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PSYCHOANALYSIS?"**

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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CHARACTER IN PSYCHOANALYSIS?*

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the role of character paying particular attention to the psychoanalytic point of view. Major early contributors such as Freud, Abraham and Reich are presented. It is demonstrated how the evolution of the psychoanalytic understanding of character development involved a gradual change from taking character as a simple drive derivative to it being the consequence of intersystemic conflict and a combination of genetic endowment, biological factors and life experiences. Finally, diverging approaches to character pathology are discussed. It is argued that in the study of character a synthesis of psychoanalytic, cognitive and behavioral approaches is needed.

INTRODUCTION

In general a human being cannot bear opposed extremes in juxtaposition, be they in his personality or in his reactions. It is this endeavour for unification that we call character. In regard to persons near to us extremely opposed emotions may be so strong as to become completely unbearable.

Sigmund Freud - The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud (by Jones)

The word character, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, derives from the Greek work to engrave, imprint, or inscribe. This derivation indicates the centrality of deeply embedded, consistent, and relatively durable behavior patterns in elucidating the term. In everyday language when we think of these aggregate or distinctive features of a person we include qualities which identify him or her as an unusual personality or an eccentric, as well as his or her reputation and moral qualities. Character represents and delimits the individual's uniqueness, highlighting strengths and distortions. When disturbing to others it is often labelled as pathological.

Translated into psychoanalytic terminology, Moore & Fine (1968), define character as reflecting "the individual's habitual modes of bringing into harmony his own inner needs and the demands of the external world ... character ...has a permanent quality that affects the degree and manner of drive discharge, defenses, affects, specific object relations, and adaptive functioning in general" (p.25). This description indicates how character refers to the singularities in the person's cognitive,

affective, and behavioral functioning as those singularities are observed by another.

From the point of view of definitions, character has been a very ambiguous concept. A principle reason has been that terms such as character, temperament, mood, personality, identity, the self, and even the ego have been used interchangeably. Character, says Schafer, "...has never been provided with either a satisfactory conceptualization or a definite place in psychoanalytic theory...character overlaps the concept ego ... the concept self ... and the free-floating concept style" (1979, p. 867). Terms such as mood, temperament, personality, and identity have also been used interchangeably. Adding to this confusion we note that there are approximately 27,000 terms in the English language that concern aspects of personality, of which 3,000 refer to common traits, and that as many as 810 character types have been "identified," (Goldberg, 1982).

Apart from problems of definition, other controversies have arisen around the use of the concept of character and passionate negative reactions have been common. There is pain involved in the process of characterization. Classification has been considered dehumanizing. Associations with sickness and hospitalization are evoked. Some have looked at classification as an attack on the person's integrity and uniqueness. Others have expressed concern about the self-fulfilling nature of using classification schemes at all, i.e., the persons who are typified in a certain manner may start to behave accordingly. In general, it can be said that it proves easier to agree on the existence of character than to agree on its identification in a specific instance.

Why Study Character?

In spite of all this, the concept has relevance and is important. The debate on the topic continues and interest in it is growing. But what is the source of its appeal?

A significant factor contributing to the contemporary interest in character has been a changing patient population which increasingly complains about the dysfunctional effects of maladaptive ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The majority of complaints are about "problems with living," not merely about getting rid of specific symptoms. Looking at whole structures instead of parts is taking an ever more central position in clinical practice, a reality which makes the analysis of character more pertinent.

Since character disorders do indeed constitute the bulk of analytic practice (Stone, 1954; Lampl-De-Groot, 1963; Baudry, 1984), it behooves the analyst to be familiar with the concept. Baudry (1984) emphasizes that a working familiarity with it has become essential to diagnosis and assessment of potential for analyzability, as well as to the working-through process. To use his words: "It is hard to imagine a concept of more everyday concern to our work than character" (p. 455). The concept's appeal, according to McLaughlin, resides in its "beguiling near-to-experience resonance -- the quality of being at the heart of what we sense to be central to our intuitive experiencing of ourselves" (quoted in Boesky, 1983, p. 240). For Schafer (1979), character is a powerful concept that allows one to talk holistically and to take into account the fluid boundary between form and content while at the same time being a congenial

alternative to the "more austere and confining terms of metapsychology" (p. 868).

