A Dark Trace

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Published by Leuven University Press


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Chapter 3
Repressed desires

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we return to Viennese bourgeois society and our analysis of neuroses, specifically obsessional neuroses. This chapter covers roughly the first decade of the twentieth century, a period during which attention shifted from hysteria to obsessional neuroses as it is in these neuroses that sense of guilt and oppressive morality are prominently found. They thus appeared to be the perfect place for Freud to look for the origins of morality and guilt. However, analysing obsessional neuroses is not the only way to approach the problem of guilt and morality. Freud’s analysis of cultural morality stemmed from his analogy of it with obsessional neuroses. His findings and explorations in this area are central to this chapter.

It is important to keep the development of Freud’s thought in mind for the rest of this study. Our point of departure is Freud’s investigation into the origins of unpleasure, morality and sense of guilt. These issues forced him to abandon the seduction theory and take the radical step of focusing on infantile sexuality and amorality. Via his self-analysis he detected the first contours of our oldest and deepest desires: the quest for ‘an old guilt’ led him to affectionate and hostile desires. These analyses of self-reproach were the basis from which he then analysed obsessional neuroses and cultural morality. Freud’s analysis of sense of guilt, which began to play a consistently more central role in his work (above all in the 1920s and 1930s), is not an effect of his analysis of obsessional neuroses and cultural morality, but rather should be understood the other way around.

It was in the first decade of the twentieth century that Freud attracted his first students and, subsequently, experienced the first breaks with them. It was also at this time that his work was increasingly discovered by proponents and opponents. We shall see in this chapter and the following how the central themes of infantile sexuality, morality and guilt yielded both recognition as well as misunderstandings and rejection.

In his self-analysis, which was, inter alia, an analysis of self-reproach and a quest for its hidden causes, Freud focused on the inner conflict between repressed desires and internal censorship. In fact, all of this is a continuation of his earlier theories on the defence against intolerable ideas, resistance and repression. He also wrote at that time that repression was a central discovery and formed the point of departure for further theorizing. What is being repressed? The simplest answer was “sexuality”.

While searching for the causes of this conflict, he found himself – via the seduction theory – at infantile sexuality. The source of the conflict between

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1 S. Freud, An Autobiographical Study, p.33.
that which was repressed and that which is being repressed lay in childhood. These two themes, (infantile) sexuality and repression, were central to Freud’s work in the years after his self-analysis.

Sexuality and repression: we have returned to chapter one and Freud’s first ideas as stimulated by Carmen. The refined, modern bourgeois mentality appears to be characterized by repression and drives. Freud’s first patients were refined bourgeoisie. He lauded, for example, Emmy von N. for her moral character and for successfully repressing strong sexual desires. Elisabeth von R.’s entire moral being revolted against intolerable ideas. And was not Dora’s “no” to Herr K. also a fine example of defence against a repressed wish?

In a 1905 article Freud addressed the role of sexuality in the origin of neuroses based upon clinical experience and supplemented with some speculation. He made clear that this piece was an elaboration of earlier theories on neurasthenia and the separately distinguishable anxiety neuroses. He briefly described in this article how he discovered the important role played by sexuality in the emergence of neuroses. He discusses Charcot and Breuer’s cathartic method, the seduction theory and the discovery of the defences against infantile sexuality, the theory of consciousness splitting, repression, and the origins of the unconscious. He also describes how he initially spoke about the defence against intolerable ideas, defence as a conscious not wanting to know. That, according to Freud, was a purely psychological term at that time. In 1905 he replaced the term defence with the more organic repression of sexuality. At the end of the article he writes, “we have been led on imperceptibly from the question of the causation of the psychoneuroses to the problem of their essential nature”. This essential nature is the sexual processes which determine “the formation and utilization of sexual libido”.

3.2 Formation and utilization of sexuality

Freud sought to chart the essence and meaning of sexuality and to do so via an analysis of infantile sexuality. The result was Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, which appeared in 1905 but was significantly expanded during the subsequent decade.

In the first essay he maps a whole range of abnormalities. Not without irony, Freud relates the popular “fable” about sexual drives: every person is divided into a male and female half which try to unite themselves in love. For men the sexual

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2 S. Freud, My Views on the Part played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses, SE VII.

3 Idem, p.278.

4 S. Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, SE VII. Important additions or reformulations were made in the revised editions of 1910, 1915, and 1920.

5 Idem, p.136.
object is, so to speak, women. Union in love is then the sexual goal. So much for the poetic fable, for directly thereafter come the first abnormalities as concerns “object” (the person toward whom sexual urges are directed). Freud was searching for the link between all of these abnormalities and supposed normality. Theories that traced abnormalities back to congenital degeneracy were missing just this link. In addition, abnormalities were also manifest in people of high intellect and morality. The link between sexual urge and sexual object appeared to be innate, but this link is very loose: the sexual drive is probably initially independent of any specific object. During development one particular object gradually gains the upper hand. Here, Freud is dealing with heterosexuality and homosexuality concretely. He does indeed see drives as a biological given, that is to say, the drives have a somatic origin. Freud defined it as the “psychical representative of an endosomatic source of stimulation”. For psychoanalysis this drive is thus only an object of study when it is mentally represented in ideas or affect or both.

The “fable” of the normal “aim” follows that of the normal object; by normal we mean genital union of man and woman resulting in the release of sexual tension and satisfaction of the sexual drive. This too is a fable, for various perversions such as fetishism, voyeurism and masochism demonstrate that the goal is seldom limited to the genitals. Thus, what is normal? Everyday normality and abnormalities from it prove that, at any rate, “fables” are not wrong. Thus, ironically enough, Freud arrives at the position where it is exactly the most disgusting perversions that appear to have the greatest mental processing of the sexual urge. In “normal” love the urge is primarily inhibited. In other words, the grandeur of love evidences itself nowhere more than in perversion. Freud dealt here seriously with the conventional distinction between normal and perverse: the first essay is thus in fact a critique of bourgeois morality. There is no homogenous sexuality which develops only at puberty and which can be called normal, and abnormalities are not degeneration from the norm. Behind bourgeois façades lie the same fantasies as “abnormals” have.

What is central to neurotics is that everything burdened with affect – ideas, wishes and desires – is denied access to conscious processing. In other words, we are dealing here with repression (of sexuality). In hysteria the consequence is conversion: the physical symptom is a substitute for the repressed wish or

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6 Gay has rightfully argued that the essays on sexuality and the unveiling of fables certainly imply a “subversion of middle-class pieties”. Bourgeois morality is undermined. P. Gay, *Freud*, p.143.
8 Idem, p.168. In the *Standard Edition* the concept of *Trieb* is often translated as “instinct”. Geyskens has argued rightfully that drive should not be equated with instinct. The drive is a concept between somatic and psychic, whereas instinct can only indicate an innate disposition towards, for example, the choice of sexual object. T. Geyskens, *Never Remembered*, pp.37-38.
desire. Resistance manifests itself as shame, disgust and morality. Freud had not considered morality a resistance against perversion, but with hysteria he did. He failed to indicate why he did so, but it seems he was falling back on his earlier description of perversion as immorality. It is the repressive power of morality which leads to symptoms typical of hysteria. These are not the degeneration of the so-called normal drives, but a converted expression of them. Put another way, that which in a perversion is immediately expressed in fantasy is in neurotic cases twisted, converted, inhibited; but the unconscious fantasies of the neurotic are the same as the conscious fantasies of the pervert.

The disposition to perversion is thus normal. This idea leads us to the second essay, about infantile sexuality, for it is there that the seeds of perversion are most clearly evident and the drives are less intense. The presumed logic is relatively straightforward: if a perverse disposition is normal, we may then assume that this develops over time in order to be later repressed. Mental power is accrued during childhood and later used to curb and contain the sexual drives, namely “disgust, feelings of shame and the claims of aesthetic and moral ideals”. The specific content of these “reaction formations” appears to be determined by upbringing but is organically determined while being constructed; that is to say, it flows from the drives.

How did Freud present these impediments and “dams”? He had spoken earlier about a certain construction of sexual pressure in childhood, a tension which was unleashed in puberty and was then habituated to, for example, cultural ends. A child is full of urges which are later expressed when thorough somatic or mental organization is achieved. In his *Three Essays*, Freud’s containment is presented as an extension of the first intuitions regarding an organization of accumulated tension. In puberty infantile sexual drives may be partly or largely diverted toward a non-sexual aim and used for other socially acceptable ends. Freud called this latter process sublimation, a term that for the time being he saw as a derivative of reaction formation.

