THE SCOPE OF INTRAPSYCHIC CONFLICT
Microscopic and Macroscopic Considerations

STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS IN INTRAPSYCHIC CONFLICT

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The theory of psychoanalysis has from the beginning been a conflict theory. In broad strokes, the sequence of Freud’s thinking went through a number of crucial stages with regard to the nature of the basic etiologic conflict (Nemiah, 1962). The earliest phase, as reviewed by Rapaport (1960), was conceived as occurring “between the memory of the traumatic event and the dominant ideational mass of the person, or as the conflict of the ideas and affects present in the traumatic situation with the moral standards of society.” The latter having been internalized and taken over by the patient as his own, the conflict was seen at once as an intrapsychic one, although a step removed from having been inner vs. outer. It was early conceived in topographic terms, i.e., between unconscious memories, ideas and affects, and the essentially conscious inner dictates of morality. The dynamic and economic points of view were implicit in the assumptions made, and were soon made manifest.

The intrapsychic locus of the conflict thus existed long before the structural point of view. In the next development, the conflict was seen as between “the wishful impulse” and the endopsychic censorship, or as between the primary and the secondary processes (Freud, 1900). Later, the intrapsychic components opposing each other consisted of libidinal vs. ego-preservative instincts, both forces residing within the instinctual drives (Freud, 1911, 1914). We know that with the elaboration of the structural point of view (Freud, 1920, 1923), as well as with both the revised theory of anxiety (Freud,

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and the *sine qua non* of all progression, without which satiety, stagnation, and emotional arrest would be the inevitable results.

Actually, as is usually the case with such pendular swings, the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes. The classic causes of fixation, as Fenichel (1945) has pointed out, occur with either excessive satisfaction or with excessive deprivation. Provence and Ritvo (1961), testing a hypothesis advanced by Ernst Kris that in the infant comfort serves to build object relationships while discomfort stimulates differentiation and structure formation, studied a group of institutionalized infants deprived of normal maternal care. These authors found that more than discomfort alone, it was discomfort—comfort contrast of a certain degree which was important for stimulating differentiation and the formation of psychic structure. The "ordinary devoted mother," to borrow Winnicott's term (1945), ministered to her child in close proximity to the peak intensity of the discomfort, which was followed then by an experience of fuller gratification and a greater degree of comfort than was the case in the institutionalized infant. In the latter case, protracted discomfort occurring over a long period of time and without relief, resulted in disorganization and disruption of the infant's capacity for ego functioning. While the ego apparatuses and repertoires for action appeared on time in the maturational timetable, they were clumsily used, poor in adaptation, and lacking in richness or subtlety. The crucial role of early object relationships in providing such favorable attention to the needs of the infant was stressed. In the same panel on object relations in which the above work was presented, Rubinfine (1962), elaborating on observations made by Escalona (1953), described mothers who were overzealous in anticipating and preventing frustration on the parts of their infants, thus preventing no build-up of tension to take place, and interfering particularly thereby with the discharge of aggression. In both sets of subjects quoted, those with a steady diet of excessive tension and those without the chance of developing a sufficient amount, the results were affects which were muted, shallow, and hollow, and an incomplete and stilted register of emotions.

A nodal contribution, which resulted in a major change in our viewpoint toward conflict, was Hartmann's classic monograph (1999a)
in which he described and gave due place to the conflict-free ego apparatuses and their roles and destinies in psychic functioning. Present from the beginning as part of the constitutional endowment, they contain a potential for meeting the “average expectable environment” and are to serve an indispensable role in adaptation. While “the ego certainly does grow on conflicts,” Hartmann writes, “these are not the only roots of ego development” (p. 8). In order to fulfill its role as a general developmental psychology, psychoanalysis must encompass and explore thoroughly that prolific “ensemble of functions” which develop and exert their effects outside the realm of mental conflicts, the “peacetime traffic” within the ego borders as well as the history of its conflicts. One of our major tasks is also “to investigate how mental conflict and peaceful internal development mutually facilitate and hamper each other” (p. 11). Of course, Freud’s interest in the phenomena of a “general psychology,” such as in dreams (1900), wit (1905) and everyday life (1901), had long antedated this—although, it is true, at first largely from the point of view of conflict-solving behavior.

In a series of illuminating articles which followed (Hartmann, 1950, 1952, 1955; and with Kris and Loewenstein, 1946), this entire area was amplified in many necessary derivative directions. We learned subsequently of the differentiation between primary and secondary ego autonomy, and how in the latter large portions of the ego previously in the service of defense and conflict may acquire secondary conflict-free autonomy following “a change in function.” Rapaport (1951, 1958), among others, elaborated later on the nature of autonomous structures; and Spitz (1957) on the phenomenon of “change of function,” drawing parallels between such occurrences on the psychological and on the embryological and physiological levels.

