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SUBLIMATION, SUBSTITUTION AND SOCIAL ANXIETY

BY

EDWARD GLOVER

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Historically the concept of Sublimation has passed through two phases of development. Up to the year 1923 interest in sublimation was largely phenomenological in order. A few generalizations had been advanced concerning the mechanism of sublimation, but pronouncements on dynamic aspects were practically restricted to the relation of sublimation to the 'return of the repressed', ultimately to symptom formation. From 1923 onwards interest became concentrated on the energies involved and the nature of their modification. It is generally agreed that prior to 1923 a good deal of confusion existed regarding the exact nature of sublimation. Since then it has increased rather than diminished. And there appears to be no doubt that this is due in part to the stress recently laid on dynamic factors. In other words, we are confused because in dealing with dynamic factors we are compelled to loosen our hold on the more familiar (and therefore psychologically more comfortable) descriptive aspects. To avoid this source of confusion, I propose treating the two phases separately.

Definitions.—Up to the year 1923 a brief definition of sublimation would run as follows: Sublimation is an unconscious psychic process whereby the aim of a sexual impulse is modified before gratification on an object.

In order to comprehend more fully the difficulties before us, compare this with a definition of wider scope: Sublimation (I) is the term applied to a group of unconscious processes which have this in common, that as the result of inner or outer deprivation, the aim of object-libido undergoes a more or less complete deflection, modification or

inhibition. In the great majority of instances the new aim is one distinct or remote from sexual satisfaction, i.e. is an asexual or non-sexual aim. In certain instances, however, some degree of gratification of the original sexual impulse can be regarded as sublimation or as an early step towards sublimation provided the greater part of its primitive components and all adult genito-sexual aims are inhibited or deflected, e.g. the aim-inhibited impulses and social relations between individuals of the same sex. A third case not to be distinguished from sublimation, but with closer relation to direct uninhibited aims, is the case of extreme falling in love where the degree of over-estimation of the object cannot be distinguished from devotion to an abstract idea. The new aims are in a large number of instances, especially in the case of the adult, not only non-sexual (although psychically related to sexual aims) but definitely cultural; (they are in an ethical sense 'higher', less selfish and socially more valuable than the original aim. Nevertheless some sublimations can be potentially inhibiting to social adaptation, e.g. some sublimations of anal erotism, obstinacy, parsimony, etc. There is in general an anaclitic relationship between sublimated impulses and ego-impulses. This cannot always be distinguished by descriptive study of the new mode, which may appear to be purely an ego-aim, i.e. the psychic relation of the new aim to the original sexual aim may be extremely remote.

Next as to energies: the greater part of the energies in question has its source in the erotogenic zones, i.e. is derived from infantile component sexuality where the object varies from a primary organ-object to a complete secondary external object. These component impulses lend themselves to sublimation owing to the fact that they can act vicariously for one another and change their objects freely. The energies derived from these zonal excitations do not lose their intensity in the process of displacement. Owing partly to the source of sublimated instincts, viz., mainly erotogenic zones, and partly to other constitutional factors, the capacity for sublimation is congenitally variable and is limited by the congenital disposition to fixation, i.e. sublimation proceeds in direct ratio to the plasticity of the libido. Acquired factors affecting plasticity also affect capacity to sublimate.

Finally as to organization of the process: sublimation is demanded by the same ego-instance that instigates repression, but the amount of sublimation is not necessarily in direct ratio to the strength of the demand. The task of effecting sublimation is, like repression, an ego activity. The general relation of sublimation to repression is one of

an auxiliary, in that it satisfies the claims of the ego without involving repression ; but it does not loosen existing repression. One form of sublimation shares with repression the mechanism of anti-cathexis.¹

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We are now in a position to study in some detail the systematic approach to the subject.

Complexity of Mechanism.—First take the view that sublimation is not a single mechanism but a group of mechanisms. The advantages of this view are the following : it rules out the necessity of producing a short and possibly hampering definition ; it indicates the possibility that seeming contradictions may be due to an unjustifiable comparison of components of different mechanisms. The best example here is a seeming contradiction or uncertainty pointed out by Bernfeld (2) and others : they remind us that in one of Freud's statements sublimation is regarded as a special example of reaction formation and that, according to a subsequent statement, reaction formation is to be regarded as a special case of sublimation. Incidentally, this difficulty can also be reduced by considering the relation of sublimation to the anti-cathexis of repression. Thirdly, it affords us breathing space for future research. For instance, increasing knowledge of the workings of the super-ego compels us to consider just how far certain guilt factors play a decisive part in processes of sublimation. In particular, recent papers by Melanie Klein (3) and Ella F. Sharpe (4) suggest that certain almost stereotyped ' restitution ' phenomena are responsible at the same time for instigating and producing an outlet for creative urges with an ultimately non-sexual aim. Melanie Klein, for example, has shewn how the desire to ' make good ' impulses to destroy the mother was at the bottom of a compelling urge to paint portraits of relatives ; and Ella Freeman Sharpe showed that dancing in one case represented the re-animated phallus of the father, i.e. was a restoration of that which the patient wished to destroy out of hostility to the mother.

