

INTELLECTUAL INHIBITION AND DISTURBANCES IN EATING¹

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Psycho-analysis has shewn that the infant's first relation is to the mother's breast, and that this relation, together with his attitude to food, may prove significant for the whole of his reactions to the external world. In the words of a schizophrenic patient: 'At bottom everything, reading, going to the theatre, paying a call, is like eating. First you expect a lot, then you're disappointed. When I come to analysis, I eat your furniture, clothes, and words. You eat my words, clothes, and money. If you work, your employer eats you up. But at the same time you do some eating yourself. At times I'm very hungry, then once again I can eat nothing'.

The functions of the sense organs stand in the service both of the instinct of self-preservation and of (modified or unmodified) libidinal instinctual aims. Furthermore, reception via the sense organs, like intellectual assimilation, is equated with oral incorporation, so that affects of greed, pleasure, anxiety, inhibition, etc., get transferred from food to these (cf. the expressions 'intoxicated with beauty', 'devour with the eyes', 'a feast for the ears', etc.). Instinctual conflicts can accordingly either inhibit or favour the function of the sense organs, and the sense of reality based on them, in two ways: (1) Through conflicts relating to the libidinal instinctual aim in whose service the sense perceptions stand (e.g. inhibition or impulses to sexual curiosity). (2) Through disturbances of libidinal trends which become secondarily amalgamated with the function of the sense organs or with the processes of thought (e.g. if seeing, smelling, or thinking are perceived as oral activities, inhibitions in eating can be replaced by inhibitions affecting sight, smell, or thought).

Our attitude to external reality corresponds for the most part to our attitude to internal reality, to our affects; for only through them do we acquire a relation to the external world. The affects are generally equated with the contents of one's body, with the incorporated objects.

Abraham shewed that the receptive function in eating forms the prototype for all later intellectual understanding, and this has been confirmed by other analysts. All the cases of intellectual inhibition I

¹ Part of a paper read before the British Psycho-Analytical Society in September, 1933.

have analysed could be traced back to an earlier inhibition in eating. In those cases where the inhibition in eating is not replaced by an intellectual one, intellectual ingestion seems to be regarded as less real and less aggressive and so arouses less anxiety than actual biting up of food.

The schizophrenic patient previously mentioned had suffered in childhood from severe disturbances in eating. These had developed as a reaction to her strong oral wishes. About the age of ten she overcame this inhibition to a very great extent, since anxiety compelled her to over-compensate the feelings of disgust and aggression towards her mother which found expression in the refusal of food: better that she should eat of her own accord than that she should be compelled to do so by her mother and perhaps have the food forced into some other opening—eye or anus. Her shyness with people was determined by the same motives as her inhibition; but a still greater anxiety compelled her to overcome this anxiety, to be 'polite', to do always as others did and to eat everything. A thing was of real value in her eyes only if it was acquired in secret—food stolen between meal-times. Yet her excessive anxiety would not let her gratify these impulses. If anyone knew what she possessed, ate, studied, etc., it at once lost its value; it might be taken from her, or her enjoyment of it might be interfered with (as in the case of masturbation)—consequently it was better that she should give it up of her own accord.

This attitude to food was decisive for her attitude to money and knowledge. She reacted to her wish that her parents should give her a lot of money (oral greed) with an extraordinarily strong sense of guilt. Consequently she wanted to avoid accepting anything from them. But since this attitude was bound up with the aggressive wish to be independent of her parents, to be grown up (oral defiance), this had in turn to be over-compensated by assuming the part of a small child dependent on its parents. This latter was also determined by her overwhelming fear of poverty (starvation).

She was under a very strong urge to study, but, as in the whole of her intellectual development, was inhibited to such an extent that at first she impressed one as mentally defective. Her wish to know everything, by knowing to be omnipotent and independent of her parents, to be admired and feared, expressed her impulses orally to incorporate an omnipotent penis. The various courses of study represented male, female, or sexless persons. She was unable to study because she could not allow herself a preference for any one particular subject, or person, or food. She had to study all subjects, incorporate

all people, all at once. She felt guilt if a subject had been neglected, anxiety if it had been begun (food bitten into but not eaten). If she could not master all subjects at once, she must give them all up. Her defiance also found expression here: 'All or Nothing'. This was strengthened by fear of the knowledge to be acquired.

The incorporation anxieties which had inhibited eating found expression in the most varied fears that study was bad for her health. In particular she could not study sociology because the different theories in this field would work in her mind like ill-assorted food in her stomach. (It is dangerous to incorporate the sadistic antagonistic parents.) These incorporation anxieties were somewhat mitigated if she worked with others, and so proved to herself that they could take in the knowledge, just as her anxiety had been less great if she ate with her mother. But then she was hampered by the anxiety and rivalry felt for her comrades. Besides, she did not want what others had, but rather something quite unique, something that had never before existed. If she had taken this in (eaten or learnt it), she was like God. In order to become like God, she had to be alone, have no human relations or sexual impulses. Another reason for having to be alone was to escape the envy of others. She was afraid that the food given by her mother and the knowledge dispensed by the teacher would prove bad, injurious or worthless. So she had to acquire valuable knowledge on the sly. But to avoid awakening in others the suspicion that she was secretly looking for something better, she had also to incorporate the food and knowledge offered her. As she did not know where the 'good' object (breast, penis, fructifying semen) was to be found, she had to consume everything in existence, and the impossibility of doing so paralysed her. She suspected that anything accounted as worthless was alone truly to be valued, consequently she had to pay special attention to all subordinate matters, but might not appear to be doing so. She was under a compulsion to buy old books, partly in the hope that these would prove to be of especial value, partly because she identified herself with them and felt they would rot away, since nobody else wanted them. She suffered from a sense of guilt toward subjects she did not learn, akin to that she felt for old books she did not buy, as well as rubbish she failed to collect, food left uneaten, abandoned children. Therefore she might not favour one subject at the expense of another. But then anxiety arose that she would not be able to look after so many children and that she herself would be hungrily devoured by them. In the same way, she wanted

