

## SECULARIZED MYSTICS.

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PROBABLY the mysterious operations of the autonomic system, as that is expressed in and through the psychic aspect of human behavior, will never be completely explored. So long as there is any large unsolved psychic mystery we will have an excess of the mystical temperament, building its metaphysical heavens or phantasmal universe, peopled with its immaterial beings, or being itself an infinite spirit. Such theories of superhuman entities are believed, because they answer to a human need. That need is a feeling of inferiority. Our emotional identification with the superhuman, for certain types of mind, furnishes a satisfying compensation or neutralizer for depressions or injured feelings. These religious mystics have, and will continue to have, their counterpart in the secular domain. To improve our understanding of this fact is the purpose of this essay. I will begin by stating my conception of the mystical mental process and then to exhibit its operation in the domain of secular activities.

### MYSTICISM A STATUS, NOT A DOCTRINE.

As the result of my studies in religious psychology I conceive the problem of mysticism to be always essentially one of the psychology of the mystics. That is to say: The differential essence of mysticism is to be found in the relative subjectivity which means the relative immaturity of the desires and of mental processes, even when accompanied by great erudition and cleverness, as that may be exhibited in the process of intellectualizing and rationalizing the immature fancies and feelings. In harmony with this result of my previous study, I conclude that persons have not necessarily outgrown the mystical stage of development when they abandon a conventional mystical cult, for one that is hostile to it, or for one that is non-mystical in its verbal expression. In other words:

From the psychogenetic viewpoint individuals are *not* to be classified according to their creedal professions, ceremonial performances or institutional adherence, but according to the psychologic *how* and *why* of these manifestations. To keep this viewpoint in mind we must remember that one may maintain any creed, either religious or secular, as the result of varying degrees of morbidity, or of immaturity. It is the compulsive *how* and the psychogenetic *why* of creed or conduct that now counts, and not the creed or conduct in itself. If we add to this the viewpoint of an evolutionary psychology then this *how* and *why* must also be seen in an evolutionary setting.

The claimant or proponent of secular and anti-mystical creeds may still be in the throes of an emotional conflict over mysticism. It may be therefore worth while to furnish some description of the mystical type of mind, when that is functioning in a secularized garb. This will help to clarify the viewpoint and assist in outgrowing the mystical stage of development.

#### THE MYSTIC'S REALITY.

One of my college mates has become such a secular mystic. With significant vehemence he scouts all religion. His omnipotent idea is a concept of honesty which he has carefully formulated and to which he gives a pathological valuation. In consequence of this compulsion he gave up a useful and promising professional career and his family, in order to live nearer to his ideal, and he is doing this mostly on charity. When I tried to encourage him to readjust his habits to harmonize more with the real world of his environment he retorted that I did not know what reality was like. In response to my request for a definition of reality he wrote this:

"A thing is real to us when it corresponds to our idea of what it should be—in other words, when it corresponds to our ideas of what it must be to justify the name given it or what is otherwise and reasoningly to be said of it. This means that a thing is real to *me* when it corresponds to *my* idea of what it should be and the picture I draw of it will or will not be real to you depending upon whether or not our ideas of how things ought to be, do or do not agree."

If now we get away from the dictionary meaning of the above quoted words and seek to understand the state of mind which they symbolize, one cannot well escape the conclusion that this secular mystic presents much the same phenomena as when the New Thoughter or Christian Scientist speaks of "the allness of mind and the nothingness of matter." It is also the equivalent of Evelyn

Underhill (Mrs. Stuart Moore), a pan-mystical authority, when she asserts that the mystic life finds "the whole of reality in a cosmic inner life," quoting Eucken.<sup>1</sup> All mysticism is relatively subjective, that is, self-centered attention.