The understanding of character -- its origins, components (e.g., modes, traits, attitudes, habits, moods, styles), formation, and disruptions, along with the identification of character types and prototypes (Millon and Klerman, 1986) -- is essential to communication (inter- as well as intradisciplinary), teaching, treatment, and research.

How do we go about studying character? How do we decipher man's operational code? What approach will provide the greatest insight and further therapeutic interventions? What will be our "text"? Do we study bodily signs, dress, demeanor, speech, overt behavior, or other signifiers? How "deep" do we go? Do we look at surface manifestations or deep structures? What "tools" do we have at our disposal to codify, objectify, and improve our understanding? What is our orientation going to be -- Will it be intuitive, impressionistic, humanistic, or scientific? Which theoretical models will provide most insight? What are the paradigms? It is our contention that of the many conceptual models used in the study of character, psychoanalysis, in spite of all its flaws, is the most promising in providing insight into this fascinating but elusive focal point of body, psyche, soul, and society.

Historical Context

The study of character has a long and turbulent history. Character has been looked at from many different perspectives. Poets, novelists, philosophers, and the like have been no strangers to the topic. As early as the fourth century B.C., Plato alluded to the fact that people may be of various types. Actually, the argument can be made that an early version of Freud's tripartite theory can be found in Plato's conceptualization of character. Plato speculated that the mind consists of three parts which individuals possess in different degrees. One element he called desire or appetite, meaning the instinctive desires in their simplest forms; the second he called reason, implying the ability to understand and think before acting -- the faculty of calculation, foresight, and decision making. The third element was thumos or thumoeides, a concept difficult to translate, which stands for self-regard, self-respect, spirit, and enterprise (Plato, 1955, pp. 185-193).

Another early precursor in the study of character was Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle's and his successor as head of the Lyceum. Theophrastus wrote a notable treatise called Characteres which consisted of thirty brief character sketches based on Aristotle's teachings. In a satirical way -- describing humankind with all its foibles and virtues -- he presented a classification of different types such as the garrulous man, the stupid man, or the superstitious man.

A classification which has lingered on until the present day was made, however, by a contemporary of Plato's, Hippocrates.

His assessment of character was based on the imbalance of bodily humors, which were the embodiments of earth, water, fire, and air. In Hippocrates' model (centuries later adopted and modified by Galen, probably the greatest physician of Roman times), there were four basic temperaments : the choleric, with its irascibility; the melancholic, with its tendency toward sadness; the sanguine, with its optimistic stand; and the phlegmatic, with its disposition toward apathy. Excesses of yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm were considered responsible for the existence of each type (Mora, 1985).

In more recent times constitutional theories have focused on the visible body rather than on its supposed contents. The beginnings of a more scientific approach saw the light of day. Gall (1758-1825) attempted to correlate character with variations in the surface of the skull. His "science" of phrenology inspired a great deal of research that went on for decades before phrenology fell into disrepute. Some hundred years later, Kretschmer (1925) and Sheldon (1940, 1945), carrying the scientific torch further, brought some credibility to the constitutional approach in their studies of the correlation between body, physique, and personality. For example, Kretschmer (1925) identified four basic physical types, the pyknic, athletic, asthenic, and dysplastic, which corresponded respectively to extraverted, epileptic, schizoid, and ineffective behavior, though the last category was rather vaguely defined. Using Kretschmer's works as a basis, Sheldon (1940, 1945) also proposed a relationship between body, physique and character. He referred to endo-, meso-, and ectomorphic builds, which supposedly were associated with three psychological types

indicating visceral interests, activity and muscular interests, and intellectual interests, respectively.

