

CHAPTER SIX

MAN AND HIS MORAL IDEAS

Any discussion of man and society will naturally lead to a discussion of man and his moral ideas. Both as an individual and as a social being man has to follow certain moral codes and norms. Man is endowed not only with self-consciousness and social consciousness, but also with moral consciousness. Indeed, morality is a human phenomenon, a mode of social and individual behaviour and moral sense is psychological. Hence psychoanalysis, though not primarily an axiological discipline, cannot but embrace a study of moral ideas.

Now, psychoanalysis is both a theory and a method. As a theory psychoanalysis investigates, explains and describes the structure and dynamics of human personality. As a method it seeks to bring into light the hidden contents of the unconscious which are inaccessible to us. In the present chapter we shall explain how Freud and Adler approach the problem of morality from the theoretical and the therapeutical points of view.

I. FREUDIAN EXPLANATION OF MORALITY : It was Freud's one of the basic formulations that a man is born basically asocial, and amoral in nature. He is guided by the Id impulses which are

asocial and immoral. He is dominated by the pleasure-principle which always aims at its immediate gratification. So a child has no innate sense of morality. But after his birth he is exposed to an environment, in that family is the first and foremost of the environmental situations, thereafter he comes to social environment. As the child's first relation, as Freud said, is with the parents he learns to pick up the moral code and precepts from the parents. According to Freud, a child immediately after his birth upto the ages of four or five (which Freud designated as the Oedipus stage) maintains an ambivalent attitude of love and hate towards his parents, love towards the parent of the opposite sex and hate towards the parent of the same sex. To a child the only way to get love of parent is to identify himself with the parent concerned. In this Oedipus stage - many other complexes, e.g., the castration fear and loss of love etc., come within the child's mind. When the child, in order to get love of mother, identifies himself with the father, he is also afraid of father's punishment and loss of love. This identification is a mechanism by which the child begins to imitate the parental model. Now for Freud, this fear of punishment and the desire for approval in the Oedipus stage cause the child to identify himself with the moral codes and precepts of his parents, and again this identification with the parents on the part of the child results in the formation of the super ego. The parents are endowed with the power of punishing and rewarding the child.

Consequently the super-ego is also furnished with the power to reward and to punish. (The former is done by the ego-ideal and the latter is done by conscience). This is the origin of morality, according to Freud, in the infantile period. With the formation of the super-ego the child leans to conform to the parental dictates and the moral codes of society. This super-ego is an important biological agent which helps the child to control his asocial Id impulses. These Id impulses are sex and aggression. This super-ego is the heir of the Oedipus Complex.

Now, what is the position of morality in the adult life, according to Freud? How do the adult persons behave morally?

As most of the desires of an adult are sexual and asocial in nature, their gratification is not permitted by the society. The only way on the part of the individual is to repress them from the conscious to the unconscious. But this repression is unsuccessful, because bare repression without gratification would not keep the individual's mind calm and quiet; on the other hand, there will remain every possibility of these desires to reappear in the conscious mind to seek their gratification in the form of symptoms. Therefrom arises neurosis. The neurotic's trouble is always due to the unsuccessful repression and is a result of the absolute conformity to the pleasure-principle.

Now, psychoanalysis is a technique. As a therapy its chief aim is to help the patient to get rid of the grip of the

pleasure-principle and thereby helping him to abide by the reality-principle. This task is accomplished by the analyst when he is able to bring the ^{un-}conscious contents of the patient into light, into consciousness. It is evident from this fact that all the Id impulses which are amoral in nature were sent to the unconscious part of the mind as a result of repression; and if these immoral Id impulses are again brought into consciousness, then certainly this charge can be levelled against the analyst that the physician is inducing the patient to immorality. But a profound knowledge about the analyst's aim will help us to refute this charge and show a close relation between psychoanalysis and morality.

At first sight it appears that the analyst is helping the patient to bring back his ^{un-}conscious contents into consciousness. But that does not indicate the end of his task. He also suggests the patient to gratify his immoral impulses in fantasy, in thoughts which again leads him to sublimation. This sublimation is a successful repression in which the immoral Id impulses may take the form of desires, and thoughts, which are moral and social in nature.

We may point out this relation between psychoanalysis and morality from another point of view in Freud's theory.

Psychoanalysis as a theory tries to formulate a theory of human personality. Id, Ego and Super-Ego - these three are the constituent elements of total personality. Moral values happen

to be the facts of mental life and psychoanalysis being the study of the total man must come in close relation with moral values as wrought up in the texture of total personality. This is why Freud once made this observation that "man is not only much more immoral than he thinks, but also much more moral than he knows".

But it should be always kept in mind that the study of morality in psychoanalysis would be always different from that in Ethics.