We must not of course rush to conclusions. We should first of all have to consider whether restitution situations are invariably a factor

¹ The above is compiled from writings of Freud published prior to 1923. It does not consist entirely of quotations, although sometimes Freud's own phrasing is adopted ; in other instances the meaning has been paraphrased : occasionally the implications of a statement are presented instead of the statement itself.

and frequently the only important factor. Even so we should have to decide whether this would justify special nomenclature. Granted that restitutive urges play a decisive part in particular sublimations, artistic, professional and otherwise, it might be considered more convenient to take cognizance of this fact under some system heading, e.g. super-ego factors. Or again we could consider it under the general heading of substitution. We might, for example, label the sublimation by reference to the psychic situation which mainly determined the ultimate presentations of instinct, e.g. expiatory sublimations. We may in fact talk too glibly of a number of mechanisms when we ought more economically and therefore more correctly to speak of different components in one main mechanism, as, for instance, a 'substitution' component, or a 'substitution determinant'.

Cultural Valuation.—Then as to the cultural valuation of sublimations. This is an issue that cannot be burked. On the whole Freud has come down heavily in favour of a social, ethical and cultural valuation of sublimations; but he has left the door open in a minority of instances: Bernfeld (2) in particular has felt uneasy at this state of affairs, and has indicated that the activities of children and adults belong to the same process whether they are concerned with artistic, with scientific or with worthless objects. He recommends the use of the term sublimation for all aim deviation of object libido which takes place without repression and is ego-syntonic. In his view sublimation is a deviation which serves an ego-aim (although the ego-aim may of course have been in existence already). The former view, i.e. definition by relation to repression, does not take sufficient cognizance of the relation, on the one hand, between anti-cathexis and repression, and, on the other, between anti-cathexis and sublimation. The second criterion, viz. the relation to ego-aims, compels us to discriminate between the ego-aims of childhood and those of adult life. It is true that by applying an adult standard to the activities of childhood, many of their sublimations could be made to appear culturally valueless, but we are not entitled to apply these standards. Unless we can establish an appropriate set of ego values for every stage of human development, we must regard the substitution activities of childhood as being either immediately or potentially valuable. Moreover, assuming that we could establish appropriate cultural scales of value, we could not get much farther with the problem unless we could at the same time establish a companion scale of *pathological* criteria, i.e. even if we could say that certain aims were worthless in the child's own

valuation, it would not follow that they were pathogenic. On the whole there appears to be no objection to adopting a cultural valuation of sublimations, in so far as sublimated impulses have an anacletic relation to ego-impulses and in so far as these ego-impulses represent or take cognizance of appropriate external standards. On the other hand, from the point of view of substitution products, there does not appear to be any justification for cultural valuation. And we cannot get away from the fact that Freud has laid the greatest emphasis simply on the deviation from a sexual to a non-sexual aim. We may subsequently proceed to classify substitutions as culturally valuable, neutral, worthless or detrimental respectively, but in that case we must have some exact understanding of the relations between sublimation, substitution and symptom formation. After all, when we say that symptom formation can be attributed to mental conflict we are also giving assent to the existence of certain social values. Illness, as Freud remarks, is essentially 'a practical conception'.