With these contributions, and with the entire literature which they triggered, there came an enormous expansion in our understanding of the life of the ego, which was thus to catch up with the previous emphasis given to the role of instinctual drives. Ego action was seen now in fresh perspective, not only with respect to these newly appreciated conflict-free regions, but also, in conjunction with the impetus given concurrently by Anna Freud’s detailed investiga-

tions into the mechanisms of defense (1956), with a more intensive understanding of its role within the conflict situation itself. With these, the processes of adaptation received new dimensions of understanding.

Hartmann (1939a) decisively pointed out, and it bears repetition here, that “It would be an error to assume that the contrast of conflict situation and peaceful development corresponds directly to the antithesis of pathological and normal” (p. 12). Such is of course by no means the case, nor is the dichotomy conflict-free vs. conflictful, by similar error, to be equated with congenital vs. experiential. Rather, all three divisions are scrambled together, in mutual and complementary fashion. Thus, for example, conflict or conflict-free activity can be associated with either the normal or the pathological. “Conflicts are part of the human condition” and absence of conflicts can be associated with failure (Hartmann, 1939a, p. 12). And ontogenetically, apparatuses destined for each sphere are included within the congenital givens, as well as being subject to the facilitations or the deterrents which are to come from subsequent environmental fates. Thus there are inborn defense thresholds (Rapaport, 1951, 1953), as well as the innate conflict-free apparatuses referred to above, all with their own “primary ego energy” to provide their own motive power.

There are spectra in all of these, as we come to see in discussions of most of our psychological phenomena (such as sublimation, conversion, nosology, etc.) so that we may extricate ourselves at once, for example, from the fruitless nature-nurture controversy, or the other similar dichotomies named, in all of which Freud’s original description of the complementary series is to be applied.

Thus the same spectrum and mutuality applies in the reciprocal interaction and overlap which take place continuously between the conflict-laden and the conflict-free spheres of activity themselves. Conflict-free apparatuses may attract to themselves, or else have thrust upon them, conflicting forces, such as in somatic compliance. Similarly, areas of conflict may become conflict-free or secondarily autonomous as described above. Yet, as with all spectra, there are components which belong and operate in a polar fashion at each end. Thus, while some functions or organs are in the central band,
there are nevertheless some which are prone to be free of conflict throughout their developmental histories, while others are more destined to operate within areas of conflict and of mounting tension.

I

I would now like to turn to the nature of the intrapsychic conflict itself, approaching it from two different positions. We might regard the first as a microscopic view; it examines the intricate components which make up the interior of the phenomenon and their sequential relationships, in a manner which I have described (1959) as micropsychophysiology. The second would be a macroscopic view, of how we are confronted with the ingredients and the consequences of conflict in a global way in the clinical and the therapeutic situation, and of what our task consists in that setting.

When applying the microscopic interior view, we should consider the following. Because of the tendency for fusion and synthesis among psychic products, it is necessary, for clarity, to distinguish the various components which take place within the entire arc which comprises the conflict situation and to separate the events which occur prior to, during, and following what can be called the actual period of conflict itself. This would entail delineating separate entities, for example, frustration, the build-up of tension, the occurrence of anxiety, and what relation these bear to the actual conflict situation, and then the defensive catheaxes, inhibitions, symptom formations, or hierarchy of symptom formations which may result. It is my contention that too often such statements as “the patient is overwhelmed by tension—or by anxiety—or by conflict” are loosely interchanged, without clarity. I take it as an opportunity, if not an assignment, to attempt to clarify such issues.

Hartmann (1939a) points out that “It would be meaningless to call every disruption of equilibrium a conflict. This would rob the concept of all precision. Every stimulus disrupts the equilibrium, but not every stimulus causes conflict” (p. 38). Hartmann then reminds us of four different mental states of equilibrium which concern psychoanalysts in relation to our regulation principles. There is the equilibrium between the individual and his environment, the equilibrium of instinctual drives (vital equilibrium), the equilibrium of mental institutions (structural equilibrium), and the equilibrium between the synthetic function and the rest of the ego (p. 39). To my mind, not all of these are of equal and central weight when we come to examine the question of intrapsychic conflict. It is the third of these, the structural equilibrium, which is most regularly involved and of most universal interest by the time a state of intrapsychic conflict is attained; I will comment in further detail below, however, on the important aspects of the equilibrium within the ego itself, as well as on the question of the equilibrium between the instinctual drives.

