, in exchange, ascribed to her his own curiosity.

In certain phases of resistance a young patient used bitterly to reproach her analyst with being secretive. She complained that the analyst was too reserved and she would torment her with questions on personal matters and be miserable when she received no answer. Then the reproaches would cease, only to begin again after a short time, always in the same stereotyped and, as it seemed, automatic fashion. In this case again we can detect two phases in the psychic process. From time to time, because of a certain inhibition which prevented her speaking out, the patient herself consciously suppressed some very private material. She knew that she was thereby breaking the fundamental rule of analysis and she expected the analyst to rebuke her. She introjected the fantasied rebuke and, adopting the active role, applied the accusation to the analyst. Her phases of aggression exactly coincided in time with her phases of secretiveness. She criticized the analyst for the very fault of which she herself was guilty. Her own secretive behavior was perceived as reprehensible conduct on the analyst’s part.
Another young patient used periodically to have fits of violent aggressiveness. I myself, her parents, and other people in less close relation with her were almost equally the objects of her resentment. There were two things in particular of which she constantly complained. First, during these phases she always had the feeling that people were keeping from her some secret which everybody knew but herself, and she was tormented by the desire to find out what it was. Secondly, she felt deeply disappointed by the shortcomings of all her friends. Just as, in the case which I last quoted, the periods in which the patient kept back material coincided with those in which she complained of secretiveness in the analyst, so this patient’s aggressive phases set in automatically whenever her repressed masturbation fantasies, of which she herself was unaware, were about to emerge into consciousness. Her strictures on her love objects corresponded to the blame which she expected from them because of her masturbation in childhood. She identified herself fully with this condemnation and turned it back upon the outside world. The secret which everybody kept from her was the secret of her own masturbation, which she kept not only from others but from herself. Here again, the patient’s aggressiveness corresponded to that of other people and their “secret” was a reflection of her own repression.

These three examples have given us some idea of the origin of this particular phase in the development of the function of the superego. Even when the external criticism has been introjected, the threat of punishment and the offense committed have not yet been connected up in the patient’s mind. The moment the criticism is internalized, the offense is externalized. This means that the mechanism of identification with the aggressor is supplemented by another defensive measure, namely, the projection of guilt.

An ego which with the aid of the defense mechanism of projection develops along this particular lineintrojects the authorities to whose criticism it is exposed and incorporates them in the superego. It is then able to project the prohibited impulses outward. Its intolerance of other people precedes its severity toward itself. It learns what is regarded as blameworthy but protects itself by means of this defense mechanism from unpleasant self-criticism. Vehement indignation at someone else’s wrongdoing is the precursor of and substitute for guilty feelings on its own account. Its indignation increases automatically when the perception of its own guilt is imminent. This stage in the development of the superego is a kind of preliminary phase of morality. True morality begins when the internalized criticism, now embodied in the standard exacted by the superego, coincides with the ego’s perception of its own fault. From that moment, the severity of the superego is turned inward instead of outward and the subject becomes less intolerant of other people. But, when once it has reached this stage in its development, the ego has to endure the more acute displeasure occasioned by self-criticism and the sense of guilt.

It is possible that a number of people remain arrested at the intermediate stage in the development of the superego and never quite complete the internalization of the critical process. Although perceiving their own guilt, they continue to be peculiarly aggressive in their attitude to other people. In such cases the behavior of the superego toward others is as ruthless as that of the superego toward the patient’s own ego in melancholia. Perhaps when the
evolution of the superego is thus inhibited, it indicates an abortive beginning of the development of melancholic states.

"Identification with the aggressor" represents, on the one hand, a preliminary phase of superego development and, on the other, an intermediate stage in the development of paranoia. It resembles the former in the mechanism of identification and the latter in that of projection. At the same time, identification and projection are normal activities of the ego and their results vary greatly according to the material upon which they are employed.