So far we have considered two aspects of the problem, viz. whether sublimation should include a group of mechanisms and whether a cultural valuation is justifiable. A moment's consideration will show that the second issue heightens the importance of the first. For example, it is often argued that the activities of a skilled counterfeiter constitute a lower, socially harmful manifestation, hence that a cultural valuation of sublimation is not universally applicable. From many points of view this argument is unsound. It can be said that the modification of the aim of instinct has already been achieved in the engraver's art, whereas the turning of the art to anti-social ends is a sort of secondary elaboration, involving preconscious processes. Or again, that the instincts gratified in the anti-social activity are unmodified as distinct from the modified instincts gratified by engraving activities. Or again, that these anti-social activities represent an alliance between a real sublimation and an infantile regression. Nevertheless, it might be argued that if we take this point of view, we have no right to claim that 'restitutive' urges of the Sharpe-Klein pattern are *primary* factors in sublimation. It is true that the 'restitutive' factor, unlike the anti-social factor, is at no point (pre)conscious, and therefore may have a *closer* connection with sublimation, e.g. with its organization. But it might still be regarded as a secondary manipulation of processes of sublimation, not as an immediate instigator. However that may be, it is evident that some grading of the end results of sublimation is a necessary subject for research. It may then be pos-

sible to impose a formal group limit to the classification of sublimations; or rather limit the number of factors which may be said to share in the processes of sublimation.

Sublimation and Object-replacement.—Coming now to the groundwork of the definition; in cultural valuations of sublimation, cognizance is inevitably taken of the *object* as well as of the aim of the impulse. Now, strictly speaking, this is not in the bargain. I am going to suggest, however, that unless we take a very broad view of 'aims' we cannot avoid paying attention to the objects of sublimated aims. Strictly speaking, the aim of every instinct is gratification, and if we adhere to that view then the change in gratification brought about in sublimation, viz. from a sexual to a non-sexual gratification, permits us to ignore the object. And it is true that in the case of sexual impulses, particularly the component instincts, the object is the most variable characteristic of the instinct. On the other hand, when we think of instinctual aims we are in the habit of thinking behaviouristically, i.e. in terms of the *mode* of gratification. It is in this mode that the degree of psychic relation to the original aim is preserved. Now since we know that sublimation can exert a protective function in mental economy in the sense of giving outlet to quantities of energy and so preventing damming up and conflict, we are bound to consider whether, apart from the absence of sexual gratification in any sublimated activity, the degree of psychical relation preserved in the new mode varies in remoteness and therefore in *protective value*. And there can be no doubt that the degree of psychic remoteness does vary greatly in different accredited sublimations. The impulse of infantile sexual curiosity concerning (Edipus objects, when converted into scientific curiosity as to the sexual habits of adults, has certainly undergone not only deflection of aim (there is no sexual gratification in the latter activity) but substitution of object. The mode of looking or listening has not however been appreciably altered. In the case of scientific curiosity regarding, for instance, the sexual habits of bees, the psychic relation to the original stimulating situation is increasingly remote, not as judged by aim or mode but as judged by replacement of objects. Substitute an abstract object, such as curiosity about the concept of sublimation, and the relation becomes still more remote. When anal-erotic sublimations take the form of collecting objects, the social and cultural valuation is determined by the nature of the object, not solely by the fact that a component sexual aim has become a non-sexual one. The collecting mode may alter little, but the object may vary from precious

first editions, to private collections of pieces of soiled paper or definitions of sublimation.

Further, the view that an object is the most variable feature of a sexual instinct is true by comparison with, for example, impulses of the hunger group, where the object must sooner or later minister to the original aim of gratification. In the long run a hunger impulse is not likely to be satisfied by eating the tablecloth or by reading of the feasts of Lucullus. Nevertheless, although sexual objects are in one sense easily changed and a sublimated impulse need not necessarily revert, the factor of fixation to *Œdipus* objects reduces the value of this pronouncement considerably, i.e. repressed factors may ultimately determine the choice of a substitute object. And you will note that in three special groups of sublimations (aim-inhibited activities, sublimated homosexuality and devotion to object-idealizations) the degree of psychical remoteness is not so great as in the deviations of component impulses.

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Substitution and Displacement.—Our next step is to consider what is the essential psychic process by which deviation is effected. Since, however, the terms 'substitution' and 'replacement' have so far been used without definition, I think we are justified in shelving further consideration of sublimation until we have taken our bearings on the nature of instinct derivatives in general. In particular we must be clear as to the nature of 'displacement', otherwise it will be difficult to describe the relation of sublimation to 'symbolism', to the 'return of the repressed' and to 'symptom-formation' respectively. To start with displacement, I find that there are about twenty-five terms in use in English translations and original works, all expressing some aspect of the mechanism of displacement, and although these can be grouped under the headings of 'displacement', 'replacement' and 'substitution', there is a good deal of overlapping, the net result of which is that the term substitution becomes rather hazy in meaning.