Sublimation is the middle road between two poles (each other’s “negatives”): perversion and neurosis. The thinking runs like this: infantile sexuality is polymorphously perverse. The period thereafter Freud called the latency period, a period in which the mental dams against sexual urges are built up. Only at puberty

\[\text{Idem}, \text{p.162, p.164.} \]
\[\text{Idem, p.165.} \]
\[\text{Idem, p.172.} \]
\[\text{Idem, pp.177-178.} \]
\[\text{Idem, p.178. From the 1915 version on, Freud clearly differentiated sublimation from reaction formation.} \]
\[\text{In *Character and Anal Erotism* (1908) the latency period is situated between the ages of five and eleven. S. Freud, *Character and Anal Erotism, SE IX*, p.171.} \]
is sexuality definitely structured. The conflict in puberty is between (infantile) sexuality on the one hand and the “moral defensive forces at the cost of sexuality” on the other.\textsuperscript{18} The outcome is thus determined by inner counterforces, but also by the possibilities and impossibilities the culture offers as well as morality as determined by culture. The result of this conflict (that is, the adult character) is determinative for the development of a perversion (given a structural failure), a neurosis (when sexual urges are drastically repressed) or of sublimation (when sexual drives are diverted from sexual to other, socially valued aims).\textsuperscript{19}

Why are drives diverted? The sexual drive aims at reproduction, but in children the reproductive function is not yet developed. Thus the urge is there but the predestined goal is not, and this gives rise to unpleasure. This unpleasure awakens counter-reactions: repression by unpleasure via containment including disgust, shame and morality. It is clear that Freud here is repeating his oldest ideas: culture is based on the containment of drives. The highest culture – not forgetting that Freud is referring to the bourgeois culture of his age – is not based on a long moral evolution in which degeneration is sometimes manifest, nor is it based primarily on upbringing (or seduction), but rather on the fate of the sexual drives and their individual outcomes.

The first vicissitudes of the sexual drive are determined by physical satisfaction. Early sexuality is auto-erotic, as Freud now referred to it.\textsuperscript{20} The term was borrowed from Havelock Ellis, who used it to refer to sexual emotion not caused by external stimulation.\textsuperscript{21} In the foreword to the fourth edition (1920) of \textit{Three Essays}, Freud poses the question which was pressing: what is sexuality really? Freud answered this by claiming that the term was so “enlarged” that it corresponded to the platonic term “Eros”.\textsuperscript{22} Seen in this way, auto-erotic is the same as auto-sexual, but that is naturally no answer. What did Freud mean by sexuality in 1905? It is in any case clear that the essence of sexuality, that is to say its fundamental origin, is biochemical. This leaves its meaning undefined. The example of infantile sexuality Freud uses is sucking (on a nipple or a thumb, for example).\textsuperscript{23} The drive, the urge, is mentally understood as a desire seeking satisfaction. The child “chooses” a body part which it believes will provide satisfaction. This choice is determined

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} S. Freud, \textit{Three Essays}, p.179.
\item \textsuperscript{20} S. Freud, \textit{Three Essays}, p.181.
\item \textsuperscript{22} S. Freud, \textit{Three Essays}, p.134.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Idem, pp.179-181. On this subject see P. Moyaert, \textit{Begeren en vereren}, pp.58-63. The example of sucking should not lead us to think that Freud is a pansexualist. Not every act can be reduced to the sexual drive. On the other hand, it should be noticed that sexuality is a broad term, certainly when we consider that jokes and aesthetic experiences generate “fore-pleasure”. S. Freud, \textit{Three Essays}, p.211; P. Gay, \textit{Freud}, p.148.
\end{itemize}
by the first source of satisfaction: the mother’s breast. It is thus the memory of the breast which motivates the search for new sources of satisfaction. The essence of sexuality is biochemically determined, but the meaning of sexuality extends beyond those borders: sucking can have a sexual meaning. Yet Freud differentiates between the meaning of sexuality in children and adults: after puberty – and more about this below – it is distinctly less likely that sucking retains its sexual meaning.

The breadth of the term sexuality is also evident in Freud’s other designation of infantile sexuality: child sexuality is by nature polymorphously perverse. As with an uncivilized person, this means that the sexual drives have not been contained. Curiosity regarding the sexual organs is not contained by shame or disgust. Cruelty (which can later develop into sadism or masochism) is not yet contained by morality. Later in *Three Essays* Freud adds pity (or compassion) as curtailing force.

The third essay deals with puberty, during which time infantile sexuality takes it final shape and is given meaning. The sexual drive was auto-erotic and only now finds its definitive sexual object and goal. Now the drives begin to serve a reproductive end. Puberty is the period during which the experiences of childhood pleasure and unpleasure result in neurosis, perversion or sublimation. What is also clear is that society’s influence is greatest during puberty: in societies which frown upon homosexuality, for example, this is less prominently expressed and vice versa. It is also in puberty that the definitive differentiation between male and female character originates. This means that men repress their female sexuality and women their male sexuality. The search for a love object is largely determined by the quest to rediscover the first love bond, that between mother and child. That this “rediscovery” is not really a rediscovery is a consequence of the internalization of the incest prohibition which is also imposed by society.

It is during the latency period – the period between early infancy and puberty – that the inner counterforces (shame, disgust and compassion) and the social

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24 In the essays the exact influence of chemical processes remains a riddle, nor are they an object of psychoanalysis. S. Freud, *Three Essays*, p.243.
26 Idem, p.219, p.231. We should notice that pity and morality are closely related. We have already seen in the previous chapter that compassion was associated with self-reproach and cruel wishes against the father. Morality is regarded as a “dam” against cruel wishes. However, in his essays on sexuality, Freud does not elaborate on the exact relationship between compassion and morality. In this respect it is also interesting to note that the Oedipus complex does not play a role in the 1905 and 1910 editions of the essays.
27 Idem, pp.207ff.
28 From the 1915 version on Freud will argue that the choice of object is already made before puberty in the so-called phallic phase, which will later also be called the Oedipal phase. This means that the distinction between infantile and adult sexuality becomes more blurred. Idem, p.207.
29 Idem, pp.219ff.
constructions around morality and authority are built up to combat sexual urges. Yet it is only in puberty that sexuality is definitely structured. The conflict in puberty is between infantile sexuality on the one hand and limitations and results determined by the counterforces on the other. Its outcome is determined by the inner counterforces that are “organically determined and fixed by heredity”, but certainly also by the social possibilities and impossibilities and education. Freud’s cultural criticism is here portrayed. Sexual development results in a conflict during puberty in which education and cultural pressure are determining factors. This means that this conflict is the origin of both the development of a higher level of culture as well as the tendency towards neurosis. These two lie dangerously close to one another, all the more since a more advanced culture demands more of its members. He concludes that it is easier for neuroses to manifest themselves in advanced cultures than in less advanced ones in which we often find freer sexual development. Freud closes the circle: beginning with the origin of neuroses, he ends up examining the essence of sexuality. At the close of *Three Essays* he returns to the origin of neuroses.

Freud pays no explicit attention to self-reproach or sense of guilt in *Three Essays*. The issue is not elaborated upon, despite the fact that the preceding chapters have shown that these terms were often mentioned together with disgust, shame and morality. He sees disgust as a reaction to what was previously experienced as pleasure. During the process whereby polymorphous perversion is contained and erogenous zones are subsumed under the primacy of the sexual organs, disgust is directed at the desire which had been bound up with those zones which later become erogenous, particularly the mouth and anus. This is true of shame, too, but principally as regards visual pleasure: voyeurs are without shame, but in a “normal” person visual pleasure is restrained. And which perversion does morality curtail? If disgust can be linked with the formally erogenous zones (mouth and anus) and shame with voyeurism, then it is reasonable to assume that morality, too, can be linked to a third group of perversions Freud mentions, to wit, sadism and masochism. He treats these two as a fusion of sexuality with aggression, and although he does not explicitly mention the counterforce(s), he does indicate that the “cruel component of the sexual instinct” is not yet curbed by compassion. However, this compassion is developed relatively late, and the cruel component of the sexual drive has not yet been fundamentally analysed.