The particular combination of introjection and projection to which we have applied the term "identification with the aggressor" can be regarded as normal only so long as the ego employs this mechanism in its conflict with authority, i.e., in its efforts to deal with anxiety objects. It is a defensive process which ceases to be innocuous and becomes pathological when it is carried over into a person’s love life. When a husband displaces onto his wife his own impulses to be unfaithful and then reproaches her passionately with unfaithfulness, he is really introjecting her reproaches and projecting part of his own id. His intention, however, is to protect himself not against aggression from without but against the shattering of his positive libidinal fixation to her by disturbing forces from within. Accordingly the result is different. Instead of an aggressive attitude toward some former external assailants the patient develops an obsessional fixation to his wife, which takes the form of projected jealousy.

When the mechanism of projection is employed as a defense against homosexual love impulses, it is combined with yet other mechanisms. Reversal (in this case the reversal of love into hate) completes what introjection and projection have begun, and the result is the development of paranoid delusions. In either case—defense against heterosexual or against homosexual love impulses—the projection is no longer arbitrary. The ego’s choice of a billet for its own unconscious impulses is determined by "the perceptual material which betrays unconscious impulses of the same kind in the partner."  

From the theoretical standpoint, analysis of the process of "identification with the aggressor" assists us to differentiate the various modes in which the specific defense mechanisms are employed; in practice, it enables us to distinguish in the transference anxiety attacks from outbursts of aggression. When analysis brings into the patient’s consciousness genuine, unconscious, aggressive impulses, the dammed-up affect will seek relief through abreaction in the transference. But, if his aggression is due to his identifying himself with what he supposed to be our criticism, it will not be in the least affected by his "giving it practical expression" and "abreacting" it. As long as the unconscious impulses are prohibited, it increases, and it vanishes, as in the case of the little boy who confessed his masturbation, only when the dread of punishment and of the superego has been dissipated.

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\[3\] Cf. “Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality” (Freud, 1922, p. 223).

CHAPTER 10

A Form of Altruism

The effect of the mechanism of projection is to break the connection between the ideational representatives of dangerous instinctual impulses and the ego. In this it resembles most closely the process of repression. Other defensive processes, such as displacement, reversal or turning round upon the self, affect the instinctual process itself: repression and projection merely prevent its being perceived. In repression the objectionable idea is thrust back into the id, while in projection it is displaced into the outside world. Another point in which projection resembles repression is that it is not associated with any particular anxiety situation but may be motivated equally by objective anxiety, superego anxiety, and instinctual anxiety. Writers of the English school of psychoanalysis maintain that in the earliest months of life, before any repression has taken place, the infant already projects its first aggressive impulses and that this process is of crucial importance for the picture which the child forms of the world around him and the way in which his personality develops.

At all events the use of the mechanism of projection is quite natural to the ego of little children throughout the earliest period of development. They employ it as a means of repudiating their own activities and wishes when these become dangerous and of laying the responsibility for them at the door of some external agent. A "strange child," an animal, even inanimate objects are all equally useful to the infantile ego for the purpose of disposing of its own faults. It is normal for it constantly to get rid of prohibited impulses and wishes in this way, handing them over in full measure to other people. If these wishes entail punishment by authorities, the ego puts forward as whipping boys the persons upon whom it has projected them; if, on the other hand, the projection was prompted by a sense of guilt, instead of criticizing itself it accuses others. In either case it dissociates itself from its proxies and is excessively intolerant of its judgment of them.

The mechanism of projection disturbs our human relations when we project our own jealousy and attribute to other people our own aggressive acts. But it may work in another way as well, enabling us to form valuable positive attachments and so to consolidate our relations with one another. This normal and less conspicuous form of projection might be described as "altruistic surrender"1 of our own instinctual impulses in favor of other people.

The following is an example of what I mean.