to keep a number of domestic pets, but feared she would not be a good mother to them, would not have enough food or time for them, etc., or might treat them cruelly. She would only be able to study if she had kept and studied mice and rabbits and proved her worth with these. But then she was afraid that if she did this well (were a good mother, i.e. feminine), she would have no right to give it up, to study (be a man). Her ideal was to be both sexes: consequently she had to have everything at once, know everything, incorporate everything (father and mother together), be man and woman at one and the same time, so as to become equal to God. By being both sexes or neither one becomes equal to God.

I have only been able in this paper to adduce some of the motives responsible for the patient's severe intellectual inhibition. They are remarkable in being diametrically opposed and consequently admitting of no compromise. As in other cases, I found that the most powerful factors inhibiting oral-intellectual ingestion were: Fear of the envy of others corresponding in intensity to one's own envy of their possessions; fear of one's sadism (of destroying food, damaging knowledge, depriving others of it by one's incompetence, i.e. sadism), and, further, numerous incorporation anxieties. An additional motive of importance emphasized by various writers is oral defiance; a refusal to take in knowledge because as a child one did not obtain it at the time or in the way or as fully as one wished.

The influence of oral factors is not solely an inhibiting one; in many cases they favour intellectual development. Greedy longing for food is often replaced by curiosity, thirst for knowledge or riches, etc., knowledge being regarded as concrete and equated with the penis, body contents, etc. An intellectually uninhibited patient prized knowledge only if it was inaccessible to others, if he acquired it in secret, 'stole' it. His main anxiety was that a woman would devour his brain or that his scientific work would prove to have been plagiarized (stolen). He equated knowledge—ideas—with the contents of his head, and these with the contents of his body. As retaliation for primitive incorporation wishes directed to his mother he feared the woman would devour the contents of his head or that his child (scientific work) would turn out to be stolen from his mother.

It seems that scientific work is very largely based on the oral sexual theory that one can only give birth to a child if one has first orally appropriated and incorporated parts of the parents' bodies. Thus, psychologically, plagiarism seems to represent a central problem

in scientific work. Normally, retaliation anxiety is avoided by legalizing plagiarism with quotation (reparation to the author). This sexual theory also finds expression in the work ritual of many people who, e.g. can only work well if they have first consumed a juicy beefsteak or who eat sweets or smoke while they work.

A patient who had occasionally stolen during puberty (mainly sweets and books) later shewed a certain inclination to plagiarize. Since in his eyes activity was bound up with theft and scientific work with plagiarism, he could only get away from these prohibited impulses by means of a really far-reaching inhibition of his activity and intellectual work.

Intellectual disturbances can extend to disturbances in production as well as in understanding. For productive work, excretory and birth symbolism is of paramount importance. Thence arise numerous disturbances: many people, for fear of remaining barren, empty (robbed of the contents of their body), can only write a work if they have already mentally finished the next one. A patient felt guilty towards work which had been completed and sent in to the editor; he had abandoned his child, sent it to strangers. So long as it lay in the drawer, it was safe, like a child in bed. Often anxiety also relates to the work itself: the various ideas (children, excrements) are like troops which must be laboriously brought under control to prevent them fighting among themselves (contradictions) or rebelling against their commander. A patient with an insect phobia compared his work with a millepede. The footnotes represented the numerous feet. Frequently hypochondriacal fears and worries are transferred from body to thoughts and from these to work. However, I do not wish now to enter more closely into these factors, but only to emphasize the part played by oral factors in inhibiting productive work.

A patient had, with great effort, given some lectures and after a further lecture reported very contentedly that—as anticipated—it had again been a failure. The bad lecture, like his tedious associations, proved to be a revenge for all the bad lectures he had been compelled to hear, for all disappointing knowledge, in the last resort for insufficient feeding. On another occasion he cancelled a lecture at the last minute. Lecturing gave him power over the audience. Here he identified himself with a nursing mother who is in a position to give good or bad food (knowledge) or to refuse it altogether.

The motives which I have here illustrated by reference to journalistic and scientific works and lectures can also be shewn at work in writing

letters, homework, giving answers at school, repeating poetry, etc., etc., and even in the ordinary conversation of adults and children. Once again these motives exercise an inhibiting influence only in some cases; frequently they form a powerful stimulus to intellectual development.

Generally it may be said that oral factors will exert a beneficial influence on intellectual development if the oral longing sublimated into curiosity is intense while not calling up anxiety or guilt as a result of the associated sadism (alternatively, if anxiety and guilt are bound without inhibiting intellectual development). Apart from the importance of excretory symbolism, the most favourable condition for intellectual production is an identification with a good mother who dispenses food and knowledge, and—on the genital level—with a potent father.

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