#### MYSTICAL PROCESS DESCRIBED.

As I conceive it, mysticism is an immature method of intellectualizing and rationalizing the urges of our autonomic apparatus. This immaturity is evidenced by the excessive feeling-value which is attached to our explanatory concepts. These are usually found to ignore rather obvious and important actualities of the problems dealt with. The precise quality of the mystical compulsion (predisposition and valuation) is predominantly determined by the present subconscious operation of past emotionalisms. People generally lack the understanding and the willingness to explain themselves in terms of their own past. In part this is due to the fact that we all conceal some skeletons in our closets, sometimes fearful and shameful ones, which often contribute mightily to a feeling of inadequacy, of inferiority. To conceal, to compensate, to neutralize this depressing feeling, we invent theories, make explanations, justify actions, all of which mentations are but wish-fulfilling phantasies, constructed to escape an unpleasant reality. These fancies are projected into the environment where they accomplish an effective distortion of our vision. These fancies relieve or even exalt us, because they are so peculiarly our own, the creation of our particular need for neutralizing our painful inferiority feeling. Because of the obsessing importance of this emotional disturbance the mystic always tends to exalt the emotions, his own estheticisms, as if thereby to prove his own relative omnipotence and omniscience. In its unconventional and therefore more obvious morbidity we call it esthesio-mania.

Now the mystic earnestly and zealously defends the intellectual product of his compulsion as the voluntary choice of his greatly superior mind. And again, he may claim that the intellectual child of his emotional need was the product of a conscious induction, an imposition of the outer world which was in fact only his phantasmal universe subconsciously created by his own needs. The religious mystic reads the intellectualizations of his autonomic requirements into the heavens, into the mind of a supposed God, the creation of an Omniscience which is only his idealized self. There in the universe he rediscovers his phantasms in terms of his metaphysics.

<sup>1</sup> *The Mystic Way*, p. 97. Eucken, *The Truth of Religion*, p. 510.

theologies,<sup>2</sup> inspired sociologies and ethics. Similarly the secular mystic reads his phantasmal necessities into the more immediate environment, also to be rediscovered and justified, all for the sake of a subconscious necessity. Behind all the zeal and strenuosity in these mystical persons is a feeling of inferiority, sometimes desperately seeking an escape, a neutralizer or compensation; that is something to justify a desired feeling, a pose or an action having at least seeming importance, and so giving some little excuse for a balancing feeling of grandeur. At times this feeling of importance is measurably achieved by a more or less blind emotional attachment to leaders or causes, enabling its victim, through association, to shine by a reflected light. These leaders and causes in turn are given an emotional valuation, or overvaluation, equal to that feeling of inferiority which needs neutralizing. Our heroes and our God, our reforms and our Utopias, our heavens or Nirvanas all shed glory upon us as their discoverers or creators. So we are relieved from our depression by the grandeur that we achieve by our reflected light. Just in proportion to the intensity of the emotional importance that we give to our intellectual projections so to that same degree do we approach the feeling that we are playing the satisfying role of a relative omniscience and omnipotence. As one's feeling of inferiority is great, to the same degree of intensity must one love or hate such dominating personalities as were the ExKaiser or Theodore Roosevelt. According to whether the afflicted persons achieve their emotional grandeur through identifying themselves with such leaders or by opposition to them, the valuation of the leader's achievement or his failure will be emotionally as great. Then our overestimation of such persons of importance will be as great as is the inferiority feeling. So come hyper-patriots and absolutist rebels.

#### FREETHINKERS AND SUNDAY-SCHOOLS.

How many avowed Freethinkers and Agnostics feel it to be useful to their children and convenient for themselves, to send their children to sunday-school? One can understand such conduct as being the product of an emotional conflict, one aspect of which is the lingering subconscious influence of unsuspected devotion to ancient or popular superstitions. It means that their skepticism is not due to their having outgrown the religious mode of feeling, or of thinking, but is rather the mere intellectualization of the anti-religious aspect of an emotional conflict, of which a suppressed sympathy with

<sup>2</sup> See Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*.

religion is the other aspect. The same sort of subconscious emotionalism sometimes makes professed Atheists an easy prey to the propaganda of Spiritualists, Christian Scientists or even the more orthodox mystics and revivalists. Psychologically such a conversion means that such persons are the victims of an emotional conflict concerning religion and in conversion they only accept into consciousness the other aspect of the conflict and intellectualize and perhaps try to rationalize it. They had never outgrown the intellectual methods which are involved in primitive religious modes of behavior. Their emotional aversion to religion expresses one aspect of the disrupted personality. Their inconsistent conduct, or their unexpected conversion to mysticism means only that these persons have been forced to take into consciousness, and to act upon, another aspect of their emotional conflict. Sometimes they will express it by saying that they have really always been this or that but didn't know it. From the standpoint of the psychology of emotional conflicts, they are mentally no different after conversion than they were before conversion. In both conditions their mental processes are functioning on the level of the conflict, and this always means relative intellectual immaturity and inefficiency. It also means that they have been dominated by an emotionalism which compels conformity to mental processes on the level of a relatively childish or adolescent subjectivism, seldom rising higher than to make special pleas for the purpose of rationalizing one or the other aspect of disrupted personality.