Although the respectability of the study of character increased, interest in it evaporated. A different approach was called for and eventually found in the newly developing behavioral and psychological sciences. The work of two little-known turn-of-the-century Dutch psychologists, Heymans and Wiersma (1906-1909), represented the dawn of the non-dynamic psychological approach to character as well as providing a conceptual link between ancient Greek writings and Freud. Basing their work on sophisticated, empirical dimensional studies, Heymans and Wiersma identified three "fundamental criteria" for evaluating character: activity level, emotionality, and susceptibility to external versus internal stimulation. Combinations of these led to eight types including the phlegmatic, the choleric, and the sanguine. Their "fundamental criteria" were very similar to Freud's "three great polarities" described in "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" (1915), i.e., active-passive, ego-object, and pleasure-pain.

The Psychoanalytic Orientation

The real inspiration for the study of character as a concept began with the development of psychoanalysis. By providing a body of theory or a number of conceptual tools and a method of investigation far richer than anything preceding it, psychoanalysis allowed character to be explored as never before. Furthermore, because of these conceptual breakthroughs, the possibility of character repair could be considered seriously.

Psychoanalytic contributions to character obviously began with Freud. In this context, a number of points must be emphasized. Firstly, as a general psychology, psychoanalysis is by its nature involved in the study of character. In this capacity it adds a dynamic unconscious dimension to man. It links the surface of man's character to underlying and unconscious structure (Baudry, 1984). Secondly, Freud's interest in character was partially "forced" upon him. His inclination was toward the study and treatment of the neuroses. Character existed as resistance -- something to be avoided. Eventually, however, he approached resistance differently, leading to the discovery of the transference and the structural model. Thirdly, Freud wrote only three articles on the subject of character his revolutionary paper on "Character and Anal Erotism" (1908); "Some Character Types met within Psycho-analytic Work" (1925); and his rarely cited paper "Libidinal Types" (1931).

Finally, and most importantly, many pertinent insights can be found in Freud's writings as scattered comments to more central theoretical expositions. Significant examples include: "The interpretation of Dreams" (1900), the very first reference where character was linked to unconscious childhood memories; "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), which tied infantile sexuality, sublimations, and construction to character formation for the first time; "The Dynamics of Transference" (1912), which discussed the repetition compulsion and the formation of stereotyped behavior; "The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis" (1913) in which he contrasted symptom and character formation; "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" (1914), which talked about the characterological absorption of memories; "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" (1915), in which he discussed the three

mental polarities as described above; "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), for its introduction to identification; "The Ego and the Id" (1923), in a class of its own with respect to the impact it made on characterology; "New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis" (1933), where Freud located character in all three systems of the psychic apparatus, giving pride of place to the superego; and, finally, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), where he discusses congenital ego determinants of defense selection.

The first real sign of Freud's interest in the concept of character can be observed in his article "Character and Anal Erotism" (1908), where he associated character traits with constitutional predispositions. Freud suggested that early bodily experiences could be viewed as precursors of later psychological ones. He supposed that such character traits as orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy were drive derivatives of the anal, erotogenic zone. Freud gradually recognized not only the importance of the study of character but also the problems associated with the concept. While symptoms had an ego-alien quality, character traits, in contrast, were ego-syntonic, which made them much harder to deal with. He also struggled with the question of how to distinguish symptoms from character traits. In dealing with these dilemmas, Freud noted that :

In the field of the development of character we are bound to meet with the same instinctual forces which we have found at work in the neuroses. But a sharp theoretical distinction between the two is necessitated by the single fact that the failure of repression and

the return of the repressed -- which are peculiar to the mechanism of neurosis -- are absent in the formation of character. In the latter, repression either does not come into action or smoothly achieves its aim of replacing the repressed by reaction-formations and sublimations. Hence the processes of the formation of character are more obscure and less accessible to analysis than neurotic ones. (Freud, 1913, p. 323).

