

MARX AND FREUD: OIL AND WATER

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NO comparison in modern thought is more strikingly incongruous than the attempt recently made by certain 'literary psychologists' of radical penchant to assimilate the doctrines of Karl Marx to those of Sigmund Freud. The latest and most dashing effort to read into Marx's work an anticipation of current psychoanalytic myth has been made by Max Eastman in his book on *Marx, Lenin and the Science of Revolution*, a chapter of which has been restated in an article on Marx and Freud in the July issue of the *New Masses*. In this short paper I shall try to make two things clear: (1) that the theory of psychoanalysis represents the crassest violation of fundamental principles of scientific method, and (2) that the salient ideas of Marx cannot intelligibly be translated into Freudian terms.

(1) The most formidable objection to the doctrine of psychoanalysis is that it has absolutely no conception of the meaning of scientific *evidence*. All of its generalizations are in the nature of hypothetical explanations *after* the fact. Instead of being based on controlled experiment they are merely expressions of facile guesses and capricious analogies. The psychoanalyst as distinct from the experimentalist can conceive of no possible evidence which might disprove his claims. In other words psychoanalysis is beyond the check of scientific experiment since no matter what the results of the experiment turn out to be, its theories permit it to interpret them as confirmatory evidence. Like the theological notion of the will of God, since it 'explains' the absence of a certain fact as well as its presence, it is scientifically useless. To give a simple illustration. I dream that disguised as Santa Claus I come

down the chimney-flue of the house in which a decrepit great-aunt of mine lives. The analysis runs that I have had a suppressed sex desire for my great aunt (who was fifty years old when I was born) and am trying to emulate my great-uncle (whom I never knew). Proof: by a process of 'free' association under the 'expert' guidance of a follower of Freud I hit upon this explanation and solemnly declare that I have an intuitive conviction that it is so. However, if my powers of recall are feeble, the doctor generally will suggest the above explanation (if he knows his case-books). Whereupon I burst into laughter and tell him he is either a fool or a faker. Yet the analysis is still valid, responds the doctor, and if anything even stronger than if I had given it direct introspective consent, since my feeble powers of association and my reaction to his diagnosis simply show how strong the power of my resistance is,—show that my 'censor' is working full blast trying to save appearances. In other words I am damned if I confess and damned if I don't. Examples may be drawn from Eastman's own article. He says, "The economic interpretation of history is nothing but a generalized psychoanalysis of the social and political mind." And in face of the opposition the theory has met, he continues, "One might infer this (i. e. its truth—S. H.) from the spasmodic and unreasonable resistance it meets on the part of its patient". Later on he tries to psychoanalyze the current psychoanalytic interpretation of revolutionary thinking on the ground that as practitioners the psychoanalysts stand to lose money if the revolutionists have their way. All this is merely argument *ad hominem* and as scientific method is nothing short of puerile. Proceeding in the same way one could explain every phenomenon in the universe. *After* the event has happened one can always account for discrepancies in the results by introducing *subsidiary* hypotheses. But just because science does not read the world backward, the element of prediction (within the limits of error) is a necessary condition of an adequate scientific theory. Bound up with this formal objection is the charge that psychoanalysis has no definite canons of evaluation in sifting alleged confirmatory evidence and in establishing correlations between symbol and meaning.

This brings us to material considerations. The basic fallacy of psychoanalytic theory is its confusion of *motive* with *stimulus*. An unconscious stimulus may be present and may be used to explain

an immediate reaction or a delayed response, but to speak of an *unconscious motive* is a contradiction in terms. Motive is a cognitive or knowledge term. (There is no such thing as unconscious or immediate knowledge or inference.) If this is denied, the psychoanalyst is bound in all consistency to endow the Unconscious with greater logical acumen (the Unconscious makes no mistakes) than our ordinary consciousness possesses. Together with the fact that the Unconscious automatically expresses its repressed desires in a complicated symbolism beyond the power of most minds on a conscious level, we seem to be confronted with another version of the discredited reminiscence theory of knowledge which is as far removed from the instrumental theory of knowledge as anything can possibly be.

As far as the peculiar *behavior* of psychic aberrants is concerned it may be more plausibly explained as due to the influence which certain early habit formations and conditioned reflexes exercise upon later life. Here, at least, is where Watson is talking sense. But to fall back upon reference to the causal efficiency of the unconscious merely represents an uncritical reliance upon a metaphor. Under the cover of the metaphor it converts the affective tones of the fringe of consciousness into cognitive attitudes and purposes 'effecting hidden ends unseen'.