Freud has given us the model for separating contiguous and closely related events, and for the establishment of the proper sequential relationships between them, in his classic study on anxiety (1926), when he separated and clearly demonstrated the relationship between inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety. Any further elaboration in this area has had to be built upon this base.

The chain of events which leads to, includes, and stems from the significant intrapsychic conflict situation comprises the following sequence:

1. Since we must arbitrarily select a starting point, let us start with a hypothetical state of psychic equilibrium, with a person at ease, content, at rest, not particularly “bothered” by anything. He is well defended and averagely satisfied with how adapted he is at that moment. (Such states are, to be sure, most often transitional and not too long-lasting in daily waking life.) You will remember also that in accordance with our constancy and nirvana principles, it is not called for that such a state be tension-free; rather a condition of optimum tension exists, indeed one “characteristic for the organism,” as has been pointed out by Fenichel (1945). Actually, all four of Hartmann’s specific equilibria enumerated above are in a relative state of quiescence to achieve this dynamic-economic state, although it is the intrapsychic reverberations (Hartmann includes the environment) which are decisive and which, from my point of view, we will be especially compelled to watch.

2. This existing equilibrium, between the psychic structures as well as at the other levels, is impinged upon by a precipitating factor.
This may be either from an external stimulus (influx) or from within, somatic or psychic. The latter may come from any one of various possible directions, for example, from an increase in intrasystemic instinctual tension, or a relaxation of a defensive ego anticathexis. While a common instance is that of an increase in instinctual pressure, either libidinal or aggressive, it is possible, in accordance with Hartmann's principle of autonomy, that an increase in intrasystemic tension can originate ab initio from other than the instinctual-drive organization, for example, from the exercise of an ego judgment, or the arousal of a superego attitude toward a specific existing instinctual urge. Writing on hierarchy and autonomy, Rapaport (1960) states: "these more neutralized derivative motivations will be autonomous from—i.e., can be activated without being triggered by—the underlying less neutralized motivations. For instance, they may discharge when their autonomously accumulated energy reaches threshold intensity."

3. When such a stimulus encroaches, a new imbalance is created, and a new economic condition prevails. From whatever source it originates, when it reaches a sufficient magnitude, it is the ego which is confronted with this new situation.

4. There are a great variety of possibilities from this point on, some of trivial psychoeconomic import, not going many steps beyond this. For the sake of pursuing, however, what follows in the case of an appreciable and significant disturbance of the psychoeconomic condition, I will select one of the possibilities, in fact, one of the quite typical outcomes, and pursue this along its possible course. It should be borne in mind that this is selective and of course extremely schematic, as is inevitable in any such stripping process which attempts to arrive at "model" activities.

The "typical" situation I have chosen is one in which, from whatever source it originates, whether activated directly or by stimulation from any of the other sources mentioned, an instinctual temptation is aroused. This may be a new instinctual pressure, or a necessary recontemplation of an old one. At once, however, the ego is now confronted with this instinctual demand, while facing a superego and possible external figures ready to pass judgment. (The superego is a sine qua non in this intrapsychic process, the external figure may be an added burden.) Between these and after it judges the nature of these forces, the ego will have to make a decision.

5. In our literature it is frequently stated, quite summarily, that at this point the ego uses anxiety as a signal. While this is certainly true, we must interpose first a few vital steps, indispensable links in the sequential chain, which take place at this juncture as preparatory stages before the anxiety signal can ensue—steps which it is my impression are usually glibly over in our descriptions of this process.

The ego is now subjected, automatically, to the experience of this new balance of intersystemic forces and to their mutual interaction. Not automatic, however, is the dosage. The ego, in control, permits only a slight amount of discharge of the instinctual tension, sampling the gratification which ensues, and ready for the consequences thereof. The latter is forthcoming immediately, and again automatically, but again in controlled dosage, in proportion to the cautious instinctual pleasure which had been permitted. This is not yet the intrapsychic conflict but a miniature controlled sample of the conflict which might ensue if the entire dose were to be permitted. We might call it a minor preliminary phase. Hartmann and Loewenstein (1962) have called a similar process "tentative temptation," but one which they refer to in a more limited and special way. "Here the ego allows itself a small dose of gratification which then serves to set in motion the forces of the superego."

6. The ego samples all of these. The analogy which Freud (1926) made between signal anxiety and inoculation comes to mind and applies to this phase as well. This is like a skin test, a preliminary small dose of the antigen, to test the reactions of the host. Just as thought is experimental action, so this entire interaction is experienced, in controlled amount, in an experimental way and in a signal manner. The experience, which was an experimental conflict, is to conflict what thought, which is experimental action, is to action. Neither is yet the end result.