In his later writings we can see how Freud began to broaden his outlook on character, going beyond mere component instinct analysis. His paper "Some Character Types met within Psycho-Analytic Work" (1925) exemplified this changing perspective in that he identified certain themes and patterns which characterized some of his patients. However, with a better understanding of the meaning of resistance and transference, Freud's interest in character really flourished (Baudry, 1983). It became increasingly clear to him that patients had stereotyped, consistent ways of dealing with their analysts, patterns based on childhood struggles with authority and obedience. It dawned on Freud and others that they were dealing with much wider phenomena than mere symptoms. Through the analysis of resistance and transference psychoanalysts moved away from the investigation of symptoms to that of character, seeing symptoms only as a part of it. They began to recognize that the distinction between symptoms and character traits was not necessarily a sharp one.

The development of Freud's tripartite structural model as introduced in "The Ego and the Id" (1923) set the stage for a

greater recognition of the forces of reality and a move away from a purely constitutional view of character. Freud's new view was that character was formed by both instinctual drives and historical experience. This evolution in his thinking was reflected in the paper "Libidinal Types" (1931), where both constitutional factors and object relations were considered as contributing variables in character development. Character was looked at as a sort of contingency whereby some people were governed by instinctual demands, others by the forces of the superego, and yet others by those of the ego. Object relations began to be seen as playing an increasingly important role in the development of character. This point of view we find emphasized in Freud's "New Introductory Lectures" (1933) :

You yourselves have no doubt assumed that what is known as "character," a thing so hard to define, is to be ascribed entirely to the ego. We have already made out a little of what it is that creates character. First and foremost there is the incorporation of the former parental agency as a super-ego, which is no doubt its most important and decisive portion, and, further, identifications with the two parents of the later period and with other influential figures, and similar identifications formed as precipitates of abandoned object-relations. And we may now add as contributions to the construction of character which are never absent the reaction-formation which the ego acquires -- to begin with in making its repressions and later, by a more normal method, when it rejects unwished-for instinctual impulses (p. 91).

Freud moved from lack of interest in character per se to seeing it in ever more complex ways: beyond transformed libido, he focused on characterological themes in the context of the tripartite model. However, libido theory dominated his work and had the strongest immediate impact on the other two pioneers of character theory, Karl Abraham and Wilhelm Reich.

Karl Abraham (1968), one of the original ten members of Freud's inner circle, brought Freud's work on the component instinct model of character to its apogee in three classical, sparsely written articles. In expanding libido theory he explored the relationship between the various erotogenic zones and oral, anal, and genital character types. He was the first to move away from symptoms and identify the central position of character. He also paid more attention to pre-oedipal factors in the genesis of character. In addition, his writings hinted at the object-relations developments that were soon to be elaborated by Melanie Klein and her followers. For Abraham, character was defined as "the sum of [the person's] instinctive reactions towards his social environment [coming to completion when] libido has reached the capacity for object-love" (1968, p. 408).

What Abraham did for component instinct analysis of character Reich did for the defense side of the drive-defense equation. Moreover, his work, captured in a brilliant and controversial text, moved character analysis into the foreground (Stone, 1954) -- symptom analysis was on the way out. Reich's ideas were to have a major impact on subsequent generations of analysts, evoking strong positive or negative reactions (Sterba, 1951, 1953; Boesky, 1983).

According to Reich the individual uses stereotyped ways of interacting to protect him - or herself against dangers, whether instinctually or externally derived. These patterns of behavior emerge as defensive solutions to the Oedipus complex and are embedded in the total psychic structure as character armor. This accounts for the characteristic ways analysands deal with the analyst. Pathology is related to the degree of rigidity in these forms of reaction. Reich suggested that we can speak of character disorders when patterns are fixed, rigid, and automatic whatever the situation encountered.

Waelder corrected the flaws in Reich's uni-dimensional approach. Rather than seeing character as an outcome of defensive reactions of the ego, he clarified the evolving psychoanalytic position in his paper on "The Principle of Multiple Function" (1930) where he confirmed that character was increasingly considered to be a compromise solution of the ego intersystemic struggle created by the conflicting demands of id, super-ego, and reality. He argued that a "future psychoanalytic theory of character ... must be at least two-dimensional according to the dominant drive and specific methods of [task] solution" (Waelder, 1930, p. 79).