#### SECULAR MYSTICS IN PEACE AND WAR.

In the political field, these secular mystics in their fancies build and contend over Utopias, which are quite often unrelated to the orderly evolution of human society, or to an adequate understanding of the relation and behavior among things and humans. When they achieve an emotional identification with the beneficiaries of things as they are they are compelled to take a relatively static view of society and then to give an extravagant emotional valuation to the established order. Fundamental critics of present forms are vigorously denounced by them and must be severely punished as traitors. In their dreams of perfection they have absolute standards and do not hesitate to act as if without knowing it they were seeking to play the role of omniscience. In these Utopias of their own creation they themselves can reign, either through feeling or phantasies, each by his own particular reform, formula (or even in or

through a glorified existing institution) as an omnipotent being whose legalized fancy determines the destiny of the human race. Without consciousness that it is so, they quite uniformly act as if they were indeed omnipotent and omniscient. In the more developed pathological case they often frankly proclaim their omniscience, or the approximate omnipotence of their pet idea. In the extreme they acquire delusions of being the Kaiser, Czar, Pope, or President.

#### RULE OR RUIN TEMPERAMENT.

Just to the extent that one is the victim of a feeling of inferiority will he give an exaggerated emotional valuation to whatever theory, or institution it is to which he attaches himself as a means of compensatory exaltation. Thus come our hyper-patriots and our absolutist revolutionaries, as but contrary manifestation of the same subjective conflict.

In the practical affairs of social or political organizations, this urge to act like an omnipotent and omniscient being creates the "rule or ruin" attitude of party leaders, in both Church or State. They must crush at any price, every challenge to their omnipotence and without troubling to take serious thought, whether or not the persecuted one has not some truth on his side. Within the conventional fold, where the disrupted personality is not yet clearly pathological, it is merely a policy of rule or ruin by conventional methods. Against the rival of another nationality or against the social heretic with fundamentally antagonistic social aims, it means dominance by means of physical violence, and for the sake of one's own infallible ideals, or for an absolute social justice. Such omnipotence has not the patience to rely upon the evolutionary potency of its superior intelligence. Thus came the savage repressions by the minions of the late Czar as well as much of the present-day temperamental adherence to the old regime and to its inevitable revolutionary reaction on the same level of emotionalism. If we know no better than to imitate the policy dictated by the late Czar, or by his clique of courtiers, we will inevitably produce the same revolutionary result in these United States. At least, so far human nature is much the same. The forcibly repressed emotions will find an outlet in violent reprisals. With more intelligence we will not repress, but develop them to function on higher levels of desire and of mental processes. Have we achieved that maturity and understanding in ourselves?

## LUST FOR MILITARISM.

These secular mystics, madly craving a consciousness of ever greater power, to overcome their morbid fears and feeling of inferiority, are leaders among the would-be war lords of every nation; among their boisterous supporters; among the hyper-patriotic street-corner loafers no less than among hysterical drawing-room parasites. Adherence to one's government from a comparative study of governments, or from any considerable understanding of the relations and behaviors of humans, is foreign to their emotional necessities, and at times is even resented. They can understand only what is on their own emotional borderland plane. Hence they demand only an instinctive patriotism. They even resent a reflective patriotism should they ever become conscious of the contrast. Their emotional conflicts and their attendant psychologic ignorance produce an almost infinite variety of theologies, of political nostrums; of moral creeds; of morbid patriotism; of morbid resistance to progress as well as morbid Utopian schemes of reform. It is the morbid resistance to social evolution toward the progressive democratization of power and welfare that has made inevitable every revolution by violence, and most of the world's inquisitions, persecutions and wars. Finally the practical universality of these mystical modes of feeling and thinking, this temperamental absolutism, combined to bring on a world war, and to make it very generally acceptable.