A young governess reported in her analysis that, as a child, she was possessed by two ideas: she wanted to have

1 "Altruistische Abtretung." This term was coined by Edward Bibring.
beautiful clothes and a number of children. In her fantasies she was almost obsessively absorbed in picturing the fulfillment of these two wishes. But there were a great many other things that she demanded as well: she wished to have and to do everything that her much older playmates had and did—indeed, she wanted to do everything better than they and to be admired for her cleverness. Her everlasting cry of "Me too!" was a nuisance to her elders. It was characteristic of her desires that they were at once urgent and insatiable.

What chiefly struck one about her as an adult was her unassuming character and the modesty of the demands which she made on life. When she came to be analyzed, she was unmarried and childless and her dress was rather shabby and inconspicuous. She showed little sign of envy or ambition and would compete with other people only if she were forced to do so by external circumstances. One's first impression was that, as so often happens, she had developed in exactly the opposite direction from what her childhood would have led one to expect and that her wishes had been repressed and replaced in consciousness by reaction formations (unobtrusiveness instead of a craving for admiration and unassumingness instead of ambition). One would have expected to find that the repression was caused by a prohibition of sexuality, extending from her exhibitionistic impulses and the desire for children to the whole of her instinctual life.

But there were features in her behavior at the time when I knew her which contradicted this impression. When her life was examined in more detail, it was clear that her original wishes were affirmed in a manner which seemed scarcely possible if repression had taken place. The repudiation of her own sexuality did not prevent her from taking an affectionate interest in the love life of her women friends and colleagues. She was an enthusiastic matchmaker and many love affairs were confided to her. Although she took no trouble about her own dress, she displayed a lively interest in her friends' clothes. Childless herself, she was devoted to other people's children, as was indicated by her choice of a profession. She might be said to display an unusual degree of concern about her friends' having pretty clothes, being admired, and having children. Similarly, in spite of her own retiring behavior, she was ambitious for the men whom she loved and followed their careers with the utmost interest. It looked as if her own life had been emptied of interests and wishes; up to the time of her analysis it was almost entirely uneventful. Instead of exerting herself to achieve any aims of her own, she expended all her energy in sympathizing with the experiences of people she cared for. She lived in the lives of other people, instead of having any experience of her own.

The analysis of her infantile relations to her mother and father revealed clearly the nature of the inner transformation which had taken place. Her early renunciation of instinct had resulted in the formation of an exceptionally severe superego, which made it impossible for her to gratify her own wishes. Her penis wish, with its offshoots in the shape of ambitious masculine fantasies, was prohibited, so too her feminine wish for children and the desire to display herself, naked or in beautiful clothes, to her father, and to win his admiration. But these impulses were not repressed: she found some proxy in the outside world to serve as a repository for each of them. The vanity of her women friends provided, as it were, a foothold for the projection
of her own vanity, while her libidinal wishes and ambitious fantasies were likewise deposited in the outside world. She projected her prohibited instinctual impulses onto other people, just as the patients did whose cases I quoted in the last chapter. The only difference lay in the way in which these impulses were subsequently dealt with. The patient did not dissociate herself from her proxies but identified herself with them. She showed her sympathy with their wishes and felt that there was an extraordinarily strong bond between these people and herself. Her superego, which condemned a particular instinctual impulse when it related to her own ego, was surprisingly tolerant of it in other people. She gratified her instincts by sharing in the gratification of others, employing for this purpose the mechanisms of projection and identification.\(^2\) The retiring attitude which the prohibition of her impulses caused her to adopt where she herself was concerned vanished when it was a question of fulfilling the same wishes after they had been projected onto someone else. The surrender of her instinctual impulses in favor of other people had thus an egoistic significance, but in her efforts to gratify the impulses of others her behavior could only be called altruistic.