We saw in the previous chapter that compassion stems from self-reproach, which in turn stems from hostile feelings toward parents or siblings. The reverse was also true, self-reproach can stem from compassion. The association of compassion and

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31 Idem, p.177.
32 Idem.
33 Idem, p.242.
34 Idem, pp.157-160.
cruelty thus takes us back to familiar ground: the Oedipal issue and the origin of morality. The trail of self-reproach (and even self-punishment) and compassion lead back to hostile feelings towards the father. We could say that morality is the counterforce against infantile aggression, but then we would be stating something Freud for now leaves unsaid. After all, we have already seen that the origin of morality remained a problem and a riddle. The same is true for the source of self-reproach and sense of guilt. In 1908 Freud once again declared that research into the source of sense of guilt was complex and that a multitude of factors play a role, but “what is certain is that guilt feelings come into being through the ruin of sexual impulses”.36 Perhaps this explains why in Three Essays Freud did not link sadism and masochism to a specific “dam” and why he had nothing further to say about self-reproach and sense of guilt. The themes of morality and sense of guilt would have led him astray from his project of charting the essence and meaning of sexuality. Yet in various publications around Three Essays sense of guilt and morality do indeed play an important role. This is evident in the themes to which Freud returned at the end: the development of neuroses in connection to culture.

3.3 Weaknesses in the system

In Three Essays Freud strongly opposed the “fables” of normal sexual relations. In this regard the work is sensational, but he was not the only one investigating sexuality’s relationship to pathologies and fin de siècle culture. The American George Beard introduced the term neurasthenia37 in 1869 and had already linked the origins of general nervousness with sexuality. This was the principle subject of Sexual Neurasthenia, 1884.38 The first thing that was clear to Beard was that neurasthenia was a modern disease: modern civilization places such high demands on the individual that they can overload the nervous system. Apart from this cultural context, there are also particular moments during which overload can occur. He listed alcohol, nicotine and drugs, climate and sexual excesses, including masturbation, impotence, condom use and coitus interruptus. These excesses exhibit a momentary or local overload of the nervous system. Following from this, Beard addressed what can be called normal sexual relations within a marriage emphasizing moderate sexual intercourse for purposes of procreation, to facilitate sleep and digestion, and the strengthening of the nervous system. What he described here as healthy is exactly what Freud called a fable: man and woman with normal, moderate sexual intercourse in the service of gratifying procreation. Imitating Beard, a number of studies appeared in the 1880s and 1890s on the

38 I used the German translation: G. Beard, Die sexuelle Neurasthie, ihre Hygiene, Aetiology, Symptomatologie und Behandlung, Deuticke Verlag, Leipzig, Vienna, 1890.
connection between neurasthenia and modern culture. Examples of these include those by Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Leopold Löwenfeld. Freud simultaneously built upon and criticized these men and their work.

In his 1895 *Nervosität und neurasthenische Zustände* [Nervousness and Neurasthenic Conditions], Krafft-Ebing portrayed neurasthenia as harmful to the nervous system partly due to hereditary predisposition and partly due to external somatic causes and stimuli. This neurasthenia is a special form of nervousness. The latter he defined as “an innate disposition consisting of a pathological change in the central nervous system”. Nervousness is thus initially traced back to hereditary predisposition, but it can also arise when the correct balance between accumulation and expenditure of nervous energy is upset. Neurasthenia is subsequently defined as “the abnormal limitations and expenditure of the nervous system”. This makes nervousness and neurasthenia a fashionable disease to a certain extent. In other words, the Darwinian “struggle for existence” is the motto of modern civilization. That means increasing competition, unhealthy living conditions in industrial areas, and conflict over status and possessions. Krafft-Ebing saw signs of this in women’s emancipation in employment, a subject upon which Freud had also commented a decade earlier. Child-rearing was also characteristic of the preparation for this “battle”. Krafft-Ebing is thus pleading for a normal, bourgeois marriage, i.e. something that could prevent many excesses and aberrations.

We have already seen that Freud responded to Leopold Löwenfeld’s criticism of his work in 1895. Four years earlier Löwenfeld had published on sexuality’s link with neurasthenia. His point of departure vis-à-vis sexuality is the idea that it serves procreation. Sexuality thus also normally plays a role when the sexual organs mature, that is, in puberty. Abnormalities are supplied under this stipulation. With regard to neurasthenia, Löwenfeld saw it as damage to the nervous system generally based on heredity, but also possibly the result of or reinforced by an excess of sexual drive. Cultural stimuli of all kinds can arouse and intensify these drives. In the third edition (1903) Löwenfeld dedicated a separate chapter to

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40 Idem, p.36.

41 A comparable theory can be found in the writings of Otto Binswanger. He also defines neurasthenia in terms of a pathological disposition of the nervous system, caused by a hereditary weakness. Psychic damage also plays a role: depressing affects, bitterness, etc. Neurasthenia can further be caused by a range of factors: stress, intellectual exhaustion, sexual excesses, a culture of pleasure and its effects on the emotional life, etc. O. Binswanger, *Die Pathologie und Therapie der Neurasthenie. Vorlesungen für Studierende und Ärzte*, Fischer, Jena, 1896.


Freud.\textsuperscript{44} Freud’s emphasis on sexual development beginning in childhood meant, according to Löwenfeld, that he paid too little attention to hereditary conditions and the influence of over-taxation and the emotional ups and downs that are the result of modern culture. Incidentally, he was convinced that a strong libido could also be the cause of neurasthenia and that resulting excesses in homosexual activity or masturbation could “disrupt” the nervous system.\textsuperscript{45} An important critique of Freud is his lack of clinical evidence. Löwenfeld meant by this that Freud influenced his patients via suggestion and guided them in the direction of early sexual trauma. In addition, he assumed fantasies to be reality. Finally, Löwenfeld considered it implausible that traumas could lie buried for decades. Among civilized people it was conceivable, but hysteria is also found among primitive peoples, and given that he believed such people had no historical consciousness or moral development, it was out of the question that they could repress and remember.

Authors such as Krafft-Ebing and Löwenfeld linked neurasthenia and sexual abnormalities. They had no doubt that culture can have a negative influence on people’s physical and mental states. They followed Darwin in believing that civilization had evolved and continuously reached a higher moral standard. Bourgeois society constituted the apex of this development. In more advanced cultures sexual urges were normally absorbed by morality and decorum, the passions transformed into love, or better still, they were used entirely for the purpose of procreation. The emphasis on equilibrium, prudence, moderation and order fitted that image. After all, in more advanced cultures the baser impulses were kept well in check. That is, …unless something goes wrong hereditarily, or pressure increases on rearing or in society, or when bad habits and external stimuli disrupt normal, healthy life. The criticism these writers had of modern culture is thus also a critique of the pressure, stress and tension that modern society produces. It is full of stimuli and their consequence is violent mood swings aimed at pleasure, but without true satisfaction. A particular philosophy of life lies behind this point of view: a more advanced culture is a sensible, well-balanced, modest and refined culture. Normal people are capable of repressing or reining in violent emotions. Normal people stay calm under pressure. It is the weak-willed who exhibit violent emotional outbursts. It is the weak-willed who ensure that sexual excesses emerge. Masturbation is merely a sign of this weakness; ultimately it has little to do with the cause of neurasthenia or other pathologies, but is rather an expression of them. Both the clear difference between normal and pathological and childhood asexuality are also shared views. Sexuality is only expressed after maturity, after it has sufficiently grown somatically and mentally. Whether a disorder subsequently arises which can be linked to a sexual “abnormality” depends on heredity and various social and cultural circumstances. The point of

\textsuperscript{44} Idem, pp.198-206.
\textsuperscript{45} Idem, pp.240-241.
departure in civilized society is thus normality; this is why the repression of drives was regarded as something positive: they served civilization.