As the basis of all definitions we fall back on units of instinctual representation, viz. psychic content and charges of psychic energy, of which the latter are in the clinical sense by far the more important; and we are agreed that, in so far as charges are apprehended in consciousness apart from ideational elements, they are termed affects. Bearing this in mind it is evident that the term displacement is the most comprehensive of the three. It implies not only the transposition (movement, release, radiation, diversion, dislocation, transference) of affect (intensity, accent) but the replacement (substitution) of one idea

or element by another. The element substituted is more suitable or less unacceptable than the original element or was originally more trivial, indifferent or unimportant, i.e. psychically more remote. Replacement of elements involves transposition of affect, but the terms are not interchangeable. We cannot always use the term replacement in the affective sense. In sublimation, as Ernest Jones (5) has pointed out, sexual energies are not replaced but diverted. On the other hand, although replacement is an accurate term for the dislocation of elements, the term replacement-product is sometimes used in the same sense as substitution-product or substitute-formation. Substitution again, although frequently applied to organised mental formations, is on occasion used (in some definitions of symbolism) in a sense that is already connoted by displacement (or replacement) of elements. It would seem advisable to reserve the term replacement for that aspect of the general mechanism of displacement which concerns ideational elements. This replacement of elements can be observed not only in processes of intercommunication between different psychic systems (dreams, wit, symbolism, etc.), but in communications within one system (allusive forms of verbal (pcs) expression). The term substitution could then be reserved for the relations between organized mental processes (as distinct from elements) in different psychic systems, e.g. the substitution of preconscious ideational *systems* for unconscious phantasy organisations. Freud originally thought of substitution as concerning the ideational representation of instinct after repression. In his view, substitution-formations were similar to but more highly organized than unconscious phantasies. Substitute-formations and symptoms implied the return of the repressed. There were, however, many different forms of substitution and at that time he did not consider that substitution and symptom formation invariably coincided. For example, they did coincide in conversion-hysteria but did not coincide in obsessional neurosis; in obsessional neurosis, substitution by reaction-formation preceded and differed in content from symptom-formation. Later (6), however, as the result of his reevaluation of the characteristics of mental 'defence', he says that it is better to ascribe to the defensive process what has been said concerning symptom-formation and to regard symptom-formation and substitute-formation as synonymous terms. He would say, for example, that under certain circumstances the replacement of an element (e.g. father by wolf) has claims to be considered as a symptom.

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At this point one might protest that there is no object in labelling this matter, that sublimation refers to the fate of some instinct components that are *not* dealt with by repression, that we have nothing to do with the relations existing between organized formations, and that as far as sublimation is concerned, all we have to consider is the part played by displacement or symbolism. But the matter is not so simple. In regard to the first point, Freud has stated that co-operation between preconscious and unconscious impulses exists even when the latter are subject to repression, if the situation permits of the unconscious impulse operating in harmony with one of the controlling tendencies. Repression, he says, is then removed for the occasion in respect of this single constellation and the results of this co-operation are achievements of special perfection. Secondly, the restitution mechanisms which, according to recent writers, play an important part in sublimation are very definitely reactive substitute-formations for highly organized unconscious phantasies. Thirdly, as Freud tells us, sublimations of anal-erotic components play an important part in determining the end products of certain obsessional onanistic ceremonials.

Reaction-Formation.—The greatest difficulty in establishing a simple relation on the one hand between unrepressed impulse and sublimation and on the other between repressed impulse and substitute (or symptom) formation is vagueness concerning the exact meaning of reaction-formation. To make this difficulty clear we must consider the phenomenon of anti-cathexis. We are familiar with anti-cathexis first of all as the mechanism of primal repression. Following psychic situations of an exceptionally grave order (either immediately or potentially traumatic) instinct presentations are denied entry to the system *pcs*, whilst in the *pcs* system we find cathexis of ideas to some extent psychically remote from the traumatic group. We also recognize anti-cathexis as one aspect of actual repression. But here it is combined with 'withdrawal of cathexis' from *pcs* elements. And it is generally held that the energy of anti-cathexis is derived from the cathexis of repressed elements. Now should the anti-cathexis involve presentations of a directly antithetical element or interest, we are accustomed to describe this as a 'reaction-formation', although the use of the term formation is not strictly justified except in the case of a system of presentations, or at any rate in relation to a *persisting* anti-cathexis. Judged by the standards of displacement, all anti-cathexes are displacements and reaction-formations are merely a special example of displacement by the opposite.