This passing on of her own wishes to other people was characteristic of her whole life and could be traced very clearly in the analysis of little isolated incidents. For instance, at the age of thirteen she secretly fell in love with a friend of her elder sister who had formerly been the special object of her jealousy. She had an idea that, at times, he preferred her to her sister and she was always hoping that he would give some sign of loving her. On one occasion it happened, as it had often happened before, that she found herself slighted. The young man called unexpectedly one evening to take her sister for a walk. In analysis the patient remembered perfectly distinctly how, from having been at first paralyzed with disappointment, she suddenly began to bustle about, fetching things to make her sister "pretty" for her outing and eagerly helping her to get ready. While doing this, the patient was blissfully happy and quite forgot that it was not she, but her sister, who was going out to enjoy herself. She had projected her own desire for love and her craving for admiration onto her rival and, having identified herself with the object of her envy, she enjoyed the fulfillment of her desire.

She went through the same process when frustration rather than fulfillment was in question. She loved to give the children of whom she was in charge good things to eat. On one occasion a mother refused to give up a particular tit-bit for her child. Although the patient herself was, in general, indifferent to the pleasures of the table, the mother's refusal made her furiously indignant. She experienced the frustration of the child's wish as if it were her own, just as in the other case she had rejoiced vicariously in the fulfillment of her sister's desires. It is plain that what she had made over to other people was the right to have her wishes fulfilled without hindrance.

The last trait comes out even more clearly in the experiences of another patient of the same type. A young woman, whose relation to her father-in-law was a particularly friendly one, reacted very strangely to the death of her mother-in-law. The patient, with other women of the family, undertook to dispose of the dead woman's clothes. Unlike all the others, my patient refused to take even a single

\(^2\) Compare in this connection Paul Federn's notion (1936) of "sympathetic" identification and his remarks on this subject.
garment for her own use. Instead, she set aside one coat
as a present for a cousin who was badly off. The mother-
in-law's sister wanted to cut off the fur collar of the coat
and keep it herself, whereupon the patient, who so far had
been quite indifferent and uninterested, flew into a blind
rage. She turned the full fury of her usually inhibited ag-
gression upon her aunt and insisted on her protégée's having
what she had intended for her. Analysis of this incident
showed that the patient's sense of guilt prevented her from
appropriating anything which had belonged to her mother-
in-law. To take a garment symbolized to her the gratifying
of her wish to fill her mother-in-law's place with her father-
in-law. She therefore renounced any claim herself and sur-
rrendered in favor of her cousin the desire to be her "moth-
er's" successor. Having done so, however, she felt the full
force of the wish and its disappointment and was able to
insist on its fulfillment, a thing which she could never do
when she herself was concerned. The superego, which took
up so implacable an attitude toward her own instinctual
impulse, assented to the desire when it was no longer asso-
ciated with the patient's own ego. When the fulfillment of
another person's wish was in question, the aggressive be-
behavior which was usually inhibited suddenly became ego
syntonic.

Any number of cases similar to those which I have quoted
can be observed in everyday life, when once our attention
has been called to this combination of projection and identi-
fication for purposes of defense. For instance, a young
girl, who had scruples of conscience about marrying herself,
did all she could to encourage her sister's engagement. A
patient, who suffered from obsessional inhibitions in spend-
ing any money on herself, had no hesitation in spending
lavishly on presents. Another patient, who was prevented by
anxiety from carrying out her plans for travel, was quite
unexpectedly pressing in her advice to her friends to do so.
In all these cases the patient's identification of herself with
a sister, a friend, or the recipient of a gift betrayed itself by
a sudden warm sense of a bond between them, which lasted
as long as her own wish was being vicariously fulfilled. Jokes
about "matchmaking old maids" and "meddlesome onlook-
ers, for whom no stakes are too high" are perennial. The
surrender of one's own wishes to another person and the
attempt to secure their fulfillment thus vicariously are, in-
deed, comparable to the interest and pleasure with which
one watches a game in which one has no stake oneself.