To a certain extent Freud will always show a certain affinity with authors such as Krafft-Ebing. He dealt, for example, with nervousness and neurasthenia as physiological concerns: a weak will is ultimately weak nerves. Freud also repeatedly resorted to terms and ways of thinking from physiology, for example when he describes unpleasure as energy or the essence of sexuality as metabolism. His interest in sexuality also links him to sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing, but Freud’s approach has its origin in a completely different “philosophy”. This is radically expressed in *Three Essays*: he no longer proceeds from normality or from normal sexual relations, but from pathology. The exploration of pleasure and unpleasure allowed him to conclude that (a) infantile sexuality existed and (b) that it had a polymorphously perverse character. All authors up to that point had assumed the asexuality of children. Sexuality only became an issue in puberty when the genitals were fully developed and could be put into action for the purpose of reproduction. Freud turned this relationship around and even went a step further: what we call morality, or higher culture, is based on a dynamic which has its origin in the perverse character of infantile sexuality. Put another way, in puberty it is not about whether a person is prepared to defend against the stress and temptations of modern life, but rather about an inner conflict between urges and satisfying the need for pleasure and containment as a mental reaction. Culture itself is based on this conflict. And normality? Normality is a fable. In 1905 Freud knew to expect criticism of these positions and he received it in spades.46

### 3.4 Attack and defence

Löwenfeld was not the only one to offer criticism. Gustav Aschaffenburg, a physician from Cologne, attacked Freud fiercely at a congress in Baden-Baden (May 1906) remarking that Freud’s method was immoral. Aschaffenburg set out his position in a September 1906 article.47 He first took a stand against Freud’s conception of the role of sexuality in the aetiology of neuroses. In contrast to Löwenfeld, he opined that masturbation cannot lead to neurasthenia although there is a connection between the two. He differentiated between masturbation as a deed and the mental excitement linked to it. Masturbation as a deed is a symptom of degeneration, but does not as such lead to neurasthenia. Mental excitement is different: masturbation was, after all, seen as morally improper and

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gave the masturbator “a feeling of lacking will power”. In other words, it was not the deed that was dangerous but the ideas linked to it – that is to say, the moral consequences. Despite his criticism of Löwenfeld, Aschaffenburg’s position is entirely in line with the authors discussed earlier. He simply could not fathom – particularly with reference to Studies in Hysteria – how Freud could defend the idea that it was the repression of masturbation which was the source of neurotic complaints. On the contrary, that kind of repression was a sign of the strength of one’s will. He believed that Freud’s search for the root of neurasthenia and anxiety neurosis in infantile sexuality was, in some cases, defensible. Yet Freud’s method was immoral: he not only interrogated his patients, he also spoke about sexual trauma thereby calling up sexual ideas. From Aschaffenburg’s perspective that was certainly not desirable.\(^{48}\)

Aschaffenburg included Eugen Bleuler and Carl Gustav Jung, \textit{inter alia}, in his argument. He presented them as sensible psychiatrists who entertained ideas similar to Freud’s, although they did so in a much more balanced way than Freud with his immoral theories and methods. This provoked Jung to defend Freud. Jung, at that time a psychiatrist at the Burghölzli (in Zurich) and Bleuler’s colleague in research into schizophrenia (dementia praecox), had sought contact with Freud in April 1906 and defended him in November against Aschaffenburg’s attack.\(^{49}\) According to Jung, Freud’s greatest merit was that he traced hysteria back to psychosexual conflicts, although he does not claim to have investigated every case of hysteria. The point is clear: Jung believed that the genesis of hysteria was not exclusively sexual. As concerns Aschaffenburg’s critique that the exploration of sexual ideas was immoral, Jung explained that this matter cannot be put in general terms. For some patients that kind of exploration is harmful, for others it is not: a pragmatic answer. The pressing question is how Jung arrived at this view. The first point is that Jung read Freud for his ideas on how memories, fantasies and affect are processed and not for his ideas on repression. The pragmatic answer was dubious from the perspective of the theories of resistance, defence and repression. After all, every person has resistance, but does that mean one should not question and explore further? The second point (an extension of the first) is that Jung ignored Freud’s cultural criticism. Freud had serious doubts regarding the repression of drives based on cultural morality. This kind of repression was particularly harmful to the patient. The question thus presents itself whether Freud would have agreed with Jung’s pragmatic position that it is sometimes useful \textit{not} to further investigate sexual ideas. Freud would have probably said that exploration is always better than repression; that is precisely the physician’s task.

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When one follows the subsequent relationship and debate between Freud and Jung we find that these same “misunderstandings” and differences repeatedly resurface.\(^{50}\) That which Freud emphasized (repression and infantile sexuality) were difficult for Jung to accept. Thus, in his June 1907 lecture in Amsterdam Jung summarized Freud’s view on hysteria defining Freud’s use of the term libido as the sexual component of mental life.\(^{51}\) Small children’s libido is divided amongst all possible sexual possibilities, including perversions. The libido occupies all of these domains, but during the child’s continued development various occupations are “absolved” and normally “the libido concentrates” on valid sexual ends and acts. That which has been liberated is “via sublimation employed” for other purposes. Jung attempted to describe Freud’s theories from *Three Essays*, but if we look closely he detached the libido and sublimation from the erogenous zones and the sexual drives as depicted by Freud. What Freud called inhibition or containment, Jung now called “absolution”. The question is, who is absolving what. We see here every indication that the libido has its own will. After all, it has what Jung will soon call “a volitional character”.\(^{52}\) As mechanisms of repression, shame and disgust only play a role at puberty. The same may be true for sense of guilt. The libido basically has its own natural evolution.

Someone who was closer to Freud’s thinking was Karl Abraham, Jung’s assistant at the Burghölzli, who approached Freud in 1907. Abraham adopted Freud’s insights into infantile sexuality, defended and expanded upon them. Abraham’s work on this subject pleased Freud.\(^{53}\) In that same year Abraham wrote an essay connected to Freud’s theories of hysteria in which guilt explicitly appears.\(^{54}\) Against the background of Freud’s theories on hysteria, Abraham asked why one child will tell its parents about a sexual experience while another will not. His answer was that children who do not talk about their sexual experiences do so on account of “a sense of their own guilt” regarding the experience. It is not only the “seducer” (in two concrete examples) who is guilty, but the child has the feeling that “he let himself be seduced”. Why would a child let himself be seduced? The answer is “increase of pleasure”, whether as “fore-pleasure” or as “a desire for satisfaction” (a differentiation taken from *Three Essays*). The desire for pleasure is a “secret” that children are desperate to conceal, and only from this can sense of guilt be explained. In this regard, Abraham here is more definitive than Freud. What then

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explains why one child seeks more pleasure than another and permits himself to
be seduced? Abraham comes to the conclusion that the libido of children who
allow themselves to be seduced is quantitatively abnormally high: these children
have an abnormal desire for increase of pleasure and because of that they suffer
sexual traumas. The resulting sense of guilt is unbearable for the child and is
split off by consciousness as a “complex” and repressed. Should sometime later an
analogous or related experience take place, what has been repressed can return to
consciousness. The consequence can then be conversion (hysteria), displacement
to compulsive ideas (obsessional neurosis) or, in the case of dementia praecox,
displacement to a “delusion of guilt”. All three are thus “expressions of a sexual
feeling of guilt”. The “delusion of guilt” includes a feeling of guilt which was
originally part of the sexual pleasure and when this returns to consciousness it is
repressed and linked with the “sin” of lacking sincerity. This is closely linked to
obsessional neurosis, only the obsessional neurotic turns this delusion of guilt into
a compulsive idea and the schizophrenic turns it into a delusional idea.

Freud endorsed Abraham’s ideas about sense guilt with the paradoxical
annotation that Abraham’s explanation of an abnormally high libido was probably
not correct: the abnormal constitution is peculiar to all children. The difference
between one sexual experience and another must be sought in the degree and
nature of the auto-erotic.

All in all, Freud was enthusiastic about Abraham’s
article which additionally meshed well with Freud’s own interests at that time.

3.5 Dominated by guilt

Freud addresses guilt several times in his published work after 1907 beginning
with Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices. It is the first work by Freud in
which religion plays a principal part. This is not to say that Freud’s interest in
religion is new. He had already demonstrated in Psychical (or Mental) Treatment
(1.5) that he had an eye for religious phenomena. The subject of that essay was
the influence of mental activity on the body and the assertion that a hypnotizer
can influence someone via suggestion. The hypnotized person “obeys” the
hypnotizer “faithfully”. The terminology, faithful obedience, is deliberate: Freud
regarded the work of the modern hypnotizer as an extension of that of the priest or
miracle-worker. The physician works in the tradition of the belief in the power
of the word and the possibility of influencing the body via the mind. In addition
to this historical kinship, Freud also sees in religious phenomena analogies with
contemporary possibilities to influence the will via the body. Just as the “religious

55 Idem, p.173.
56 Idem, p.175.
57 S. Freud, K. Abraham, A Psychoanalytic Dialogue, p.3.
58 S. Freud, Psychical (or Mental) Treatment, pp.289ff.
believer” seeks and possibly finds spiritual salvation at a pilgrimage site, the “religious non-believer” seeks salvation from the physician.

