

INTUITION IV. PRIMAL IMAGES AND PRIMAL JUDGMENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

A primal image is the image of an infantile object relationship, that is, of the use of the function of an erogenous zone for social expression. A primal judgment is the understanding (correct or incorrect) of the potentialities of the object relationship represented by the image. In the normal adult, under ordinary conditions, neither the primal image nor the primal judgment comes into awareness. Instead, a more or less distant derivative, which is called here an intuition, may become conscious.

Primal images are pre-symbolic representations of interpersonal transactions, whose study leads directly into certain important areas of psychopathology. These images, which have a special quality reminiscent of eidetic images, may be regarded as clear and direct representations of the psychophysiological bases of another person's social expression. Primal judgments imply an understanding, based on such images, of certain archaic unconscious attitudes of other people. These attitudes are derived from early instinctual vicissitudes and express a deep and persistent infantile quality in object relationships. Such "primal" understandings may be selectively influenced by the percipient's own archaic needs and strivings but, nevertheless, appear to reflect accurately in many cases something in another person's mode of relating. As the exposition will necessarily be complex, a clinical example may be given at the outset so that the reader will have a notion of what is being talked about.

Belle, a 40-year-old housewife, gradually became aware that her relationships with men were somewhat stereotyped. There were some whom she mocked in a more or less subtle way, while she tormented others. In the course of time, she sensed that her mockery was the tincture for a feeling of relief, while the cloak of the tormentor concealed a sense of danger. One day she recounted with a jeering feeling of laughter a conversation with a known exhibitionist. How droll he would look, she thought, taking off his clothes to exhibit his flaccid penis! This was her conception of exhibitionism. It brought to mind her thoughts about the therapist, who was such a flaccid sort of man that he reminded her of

her dear old grandmother. But he did not always appear so. Sometimes he reminded her of her husband, a man as implacable as stone, whose tremendous erections frightened her and whom she teased cruelly, leading him on sexually until he could hardly contain his passion, and then at the last moment freezing him out with ruthless frigidity. Only the other day she had glanced at the therapist and thought she could see the conformation of his genitals, and had tried to determine if his penis was flabby or erect. She used to do the same thing with her father, when she played on his lap as a child.

The men she jeered at did have a flaccid quality, she saw now, and it was the virile ones she tormented. External evidence seemed to confirm her judgments of some of the men she encountered. She began to feel that such judgments, which had previously been unconscious, were based on an image of each man's penis, which had also previously been unconscious. Indeed, it turned out later that she had been as a child (and still was to some extent) obsessed by sexual images. The penis-image reminded her of her husband when he took a sunbath. Sometimes he would have an erection, and she could not bear the sight. Once he told her a joke about an erection, which was so graphic that she could not tolerate the image it conjured up, and she became nauseated. "I could see that fellow's penis right in front of me, hairy, ugly, and raw." She could talk of the vagina in an intellectual way but could not bear to think of it as she really pictured it, "a raw red slimy gash." The image terrified her, and she desperately avoided it. "My images are too clear. It frightens me. I just can't bear to think of it." Smell seemed to play a prominent part in this type of imagery with her, as it does in many cases.

It will be noted that she reacted to her "too clear" images as though the organs pictured had special potentialities for her. It is such images that the writer proposes to call primal images, and such judgments as she made of people, based on these images—"This man is flaccid (in his potentialities toward me)" and "This man is virile (in his potentialities toward me)"—that the writer would term primal judgments.

Among the earliest psychological phenomena discussed by Freud, in connection with one of his very first analytic cases, Mrs. Emmy von N.,¹ he refers almost in passing to "plastic images."

This is a topic which he did not systematically follow up, although he repeatedly mentions it in connection with dreams and wit. These images, as they occur in hysterics such as Belle, seem to be closely related to, or identical with, primal images. If so, then they are also closely related to Jaensch's eidetic images,² which seem to have many of the descriptive qualities discernible in primal imagery. The qualities common to both eidetic images and primal images, and which differentiate them from ordinary memory images, are: a pseudoperceptual quality; superior clearness, richness, and accuracy of detail; and more brilliant coloration. All these are present even when the period of exposure is shorter than that usually required for a vivid memory image. Although they are both "images of hallucinatory clearness," they can be distinguished from hallucinations and pseudo-hallucinations. Eidetic images, like primal images, are supposed to exist in other sense-fields besides the visual; it is even said that ordinary "images" do not exist at all in the field of the lower senses, and that there all past sensory experiences are revived eidetically.