The problem has been lightened somewhat by Freud's recent pronouncement on reaction-formation, viz. that it is to be regarded as a mechanism of defence distinct from repression (6). But if we are to regard reaction-formation as a mechanism distinct from repression we ought to be able to offer a good metapsychological reason for this change. Is it because we have hitherto included too much under repression and now desire to split off a special aspect, viz. anti-cathexis through antithesis; or is it simply that from the clinical point of view it is more convenient to raise a particular form of anti-cathexis to the status of an independent mechanism? There are some grounds for the latter view. In hysteria we find that *withdrawal* of cathexis is the most striking feature. There are anti-cathexes in hysteria, it is true; these move along lines of displacement but vary in psychic remoteness. On the other hand, in obsessional neurosis we find a *relative incapacity to withdraw cathexis* together with an extreme exploitation of anti-cathexis, particularly along one definite line of displacement, viz. through antithetical presentations. That is to say, the degree of psychic remoteness is more or less fixed. In one case we have a *mobile* mechanism (exemplified by the changing anti-cathexis of outer stimuli seen in hysteria); in the other we have *organized* anti-cathexis, more or less permanently embedded in the ego. In other words, if reaction-formation is an independent defence mechanism, it must be in the sense of a substitution product having some degree of permanent organization, as distinct from the lability of hysterical anti-cathexis. From this point of view, we are entitled to classify various substitution products in accordance with their depth and the permanence of their relation to ego structure. For example, to judge by their degree of refractoriness to analysis, we could place in order of permanence the following psychic manifestations, viz. normal character formations, neurotic character formations, a number of obsessional formations and the reaction-formations of hysteria. Possibly criteria of this sort may be applied with advantage to the processes of sublimation.

Sublimation and Reaction-Formation.—In the meantime, let us summarize the possible relations between sublimation and reaction formation in the light of our discussion of displacement. First of all, as regards elements: if reaction-formation is simply a form of anti-cathexis of certain ideational elements, then it is *a priori* a form of displacement and has that much in common with sublimation. But in that case it is difficult to insist that sublimation is solely concerned

with unrepressed elements. If, however, reaction-formation is an organized psychic formation, then we may be able to distinguish it from sublimation, provided we are content to regard sublimation simply as a variety of displacement. If, however, we regard sublimations as themselves organized psychic formations, then we can justify the use of a special term, 'sublimation', only provided we can distinguish sublimation from other organized formations, e.g. reaction formations, character formations and symptom formations. Obviously this would raise difficulties because we have become accustomed to regard some character formations as sublimations, e.g. anal-erotic sublimations. With regard to sublimation and symptom formation, it might appear that such a distinction should be taken for granted. It is, however, as I hope to show, by no means axiomatic.

Then as to energies: here the relation to symptom formation is again important. Consider the view that sublimation concerns only unrepressed instinct. If one adheres to this view, then one can definitely distinguish sublimation from organized reaction-formations because the latter certainly deal with instincts under repression, but in that case the relations of sublimation and character formation are again obscured. By existing definitions certain character formations are means whereby an individual can to a large extent spare himself repressions. And sublimation by itself will not cover the phenomena of character formation. In any case, when we talk of an individual sparing himself repressions we mean actual repression. Perhaps we should do well to avoid this loose use of the term repression and speak of sublimation phenomena in quantitative terms: we might say, for example, that a sublimation applied only to the *complete* transfer of an original cathexis to the replacement element.

To conclude our consideration of reaction-formation in relation to sublimation, we may recall that Ernest Jones (5) has always drawn a distinction between these mechanisms. He has stated that sublimation represents the continuation, after modification, of positive unconscious impulses *only*, whereas reaction-formations include also certain elements of ego-reaction. He would admit, of course, that the end product in both cases shows deviation of aim, and the distinction, as he points out relates essentially to the source of the instincts concerned. Positive sublimated instincts originally belong to the appetitive group; reaction-formations contain positive drives but include also representatives of reactive instincts. By putting emphasis on the source of instincts and whether they operate directly or through the ego, he has offered us an

apparently simple solution of the matter. According to this view, deviation of aim would not be exclusively a characteristic of sublimation.

Tempting as this definition is, there are certain difficulties in the way. If, as has been suggested, certain creative activities prove to have been stimulated by restitutive urges, then we have an example of an apparently positive urge (the impulse to create), functioning not only in a reactive sense but in a manner which is reminiscent of the obsessional mechanism of undoing (6). In obsessional undoing, you will remember, one representative of instinct is followed by another calculated to 'undo' or 'expiate' or 'cancel' it. This suggests that we may have included and still include under reaction formation, phenomena which require a separate category.

