SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PHENOMENON OF AGGRESSION.

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WHEN we pass under review the theoretical concepts of aggression three main types stand out clearly, which are fairly representative of prevalent opinions.

It would seem to be in place first of all to refer to Freud's views on the subject as set forth in his study, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*. In this study he relates aggression to his death-instinct conception, in which aggression is regarded as a derivative from the death instinct, which has turned outward. Not self-destruction, but the destruction of others is then the object aimed at. Conversely, a restraint of aggression may give rise to a heightened tendency toward self-punishment and self-destruction.

As a transitional stage towards the anthropological views a theory is now coming to the fore in which aggression is regarded as a reaction. As its leading exponent in the Netherlands we may mention Grewel, who considers aggression to be above all sociologically determined. Several authors had already pointed out the reactive character of aggression; abroad its leading spokesman is Kunz. Whenever the external, environmental factors are favourable, aggression will find no scope for development. Rightly Grewel again points out that aggression has nothing to do with greed, and that it is not linked with property either. Nor has it anything to do with the *esprit de combat*, the fighting spirit of masculine combativeness.

Another important point is his remark that not every change of structure constitutes a destruction or is a consequence of aggression. A child for instance, that in its exploration of the outside world will tear up the wall-paper, is not aggressive.

In this discussion we will only deal with genuine aggression. According to Grewel, then, it is not permissible to speak of primary aggression; every aggression is essentially a reaction to a frustration or to the expectation of frustration. In every form of aggression there is, furthermore, an element of fear. Grewel also points out that socio-psychological factors are co-decisive for the appreciation of aggression and aggressiveness. There are socially tolerated, socially approved, and socially prohibited forms of aggression. Aggression is also a reaction aiming at self-preservation.

So far we have summarized two attempts—and extremely important ones—to approach the problem of aggression. Freud's instinct conception is only a unilateral crystallization of an immature choice, which choice cannot be regarded as a simple reaction either. For we have here a relationship, a meeting. Aggression is not an imprisoned instinct, which, like a caged bird, seeks to escape with unco-ordinated fluttering movements of its wings.

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In the theories noticed so far we are struck by a lack of phenomenological differentiation and anthropological discernment.

A casual phenomenological glance at the phenomenon easily shows up its threefold nature. Thus we distinguish: the aggressive attitude, the forms under which it reveals itself, namely, the vehicles of aggression, and finally its consequences for the opponent, that is, the one who stands opposed to us, and respectively for the aggressive individual himself.

This simple outlook on the phenomenon itself readily yields an insight into its complexity. We should like first of all to point out the fact that various different emotional attitudes may as it were initiate the aggression, namely, hatred, anger, wrath, resentment, repudiation, envy, etc. So far it has not been found possible clearly to delimit these conceptions from each other in a phenomenological sense, although there are considerable differences of intent, power of penetration, duration, and space-schema.

Next the vehicles of the aggression are the entire complex of man's possibilities of expression, namely the spoken and the written word, gesture and action. Kunz has some very interesting things to say on this subject.

In passing we may go into this question a little further. A differentiation in this field would seem to be of the greatest importance. In the child aggression manifests itself much less subtly than in grown-ups. The child tries to devaluate the adversary by the simple means of excommunication, or rather of elimination; the other child is forced to withdraw from the community of play, to surrender his playing-space. Furthermore the aggression manifests itself in the childish fight. The opponent is rendered powerless by throwing him to the ground, by beating, kicking, pinching, biting, etc., in fact, by means of torture. However, matters do not stop at torture by hand or foot, but often an extension-piece is used (a stick, whip, etc.). The development of technics, moreover, has made it possible for the distance between the two adversaries to be considerably widened.

In principle this does not lend a different cachet to the problem of aggression. The gesture may be the means by which the other person is ridiculed. Language, too, sufficiently indicates that, as regards both content and tone, the word can reveal the aggressive frame of mind. We speak of a sharp, cutting tone; words are able to hurt, lash, and wound.

Then there is invective, calling names, which is done mostly by children, but also by infantile older people. This calling names is a form of labelling, i.e., the other person is spoken to quite arbitrarily, in a manner that does not correspond with his true nature. The object in view is again to render the other person powerless.

In writing and in pictures, too, the aggressive frame of mind may become clearly apparent. Tale-telling brings us to another plane. Here a higher authority is called upon to materialize the aggression. It is the renunciation of the personal, direct aggression. It is thus endeavoured to realize the aggression directly, or to vent it in a round-about way. Threatening with a higher authority, for instance, the father, lies on the same level.

However, in aggression a tendency to confuse part and the whole is always apparent; the value of the whole is measured by a negatively valued detail.