This defensive process serves two purposes. On the one
hand it enables the subject to take a friendly interest in the
gratification of other people's instincts and so, indirectly
and in spite of the superego's prohibition, to gratify his
own, while, on the other, it liberates the inhibited activity
and aggression primarily designed to secure the fulfillment
of the instinctual wishes in their original relation to himself.
The patient who could not lift a finger to gratify her own
oral impulses could feel indignant at the mother's refusal to
indulge her child, i.e., at oral renunciation imposed on
someone else. The daughter-in-law who was prohibited
from claiming the rights of the dead wife felt it permissible
to defend the symbolic right of another with the full force
of her aggression. An employee who would never venture to
ask for a raise in salary for herself suddenly besieged the
manageress with demands that one of her fellow workers
should have her rights. Analysis of such situations shows

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3 "Kiebitze, denen kein Spiel zu hoch ist."
that this defensive process has its origin in the infantile conflict with parental authority about some form of instinctual gratification. Aggressive impulses against the mother, prohibited so long as it is a question of fulfilling the subject's own wishes, are given rein when the wishes are ostensibly those of someone else. The most familiar representative of this type of person is the public benefactor, who with the utmost aggressiveness and energy demands money from one set of people in order to give it to another. Perhaps the most extreme instance is that of the assassin who, in the name of the oppressed, murders the oppressor. The object against which the liberated aggression is directed is invariably the representative of the authority which imposed renunciation of instinct on the subject in infancy.

Various factors determine the selection of the object in favor of whom instinctual impulses are surrendered. Possibly the perception of the prohibited impulse in another person is sufficient to suggest to the ego that here is an opportunity for projection. In the case of the patient who assisted in the disposal of her mother-in-law's property, the fact that the vicarious figure was not a near relation was a guarantee of the harmlessness of the wish which, when cherished by the patient herself, represented her incestuous impulses. In most cases the substitute has once been the object of envy. The altruistic governess in my first example displaced her ambitious fantasies onto her men friends and her libidinal wishes onto her women friends. The former succeeded to her affection for her father and her big brother, both of whom had been the object of her penis envy, while the latter represented the sister upon whom, at a rather later period of childhood, that envy was displaced in the form of envy of her beauty. The patient felt that the fact that she was a girl prevented her from achieving her ambitions and, at the same time, that she was not even a pretty enough girl really to be attractive to men. In her disappointment with herself she displaced her wishes onto objects who she felt were better qualified to fulfill them. Her men friends were vicariously to achieve for her in professional life that which she herself could never achieve, and the girls who were better-looking than herself were to do the same in the sphere of love. Her altruistic surrender was a method of overcoming her narcissistic mortification.

This surrender of instinctual wishes to an object better qualified to fulfill them often determines the relation of a girl to some man whom she chooses to represent her—to the detriment of any true object relation. On the grounds of this "altruistic" attachment she expects him to carry out the projects in which she believes herself to be handicapped by her sex: for instance, she wants him to lead the life of a student or to adopt a particular profession or to become famous or rich in her place. In such cases egoism and altruism may be blended in very various proportions. We know that parents sometimes delegate to their children their projects for their own lives, in a manner at once altruistic and egoistic. It is as if they hoped through the child, whom they regard as better qualified for the purpose than themselves, to wrest from life the fulfillment of the ambitions which they themselves have failed to realize. Perhaps even the purely altruistic relation of a mother to her son is largely determined by such a surrender of her own wishes to the object whose sex makes him "better qualified" to carry
them out. A man’s success in life does, indeed, go far to compensate the women of his family for the renunciation of their own ambitions.

The finest and most detailed study of this altruistic surrender is to be found in Edmond Rostand’s play Cyrano de Bergerac. The hero of the play is a historical figure, a French nobleman of the seventeenth century, a poet and officer of the Guards, famous for his intellect and valor but handicapped in his wooing of women by a peculiarly ugly nose. He falls in love with his beautiful cousin, Roxane, but, conscious of his ugliness, he at once resigns every hope of winning her. Instead of using his formidable skill as a fencer to keep all rivals at a distance, he surrenders his own aspirations to her love in favor of a man better looking than himself. Having made this renunciation, he devotes his strength, his courage, and his brains to the service of this more fortunate lover and does all he can to help him to attain his desire. The climax of the play is a scene at night, under the balcony of the woman whom both men love. Cyrano whispers to his rival the words with which to win her. Then he takes the other’s place in the dark and speaks for him, forgetting in the ardor of his wooing that he himself is not the wooer and only at the last moment falling back into his attitude of surrender when the suit of Christian, the handsome lover, is accepted and he goes up to the balcony to embrace his love. Cyrano becomes more and more devoted to his rival and in battle tries to save Christian’s life rather than his own. When this vicarious figure is taken from him by death, he feels that it is not permissible for him to woo Roxane. That the poet is depicting in Cyrano’s “altruism” something more than a strange love adventure is clear from the parallel which he draws bet-