Ethics is a normative science and is concerned with moral judgments. It studies moral behaviour with reference to a norm, a standard - the highest good. But psychoanalysis as a science, is concerned with the actual facts. Its judgments are factual judgments. It makes a positive approach. To quote Heinz Hartmann, "the attitude of the psychoanalyst is that of the psychological student of moral or other valuations and their inter-relation with other individuals or socio-psychological phenomena. His objectivity is scientific objectivity, his truth is scientific truth".¹

Ethics is concerned with the validity of moral judgments and ideals, whereas psychoanalysis is concerned with their origin and growth in the individual mind. "The relation of analysis to value problems was of necessity the same as that of any other

¹ H. Hartmann, Psychoanalysis and Moral Values, p. 2.

science." ² Though the study of morality comes within the province of psychoanalysis, it never studies what good is and what bad is, rather its main concern is to regard what the psychological factors that play their part in our moral evaluation are.

This is in bare outline Freud's view on morality. But very often an objection is raised against Freudian view. The 'super ego' which, according to Freud, is the heir of the Oedipus complex grows with the formation of the Oedipus Complex while a child is passing through three main stages, especially the phallic stage, all on a sudden. But this type of explanation regarding the origin of the super-ego which is closely associated with the moral values of man, cannot stand on reasonable grounds. The super-ego being a psychical phenomenon, must have a separate history of its own regarding its growth and activity.

Freud's view on morality may be objected from the ethical point of view in this way that morality is a phenomenon which assumes freedom of will whereas Freudian psychoanalysis is based on rigid psychological determinism, which means the unconscious determinism. To be ^{un}consciously determined means to be determined purely by the pleasure-principle. All the acts, thoughts and desires of men are regulated by the unconscious which again is dominated by the pleasure-principle.

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Ibid., p. 20.

But Freud never used determinism in this sense. Psychoanalysis is a method to cure mental disease; its chief aim is to help one to get rid from the grip of pleasure-principle and thus to make him conform to the reality-principle. The success of this therapy depends upon the ability of the analyst to make the patient abide by the reality-principle. To be so guided means to be free. To be free means to be able to execute a plan of action worked out in obedience to reality-principle. So this objection against psychoanalysis that it rejects freedom is not tenable. Though this freedom is not equally present in each and every normal person. It is a matter of degree. It depends upon the strength of the ego. The more the ego is able to act according to the reality principle, the more free it is. Freedom is never an absolute concept. No man is either absolutely free or wholly chained. In all his acts, he is guided partly by the pleasure-principle and partly by the reality-principle. So the analyst refrains from moralizing and only helps to strengthen the ego so that it can take over the moral functions by suppressing the immoral impulses; and super-ego, in that case, is the most important biological agent to suppress them.

II. ADLER'S DEVIATION FROM FREUD : Alfred Adler never regarded Ethical demands as a mere restriction of human nature or its modification through outside pressure or an outcome of an intrinsic conflict between internal opposing forces but rather the ethical behaviour is a form of expression which is in harmony with a natural predisposition.

Freud as an individualist regarded the individual as basically anti-social in nature - this very view of Freud was criticised by Adler. For Adler every individual is born with the social feeling which may be regarded as an innate disposition of human beings; but as 'inferiority feeling' is a basic postulate of Adlerian psychology, so for Adler this social feeling also originates from the 'feeling of inferiority' of the individuals. As soon as the child finds himself inferior to others around him regarding his organs, a strong desire emerges in him to compensate it. His very weakness of organs makes him dependent on others to take care of him. Thus the feeling of inferiority contains in it the very germ of social-feeling.

For Adler the individual is socially embedded. It is the reason why the individual always likes to live in a community with his fellows. All the social factors - ethical imperatives, cultural progress - Adler tried to explain in terms of this communal feeling of human beings. Next to the striving for over-

coming the inferiority feeling and for superiority the social aspect is indeed the most important factor in Adler's Individual Psychology. We have already shown it that the very definition of inferiority became relative to the social situation. It refuses to recognize and examine an isolated human being.

For Adler it is a striving for superiority and ultimately it is a social feeling or social interest which is behind every human creation and it is a source of all contributions which are made to our culture. All human judgments of value and success are founded, in the end, upon co-operation. We shall never find a man who is completely devoid of social feeling.

Our enjoyment of beauty is founded on the understanding that appreciation and recognition of the beautiful and the good must be common property. One can easily arrive at the conclusion that the concepts of reason, logic, ethics and aesthetic can have taken their origin only in the communal life of man, and that they are at the same time the cement which protects culture from disintegration.

Now according to Adler, this inferiority feeling, on the part of the child is intimately related to his environment; the stronger the feeling of inferiority, the more violent is the ensuing reaction. The long series of ethical imperatives which a child has to face in his social life increases his feeling of inferiority.

Adler again suggested a possibility which may help the individual to overcome his inferiority and which is a subjective origin of ethics. An individual can make the foreign (ethical) demands his own. When it is done the ethical imperatives have been replaced by the imperatives of freedom. Thus the individual will not come into conflict with his environment and will formally maintain himself as independently willing. Only then the individual is said to overcome the inferiority feeling and is no longer a servant but has become a master of himself.