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This detail is then the weak spot that the aggression seizes upon. The *pars pro toto* pretext is especially revealing in such expressions as "You're crazy," "You're a dirty skunk," "lousy," etc. It may refer to both physical and certain mental defects. Here the word therefore gives expression to the deforming aggressive frame of mind. The total figure of the other person undergoes a transformation which tends to a loss of value.

I do not wish to enlarge on the aggression against the self, including the body. We see its effects in bodily torture, self-mutilation and suicide; mentally it appears in certain forms of self-reproach, etc.

The generalization of a criticism of detail thus implies that our fellow-men are judged according to a simple manifestation, not according to their intrinsic merits. The labelling is usually done with reference to an individual devaluation. On the other hand, classification implies that a person is identified with a certain group towards which one is aggressively disposed. Here, too, there is the failure to do adequate justice to the individual. From certain expressions, for instance, the inference is drawn that a person must be classed with a certain group, against which one happens to be unfavourably disposed.

All -isms can be made subservient to aggression. If we reflect that the word is a symbolical interpretation of certain experiences, and how difficult it is, too, to express the emotions by means of words, we realize how dangerous it is to come to definite conclusions concerning the personality of a person on the basis of his words.

Mocking is found even among primitive peoples. In Greenland, for instance, it is the custom in a conflict to sing satyrical songs on both sides, life in the community being finally made impossible to the losing party. The object in view is to restore peace within the community by means of this excommunication.

Laughing at a person can have a similar significance in the service of aggression. Thus the aggression, which points to a disturbance of harmony, may express itself roughly or subtly. Always, however, there is to be found a reduction, a disfiguration of the personality. The substitution of *pars* for *toto* that may be expressed in a generalization of a judgment of detail is here the powerful system in the service of aggression. The fellow-man is here a *corpus alienum* which one would like to expel from the community.

As the coarser forms of aggression are for the greater part socially inadmissible more refined forms are resorted to. Well, then, the spoken and written word offer abundant scope to realize the aggression. In polemic writings, etc., we can observe this only too clearly. The aggressive tendency for the purpose of at the same time securing one's own safety is found again among primitive people in the form of sympathetic magic (*envoûtement*). By this is understood the endeavour to kill or hurt one's fellow-man by making an image, provided with hair or sweat from the person that is meant to be affected. The sentence is executed on the image, so that the personal risk is greatly diminished. Even after the death of the person one fears the aggressive feelings may be vented on his image. Thus it often happened after the last World War that images were carried in processions to be burnt afterwards. At present it is not so much the action of burning as of psychically stigmatizing, as a form of

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labelling, that stands out, and is the invading part of aggression. Aggression thus points to a definite relationship, to a inter-human connectedness, a state of being concerned in one another, where it is at the same time having an interest in the other person, although this interest tends to a loss of value.

Now it has become possible to give a definition of genuine aggression. By aggression we understand the more or less conscious desire to encroach on another living-space, to expand one's own sphere at the other's expense; or in other words, the more or less deliberate injury to the welfare of the opponent.

Welfare is here a psycho-physical totality striving towards integration. The adversary constantly implies a threat—which may or may not be real—to the person. Here we come into contact with the negative influence that our fellow-man, the authority, may acquire. There is no possibility of respectfully and ecstatically submitting to the authority, no willingness to surrender our own territory for the sake of the other, not to free oneself from it in an absolute sense. This problem of authority with the ambivalent form in which it is experienced is an irrational principle incapable of being psychologically unravelled. Aggression need not spring up in every threatening situation. Resignation, passiveness or a submission to the threat, too, sometimes occur. Flight, and paralysis of the psychical tension may also result. In aggression a certain tension always finds expression, a resistance which takes action against the unequality of men. Aggression is an attempt at self-preservation, or to expand one's own sphere at the other's expense. The aggressive person may at the same time feel threatened and encroached upon with respect to his own sphere. He is hyperaesthetic and vulnerable. The fact that he feels a need for hurting the other person at the same time testifies to his own vulnerability. It is a communication disturbance, a lack of faith and confidence. This is not to say that objectively speaking there is much cause for trusting or believing the fellow-man. However, in aggression there is no trace of an objective appreciation of certain definite shortcomings of the opponent. Nor is there any possibility (although the need may indeed be felt) of settling the existing difficulties in a conversation.

As a rule aggression is attended with the fear of conversation, of a constructive use of the word. In the organ-neurosis certain organs give expression to the fact that there is an uneasiness in the interhuman relationships. Aggression points in the same direction; it would render the adversary powerless; it does not go about it blindly, as in pathological impulsiveness, but it keeps more or less to the fixed boundaries of an existing order. Form and method of aggression are largely determined by the historical background with its social structural components. One's own safety is rarely given up in aggression, although the risk is considerable.