From the point of view of scientific psychology—there is not a particle of evidence that any of the elaborate Freudian mechanisms, such as the censor and the processes of displacement, etc., exist in consciousness. In fact, the use of the term *force* in Freud's writings—force of repulsion, force of resistance, force of repression—should arouse suspicion even in the minds of those who do not forswear animism with such blustering vehemence as does Eastman, that Freud's psychology is literary rather than scientific, and smells of the pipe and the armchair rather than of the laboratory. At this point, people are sure to interpose with mention of Freud's clinical cures. The cures are not disputed any more than the cures wrought by Coué, Christian Science and the miracle makers. All fakers claim to be justified by occasional cures. But the question is what is the relation between the theory defended and the practice followed. If the cure is the result of a technique which can be verified by other experimentors, then its citation is relevant. But Freud has not established any direct connection be-

tween his romantic psychology and his clinical successes. In addition, it should be pointed out that Freud's alleged cures may be more plausibly explained on the basis of a more sober neuro-physiological theory. It is interesting to note that a great many psychoanalysts—notably Brill—hold that the great value of their theory is prophylactic rather than remedial. But in the absence of logical evidence one statement is just as gratuitous as the other.

In view of the above, I do not think it too rash to say that Freud is working his way back to the old fashioned notion of the soul—the ghost that haunts the mansions of the mind—and that doctrinally his views are quite compatible with the biological vitalism and mysticism of Bergson and Driesch. But we will leave that theme to be developed some other time.

(2) If it is rank confusion to call the psychology of Freud scientific, it is sheer intellectual violence to convert the social objectivism of Marx into an anticipation of the mystical subjectivism of Freud. Eastman is able to draw the connection because he mistakenly believes that historical materialism is a theory which attempts to account for individual motives rather than for certain social forces and factors. His conception of historical materialism boils down despite his frantic efforts to escape from the position, to the theory that the economic interests of men are primary, and *unconsciously* control their activity. This is palpably false. Marx would never have been able to explain his own life-time of revolutionary activity on the basis of this vulgar theory of self-interest. Nor would Eastman himself. Surely such a theory can never plausibly account for the misguided idealism of many workers who believe that the best way they can serve their country is by laying down their lives for it. The intense national patriotism of the working class is not an ideology "indulged in by people controlled by their own unconscious class interests." No, according to the followers of Marx, it is the result of a systematic and pernicious propaganda carried on through the instrumentalities of the press, the church and the school—that unholy trinity of capitalist civilization. The process is social and objective. The ideas a man carries in his head are not a function—conscious or unconscious—of the cash he carries in his pocket. Eastman's remarks ignore one of the most patent facts in all history—*ignorance of what one's true interests are*. And what these true interests are, is not to be

found by holding one's nose and prying into the unconscious but by critical analysis and experience in the class struggle. Eastman by implication denies this and again falls back upon the 'infallible unconscious' as the source which inspires and determines the conduct of men. He has some inkling of the difficulty when he qualifies his statement by saying it is true "on the broad average and in the long run". But strictly speaking these words state the difficulty instead of solving the problem which confronts his theory. In another sense these words contradict his primary assertion for unless one knows the point of view from which the 'average' is determined and how far the 'run' extends, one might very well say that the direct impact of objective economic conditions sets the limits between which unconscious activities function.

In view of Eastman's continuous invective against the Hegelian dialectic as both mystical and mysterious, it is instructive to tabulate the mystical and mysterious elements in his own thinking. They enter into his outlook; (a), through the belief that apparently pure unmotivated association of elements in a dream or in everyday human experience, must of *necessity* be an expression of desires which have previously been repressed; (b) through the belief that the unconscious motives of all the members of a certain class can be traced to the *same* repressions; (c) through the belief that the compensating expression of these repressed desires by a sort of pre-established harmony give rise to a common class *interest*. All of these views are implied in what he says but not an iota of proof is offered in substantiation. To ridicule Hegel and yet stand committed to these propositions is straining at a gnat and swallowing a whole drove of camels.

Without developing in detail the positive argument on the basis of which the above criticisms and interpretations of Marxism are made, I suggest the following. Historical materialism takes its point of departure from the objective existence of an economic class struggle. In the interests of the struggle, ideas and doctrines are used as *instruments* in bringing the issue to a successful completion. The anticipated efficacy and adequacy of these ideas in furthering class interests explain their *acceptance* and *use* but not necessarily their *genesis* or *origin*. No social factor can *wholly* explain the mechanics of individual creation. But only social factors can explain why once these ideas have seen the light, they

have been *accepted*. They are accepted (or rejected) not because they are in the *personal* interest of any *one* individual but because they are instrumentalities which are used to accelerate (or retard) the tendencies of the economic environment in the direction of a social ideal. Conscious allegiance to a social ideal expresses the social *idealism* of the revolutionist. This social ideal is not a mere possibility of the given nor is it a foregone certainty. It is grounded in objective *tendencies* which set the limits of the type and range of instruments which may be effectively used. Marxism then turns out to be a self-critical theory explaining its own acceptance on the basis of its own principles. It appears in the main as a huge *judgment of practice* in Dewey's sense of the phrase and its truth or falsity (instrumental adequacy) is an experimental matter.

But it is a far cry from this to the suppressions of Freud.

There is enough superfluous baggage in the socialist camp without adding the rotting corpse of a prurient 'bourgeois' (to use a favorite epithet of Eastman's) psychology, if ever there were one, to infect the rest of the doctrine.