Also in *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage* (1905 or 1906) Freud had dealt with religion. In this short and often unnoticed text he first of all dealt with tragedy (opera, drama) as the staging of suffering through conflict. This gives the audience pleasure – identification with the hero enables the viewer to “blow off steam”. Freud had focused here on *Hamlet*. Because tragedy “originated out of sacrificial rites” he could write that the “religious drama” is one of the “grand scenes” staging the struggle between “love and duty” in the form of the hero rebelling against God. This staging of struggle is not only found in religion and drama, but also in culture (man struggling against institutions) and in psychopathology (the conflict between conscious and repressed impulses). There are hence analogous “terrains” staging the same conflict. Next to the issue of analogy, in this article we can detect some ideas Freud will later more explicitly elaborate upon: religion as the “staging” of conflict (*Totem and Taboo*); culture and religion as tragedy (*Civilization and Its Discontents, Moses and Monotheism*).

Historical kinships and analogies were for Freud reason enough to discuss religion in these early essays. With regard to *Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices*, there is another reason as well: cultural criticism. The notion that morality and culture can exercise an oppressive influence on sexuality extends to religion as well. Now and then he mentions morality and religion in a single breath. His quest after the origins of morality and the sense of guilt brought him naturally to religion.

In *Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices* the analogy of neurotic obsessive actions and religious ceremonies is central. He describes the analogy from the perspective of the obsessive neurosis which consists of small acts, additions and limitations regarding other acts, and assignments. All of these kinds of acts appear meaningless, senseless, not only to others, but also to the obsessive neurotic himself. Characteristic of this practice is, however, the conscientiousness with which it is carried out and the fear that accompanies its omission. It is precisely these two elements that can give the obsessive act the character of a ceremony, a “sacred act”. Typical of this ceremony is also that it has a private quality: the neurotic can also meet his social obligations without difficulty.

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60 Idem, p.306, p.308.
61 Freud starts his essay with the remark that others have also recognized the analogies between obses-sive actions and piety. Indeed, Krafft-Ebing, for example, in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*, had suggested a link between neurasthenia and religious confusion. R. von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, pp.7-8. Havelock Ellis also referred to the analogy between sadism and flagellation. H. Ellis, *Das Geschlechtsgefühl. Eine biologische Studie*, Stuber’s Verlag, Würzburg, 1903. Finally, Hellpach had suggested a relation between nervousness and a cultural moral that holds on to outdated religious traditions. W. Hellpach, *Nervosität und Kultur*, Verlag Räde, Berlin, 1903.
What are the analogies with religious ceremony? Freud named three: the qualms of conscience generated by the omission of the ceremony, the isolation as regards other acts, and the conscientiousness with which the act is carried out.\(^{63}\) There are obviously differences as well: the obsessive act is private, the religious rite is public and communal. The great difference appears to be the senselessness of the obsessive act as compared to the presumed meaningfulness of the rite. Yet that difference is only skin-deep, for the obsessive act does indeed make sense. It appears to be derived from the sexual life of the person and seen this way the act is about a “meaningful” handling of an intimate experience. The point is only that the obsessive neurotic is not conscious of this meaning himself. The obsessive act is thus an expression of unconscious motives and ideas.\(^{64}\) This appears to be an important difference from the religious rite, but, Freud thought, average believers are often barely aware of the meaning of the rites in which they engage either.

He then further addressed the nature and origin of the obsessive neurosis and referred to earlier theories. In short, we are dealing with repressed self-reproach (an affect) which returns to consciousness as an empty sense of guilt, but bonds within consciousness with a new idea. In this way the affect (self-reproach) is converted into another emotion, fear or shame for example. Freud put it as follows: “the sufferer from compulsions and prohibitions behaves as if he were dominated by a sense of guilt, of which, however, he knows nothing, so that we must call it an unconscious sense of guilt, in spite of the apparent contradiction in terms.”\(^{65}\) This sense of guilt gives rise to expectation anxiety and expectation of doom: the fear that characterizes the obsessive neurotic signifies a fear of punishment if the ceremony is not meticulously performed. Seen this way, the ceremony also acts as a protective measure against punishment. This sense of guilt on the part of the obsessive neurotic has an analogy in the believer who sees himself as a sinner.\(^{66}\) Fear of punishment and the use of ceremony as protection are thus results of the sense of guilt.

Where does this sense of guilt come from, however? Its origins lie in “the repression of an instinctual impulse (a component of the sexual instinct)”, a drive which for a time during childhood could be expressed but was then repressed.\(^{67}\) The drive leads to a self-reproach which is repressed. Repression includes a reaction formation, conscientiousness, which feels itself constantly under threat by the drives and experiences this as temptation. This is the source of expectation anxiety. The obsessive act is a defence against temptation and protection from expected disaster. Yet the obsessive act is simultaneously also a possible outlet for that which is not absolutely forbidden. Freud here once again drew a parallel with religious

\(^{63}\) Idem, p.119.

\(^{64}\) Idem, p.122.

\(^{65}\) Idem, p.123.

\(^{66}\) Idem.

\(^{67}\) Idem, p.124.
rites: the church wedding ceremony approves a prescribed form of permissible sexual enjoyment while precluding extramarital sexual enjoyment.\textsuperscript{68} Seen in this light the obsessive act (and the religious ceremony) share a compromise character between what is forbidden and permitted: “they always reproduce something of the pleasure which they are designed to prevent”.\textsuperscript{69}

Religion, too, appears to repress certain drives, but not, as is the case in neurosis, exclusively sexual ones. In religion we are dealing with the repression of “self-seeking, socially harmful instincts”, in which a sexual component (Freud did not specific which) does indeed play a role.\textsuperscript{70} Just as in neuroses, sense of guilt also plays a prominent role in religion – one speaks of a fear of divine punishment. In both neurosis and religion Freud claimed that this was possibly the result of repression having been successful, yet insufficient. The believer can also backslide into sin and from there develop a need for acts of atonement. This has once again similarities with the character of an obsessive act.

The final similarity Freud mentions is the “displacement” shared by both the obsessive neurotic and the religious rite.\textsuperscript{71} In my view, he meant the empty sense of guilt that, once returned to consciousness, bonds with a random idea and can even metamorphose. A trivial detail can in this way become essential to an obsessive act, just as petty religious rituals can become more important than the way of thinking of which they are the expression.

The essential analogy between obsessive acts and rites is thus for Freud in the repression of drives as the basic motive for the most conspicuous similarities: the qualms of conscience caused by omission, the isolation with respect to other acts and the conscientiousness of how the act is carried out. Put another way, experiencing pleasure leads to self-reproach. These two are repressed together. That which is repressed returns as sense of guilt and is transformed into fear, conscientiousness and obsessive acts.

It now appears as if obsessional neurosis is the pathological counterpart of the formation of religion, and religion is simply a universal obsessional neurosis. But with regard to religion, the renunciation of the drives forms the fundament of cultural development.\textsuperscript{72} Renunciation of the drive means that “instinctual pleasure” is partly transferred to the deity. Freud cited by way of example from the Bible: “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord”. This is a citation from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (12:19b). Paul in turn cites freely from “Moses” (Deut. 32:35-
36).73 For Freud the meaning of this citation is illustrative: God may do what men repress, namely express his vicious, socially dangerous urges. He described that as a liberation and I believe he meant by this that the thought that God may indeed seek revenge can be liberating for those to whom vengeance is not permitted and/or those who do not permit revenge.

For the time being, Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices was a tentative study of an analogy between obsessive neurosis and religious rites. Freud made no attempt to explain one via the other.

3.6 Cultural morality

Freud’s cultural criticism was an extension of his thinking since Carmen, as discussed earlier. This criticism concentrated principally on sexual repression in bourgeois society. At the end of Three Essays this criticism appeared once again. In puberty, a conflict between infantile sexuality on the one hand and the curtailment and result of the sexuality determined by counterforces on the other, moral pressure from the presiding culture plays an important role. He then concluded that a neurosis in an advanced culture is more easily effected than in a less advanced one, that is, one characterized by freer sexual development.

Freud’s next work in this field after Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices was “Civilized” Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness from 1908. He cites extensively from, inter alia, Krafft-Ebing and Otto Binswanger.74 These authors dealt with the link between modern culture and the prominence of nervous diseases. By means of citations, Freud highlighted what these authors designated as a core link: the stress and pressure on the individual in the struggle for survival. Freud asserted that this explanation was incomplete. After all, these general tendencies cannot explain individual differences amongst neurotics. The most essential link between culture and nervousness is cloaked by general tendencies, namely the injurious repression of sexuality by sexual morality in modern bourgeois society.