I do not think it is right to reduce the authority relationship described to an infantile complex, oedipus complex, castration complex, etc. The phenomenology of primitive man points in an entirely different direction. It is true that every meeting is partly determined by the historical totality of experience. Every authority experienced is certainly not a splinter of the image of the archetypal father. In aggression there is a choice, an elective

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mechanism that is dissatisfied with the existing situation, and strives in a revolutionary manner to change it, which change—as shown by experience—can always be made acceptable on certain grounds. This change of the existing situation is not, therefore, effected via conversation, but the other person is gnawed at and jerked at until his existence is undermined.

Many analysts, among whom Kunz, refer to the expansive effect of aggression. I think it would be better to speak of an infiltrative influence. This infiltration is achieved via the weak spots that are to be found in every person. We may be allowed to use a simile, and compare aggression with the carcinoma, which in growing does not respect the boundaries of the organ, but which does not originate independently from the tissue. In a similar manner the aggressive process spreads to larger units, and undergoes metastasis like a cancerous tumour.

Aggression and revolution have many characteristics in common. Each is unthinkable without the other; both, either directly or indirectly, undermine what is felt to be the authority. The fact is that man in his development experiences the existence of authorities with whom he is confronted, and who represent an imperfect society. The existing forms of society do indeed often preclude a harmonious development of the individual, which is a problem with many sociological and paedagogic aspects. In primitive man, and in the child it may even be an inanimate object that has a representative significance, and rouses the aggression. In adults it is as a rule a fellow human being, a human being that distinguishes himself from the colourless environment in being the representative of a certain authority. This authority is not a quantity that can be standardized in certain formulas, but an irrational potentiality. It exists in the realm of the strange, the hard-to-schematize, the variegated aspects of which are most easily approximated by means of the Melanesian concept of "*mana*."* In agression a definite position is chosen, causing the fear experienced with regard to the powers that are revealing themselves to be dissolved. If, with Marrett,† we may regard the relationship to "*mana*" as an inter-human and primitive religious system, aggression has an anti-religious aspect.

Aggression is closely allied to repudiation. Man makes resistance to surrendering to the supernatural, or rather the super-schematic. The aggressive attitude has been in evidence during the whole process of man's evolution, from primitive magic upwards, and it has run through the whole of man's history down into the most subtly differentiated philosophical and religious systems, in passing destroying religious values and pseudo-values.

Could we now penetrate deeper into the essence of aggression? It is a remarkable fact that aggression is as a rule experienced as a form of resistance against a threat to freedom, to the integrative manifestations of authority of the individual himself. However, to my mind there is here only an inadequate attempt to secure freedom, which is always *in statu nascendi* in man, but which is at the same time exposed and abandoned to being choked. Owing

* Lehmann, "Mana, der Begriff der Ausserordentlich Wirkungsvollen bei Südseevölkern."

† Marrett, *The Threshold of Religion*, London, 1900. "The Primitive Medicine Man," *Hibbert Journal*, 1918, p. 17. *Faith, Hope and Charity.*

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to the unequality of people this freedom may be quite illusory. This unequality, however, is not decisive, but owing to the grotesque shifts brought about in a convulsive world freedom is jeopardized. Thus the aggressive attitude may be a form of self-defence or possibly of self-preservation, in the midst of the pseudo-religious powers. In aggression a tendency to level down life is revealed at the same time. The consequence is nevertheless an increase of power, of room for the aggressive individual himself. On the other hand, the elated sense of power is only the effect, not the object of the aggression. The immature objective aimed at is to arrive at a deeper form of communication starting from the levelling phase, which objective is not attained, because in aggression there is too much of a space problem in which the I-you relationship is debased into an either-I-or-you schema. Thus we observe a will in aggression, a searching agency which wishes to detect the weak spots in the other. This weak spot, which is to be found everywhere in an imperfect society, is lifted from a criticism of detail to the complete image of the human condition. This means that the situation of the moment is inadequately appreciated. The other is reduced and schematized. His " being " becomes a " so-being," and is reduced to the schema which was built up from the detail. This detail at the same time constitutes the theme, the content of the aggression.

However, this schematization involves at the same time the aggressive individual himself, owing to which the attempt to free oneself leads to a new bondage, namely a subjection to the dictatorship of the system, the theme, the dogma, in the unfavourable sense of the word. Indeed, a criticism of others is of no value at all without a redeeming measure of self-criticism. Because of the fact that there is a constant discrepancy between the immature objective of the aggression and its contents it never achieves the desired end. Freedom has no other significance than that of a temporary liberation from the irrational prestige, which is made concrete somewhere, but which cannot be destroyed.