Otto Fenichel in his Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis (1945), the "bible of psychoanalysts," provided the most complete summary of the psychoanalytic theory of character as it then existed. One can easily recognize the influence of Reich and Waelder in his description of character as "the habitual mode of bringing into harmony the tasks presented by internal demands and by the external world ...[It is]... a function of the constant, organized, and integrating part of the personality which is the

ego ..." (1945, p. 467). It was Fenichel's misfortune that in relating character so closely to the ego he had great difficulty in distinguishing one concept from the other -- a problem that is still with us today.

But ego psychology as a separate area of endeavor grew rapidly and pushed the frontiers of character analysis forward. As a central figure in the development of ego psychology, Heinz Hartmann (1958) argued that the origin of character may be found in instinctual energies independent of conflicts and their resolution. Another innovator, Erik Erikson (1959), emphasized the role of social reality in the formation of character. In his conceptualizations identity stood for the experience of continuity and coherence of the organization of self vis-à-vis others and the influencing of the social environment. His ideas brought home the point that, with respect to character, consideration must be given to a person's development throughout the life cycle. According to him, psychopathology was strongly associated with developmental problems, not just instinctual conflicts. It should be noted how, in Erikson's terminology, identity and character became almost interchangeable entities, both describing an individual's way of organizing ongoing experience. He stressed the consolidation of character as a central task of adolescence.

Peter Blos (1968), another developmental researcher, argued that the cardinal achievement of adolescence was the transition and modification of childhood character traits into character. In the process of this formation, character takes over the homeostatic function from the regulatory agencies of childhood and stabilizes the residue of inevitable and

unavoidable childhood traumata. The relentless push for actualization by this residue contributes to character's compelling nature. Whether it will become defensive or autonomous depends on the success with which adolescent developmental tasks are handled.

Thus, the evolution of the psychoanalytic understanding of character development involved a gradual change from taking character as simple drive derivatives to it being the consequence of intersystemic conflict and then a combination of genetic endowment, biological factors, and life experiences. Thus character took over the originally central position of symptoms.

At present, the analysis of symptoms can be viewed more as a preliminary to the analysis of character. Character pathology has become a primary indicator for psychoanalytic treatment. Moreover, it can be said in a metaphorical way that the original emphasis on Oedipus has been replaced by emphasis on Narcissus, meaning that greater attention is currently being given to pre-oedipal themes in the understanding of character. This development is part and parcel of the widening scope of psychoanalysis as borderline and narcissistic disorders and the role of the first years of life in their pathogenesis take a more central position.

However, in spite of the increased sophistication in understanding character, controversies continue. Many (Boesky for one [1983]) feel more comfortable studying character traits which are less abstract, less highly inferential, and therefore empirically closer to hand. While this approach is eminently sensible, it does have one drawback: it does not do away with

the need to study character as a whole. It is clear that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. This point of view is well articulated by Blos who said that, "we certainly ascertain in character formation integrative processes, structurings and patternings that belong to a different order than a mere bundling together of traits, attitudes, habits and idiosyncracies." (1968, p. 249). According to him, character formation is "... an integrative process and as such aims at the elimination of conflict and anxiety arousal" (1968, p. 251).

Diverging Approaches to Character Pathology

In the meantime, despite all of these developments in the study of character, the notion of typologies had fallen on hard times. In many instances, clinically derived assessments were labeled unscientific because they were deemed insufficiently rigorous. In order to attain greater precision in diagnosis, more atomistic approaches were advocated. To use Millon's words, "... the personality configuration was segmented into its ostensive constituents, construed as S-R bonds by some, statistical factors by others, dimensional traits elsewhere, and so on" (1984, p. 452). But with this shift in orientation, the richness implicit in clinical diagnosis, whole configurations, and dynamic interpretations was lost.