Sublimation and Symptom Formation.—Now let us follow the relations of symptom formation and sublimation a little farther. The main feature in the definition of sublimation was, it will be remembered, the fact of change of aim. Now in a large majority of instances a symptom amongst other achievements succeeds in altering the aims of impulses—the substitute product is apparently non-sexual and except in rare instances unaccompanied by sexual gratification. One can try to get out of this difficulty by saying, as Bernfeld does (2), that a sublimation is the opposite of a symptom, that the energies are not conflicting but work together producing increased ego activity. Well, unless one combines this with a cultural valuation, one has not discovered a unique characteristic; in certain phases of neuroses, individual activities may be quite excessive. But there is here at any rate some point of agreement. We are bound to concede that obsessional energies are expended on trivial activities. Symptoms, as Freud tells us, are either detrimental or useless to life as a whole or may be obnoxious to the individual and involve him in distress or suffering. These remarks do not appear to apply to sublimations. But these standards are descriptive standards (social and clinical) not metapsychological.

Pleasure-pain Criteria.—In any case the pleasure-pain standard of differentiation requires some assessment. Gratification of sublimated activities is held to reduce *Unlust* or increase *Lust*, whereas symptoms (primary or secondary gains apart) induce *Unlust*. This seems a promising distinction, but one is bound to ask whether it has not been taken too much for granted in the past. It is true that Freud, in his latest work (7), stresses the importance of sublimation as a method of

preventing psychic suffering, and in that sense relates it to the operation of the pleasure principle (in its reality aspect); but he has been careful to point out in the same essay that we cannot estimate what part in these cultural processes is played by the complete suppression or repression of instinct gratification. At a later stage I hope to show that if we investigate the data carefully enough, it is by no means universally true that sublimation is unaccompanied by psychic tension of the *Unlust* order.

The protest may here be raised that social valuations apart, we have ample means of distinguishing a symptom from a sublimation; in particular it will be said that a symptom is a boundary construction with one foot in the Ego and the other in the Id (6): or to put it another way, that it is a compromise artefact nourished not only by energies proceeding through the Ego but by immediate Id energies. Also that it is rejected by the Ego. So much may be freely admitted. And we can also agree that many reaction-formations and most sublimations appear to be accepted by the Ego without question. But it is equally true that many normal character activities and most neurotic character activities are accepted by the Ego without question. Yet neurotic character activities are not generally regarded as sublimations, nor do they have the same structure as symptoms. The fact that neurotic character formations like sublimations are accepted by the Ego has been commented on by Ernest Jones (8), who goes on to say, 'it is likely that there is no hard and fast distinction between the two'. He believes, however, that the changes in sublimation are more radical and intrinsic, whereas in neurotic character formations the sexual nature of the impulse is retained, being merely disguised through the contact it has established with the Ego. In so far as he refers to 'desexualization' of sexual impulse, this view is probably quite valid, although it compels us to examine carefully the concept of desexualization. From the point of view of deviation of aim, however, it can only hold in respect of the degree of *psychical remoteness* achieved by displacement, and is not a completely serviceable distinction for our present purpose.

Sublimation and Action.—We are faced with a similar difficulty if we try to distinguish sublimations by reference to the factor of *motor expression*. It is true that by means of symptom formation, motor expression of certain instincts is either denied or limited to the body of the individual, whereas sublimation gives free motor discharge to instinct, provided displacement has been effected. Motor expression

after displacement is, however, also characteristic of neurotic character reactions and the activities extend likewise towards the environment.²

Sublimation and Inhibition.—Perhaps a more fruitful line of approach would be to consider the relations of inhibition in general to sublimation. We know that whereas some inhibitions take part in symptom formation, they can be distinguished from symptom formations in that inhibitions are ego-activities and supplied with energies from within the Ego. To use somewhat loose terms, most inhibitions are considered to be the result of excessive erotization of Ego-function leading to disturbance of that function (e.g. disturbances of vision); and from the point of view of sexual aims, we might regard sublimations as Ego-aggrandisements of certain erotic functions (mainly component). The reader may recall here Ernest Jones' (9) stimulating suggestion concerning sublimation, that it represents an ontogenetic repetition of a stage in the development of primitive man when sexual energy was first drained into non-sexual channels, e.g. work, etc. These seemingly antithetical relations between sublimations and inhibition are deserving of closer investigation.