To Adler the psychological source of morality is to be traced out in the complementary urge of 'social interest' which again arises out of the most fundamental human urge to compensate inferiority and thereby to achieve power and superiority. This feeling of inferiority was the most fundamental assumption of Adler's Individual Psychology, by reference to which he made every possible attempt to explain all aspects of human behaviour. Adler held that immediately after birth the child acquires the feeling of inferiority as a result of frustration and humiliation that his environment inflicts on him. So this feeling of inferiority is a universal phenomenon, and essential part of human life. This is the feeling which no individual can stand for long. Naturally it leads him to act in accordance with a selfish motive to acquire power and superiority. In this light Adler explained the cause of man's adaptation to the moral standard of his environment as an

outcome of his primary and fundamental egoism; or his selfish need to dominate and be superior. It was Adler's view that when we find ourselves in our childhood period that we are not superior but inferior to others, we erect a 'guiding fiction'. This 'guiding fiction' corresponds to Freud's ego-ideal. The 'guiding fiction' is determined by an effort to compensate for inferiority and the individual's whole urge to prove his superiority is, according to Adler, constantly strengthened by the realization or the fear of inferiority.

III. A CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE ESTIMATE : Neither

Freud nor Adler is primarily interested in morality as such. Indeed to Adler is attributed the remark : "If anyone talks to me of morality, I look to see if per chance his hand is not in my pocket." ³ But neither Freud nor Adler could avoid reference to morality, inasmuch as rightly or wrongly regarded it is a part and parcel of human nature and society. Neither of them was eager to formulate any kind of ethical principle or standard - they both tried to offer an explanation of the moral phenomenon. Both tried to explain the development of morality in individual life, and so both of them had to refer to the childhood period. For them morality is not an essential aspect of human personality, though, according to both, every individual, placed as he is in his social setting, is bound to observe some moral standard or other. Thus for both

³ Quoted in Lewis Wax, Alfred Adler, p. 208.

of them morality is more a social than an individual affair. Taken in this sense, both were determinists, though Freud was more pronouncedly, and openly so.

But their approach is initially different. As in other fields, so here also Freud tried to explain morality in terms of libido as it expresses itself in the Oedipus stage. In Adler libido or sex is not given any position of prime mover; but he too explained it in terms of childhood experience of inferiority. But Adler had an advantage over Freud in explaining origin of morality in so far as he looked upon 'social feeling' as basic to human personality. Now, regarding Adler's emphasis on man's basic social character, two misinterpretations should be guarded against :

(i) First, it may be thought that in so far as man is to practice social morality, he will have to go against sexuality. But society is not hostile to every kind of sexual activity; the real purpose of social morality, as Adler envisaged it, is not to repress, but to guide sexuality. Taken in this light, the opposition between Freud and Adler is not as sharp as it appears at first sight.

(ii) Secondly, social feeling as assumed by Adler is not itself any moralizing agency as such, but it is a basic assumption about life which helps an individual in making proper adaptation to society and thereby in having a good mental health. Referring to this social feeling, Lewis Way comments, "Its essence is missed if it

is taken to be either a philosophy or a morality." ⁴ But it must be admitted that because of his social feeling, the individual of Adler has a proclivity to morality, while the individual of Freud's imagination has to put up a show of morality with much struggle. But then Adler believed that the values are all useful and teteo-logical fictions. ⁵ If we are to take the theory of fictionalism literally, the gap between Freud and Adler narrows down. Indeed, both Freud and Adler offered for rational and dispassionate consideration a perspective in which morality is seen to be no less complex than is the moral agent himself. The enigma of morality is that it is the self that promulgates the moral law and assumes the obligation to act according to law; and yet it is the self that defies the law. The psychologists by their keen analysis have no doubt brought to bold belief the conflicting character of human personality - they explain why men are selfish and yet social and altruistic. The analysts - specially the members of the Freudian school - have been subjected to severe criticisms; for example, the Freudians are encouraging immoralism, that being supporters of determinism they have forfeited their right to explain morality etc. We have already briefly examined these objections ⁶ and we need not repeat them. All that we may say here is that

⁴ Ibid., p. 208.

⁵ See Ch. V., Sec. IV., p. 167

⁶ See Sec. I. of the present chapter.

many of these criticisms would lose their edge if we realise that the analysts are holding a plea for self-examination and self-understanding. They are in a way reviving the old Socratic maxim : Know Thyself.

The analysts by their probe into the moral field have made some important contributions. They have emphasised the unity of knowledge and virtue - they have shown that self-knowledge, mental health and moral virtue are the three facets of one process. They have emphasised the need for a properly guided moral training in childhood, a guidance which is to be mainly given by mother. They have also drawn our attention to the evils of too rigid and authoritative moral control over children and have also tried to determine, though each from his own standpoint, the causes of moral pathology.