## PROSPECTS OF UNDERSTANDING.

If once we can secure a psychogenetic understanding of the mystical temperament, seeing the determinants in a wide range of time and space, this may furnish us a new and most valuable approach to the solution of all human problems, and especially will it produce a revaluation of popular leaders and their boisterous, dominating temperaments. This I imagine may come from the study of a genetic and evolutionary psychology. When such concepts are applied, as the basic idea of an educational system, its demand of educators will require and enable them to mature the desires and mental processes of humans so as to eliminate at least the extreme of emotional interest in both religious and secular mysticisms. Most important of the consequences of such understanding is that it will enable us to overcome our present emotional valuations and so open our minds to a more objective understanding and rating of humans and their ways.

This means that through the maturing of human desires and mental processes will come the approximate emancipation of the race from fear, from emotional valuation of things as they are, and so from the predominance of subjectively and subconsciously conditioned compulsions which are the most potent forces leading to all slavery, exploitations and conflicts of force whether ecclesiastical, political or economic. So also will come the elimination of both love and hate (that is the emotionalism) which makes for cruelty (sado-masochist conflicts) as manifested in ordinary social relations, in reformatories, jails, governmental and military establishments.

#### RELIGION TO MENTAL MATURITY.

Just as a world war and its crude aftermath are the most conspicuous example of secular mysticism, the product of infantilism in action, so all religion and theologies may yet come to be viewed collectively as the most conspicuous concurrent exemplification of infantilism in the domain of thought. For the mystic, even the "sane mystic," my type of mind seems "strangely perverted." Yet I am inviting the race to become even more "strangely perverted" than I have been able to become, so that we can pursue all our studies with a much higher degree of emotional aloofness, and achieve a corresponding enlargement of our understanding of the relations and behavior of things. This understanding, ever in the process of perfecting, will then become a more useful guide to human action than religious, moral or political creeds. These creeds and their elaborate rationalizations are mainly the predetermined product of those same immature impulses (desires) which brought upon us the world-wide slaughter, and are now preparing the field for another such slaughter in an impending world-wide war of economic classes. All this is because our feelings (as in the case of religion) determine our thinking, with a minimum coordination of any understanding of the relation and behavior among things and humans. When we reach a greater psychic maturity this relationship or emphasis may appear to be reversed. Since religious activities furnish the oldest and best organized defense of this archaic mode of feeling and of thinking, it becomes the most important center for its study and for achieving that understanding by which it is to be outgrown. The object to be attained by this is the outgrowing of mystical modes of behavior, especially in the field of the social sciences. Here the difficulty is the greatest, because we habitually overlook the contributing factor from within our-



selves, which can be adequately achieved only by developing the psychological approach to social problems.

#### THE FUTURE.

Once having achieved an evolutionary standard of the psyche, we also have a standard for the more conscious and more accurate rating of workers in the social sciences. The secular mystic, like his religious prototype, may now be more readily and more accurately distinguished and corrected. Once this concept is adequately developed it must also influence our ideas of education. Now our differences in religious and secular activities, in war and peace as well as the disputes between laborers and their exploiters, are all seen as but the objectivization of differences of desire and of mental processes, operating with or without an adequate coordination of objective data. From this view point our educational methods will put some real emphasis upon reconditioning the desires and mental processes of humanity. Perhaps when these desires and mental processes attain a greater and more uniform maturity, our social problems can be solved by other methods than those of the legislative mystic. In the main the secular mystic is merely reformulating religious morals and demanding a devotional obedience to his personal law and order, subserving his interests as conceived on the level of some infantile desires. So also may we outgrow the judicial mystic enforcing law and order according to his sadistic impulses; and the economic despots dominating a nation by the spontaneous interaction and blind unconscious co-operation of the victims of a morbid fear-psychology; a world war precipitated by the necessities of a subconscious sado-masochist conflict in and among national leaders; wars that are welcomed by a world floundering in similar emotionalism, and therefore (no matter how unconsciously) ever ready and eager for an excuse to release an intolerable quantity of repressed emotion, repressed only because of our general ignorance of emotional behavior and our consequent superstitious reverence for the intellectualized and rationalized ignorance of religionists, moralists, sentimentalists and secular mystics generally.