Apart from that, the relation between sublimation and inhibition brings out a point in the study of instinctual mechanisms which has not yet received sufficient attention, viz. the chronological order of development of instinct modifications. For example, we know that inhibitions are the last line of defence in dealing with instinct that has escaped repression, i.e. they are interpolated immediately before motor activity. It might be possible, therefore, to introduce a chronological factor in the estimation of sublimation; the latter may occur at some

² *Sublimation and Characterology.*—The concept of character, and, in particular, of neurotic character, has been a constant source of difficulty in this context. One way out of this difficulty would be to jettison the term 'character' altogether. It is always possible that this term has outworn its usefulness and is no longer necessary or suited to metapsychological presentation. I believe there is a great deal to be said for such a procedure, although space does not permit any discussion of its justification here. Besides, if we stopped to throw character terminology overboard at this point, we might have to meet a counter-attack from characterologists. They might retaliate with a suggestion to discard the term sublimation. Anyhow, there certainly do seem to be good grounds for a careful overhaul of our terminology in order to eliminate the confusion due to overlapping.

precise point, probably late in a series of instinctual modifications or defences. It would of course come before inhibition.³

A few years ago Melanie Klein (10) considered the relations of sublimation and inhibition in some detail, and although part of her theoretical presentation was based on then existing views as to the nature of anxiety, views which Freud has since modified, her actual findings do not lose their significance on that account. One of the points brought out was the fact that inhibitions tend to make their appearance where superfluous libido is attached to an existing sublimation. (By sublimation she means the transfer of a libidinal cathexis to an ego activity, the path being determined by sexual-symbolic displacement.) This view emphasises the importance of chronological order and incidentally supports the truth of a general statement made by James Glover (11) that an inhibition covers a hidden talent. It is even more important in another respect: it focusses attention on the part played by sublimations as *conductors* for excessive (pathogenic) libidinal cathexes. It was of course already known that in the obsessional neuroses sublimations acted as conductors for symptoms, but Melanie Klein's work on the 'disinclinations' of children indicated a more general exploitation of this conductor activity. Moreover, it is easy to see that sublimations can play a part as conductors in anti-social constellations (e.g. the activities of a skilled counterfeiter). In view of these facts it seems essential to pay much more attention to the clinical aspects of sublimation before we attempt to determine its relation to symptom formation and neurotic character formation.

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Sublimation and Symbolism.—Use of the term 'conductor activity' brings us to what is perhaps the most difficult problem of all, viz. the relation between sublimation and symbolism. Strictly speaking, we might have considered it under the heading of displacement, but equally justly it could have been dealt with under the heading of symptom formation. For example, it might be said that sublimations do not act as conductors for symptoms but that the element of symbolism does. This is probably true in the sense of presentation,

³ Since writing this I observe that Sterba ('Zür Problematik der Sublimierungslehre,' *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, 1930, 3/4, S. 371) stresses the chronological order of mechanisms. Not only does he classify various types of sublimation in order of incidence, but he considers that reaction formation must necessarily be preceded by sublimation in the sense of desexualization.

but not as regards energy. Ernest Jones (9) has pointed out in regard to this subject that it is the transfer of psychic energy alone which is the significant feature in sublimation, whereas in symbolism the full significance of the original complex is retained unaltered and merely transferred to a secondary idea. He agrees, however, that sublimated ideas can temporarily regress and sink back to become mere symbols of complexes. From the descriptive standpoint, therefore, the distinction does not help us out of our present difficulties; the result in both cases is displacement or change of aim. It would appear that any fundamental distinction must be effected in terms of energy. Such a view would invalidate completely any form of cultural definition. Cultural assessments would then be a matter of individual taste.

The subject has been reconsidered in recent years by Melanie Klein (10). If I have apprehended her views correctly, the phenomenon of sublimation cannot be understood without constant reference to the related factors of fixation and repression. The stages are as follows: primary identification—sexual-symbolic cathexis—sublimation. Repression can play a decisive part at three points; first, in leading to the distinction between identification and symbolism (fixation here has a retarding effect on all subsequent development), second, in preventing the gradual extension from symbolism to sublimation (here fixation is responsible and the result is symptom formation), and third, in interfering with existing sublimations when these are charged later with excess of libido (here the result is inhibition). Melanie Klein's presentation is much more comprehensive than anything hitherto attempted, but it does not solve the problem of the distinction between sexual symbolic cathexis of Ego tendencies and sublimation. It would appear that the only criterion she offers, the presence or absence of a 'tone of sexual pleasure', applies only to the distinction between primary identifications on a pleasure tone basis and symbolic interest in certain activities, not to the relations between symbolism and sublimation. In the absence of some such criterion the distinction she offers as between sublimation and symptom formation is not so serviceable as it appears at first sight. In fact one is more and more driven to the view that sublimation can justify its retention as an independent metapsychological term only provided we can establish some intrinsic change in the nature of the energy, such as was hinted at by Ernest Jones in distinguishing between sublimation and reaction formation. Nevertheless, one of Melanie Klein's findings (12) is extremely illuminating. She points out that the drive to