What did Freud mean by “cultural sexual morality”? Freud referred to one of Brentano’s students, the philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels, who is best known for having laid the groundwork for what would later be known as Gestalt psychology.75 Freud referred to Ehrenfels’s Sexualethik [Sexual Ethics], 1907, whose point of departure was that ethics attempts to be the decisive answer to

73 This sentence has often been presented as a direct citation from Deuteronomy, and hence as a first indication of Freud’s fascination with the figure of Moses. It is in fact a citation from a letter by Paul, and hence also expresses another fascination, namely for the figure of Paul, a fascination that somewhat in the shadow of Moses forms a “dark trace” throughout Freud’s writings. On this subject see H. Westerink, “The Great Man from Tarsus: Freud on the Apostle Paul”, in Psychoanalytic Quarterly 76 (2007), pp.217-235.
75 Idem, pp.181ff.
moral conflicts and one of these fields of moral conflict is sexuality.\textsuperscript{76} In order to make this conflict clear, he distinguished between a natural sexual morality and a cultural sexual morality. The former is biologically determined and is hereditary, the “constitutive property”, which must be differentiated from “cultural property”.\textsuperscript{77} Natural sexual morality serves reproduction in the battle for existence and is thus characterized by evolution of the species by natural selection and competition between men. Natural, too, was polygyny, that is to say a single man mating with multiple women. Natural urges can thus be objectionable within a culture that sets boundaries; simultaneously culture’s development is in principle within the framework of the natural development of the species. Culture is thereby both a means and an obstacle in evolution. Ehrenfels identified what we have already seen is a characteristic feature of the Viennese bourgeois – the public decency, the respectability which largely disguises or veils natural sexual urges. Behind the respectability it was clear that women were expected to be monogamous, but men apparently lived by a double standard – in public life they were monogamous fathers, but they revealed their true face whenever they wanted to cavort with “immoral women”. Evidently natural morality was not easily repressed and Ehrenfels thus proposed greater openness: strict monogamy must be rejected for it leads to an undesired double moral standard. A serious problem with monogamy is additionally that it makes natural selection impossible, thereby inhibiting the development of the species.\textsuperscript{78}

What Freud found in Ehrenfels was a critique of cultural sexual morality from the perspective that man is naturally not geared to wearing a tight straitjacket. This is in accordance with the position that cultural morality represses sexual drives. But Freud missed an important aspect in Ehrenfels’s text: cultural morality also damages the psyche increasing the number of people with nervous illnesses.\textsuperscript{79}

After examining these authors, Freud differentiated between neuroses and psychoneuroses (hysteria, obsessional neurosis), which are both caused by the repression of sexual urges.\textsuperscript{80} In this way neuroses and psychoneuroses are in fact analogous phenomena. In addition, in both cases the repression is “progressive”.\textsuperscript{81} Individual sexual development changes incrementally from auto-erotic, to a love object under the primacy of the genitals (aimed at reproduction), and repression of all perverse sexual urges.\textsuperscript{82} Analogously to developments in individual development, cultural development sees a line of free expression of sexual urges,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{76} C. von Ehrenfels, \textit{Sexualethik}, Bergmann Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1907.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Examples of natural property include body length, muscle strength, intelligence, fantasy. Examples of cultural property include tools, scientific knowledge, language.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Idem, p.35.
\item \textsuperscript{79} S. Freud, “\textit{Civilized}” Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness, p.182.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Idem, p.185.The difference between neurosis and psychoneurosis is the fact that the symptoms of the former are of a toxic nature, whereas the symptoms of the latter are of a psychogenetic order.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Idem, p.187.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Idem, pp.188-189.
\end{itemize}
via the repression of sexual urges in the service of reproduction, to a stage in which only legitimate reproduction is permitted (marriage).\textsuperscript{83} It is with this analogy that Freud was able to implicitly criticize Ehrenfels, Krafft-Ebing and others who emphasized too heavily the natural tendency towards procreation. Infantile sexuality is certainly not directed at reproduction, and neither are perversions or homosexuality.

In the second cultural stage the development of perverse or homosexual impulses can be a source of mental anguish. That is to say, someone with weak sexual desire is still busy with the repression of that urge and does not achieve sublimation.\textsuperscript{84} Someone with strongly perverse impulses either remains perverse or, under the pressure of their upbringing and social demands, manages to repress those tendencies. This repression will eventually fail, however, and be harmful to both the individual and society manifesting itself in psychoneurosis. Indeed, experience shows that every individual has limits as to how far he can accommodate culture’s demands. These limits demarcate a quantitative difference between weak and intense impulses. This is why it is problematic that society demands the same sexual behaviour from all of its members. What is possible for one member of any given society may be impossible for another.\textsuperscript{85}

All of this takes place within culture’s second stage. We now move on to the third stage; in this stage sexual freedom is further curtailed and restricted to marriage. The group of people whose individual constitutions conflict with cultural demands is even larger here. The principle problem area is sexual abstinence before marriage. Our culture actually calls for sublimation, but only a small number of people can achieve this.\textsuperscript{86} The danger of neurosis is much greater here: desire is here excessively strongly repressed, which can often lead to neurotic symptoms. Does marriage then offer sufficient solace? The answer is no. After all, cultural sexual morality also places limits on sexuality within marriage with sex purely in the service of reproduction. Ehrenfels’s “double moral standard” provided relief for men, Freud admitted, but woman’s fate was absolutely miserable.\textsuperscript{87} Certainly when a woman had a strong moral character – think here of Elisabeth von R. – their feelings of duty will be stronger than their desire for a lover, for example, and they will find refuge in neuroses. So does repression generate more for society than the personal suffering of its members? He did not offer any critique of this utilitarian assessment per se, but put forward that this determination was simply

\textsuperscript{83} Idem, p.189.

\textsuperscript{84} Sublimation is defined as the capacity to exchange the originally sexual aim for another one, which is no longer sexual but which is psychically related to the first aim. Idem, p.187.

\textsuperscript{85} Idem, pp.189-192.

\textsuperscript{86} Idem, p.193.

\textsuperscript{87} Idem, p.195. A similar analysis of Viennese morality can be found in Stefan Zweig’s memories. He writes that Viennese morality was a double morality, repressing sexuality from public life and discourse, but also admitting men a “secret” sexual life, whereas women should always maintain their “holiness” and thus restrain their urges. S. Zweig, \textit{Die Welt von Gestern}, pp.96-97, pp.100-101.
difficult to make. He did indeed ascertain that this mental hardship did not make a person stronger or harder, but rather the opposite. The repression of drives usually did not accomplish anything other than the repression itself. The absence of any gain for society is a loss for that society.

Freud was no proponent of the demand for celibacy before marriage. Such an injunction was particularly hard on young women. All in all, he had to conclude that marital bliss suffered under greater cultural demands. It was thus also time for a reconsideration of cultural sexual morality, but by this he did not mean that this task was decisively a medical one. He referred back to Ehrenfels\(^88\) who had indeed presented it in more general terms in his *Sexual Ethics*, including more openness (less shame), and certainly a return to natural sexual morality, acceptance of that which is not harmful (masturbation and homosexuality), revision of morality and opposition to the “double standard”\(^89\).

The point of departure in this essay is the analogy between the development of a mature sexuality and the development of a culture when both are based on the repression of drives. Just as in *Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices*, Freud did not explain one with the other. The point is that cultural sexual morality can have a negative effect on individuals with weaker mental constitutions. Freud did not yet, however, link the fact that cultural morality can have power over individual lives with identification with authority figures. For the time being, it remained an analogy.

3.7 Hostility toward the father

In his discussion of “cultural” sexual morality, Freud mentioned neither self-reproach nor sense of guilt. But from what we already know of the place and role of these concepts, we may conclude that they played a significant role in the repression of sexuality by culture. After all, we are dealing here with the repression of pleasure based on a feeling of duty. Self-reproach and sense of guilt have a place in the reaction to pleasure and the development of conscientiousness. This role is explicit in Freud’s great case of obsessional neurosis: the Rat Man.\(^90\) This case can be seen as a summary analysis of Freud’s earlier studies into obsessional neurosis, but also as a case for the first exploratory psychoanalytic studies into religion and culture discussed above. Indeed, the repression of pleasure and relations with

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\(^88\) S. Freud, “Civilized” Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness, p.204.

\(^89\) Idem, pp.195ff.

authority (the father) are central. Seen in this light, this case can also be read as a case of “cultural” sexual morality.