Another remarkable feature is that among individuals aggression so readily fades as soon as there is question of a joint action against a third power. At that moment Herod and Pilate become friends. When group aggression enters upon the scene personal feuds also fade away. It is as if the object of the aggression always easily rises high above the individual or even above the collectively human plane. This is one more proof of the contents of the aggression having only a secondary significance. It is as if the aggression really turns against a metaphysical power, which yet reveals itself to man. The aggression aims at comprehending the mystery, both personal and supra-personal, within the system. The struggle for freedom via aggression always leads to a wielding of system and theme, to their elevation to the dignity of absolute standards, whereas their function is only that of weapons, of vehicles of the aggression. So the aggression fades away as soon as the other's prestige has diminished sufficiently; it usually stops with the death of the person who happens to be the adversary. Only when we have to do with a very heavy " *mana* " with a very wide sphere of influence is death no boundary, and the universe is not big enough.

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We shall not give a comprehensive survey here of all the schemata that have become crystallized as the final product of the historical development. Their differentiation is as extensive, and as difficult to gain a clear view of as Jung's archetypes. Aggression always results in the dictatorship of its own schema. For, even in its pretended pursuit of freedom, this attitude points to its committedness to the crystallized product. On the one hand aggression is related to property, everything having become solidified into possession. At the same time it gives expression to an irrational warp, which either originates in the self and is projected to the outside world, or perhaps is of demonic origin.

Psychologically speaking aggression is an attitude of the incomplete person, even though its significance may be due to a resistance against the spurious and caricature-like forms of irrational prestige. The immature person tries to come to a settlement with this power, just as primitive man does by means of magic. The aggressive person also likes to merge in the group. Here the freedom of the individual is submerged in an endeavour to achieve the supremacy of the group. As a matter of principle it makes little difference whether the contents are trivial, political, religious or scientific. Personal aggression easily runs into greater human conglomerations. Aggression in general points to a possibility of development, but owing to its relative blindness can never achieve true freedom. The aggressive person is the planimetrical person, schematic, never rising to the level of true freedom. This freedom can only be thrown light on existentially, against a philosophical or theological background, in which the narrow either-I-or-you relationship is replaced by the I-you relationship.

The will to be aggressive is at the same time an unwillingness to love; the aggressive person gets round the mystery, he is building up the weapons which he will use to infiltrate the territory of the other. Thus aggression is bound to the spatial conditions of the earth. The aggressive person places the object in front of himself, and penetrates infiltratively into his sphere of influence, after which the wounds inflicted undermine his existence. The anthropological development recognizes the problem of human space as the specific element in aggression. Starting from the anthropological view it is also possible to differentiate aggression from the various forms of pseudo-aggression. Thus the word expansive rather applies to the field of pseudo-aggression. Masculine combativeness for instance may be anthropologically characterized by elastic space. Both a widening and a narrowing take place smoothly. One's own territory is enlarged at the expense of space that had become vacated or that was not being used, but all this within the sphere of orderly possibilities, where expansion and contraction are endured in an orderly manner. It is the world of the smile, whereas the grin is proper to the realm of genuine aggression. Finally, playing is amongst others characterized by the fact that the surrounding space is reconnoitred.

Aggression in all its various facets is perhaps most readily studied in the sect. Here we have to do with a group-formation in which the contents have become a dogmatic system, which had been strained and altered until it became generally acceptable. This complex of contents then constitutes a solid

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structure which is easily defended against the outside world. This objectified schematic complex has become property, into which no penetration is admitted. Only if the rational attacks prove too heavy are any frontier adjustments made, at best. The communal property, the collective space is put into a state of defence as best it may. However, the group is not only defined by its attitude to the onward-pressing outside world, but it is also positively defined, namely by its expectation of salvation. In the dogmatic formulation the latter, too, becomes unalienable property. Aggression against unbelief on the one hand, and the expectation of salvation as a positive element on the other hand, are the two characteristics of the sect. The collective myth is a virtually unalienable possession, it is the field where the *I* is completely identified with the *self*. Externally the group is, when necessary, in the hedgehog position, although at first it will act expansively as well, which phase is followed by the infiltrative form of aggression. The group stands or falls by the upholding of the central themes.

In the thematic element is expressed the rigidness, the unbendingness, the propensity to aggressiveness. The group is a *sympsychium*, which is not to be defined as the sum of the individual members. Only in so far as the individual shares in the communal contents is he a reflection of the collectivity.