tween Cyrano’s love life and his fate as a poet. Just as Christian woos Roxane with the help of Cyrano’s poems and letters, writers like Corneille, Molière, and Swift borrow whole scenes from his unknown works, thus enhancing their own fame. In the play Cyrano accepts this fate. He is as ready to lend his words to Christian, who is handsomer than himself, as to Molière, who is a greater genius. The personal defect which he thinks renders him contemptible makes him feel that the others who are preferred to himself are better qualified than he to realize his wish fantasies.

In conclusion, we may for a moment study the notion of altruistic surrender from another angle, namely, in its relation to the fear of death. Anyone who has very largely projected his instinctual impulses onto other people knows nothing of this fear. In the moment of danger his ego is not really concerned for his own life. He experiences instead excessive concern and anxiety for the lives of his love objects. Observation shows that these objects, whose safety is so vital to him, are the vicarious figures upon whom he has displaced his instinctual wishes. For instance, the young governess, whose case I have described, suffered from quite excessive anxiety about the safety of her friends in pregnancy and childbirth. Again, as is shown in the sketch which I have given, Cyrano sets Christian’s safety in battle far above his own. It would be a mistake to suppose that this is a question of suppressed rivalry breaking through in death wishes, which are then warded off. Analysis shows that both the anxiety and the absence of anxiety are due rather to the subject’s feeling that his own life is worth living and preserving only insofar as there is opportunity in it for the gratification of his instincts. When his impulses have been surrendered in favor of other people, their lives
become precious rather than his own. The death of the vicarious figure means—as Christian’s death meant for Cyrano—the destruction of all hope of fulfillment.

It was only after analysis, when she happened to fall ill, that the young governess discovered that the thought of dying was painful to her. To her own surprise she found that she ardently desired to live long enough to furnish her new home and to pass an examination which would secure her promotion in her profession. Her home and the examination signified, though in a sublimated form, the fulfillment of instinctual wishes which analysis had enabled her to relate once more to her own life.  

* There is an obvious similarity between the situation in altruistic surrender and the conditions which determine male homosexuality. The homosexual makes over his claim on his mother’s love to a younger brother whom he has previously envied. It is true that he proceeds to satisfy this demand himself by adopting a maternal attitude, i.e., by enjoying both the active and the passive side of the relation between mother and son. It is difficult to determine how far this process contributed to the various forms of altruistic surrender which I have described. Cyrano and the altruistic young governess must both have derived pleasure from this mechanism even before they could rejoice vicariously in the successes of their substitutes. Their rapture of giving and helping shows that the surrender is in itself a gratification of instinct. As in the process of identification with the aggressor, passivity is transformed into activity, narcissistic mortification is compensated for by the sense of power associated with the role of benefactor, while the passive experience of frustration finds compensation in the active conferring of happiness on others.

It remains an open question whether there is such a thing as a genuinely altruistic relation to one’s fellowmen, in which the gratification of one’s own instinct plays no part at all, even in some displaced and sublimated form. In any case it is certain that projection and identification are not the only means of acquiring an attitude which has every appearance of altruism; for instance, another and easy route to the same goal is by way of the various forms of masochism.

Part IV

DEFENSE MOTIVATED BY FEAR OF THE STRENGTH OF THE INSTINCTS

Illustrated by the Phenomena of Puberty