Ernst Lanzer, “the Rat Man”, was a twenty-nine-year-old lawyer in therapy with Freud. Since the age of four he had suffered from obsessional ideas chiefly having to do with the fear that something might happen to two people dear to him, his father and a certain lady. (His father, incidentally, had already died.) He also suffered from compulsive impulses, namely the impulse to slit his own throat with a razor, and he forbade himself all kinds of things. When Freud invited him to relate anything that came to his mind, he spoke about a good friend who had supported him when he suffered from his impulses before abruptly switching to a story from his early childhood. He had demonstrated with a certain degree of pleasure an all too eager interest in the body of a governess. An enduring “tormenting curiosity” was the result. The picture which quickly emerged was that of an intelligent man who was sexually active very early. He himself located the beginning of his problems here – the desire to see a naked girl was accompanied by “an uncanny feeling, as though something must happen if I thought such things, and as though I must do all sorts of things to prevent it”.

This child, Freud wrote, was dominated by a desire to look. This obsessive desire was paired with an obsessive fear which was formulated as follows: “When I have the desire to see a woman naked then my father must die”. Formulations such as these are typical for obsessional-neurotic thought.

The following psychoanalytic session dealt with the direct cause of why he sought therapeutic help. The patient reported a military exercise in which he participated as a reservist. He hated the lieutenant-colonel “for he was obviously fond of cruelty”. In the mess he indeed told stories about horrible Chinese methods of torture. Then the patient fell silent and refused to relate the horrible details. Freud pressed him to overcome his resistance and the story then emerged: a criminal could be punished by having a pot full of rats placed upside down on his bottom while being tied down. The rats would then gnaw into… – the patient then became emotional and stopped – …his anus, Freud supplied. He interpreted the facial expression of his patient as “horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware”. The patient then added that when he heard his lieutenant-colonel tell this story he immediately thought this would happen to a woman of whom he was fond. While relating the rest of the story it appeared that the Rat Man was doing all he could, as it were, to ward off his obsessive thoughts. The lieutenant-colonel’s cruelty was also alive within him.

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91 S. Freud, Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis, p.160.
92 Idem, p.162.
93 Idem, p.163.
94 Idem, p.166.
95 Idem, p.167.
During a subsequent session the Rat Man spoke about his father and his death. He reproached himself, it appears, for not having been there when he died. He suspected that his mother and sisters also reproached him for this. At first this caused him no trouble, but after a year and a half it began to torture him. The immediate cause was the death of an aunt. Freud wrote that a layman might think that there is an enormous difference between the cause for his self-reproach (not being at his father’s deathbed) and the magnitude, the affect, of the reproach (the self-accusation of being a criminal), but Freud wrote instead that, “sense of guilt is not in itself open to further criticism”. After all, the affect originally belongs to another idea.

What is striking about Freud’s interpretation of this story is that he treated self-reproach and sense of guilt as synonyms. Until this point we have not seen this equivalence made so clearly. He then explained to the Rat Man, and his readers, that his reproach or sense of guilt was the key to a possible cure for his complaints, at least if the self-reproach could be linked to the original idea. The difference between the conscious and the unconscious was translated by the Rat Man, with Freud’s approval, as “moral self” versus “evil one”. Freud’s assent was understandable, given Meynert and the primary and secondary ego, for example. 

Freud dug deeper still into the Rat Man’s world. This produced a story about falling in love with a girl when he was twelve and his idea that if his father died he might fall even more deeply in love was immediately seized upon by Freud in order to pursue the wish character of the latter thought, particularly because this same thought became recurrent. The Rat Man maintained, however, that he did not wish his father dead. Indeed, he still loved him. Freud told him that it was just that intensive love which provided the circumstances in which hate is repressed. Where love is less intense is where hate more quickly surfaces.

97 Idem, pp.175-176.
98 Idem, p.176.
99 Idem, p.177.
100 Idem.
101 Idem, p.179.
derived its indestructibility was evidently something in the nature of sensual desires, and in that connection he must have felt his father as in some way or other an interference”. He labelled this a conflict between the will or authority of the father and the Rat Man’s own amorous wishes.

The analysis of self-reproach and sense of guilt leads back to one’s earliest childhood and the conflict between one’s own desires and their obstruction by one’s father. It is here that Freud located the source of hostility toward one’s father. The brief reference to Brutus is telling: the trail of self-reproach leads back to the father and that is precisely what Freud also discovered in his self-analysis. With regard to self-reproach, it is the first thing one notices about the Rat Man case – the analysis of self-reproach is what leads back to the earliest hostility toward one’s father.

In line with The Interpretation of Dreams, one might now expect Freud to have continued with the theme of hostility toward one’s father and love for one’s mother. In short, one might expect him to bring up and expand upon the Oedipus complex. Yet that did not happen. His analysis of the Rat Man led to ambivalent and conflicting feelings of love and hate. His analysis led him to the repression of what he in Three Essays called a “cruel component of the sexual instinct”. In Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices he also described the repression of a component of sexual instinct but did not further determine which components they might be. However, “cruelty” was discussed: in religion antisocial, for example vengeful, urges are repressed. Where did the Rat Man’s sense of guilt come from?

Actually, Freud wrote, there are two conflicts in (the Rat Man’s) childhood. The first is a conflict between love objects, such as is expressed when one asks a child, “which do you love most, Daddy or Mummy?” – or in the case of the Rat Man “father or lady”. It is clear that the father is seen as interference in the desire for another object other than the father himself. At first the other object is loved more than the father. Once the father is perceived as a nuisance, that becomes the reason diminished love can become hate. The Rat Man rightly asked in response why his being in love with a certain lady had to be paired with hostility toward his father. There was no reason why being in love should transform love for his father into hostility, was there? Freud then proposed the possibility that hostility towards the father arose in earliest childhood before there was a clear differentiation between a loved and a hated object. In other words, Freud proposed the possibility that sense of guilt had its origins in the period that preceded clear object choices. That brings us to the other childhood conflict.

That other conflict is between the loved and the hated self. Freud saw this conflict clearly in the Rat Man’s ambivalent feelings towards his father: he is inclined to both hostility and love towards him. He wished his father dead and he admired him. Yet Freud saw this same ambivalence in other of the Rat Man’s relationships,
such as hateful wishes towards the lady with whom he was in love. Hostility was directed not only at those who interfered with his loves, but also against the loved ones themselves. Freud called this ambivalence of feelings simply “doubt”, doubt as an expression of a conflict between love and hate, not as a conflict between love objects. Yet where did this conflict come from now?

In *Three Essays* Freud had already differentiated between sexual object and sexual aim. In fact, the designation of the Rat Man’s two conflicts can be traced back to this differentiation. The love-hate conflict is related to the sexual aim. Freud called sadism (and masochism) one of the deviances from “normal”. The polymorphous perverse character of the drives means that desire can be experienced as cruel. Sadism is a liberation and exaggeration of an aggressive component of the sexual drive. Yet even outside sadism, Freud wrote, sexuality is often found linked to aggression to a certain degree, a tendency to overpower a love object and conquer his/her resistance. The thoughts from *Three Essays* now found resonance in the Rat Man case. In his 1913 *The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis* Freud made this even more clear than he did here: hysteria and obsessional neurosis can be traced back to a phase of auto-erotism and narcissism “before object-choice has been established”. For the obsessional neurotic this means that they manifest themselves in the “reaction formations against anal-erotic and sadistic impulses”.

In the Rat Man case, Freud concluded that in obsessional neuroses love represses hate, but that this hate is in fact a sadistic component of “love” itself. In other words, love and hate have the same origin. This love and hate remain strongly intertwined within the obsessional neurosis – love is completely dedicated to suppressing hate and in the reverse hate restrains love. The compulsive ideas and compulsive affects then also have a compromise character and reveal a combination of love and hate. An example is the Rat Man’s praying. Whenever he prayed to God for protection he compulsively added a denial to his prayer: God, protect me… not. Prayer served to repress and ventilate hate. The compromise character of obsessional thoughts also permitted the Rat Man to experience pleasure in his attempts to repress the cruel ideas.

The Rat Man repressed both his hate and his hostile wishes toward his father. Freud believed that the two conflicts were “not independent of each other, but bound together in pairs”. In fact, in the conflict between love and hate he found a solution in love and hate for and against people. Yet Freud also proposed that

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104 Idem, p.191.
105 S. Freud, *The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis. A Contribution to the Problem of Choice of Neurosis, SE XII*, p.318. By this time Freud has already introduced the concept of narcissism as a developmental stage between auto-erotism and object-choice. See chapter 5.
106 Idem, p.320.
108 Idem, p.238.
these two conflicts “had no connection whatever with each other, either in their content or in their origin”.  