The concept of the signal can, it seems to me, be extended forward to explain, with profit, this phase as well. The experimental action, the controlled gratification, is a signal action, as is the return signal of the superego's reaction. The ego receives, judges, and reacts to this series of preliminary signals,
7. The reaction is crucial, the estimate of the danger. The ego is the recipient, on the basis of the above, of either an automatic reaction of anxiety or else of a sense of safety. On the basis of this, the ego judges that there either is or is not a danger situation, and if so whether it is mild or severe.

8. If the latter is deemed mild or nonexistent, the ego can act accordingly toward the instinctual demands, and allow lenient gratification. During the course of everyday life such an outcome occurs frequently, with action or other behavioral discharge taking place without even the production of a significant intrapsychic conflict. Up to this point the latter cannot yet be said to have occurred. The scanning, judging, and filtering functions of the ego, which constitute a continuous action during the process of waking life, have performed their tasks without too much challenge. We might say, in Hartmann's sense, that the equilibrium—or rather, the equilibria have been disturbed, but a conflict did not ensue.

9. However, the result may not be the above, but instead the ego may judge that there is indeed an appreciable danger involved if the instinct in question were to be yielded to, danger from the superego or from the external world (castration or loss of love), or from the strength of the instincts themselves. This is now the true stage of the anxiety signal. As a result of having experienced a small sample of a significant danger, and of being able to judge and anticipate what its full impact would be, signal anxiety is automatically experienced, a new level of signal, and the crucial one in this train of events. This may range in intensity from mild and easily controlled, to severe and barely controlled, or may presage the imminence of panic or of the traumatic state, as in Schur's (1953) series of controlled to uncontrolled anxiety. Incidentally, lest this point be overlooked, it should be made explicit that the outcome here depends not only on the particular current stimulus in question, either its quantitative or qualitative aspects, but more importantly on the extent to which this has access to and arouses a traumatic chain of memory traces, i.e., the pull from the repressed, as well as the push from above. It is, as always, the situation in depth, based on the ontogenetic history, which is crucial.

10. Only now does a significant increment of conflict ensue. I say "increment" to differentiate it from the quiescent conflict which existed as a baseline even before the present stimulus appeared. This increase is that specifically related to the new disturber (and its ability to arouse latent ones).

As will become clearer with what follows, this present spurt of conflict is only one phase of the conflict's total later history, and can be designated as "major phase one" of the conflict (there has been previously the "minor" phase referred to above, i.e., the experimental, controlled, signal phase). It is anxiety—or more correctly, the danger which this anxiety heralds—which caused this new and major increment in conflict, just as this same anxiety will be the motive for defense. The motive must precede (this phase of) the conflict, and the conflict must precede the later defense. At this stage, and as a result of the estimate of danger occasioned by the degree of signal anxiety, the ego is "in conflict" as to what to do next.

It might at this point occur to you to intercede, as it did indeed to several discussants on first hearing this material, with the question, "But doesn't conflict cause anxiety, rather than the other way around?" It might thus be thought, for example, that it is the perceived or experienced conflict between the superego and the id which causes the ego to feel the anxiety. To this I would say first that the superego's demonstrated opposition to the instincts has so far mostly been kept in check. At best it can be argued that only a minor and experimental conflict has at yet ensued, as stated above, with a more major one perceived as potential if certain things were allowed to happen (i.e., instinctual gratification). It is for this reason that I said above that the (i.e., significant) intrapsychic conflict has not yet taken place. However, speaking more strictly, it might be said that even in the controlled minor and experimental interchange, what has been demonstrated and experienced so far has not been an existing conflict but a series consisting of act and punishment (in small doses). The potential doer and the reactive punisher have been defined, but they have not yet locked grips, i.e., there is not yet a conflict between them, with forces deployed one to the other. Moreover, as I will show in another paper (1963b), it is even a question.

\[\text{Drs. Arlow and Schur both posed this question in discussing this point during the panel discussion at which this paper was presented (see Nemiah, 1963).}\]
whether the superego is in conflict with the id in the usual instance at all, or whether it is not rather in conflict only with the ego, in response to a certain attitude of the latter toward the id. In this sense, it might properly be said that the ego has by now suffered a small amount of experimental intersystemic conflict, felt by it from the direction of the superego as a result of its already slight gratification of the id. In this sense the anxiety can be said to be a result of this already-discovered conflict. But speaking strictly again, what actually caused the anxiety was not the conflict but the danger which was revealed as lurking in the superego.