There is a parallelism between the attitude of the sect as a whole and that of the individual sectarian. The sectarian may be compared to a snail, which always carries about on its back its sacred territory (viz., its shell), and at every threat withdraws within its safe inclosure. An open communication with the outside world remains, but it is mainly utilized in order to spy out iniquities that might jeopardize the existence of the safe complex.

The sectarian is never completely free from the complex. The boundary of its space is at the same time the boundary between good and bad. The sect rejects the idea of compromise. It is ruled by the all-or-nothing law, by the alternative, either-or. The withdrawal from the outside world is symbolized in the fact that its premises are private, in the smallness of the windows, and the opacity of its panes, in the gloomy, hushed atmosphere. As a rule we may observe its reflection in the dark, monk-like wearing apparel, in prudishness and narrow-mindedness.

Another characteristic of the sect is its authoritarian, coercive character, and its idolization of the number. The sect tries to achieve expansion through an increase of the group. Thus it is characterized on the one hand by its isolation from the outside world, on the other hand by being related to it through its prying and spying, and by the fact that it aggressively directs its attacks on the weak spot of the other.

The community itself acts as the mother with whom the individual is safe. Furthermore the sect is characterized by its aggressiveness, which cannot be more profitably studied in all its aspects anywhere but here. Aggression points to a disturbance of the inter-human relations, whose foundations were laid genetically in childhood. Aggression develops if the normal need for expansion in the child is not satisfied.

Some reference to therapy would seem to be in place after a description of

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aggression. In the child we may observe that the aggression is partly canalized and sublimated in play. From the point of view of the recreationist the aggression must not be repressed, but should indeed be canalized. The child should learn to adjust itself to the resistances of life.

It is a fact of our experience that especially the repressed aggression has an important significance in many psychoses. The appreciation of territory and time is seriously disturbed. The aggression is distorted into impulsiveness, and other chaotic forms. The elasticity has completely disappeared. In patients, too, aggression is often successfully checked through sports and



FIG. 1.—Dummy fixed on an iron stick ending in a ball-articulation only movable in one direction.

games, and regular work. Not infrequently, however, we see that this active-therapy fails to strike home. I do not think aggression should be repressed, and controlled by means of constraining sheets or isolating cells, but it should acquire sense to the patient in its senselessness. But it is of paramount importance to divert the aggression from the inter-human sphere.

It is especially manual aggression that has hitherto received less than its due share of the attention. With our aggressive patients we now use a method to canalize manual aggression. We try to effect this aim by the introduction of the punchball. During his aggressive mood the patient is given an opportunity to vent his feelings on the punchball. The result is astounding. Instead of a fight between staff and patient, in which the latter finally used to land under a constraining sheet, with all the tensions that were the inevitable

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consequences of such a humiliation, the patient becomes acquainted with the resistances of life. The ball returns to him unfailingly, demonstrating to the patient the senselessness of aggression. After a number of treatments the patient is given an opportunity to give rein to his aggression at intervals fixed by the doctor, the intervals being gradually widened. In connection with the aggression it seemed desirable to us considerably to increase the possibilities of projection. To this end we constructed an object, a sort of dummy, whose chief characteristic is that it is de-humanized, but does bear in itself many possibilities of projection. Furthermore the object is in the nature of a spring resistance: it gives way, but always returns in a straight line. In its final impassivity it symbolizes the pointlessness of aggression. In this there is no question of repression: the patient retains absolute liberty to work off his aggression. As for the poly-projectability, some patients recognize animal shapes in the dummy, others a trunk, or a head and belly. The dummy is covered with bluish black leather, with the rough inside out. This colour strongly provokes the aggression, whilst the possibility is left open to draw figures on it with chalk in order to heighten a certain effect. Thus the patient is given a chance to become adjusted to the resistances of life in a symbolic way. With clock-like regularity the dummy rebounds after each blow. Infiltration is impossible. Gradually it is brought home to the patient that an increase of living-space is not the result of aggression, but of real performance. It now becomes far more easy to absorb the patient in the processes of active therapy, that is in both regular work and in sports and games.

Up to now we have treated some 30 patients—all men, both psychosis (schizophrenia, epilepsy, etc.) and neurosis—and very successfully, too. In women the problem of aggression may be of a different nature. In the Psychiatric Institution of *Maasoord* all the men are at work at present, and aggression has practically ceased to occur. The line we are following at present leads via spontaneous and controlled gratification of aggression (punch-ball and dummy) to the absorption in the process of work and recreation in sports and games. In this manner the possibility is widened of making the mental hospital into an ordered society from which any disturbance by aggression has disappeared.

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