Moreover, the deteriorating partnership between psychiatry and psychoanalysis added to the decline in interest in character. The reasons for this development are numerous and beyond the scope of this paper (Sabshin, 1985, p. 474). Competing theories, alternative therapies, the growth of

psychopharmacology, the need to maintain the purity and/or identity of psychoanalysis as a medical discipline, and disillusionment with psychoanalytic treatment all played a part. The subsequent parting of paths has brought about some unfortunate consequences. One significant area of conflicts concerns the diverging approaches to character pathology and its classification and investigation.

It would be a mistake to believe that the loss has only been psychiatry's -- that psychiatry has suffered doubly by losing the "royal road" and by being misled by spurious, theoretically anaemic, and/or flash-in-the-pan concepts, models, and approaches. Psychoanalysis has lost out as well, being notoriously poor in the area of classification (category formation), identification (assigning new entities to a given category), and taxonomy (theoretical study of classification) (Blashfield, 1986, p. 363). It could indeed benefit from the advances made in this area by psychiatry and psychology.

One other aspect worth noting is that less overt functional impairment is conveyed by the psychoanalytic diagnosis of character disorder rather than by the psychiatric counterpart. For example, at the low end of the spectrum a psychiatrist may deem an individual healthy, where the psychoanalyst would note significant difficulties which need attention. This is not a question of seeing trouble where there is none but of having a greater sensitivity on issues which can seriously impair the quality of life without producing gross manifestations of functional disturbance.

Nevertheless, while the psychoanalytic study of character has become increasingly rich and sophisticated, psychiatry has retreated from a dynamic approach by arguing about the "elusive complexity" of character. Fear of making inferences and of "soft" concepts has led to a search for "hard" data and, unfortunately, to hard times for the understanding of character disorders.

Over the last thirty years psychiatry has increasingly taken a purely organic, Neo-Kraepelinian point of view in the area of psychopathology, first articulated in the influential textbook by Meyer-Gross, Slater, and Roth (1954) and strongly critical of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. This Neo-Kraepelinian "invisible college" has led the way in developing the paradigm embodied by DSM III and its revision, DSM III-R. This model emphasizes empirical attitudes and a heavy reliance on psychometric and quantitative approaches to psychopathology, as well as an operational methodology. It is hard to fault these interests and it would be folly to belittle or underestimate the serious and brilliant developments which have emerged with increasing regularity since the publication of the Washington University criteria for operational diagnoses (forerunner of the DSM III, Neo-Kraepelinian push in the 1970s) (Klerman, 1986, pp. 15-17).

While these orientations are certainly to be applauded, the results in the area of personality disorders are disappointing. The axis devoted to personality disorders in DSM-III and DSM III-R is committee designed and politically sculpted. As Gunderson (1983) argues, "...for most of the personality disorder categories there was either no empirical base ... or no clinical

tradition, thus their disposition was more subject to the convictions of individual Advisory Committee members" (1983, p. 30). Stein (1983) points out that "...it is doubtful that one can classify any body of data without a theory upon which that classification is based" (p. 225). The failure of DSM III has been its inability to consider data regarding unconscious mental functioning. Without such data it is impossible to make a fully meaningful diagnostic assessment of and statement about any patient. Unconscious conflict is universal whether or not it is currently amenable to psychometric measure or capable of being operationalized. In addition, it is not the province of one particular theory. Reluctance to use psychoanalytic theory which "furnishes us with a valuable tool for observing, organizing and interpreting clinical data" (Stein, 1983, p. 226) is to be regretted, as is waning attention to predisposing factors and the history of the disorder.

We can now see that the pendulum is swinging in the other direction. Alternative approaches have not lived up to their original promise and the vacuity of many of these orientations has become increasingly clear. Clinical behaviorism and psychopharmacological approaches to the study of character have proved to be overly simplistic and sterile. Hence, we can observe that attitudes toward the analysis of character have been changing. As pure empiricism and positivism have not given the answers, we can see how part function analysis is being replaced by the study of whole structures once again. In moving in that direction, however, emphasis must put on a synthesis of psychoanalytic, cognitive, and behavioral approaches. And here psychoanalysis furnishes a unique body of data and theory not

easily found elsewhere and were able to stimulate this development.

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