So, at the most, a small experimental and only minor conflict has revealed the danger, which provoked the signal anxiety. As a result of the latter, and depending on its extent, a major increment now occurs, what we may call a first phase of the major conflict. The ego is now “in conflict” as to what it should do next.

This is a good point at which to consider another issue which makes for confusion and which needs clarification at once. The term “conflict” has two different meanings which need to be distinguished in this discussion. One is, according to Webster, “competition or opposing action of incompatibles—antagonism, as of divergent interests.” Another is “a battle, a fight, struggle, hostile encounter.” What I have just outlined about the ego’s conflict applies to it in the first of these meanings, in the sense of competing alternatives, and the obligation to effect a choice. It is in fact this meaning which occurred to me first as the usual one, which an analyst thinks of when he speaks of the ego as being in conflict. However, the second has of course just as much validity and even a longer historical tradition in our field.

In my opinion, this differentiation has not been pointed out or at least is usually neglected or insufficiently kept in mind in the psychoanalytic literature on intrapsychic conflict. Historically, it was the opposition-of-forces type which first held exclusive sway in our early theoretical formulations. While the participants in the struggle changed a number of times, the form of it endured. However, the alternative-competition or decision type of conflict described above entered the scene with the tripartite structural model and the role assigned to the ego as mediator and integrator between the other two systems. Although such a function came into play at once, this new distinction in types of conflict was not, to my knowledge, made explicit. This division of meanings of our main term, however, is indispensable and must clearly be borne in mind when we follow the changing interrelationships which take place.

To return now, after this necessary digression, to the plight of the ego, it is to be noted that its problem at this point is an intersystemic one. This point is the center of a separate accompanying paper (1963b) in which I elaborate in greater detail on the structural questions with regard to intrapsychic conflict. Possessed now of an awareness of cause and expected effect, of impulse and anticipated punishment, the ego is confronted with an internal, intersystemic decision-dilemma, as to what to do, which to choose, how to find a way out.

I should like to pause still further at this stage to make a number of other relevant observations which come to light here. It may be noted, for example—and this is also a point which, it is my impression, is frequently not appreciated—that the severity of the conflict, at least this segment and form of it, is not necessarily proportional to the severity of the anxiety. Thus, I believe it would be accurate to state that the decision-conflict at this point is most intense, not with the most intense anxiety, but rather in the middle of the spectrum of intensity of the latter. Such a conflict-dilemma is at its height when the forces comprising it are most nearly balanced, while the issue is more easily decided in one direction or the other when the balance is uneven. Thus in mild signal anxiety, this conflict is minimal, in favor of instincts. But similarly when the anxiety is severe or there is even the verge of panic, it is not the conflict which reaches a high peak but rather the ego’s doubts with regard to its own resources. In other words, in the face of the severity or imminence of the threat, the ego’s concern is not which way to go, but whether it is able to go in the direction it knows it must, i.e., repress, or otherwise defend. The ego is now not so much in a state of conflict as in a state of impending impotence, or at least of relative insufficiency. Can it stave off the threatening pressures? It is faced now with the possibility of the signal becoming an actual danger, to the point of psychic helplessness.
A corollary of the above is that the severity of the (ultimate) outcome is also not necessarily proportional either to the severity of the anxiety or to the intensity of the conflict. There may be the most anxiety in a phobic, the worst conflict in an obsessional, and the most severe total pathology in a psychotic. The determining factor is the relative strength and resourcefulness of the ego in the face of the particular balance of threats.

Thus, an example of the most intense and raging conflict of this (dilemma) nature is that behind a severely obsessional state, rather than in more severe psychopathological conditions. Ambivalence, indecision, an almost precise and devastating balance are the rule, sometimes with simultaneous and at times with alternating opposing actions, representing in turn each arm of the conflicting forces. Indeed, the ego here must be strong to contend with such formidable adversaries, and this is often the case in the obsessional neurotic, who may appear in many ways as if made of iron. In more regressed and malignant states, however, as in schizophrenic or other psychotic episodes, while the pressures may be more severe, and the threats more overwhelming, it is the disorganization of the ego and its relative insufficiency in the face of these primitive archaic and violent forces, at the level to which regressions have taken place, which form the core of the psychopathology at this phase, rather than a greater intensity of the conflictual state.

11. I will now return to an examination of the continuing succession of events. We have seen until now how signal anxiety brings on conflict, which then behooves the ego to act, to choose, to look for a solution—of course, at the least price. What follows now are the sequelae of this phase of conflict, the attempts at its resolution.