Jaensch, however, does not seem to emphasize clearly the dynamic effects of special imagery in influencing interpersonal relationships. This is the purpose of the present communication. It is pertinent, however, that Fenichel does remark that "eidetic types may be designated as perception fixations."³ (p. 53) Silberer's "functional phenomenon" appears to be a symbolic derivative rather than the direct expression of the "primal" phenomena dealt with here.⁴ Two recent rather comprehensive symposia on perception and personality^{5, 6} fail to note this particular kind of dynamic imagery. A recent article by Smythies⁷ borders on the subject, but the nearest thing to a systematic psychodynamic discussion is Ferenczi's paper "On Obscene Words."⁸ Several disjointed sentences from that work may be quoted as an introduction to the discussion.

"An obscene word has a peculiar power of compelling the hearer to imagine the object it denotes, the sexual organ or function, *in substantial actuality*. . . . These words as such possess the capacity of compelling the hearer to revive memory pictures in a regressive and hallucinatory manner. . . . The obscene verbal images retain as does all repressed material the characters of a more primitive type of imagination." Ferenczi speaks of "a high

degree of regressive tendency," a vivid "mimicry of imagery," and of "primitive" attributes.

Ferenczi is talking of the evocation of such images by the stimulus of an obscene word, while the concern here is with their spontaneous activation during the course of an interpersonal relationship. Ferenczi's work has recently been reconsidered and enlarged upon, primarily from the linguistic point of view, by Stone,⁹ who gives a large number of references, including Bergler's paper of 1936; but again the viewpoint is not directly concerned with the present problem. Kestenberg¹⁰ also discusses primitive sensory experience, with references to the literature. But so far as the writer knows, no one has yet systematically discussed the connection of such images with judgments of, and subsequent reactions to, the people in the environment; that is, essentially, their relationship to intuitive processes. Perhaps Jung,¹¹ in a nondynamic way, comes closest, especially when speaking of "primordial images."

What will be considered here are the following topics: (1) The infantile origins of primal judgments. (2) The pathogenicity of primal images. (3) The relationship of primal images and primal judgments to intuitive processes.

But first it is desirable to try to clarify some of the terminology which will be employed. The following definitions are taken from some of the writer's preliminary communications on the subject.^{12, 13, 14}

II. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Every human being is capable of making judgments by the use of functions whose processes are not ordinarily verbalized. In practice, judgments of reality are probably made through the integration of a series of types of cognitive processes. It appears that the most important and influential judgments which human beings make concerning each other are the products of pre-verbal processes—cognition without insight—which function almost automatically below the level of consciousness. A study of these processes demonstrates that the individual can know something without knowing how he knows it; in fact, he may not even know what it is that he knows, but behaves or reacts in a specific way as if his actions and reactions were based on something that he knew. To go a step further, he may not only be unaware how he made a cer-

tain judgment and what the judgment is but he may be unaware that he has made a judgment at all. The latter is likely to be the situation in what are here called "primal judgments."

By *judgment* is meant an image of reality which affects behavior and feelings toward reality. An *image* is formed by integrating sensory and other impressions with each other and with inner tensions based on present needs and past experiences. By *reality* is meant the potentialities for interaction of all the energy systems in the universe; this implies the past. A judgment concerning one person, the *agent* (corresponding to the communicant), by another, the *percipient* (corresponding to the receiver), is here called a *diagnosis*. Diagnoses are made through the medium of communication. Any transfer of energy from without to within an organism may be called a *communication*, provided it is understood by the receiver. A communication is *understood* when it changes the distribution of the psychic cathexes in the receiving organism. Any change in the psychic cathexes in an organism, such as that brought about by a communication, changes its potentialities for action. *Cathexis* refers to the charge of energy on a psychic image, and the investment of such an image with feeling and significance. An *interpersonal* communication is any communication, through any modality of energy, between two people. A *manifest* interpersonal communication corresponds to the successfully executed conscious intent of the agent, while a *latent* communication is inadvertent. In general, the interpersonal communications considered here are *direct* in time, place, and person, that is, vis-à-vis.

An intuition is a special kind of diagnosis resulting from archaic processes which are subconscious (that is, preconscious and/or unconscious). Intuitions, as consciously perceived, are derivatives of primal judgments, which are based on primal images activated by latent communications. "Primal" is used in the Freudian sense, as in "primal fantasy" and "primal scene." In fact, it is probable that many primal images are based on primal scene memories. The word carries with it connotations of the archaic infantile psychological process, and, indeed, the question at issue here might be most succinctly exemplified by the query: "How does an infant make a diagnosis and what are his diagnostic categories?"

III. INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD

Fenichel describes the perceptions of infants as follows: "The first images are large in extent, all enveloping and inexact. They do not consist of elements that are later put together, but rather of units, wholes, which only later are recognized as containing different elements . . . the perceptions of many sense organs overlap. The more primitive senses, especially the kinesthetic sensations and the data of depth sensibility prevail . . . the contents that are perceived are also different. Hermann called perceptions 'which the small child possesses, but which later disappear for inner or external reasons,' primal perceptions . . . To a greater part the characteristics of archaic perception result from its 'unobjective' character, its emotional nature. The world is perceived according to the instincts as a possible source of satisfaction or as a possible threat . . . the primitive experiences are felt as still undifferentiated wholes which make their appearance repeatedly."³ (p. 38f.) He also states that "the pleasure principle is incompatible with correct judgment."