identification of Ego activities with directly sexual activities is the primary anxiety developed by the child in the course of its object-relations. There is, it appears, an optimum amount, excess of which at an early stage leads to grave retardation in symbolic and ultimately sublimation activity.

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Summary.—We must now attempt to summarize the results of this protracted discussion. We started to discuss the state of opinion regarding sublimation up to 1923. This includes definition, description of psychic mechanism and relation to other psychic manifestations. We have paid scant attention to the modifications undergone by the energies involved, because this aspect belongs more properly to the second phase, viz. from 1923 to the present day. Little has been added since 1923 to the more general aspects of sublimation.

The first and inevitable conclusion must be that the concept of sublimation as originally stated involves a considerable amount of confusion; the second that we have not yet extricated ourselves from this confusion. As regards mechanism, we have produced nothing exclusively characteristic of sublimation. If we reduce sublimation to terms of displacement, there seems no great point in retaining a tautological expression. If we insist on cultural valuations, we cannot be content with a simple definition of 'aim deviation'. We may, if we so desire, introduce a cultural factor, but this implies a complex of mechanisms and we are not in a position to indicate any exact boundary to this complex formation. Moreover, if we include substitution elements in sublimation we have difficulty in distinguishing the latter from other organized substitutions (either characterological or symptomatic). And then we get confused as to the relation of sublimation to repressed and unrepressed instinct.

On the other hand the existence of confusion stimulates us to seek for some precise method of valuation. For example, the degree of psychic remoteness from the original impulse seems to be an important factor in sublimation, but we are unable to estimate this precisely, owing to the element of symbolism present. And if we are to take the remoteness factor seriously, it would appear desirable to exclude mere aim inhibition and object idealization from the category of sublimated processes. As regards the relation to organized psychic formations, a promising line of investigation would appear to be the relation of different formations to the main psychic systems (e.g. super-Ego).

Also the position of sublimation in a hierarchy (or chronological sequence) of psychic mechanisms seems worth investigating.

As regards energy, although we have hardly touched on this matter, certain possibilities have presented themselves. It seems that a quantitative factor in displacement might permit of a classification in which sublimation would be characterized by complete transfer of cathexes. This naturally suggests the operation (independently or concurrently) of a *qualitative* factor. Indeed one tends to form the opinion that some qualitative change in energy may prove to be the only valid metapsychological criterion of sublimation. An illustration of this qualitative factor would be the process of desexualization to be considered later. Finally, it is obvious that there is much to be gained by an examination of the sources of instincts involved, particularly the relation between reactive instincts and instincts capable of sublimation.

In conclusion, we must remind ourselves of two possible errors in approach. First of all we may have been obsessed by cultural valuations; it may be that we should define sublimation only in terms of protective value (related chiefly to illness). Sublimation might then be regarded as that process which affords the maximum protection from illness with the minimum expenditure of energy. Lastly the factor of social valuation reminds us that in attempting to define sublimation in purely metapsychological terms we may be attempting the impossible. If, as Ella F. Sharpe suggests, sublimation and civilization are conterminous, it would be unreasonable to expect to shoehorn sublimation into a short metapsychological definition.

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Clinical Investigations.—We have at last arrived at the proliferating margin of research on sublimation. There are three obvious directions in recent investigation. The first is clinical, the second a re-examination of psychic structure and the third a qualitative investigation of psychic energies. By accepted usage clinical investigation comes first. Clinical investigations can be either direct, in which case we are concerned at first hand with the observation and analysis of processes regarded by common consent as sublimatory, or they can be indirect, by which is implied the observation and analysis of phenomena accompanying or connected with sublimation, but not usually regarded as part of sublimation.

Transitory Sublimations. (a) *Developmental.*—A good example of the direct method is the investigation made by Bernfeld (2) into