In a favorable situation, with the threat the least, the forces impinging not too great, and the sufficiency of the ego resources quite equal to the task, mastery is achieved with the least sacrifice and the most satisfactory and simple solution. Anna Freud (1962) quotes, as a good prognostic sign, the child who, when frustrated, can simply say, "Okay." (I add: In a way which we do not have to worry about!) In contrast to the situation described above in which signal anxiety was not forthcoming at all, as a consequence of which the ego was able to permit lenient discharge, the present situation generally calls, even in a most favorable instance, for at least a certain amount of defense, of denial, repression, or other. This is seen to institute the next phase of conflict, although here in a benign and adequate way, either an increment or at least a reaffirmation of the existing intersystemic conflict between the ego and the instincts. Now the form of the conflict changes to the opposition type, with counter-cathetic ego energy being called for and sacrificed at the ego-id border. We can call this the "second major phase" of the conflict emanating from the original traumatic stimulus which I hypothesized. It supersedes and outlasts the first "decision" phase, and will continue, after the latter may have come to rest, until a final point of relative stability is achieved.

12. Under less favorable circumstances, however, things continue to happen, and the instincts will not be so easily put off. I would like to single out, en route to symptom formation, a next intermediate phase which the ego undergoes in its successive and continuing steps toward an attempt at resolution. This is a phase, quite regular in its occurrence, which is often passed over quickly, and which I feel deserves the dignity of separate attention commensurate with its clinical importance. It is the state of dammed-up tension, occasioned by the fact that, while the blockage of discharge is exerted, the instinctual pressures will not abate. The intersystemic, opposition type of conflict continues in an unstable form. The resulting tension state, from a continuing increase and a damming-up of this instinctual pressure, plays, I believe, a regularly significant part in the ensemble of derivative sequelae which follow the suffering of conflict.

Intersystemic conflict thus results in increasing intrasystemic tension, which in turn exerts intersystemic effects. Tension continues to harass the ego, which, depending on its intensity and the relative strength of the ego to absorb or resist or otherwise handle it, may remain as an enduring state, or may be transitory, to be superseded by more definitive symptoms, or else may, in more favorable situations, recede.

I will again digress briefly, this time because we touch here upon certain aspects of the theory of anxiety. It was this stage within the parade of intrapsychic dynamic events which I believe led Freud to his theory of "actual neurosis" and of the direct transformation of repressed libido into anxiety. And it was his correct observation of
the existence of this phase which caused him to retain this theory of direct toxic transformation even after he changed to his second, signal theory of anxiety (1926). In my unitary concept of anxiety (1955), I feel that I resolved Freud’s “non-liquet” statement with regard to these two conflicting theories, by retaining the existence of this tension state, but not with his explanation of transformed libido. This state of tension does exist, as stated here, but it is not anxiety.

Although I have spoken in favor of its presence, I have differentiated this state from the actual-neurotic anxiety of which Freud spoke, and with which Fenichel tends to concur. In my view, the dammed-up state is one sequel stemming from anxiety, as in the sequence which I have shown above, or anxiety may then again follow from it (see below) in circular fashion. But the two are not the same, and in each case the anxiety, when it occurs, serves the same function, i.e., the recognition and signal of danger. When anxiety follows this tension state, and is admixed to it, the danger which it forebodes is that of the dammed-up state continuing, or getting worse, and of the ego being overrun by the instincts.

There are a number of other points of difference between my view and the original concept of actual-neurotic anxiety, chiefly in that the latter implies an absence of ego or even of mental participation and a direct physiological transformation to anxiety. This latter view is concurred in by Blau (1952) and unequivocally by Benjamin (1961) but is disputed by most other students of the problem of anxiety, as Brenner (1958), Schur (1958), Greenacre (1941), Spitz (1950), and Kubie (1941). A number of the latter, however, fail to assign any place to the dammed-up state in the spectrum of psychic events.