The question now is where the sense of guilt comes from. We must return for a moment to chapter one. Freud’s idea in Draft K was that an early, active experience of pleasure caused displeasure in the form of a self-reproach which was subsequently repressed. The defence consists of a certain conscientiousness. In puberty the repressed reproach can return as an empty sense of guilt which then bonds with other ideas whereby the affect can transform into, for example, anxiety or hypochondria (compulsive ideas or compulsive affects). The counter-reaction consists of an increase of conscientiousness and leads to compulsive behaviour. Freud deliberately reached back to this earlier theory – he began the theoretical part of his case history with a reference to his definition from his 1896 Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence: obsessional ideas are “transformed self-reproaches which have re-emerged from repression and which always relate to some sexual act that was performed with pleasure in childhood”. He now deems this position debatable on account of its “unification”. He emphasized more strongly that what neurotics “heap together” as obsessional ideas should in fact be differentiated as “obsessional thinking” expressed in various psychical acts such as wishes, temptations, impulses, reflections, doubts, rules and prohibitions. The obsessional neurotic suffers from various forms of “thinking”. This is strongly expressed, for example, in the doubts an obsessional neurotic has, but also, for example, in the thought that a wish – for good or evil – can come true and must therefore be sworn off.

In his analysis of the Rat Man, Freud linked this “thinking” with the “epistemophilic instinct”. During the auto-erotic stage, a strong curiosity about the sexual organs and where children come from can develop. This curiosity does not develop spontaneously, but generally as a hostile reaction to the arrival of siblings. This desire to know is important for it expresses the first interest in others, one in which the others are seen as competition. This curiosity, in which aggression plays a role, can come into conflict with parents who do not tolerate it or are recognized as rivals. This is also what happened to the Rat Man when he

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109 Idem.
110 Idem, p.221.
112 Idem, p.245.
113 Freud had clearly depicted this in his analysis of Little Hans. S. Freud, Analysis of a Phobia in a five-year-old Boy, SE X, p.34, pp.60-62, pp.86-87, pp.91-92.
114 Idem, pp.133-135. In The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis Freud argued that the “instinct for knowledge” – the epistemophilic instinct – can be seen as a “sublimated off-shoot of the instinct of mastery exalted into something intellectual”. This is said in the context of discussing the primacy of sadism and anal-eroticism in the disposition to neurosis. In other words, the instinct of knowledge is seen as a sublimation of sadistic components of the sexual drive. When this sublimation fails (through frustration, inhibition) the result will be the doubt typical of obsessional “thinking”. S. Freud, The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis, p.324.
was punished by his father for biting a girl.\textsuperscript{115} What happened here is that his father interfered with the expression of the Rat Man’s auto-erotic instincts. The curiosity is auto-erotic by nature, but also expresses the initial interest in other objects. Feelings of love and hate are linked via this epistemophilic instinct to objects and are thus “paired” with another conflict. There are hostile feelings towards the father because he forbids and deals out punishments, but the Rat Man also loved his father, accepted his authority and tried to obey him. The core of the conflict is thus not the love for one object versus hostility towards another but rather centres around wishes and prohibitions, around love and hate and the tension between them.

Analysis of sense of guilt leads back to hostility towards the father. We might think that therein lies the origin of the sense of guilt – the Rat Man felt guilty because of his hostile thoughts towards his father and he repressed these thoughts and the self-reproach that came with them. According to the theories of at least ten years earlier, the consequences were known. Yet things are not quite that simple, for the origins of the obsessional neurosis are not found in the repression of feelings of hate towards people, but in the repression of the sadistic components of sexual drive. Hostility towards the father can be traced back – via the epistemophilic instinct – to this component.

In 1896 Freud formulated obsessional neuroses as transformed self-reproaches which have re-emerged from repression and which always relate to some sexual act that was performed with pleasure in childhood. In \textit{The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis} Freud criticized this definition again: he proposed that the thought that an obsessional neurosis can be traced back to an activity must definitively be depraved.\textsuperscript{116} The obsessional neurosis is here seen as a protective measure, a reaction formation against anal-erotic and sadistic impulses. These impulses are directed at objects which, as it were, are perceived as “contrast to the subject’s own self”. Freud meant siblings and parents.

When does self-reproach develop to oppose this sadistic component? Freud is not clear about this here. A decisive clue is offered in \textit{The Sexual Enlightenment of Children} from 1907.\textsuperscript{117} Small children express their desire to know, their curiosity regarding the sexual organs and the origin of children frankly. He noted as well that it is understandable that parents do not want to simply smother these urges, but want to answer these childish questions. Should answers not be forthcoming, rebellion against parental authority can occur. Yet what can also happen is that the secrecy around these questions can lead to torturous thoughts and a growing sense of guilt because they – and thus any doubts regarding sexual feelings – remain

\textsuperscript{115} S. Freud, \textit{Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis}, pp.206-208.

\textsuperscript{116} S. Freud, \textit{The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis}, p.319. Compare also S. Freud, \textit{My Views on the Part played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses}, p.275.

\textsuperscript{117} S. Freud, \textit{The Sexual Enlightenment of Children}, SE IX.
and may not be expressed.\textsuperscript{118} (Freud then offered a plea for a liberal educational system.) Self-reproach can thus arise when parents, forbidding and punishing, intervene in the child’s sexual curiosity. With regard to the Rat Man, his father’s punishment for biting the girl was the condition for the development of a sense of guilt. There was then no discussion of open rebellion against his father’s authority. Quite the opposite: the Rat Man loved him deeply and tried to be obedient. What was thus decisive for the development of a sense of guilt in the Rat Man was his father’s authority.

In fact, this specific conclusion is a specification of the general train of thoughts in “\textit{Civilized} Sexual Morality. Sexual urges come into conflict with a culture that demands repression. Because Freud saw religion as part of morality and because he strongly emphasized the repressive and stifling influence of morality, one would expect nothing less than a substantial critique of religion. \textit{Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices} only goes so far in this regard. Freud did criticize the repressive character of the religious ceremony in so many words, but simultaneously he also referred to the advantage that destructive powers in religion can be ascribed to God thus forestalling actual revenge.\textsuperscript{119} With regard to religion, Freud could be remarkably mild in this period, milder than he was with bourgeois morality. Examples can be found in his correspondence with the Protestant Pastor Oskar Pfister. Freud clearly indicated that religion offered the possibility of sublimation.\textsuperscript{120} In the discordant world of young people in which Pfister worked, this offered the possibility of using religious belief “to stifle” neuroses. That is a possibility, but Freud immediately added a critical note – religion generally represses sexuality forcefully and judges it a sin. In other words, the problem is not that religious sublimation is absurd, but rather that existing religious traditions contribute to a culture in which neuroses are more prominent than ever before. Yet, in \textit{The Future Prospects of Psychoanalytic Therapy} Freud reported that there was a great increase in neuroses at the time, when the influence of religions decreased. Thus, culture still demanded repression whereas religion offered no better prospect to satisfy desire.\textsuperscript{121} People were still sensitive to authority, and submitted to culture’s demands. Freud wanted to employ the need for authority for the benefit of psychoanalysis. Therapists may have the possibility and even the duty to conquer resistances, including social ones, and thereby also cooperate on social change and improvement. Culture will not permit that easily, because, Freud

\textsuperscript{118} Idem, p.137.
\textsuperscript{119} Amongst others, Susanne Heine has rightfully argued that Freud criticized religion’s “excessive” repressive morality, but also valued its capacity to contribute to civilization by demanding renunciation of anti-social drives. S. Heine, “Erkennen und Scham. Sigmund Freuds bibliisches Menschenbild”, in \textit{Verbum et Ecclesia} 27 (2006/3), pp.869-885.
\textsuperscript{121} S. Freud, \textit{The Future Prospects of Psycho-Analytic Therapy}, SE XI, p.146.
claimed, “we destroy illusions”. He did not speak about religion as an illusion, but about the cultural illusion that an edifying, bourgeois civilization can repress sexual urges without causing problems. Culture eventually gets what it wants – repressed urges return to damage people and damage culture, which as a whole can then no longer harbour the illusion that it is superior.

\[122\] Idem, p.147.