Such ideas concerning the nature of imagery in young children can only be inferential, but it is probable that no adult ever sees anyone as glorious or as evil as his mother appeared to him during his first years, or as splendid or as terrifying as his father, except in states of sleep, intoxication, ecstasy, or psychosis. It is likely that some of the images of infants are enormously cathected and have an uncanny magical immediacy and urgency which the normal adult never experiences (cf. R. Spitz¹⁵). The representations which the normal adult may unearth are the shadows of these archaic ones, with the primal cathexes long ago diluted and withdrawn to be distributed among derivatives.

It is safe to infer from the available evidence that the infant's diagnostic categories are based on various aspects of self-interest. It is probable, furthermore, that his diagnoses are based on latent communications and not on manifest ones. The "friendly" smile which is not sincere may give way under his ruthless appraisal. He often appears to react to the hidden insincerity rather than to the manifested smile. But there are frequent exceptions. For example, his reputed skill in detecting latent communications can be beguiled by an appeal to his immediate needs, which may be the

sort of thing that disturbs the compatibility of the pleasure principle with correct judgments.

The infant, as he is observed in his relationships with adults, seems adept at divining what lies behind any but the most stable defenses and derivatives. As he grows up, he learns to civilize these primal judgments and fit them into a cultural framework, and his putative awareness of just what he thinks people want from him or are likely to do to him becomes obscured.

Originally, he must see people in a primitive way, relating his observations primarily to himself as an organism whose function is to survive and get direct satisfaction from his environment. Insofar as his diagnostic capabilities are learned, we may suppose that he watches the expressions of the people around him when they are disposed toward him in various ways, and learns by some kind of experience what various emotional expressions signify for his own future. Thus he becomes a judge of other people, such as strangers. His judgment is sufficiently refined even during the first year so that he can distinguish between people who want to hurt him and people who have to hurt him even though they do not wish to. For example, he knows that the doctor is going to hurt him even before he sees the needle, but he quickly forgives the doctor after it is over. On the other hand, he bursts into unforgiving tears when he sees the mean little boy approaching.

An infant under six months who was brought to the clinic by his mother responded happily to one social worker's cooing, but burst into tears and buried his face in his mother's breast when another tried similar tactics. He responded in the same way to each of them on subsequent visits. The child's "diagnoses" happened to correspond to the impressions of those who knew the social workers well. The first worker was known for the affectionate relationship which existed between herself and her own children, while the second was a spinster whose outward appearance was agreeable enough but who was felt by the staff to be unconsciously hostile to mothers and to infants. It is noteworthy in this connection that some people seem to quaver beneath the appraising stare of a babe in arms, just as many do under the diagnostic regard of the unpredictable, "fool-proof," and uncontrollable psychiatrist, as if they feared in both cases that their defenses and maneuvers would not avail to conceal their own primal, exploiting needs.

It may be inferred that an infant's responses to people, especially strangers, such as baby-sitters, are based on primal judgments appropriate to his age, as to whether they threaten his security or promise satisfaction for his current needs: in the oral phase, for example, "Does this one bring me what I crave?" The schizophrenic's judgments often have a similar infantile flavor; this is known in one way or another to many skillful therapists, who guide their behavior in the treatment accordingly.

IV. SCHIZOPHRENIA

A hebephrenic was able to talk about his primal images in some detail. He was observed on the ward laughing and muttering to himself, completely out of touch with his surroundings. The following day, however, he had a rather complete remission and was able to discuss his thoughts coherently. The psychiatrist, who thought he knew what was troubling the patient, inquired:

"What you saw was intolerable, wasn't it?"

Patient: "Yes. It was awful. I couldn't bear it."

Therapist: "It was too close."

Patient: "Yes, right in front of me."

Therapist: "What was it?"

Patient: "A woman's legs around my head, and her vagina right up against my mouth."

Therapist: "Did you know who it was?"

Patient: "Yes."

The therapist thought it wise not to press the point further. His intuition concerning the patient's primal image about cunnilinctus had turned out to be correct, and he did not think it advisable to risk disturbing the patient in order to confirm his surmise as to the identity of the woman. The patient stated that this was an image, and not a vision, and that there had been two other forms of the same representation: "a scale model in the corner of the room, a man and a woman having intercourse and doing that, like a photograph," and that he "also saw it in my mind sometimes, just an image of a man and woman doing that." But as for what had made him smile the day before, "It was those legs being right there, right in my face."

In this case, the patient visualized his relationship to an important woman in terms of the juxtaposition of selected erogenous