I return from this brief and unavoidable digression into anxiety theory. This tension state has its own derivative effects, which stem directly from this dynamic and economic situation rather than from any other part of the total complex arc, or the composite collection of them all. Certain subjective experiences of the patient, which may be part of his final total symptom complex, may derive from these intrasystemic instinctual pressures themselves. They may come out in such expressions as “I feel like busting out all over,” or “I’m going to burst out of my skin,” or even by another derivative step of incipient somatization, “I just feel itchy and tense all over.” One patient put it, “I feel like a Cadillac engine in a Ford body.” Such feelings, sometimes spoken and most often not, may be quite universally behind all the more varied symptoms of severe and more definitive neurotic disorder, due precisely to an insufficiency of the ego in the face of continuously pressing instinctual demands. Fenichel (1945) is of the same opinion when he states that “actual-neurotic symptoms form the nucleus of all psychoneuroses” (p. 192). Fenichel divides the symptoms attributable directly to this tension state into negative and positive ones (p. 168 ff.). The negative symptoms, which consist of general inhibitions of ego functions, are due to a decrease of available energy as a result of the energy consumed in the service of defense. The positive symptoms are traceable to the instinctual pressures themselves, and consist of “painful feelings of tension, of emergency discharges, including spells of anxiety and rage, and producing sleep disturbances due to the impossibility of relaxation.” I would say that the latter are already indirect effects.

13. The above phase, although I have belabored it to give it its due place, is most often a transitional one, to be followed by further attempts at a more stable and a more livable-with resolution of the unstable and continuing conflict state. I cannot discuss in equal detail all the possible succeeding steps toward conflict resolution, but will have to pass over the rest by merely stating them. This is due not only to limits of space, for such an undertaking would necessitate the space of a book, but also because these next moves involve the traditional center of psychoanalytic exploration, have been the phases most copiously studied in the past, and are not the center of our interest at this time. They involve the well-known methods of symptom formation, including regression (to previous points of fixation), and the entire range of compromise formations which arise as end products. In a wider sense and over a more sustained view they also lead in the direction of character formation. Although these more stable resolutions are still along the line of conflict solving, in the interest of selectivity I have here enlarged only upon those relatively earlier phases which have usually not been highlighted and on the several dynamic details which to my mind have not been spelled out clearly before—see, e.g., Nemiah’s review (1962).
II

For my focus of interest, it should be noted that the process of conflict formation itself continues alongside of and subsequent to the various sequelae which its presence has initiated. Thus, as noted above, the tension state itself may become a source of anxiety, with a new layering of conflict resulting and demanding solution on its own account. Similarly, there may be defenses against defenses, or a symptom may be defended against, or an entire neurosis may represent a new threat to the ego. These may be for reasons related to the original etiologic conflict, or the motives and the anticipated dangers now may be of quite a different caliber, but in either case they then trigger off a repetition of the entire process, which may then again be repeated, either in whole or in part, etc.

The above process, however, is not limited to psychopathologic events, but may similarly be responsible for the achievement of highly effective psychic formations. Thus, Rapaport (1953) has eloquently described such a process of increasingly complex hierarchic development in the formation of derivative motivational drives and of increasingly complex ego defenses. The same layering process is at the root of the "taming of affects" described by Fenichel (1941) and of the increasingly subtle shadings of affect discharge which become possible with the attainment of maturity, as described by Jacobson (1952, 1953) and by Rapaport (1953). This continuous process of conflict solution, derivative conflict, and derivative solution results in the increasing neutralization and modulation which accompany the course of psychic development. Along with neutralization, increasing ego autonomy, and the use of increasingly effective sublimatory discharge channels, these processes, to quote Jacobson (1952), "change the quality of drives, bind mobile energy, and by producing various combinations of high- and low-speed discharge processes result in the complex affect experiences of some of our most sublime pleasurable states."

Rapaport (1960), writing on motivations, states "clinical evidence shows that the defense motives are themselves subject to defense formation, and indeed whole hierarchies of such defense and derivative motivations layered one over the other must be postu-

lated to explain even common clinical phenomena. Knight, and Gill have demonstrated this for the relationships of aggression, homosexuality, and paranoia. This hierarchic layering of structures is conceived to be the means by which the neutralization of instinctual-drive cathectes is brought about. These multiple structural obstacles transform the peremptory instinctual drives into delayable motivations by setting the structural conditions under which the pleasure principle must operate."

The process of decomposing, which demonstrates the stratification in the developed state, can further be compared and viewed with profit against the background of the ontogenetic development. It will be remembered that the earliest months of life, in gross description, are characterized psychically by the experiencing of frustration, tension, unpleasure and pleasure, but not yet anxiety or conflict. The psychic apparatus, such as it is, is directed toward a unified purpose, that of discharge, under the complete sway of the pleasure principle. With the advent of anxiety—and it does not matter for our purposes whose timetable we adhere to as to when this supervenes—there is added the capacity to anticipate and to delay, resulting in the acquisition now of conflict, but at this stage between inner (needs) and outer (sources of supply).

Perhaps we can say that the true intrapsychic conflict arises only with what Spitz (1957) calls the third organizer of the psyche, the achievement of the ideational concept of the negative and the affirmative. Although there were barriers to discharge long before this, such as the inborn defense thresholds, or the stimulus barrier, these can by no means be said to have constituted the nature of a true conflict. "The tacit assumption that the stimulus barrier represents such an opposing force is misleading. . . . The stimulus barrier is neither an obstacle, nor does it express refusal. It is a manifestation of a maturational state, namely, that at birth the sensorium is not yet cathexed. . . . The stimulus barrier does not belong in the same conceptual category as negation and affirmation" (Spitz, 1957, p. 105). With the acquisition of apparatus for the latter, "beyond doubt the most spectacular intellectual and semantic achievement in early childhood" (p. 99), a new level of ego integration is reached which heralds the advent of symbolization, abstract thinking, and concept formation, and converts passivity to activity. While this new state brings
with it the triumphant ability to refuse, deny, and oppose the environment, it also means, concomitantly, the same ability to oppose and countermand inner forces; indeed it brings with it an increased necessity to do so. The entire scope is enlarged, and with the increased range of ego functioning comes also greater exposure to danger, and hence a greater need, and with it a greater ability, to defend. Now there is possible, and exists, a true intrapsychic conflict.

This ontogenetic acquisition, in stages, of frustration, tension, anxiety, and conflict, has its counterparts, as described, and is recapitulated in the stratification which exists in the end result of psychic development. In regression, or in states of slow-motion psychopathology, they can be seen again in their separate states.

There are a good many further problems in relation to intrapsychic conflicts which center on the structural composition of such conflicts and the various possibilities which exist. These are of a sufficient order of magnitude and are sufficiently cohesive so that I have decided to deal with them in a separate paper (1963b).

III

The above presents the complexity of the procession of intrapsychic events in which conflict plays a part. It helps the accuracy of our understanding clearly to elucidate and to bear in mind that conflict itself is only a part of the process; that it comprises crucial links in the chain, but is not the entire process. We are apt, in the grosser clinical setting, which will be discussed below, to speak loosely of a patient being "overwhelmed by conflict," when we might more properly mean "by the unbearable tension from instinctual pressure, or by severe anxiety at the prospect of impending danger, or by an unconscious premonition of a hopelessly ineffective ego in the face of forces against which it will wither." These are all close together, to be sure, and intermingle, but it would benefit us conceptually to separate the successive components. Conflict plays an important part in all, but it is sometimes at the center, and sometimes at the periphery of the presenting segments from this etiologic chain.

The above events, although they have been teased apart and presented as a discreet succession of psychic phenomena, can and usually are compressed in time so that they may take but a moment to exert their effects. As befits the variability of human behavior, however, the temporal characteristics of this process may range from almost instantaneous action at one end to prolonged, stabilized, and almost static behavioral processes at the other. Thus, for example, we all know how in daily waking life the entire gamut from initiating stimulus to a final end point of one kind or another can take place rapidly and repeatedly, most often entirely subliminally, but at times with such telltale surface derivatives that an analyst, or sometimes even the subject, can be aware of the process. The rapidity with which such psychic processes operate are familiar to us in dream formation, where we know how a seemingly long and complex dream can occur in but a moment following the application of an experimental waking stimulus. Or the same can be attested by Fisher's experiments (1954, 1956) in which the tachistoscopic signal is incorporated instantaneously into a ready and complicated psychic functioning. Or it is known to us in reports, such as I have heard from a patient, of how, in a moment during which death is expected, the crucial events in almost an entire life history can flash before a person. My patient was lying in a trench during the Battle of the Bulge and caught sight of an enemy soldier with a bayonet in full view above him. He lived to tell me later what went on in his mind during but a moment.

When I thought of what examples I might present to illustrate some of the theoretical sequences outlined here, I chose two instances at opposite ends of the temporal spectrum. One was at the short-lived end just talked about, and consisted of an episode in which a patient, talking comfortably to a few friends, had a question, or really just a remark, directed at him, which almost instantly caused him to feel a flush. Although so brief—and I chose it because of its benignity and universality—an analysis of the intervening phases into which the resulting process could be broken down, which took place in the moment between stimulus and response, would show some fifteen or twenty separable components along the lines outlined above. To elaborate on the details of these would take another complete presentation, just as the analysis of the simplest of dreams can take a chapter.

At the other end of the spectrum, both in time as well as in
severity of outcome, I thought of a woman patient who had been living for the last eight or ten years between the horns of an in-terminable dilemma, caught in the gripping throes of an illicit love affair. Since her nature and her history did not make her particularly facile at such an activity, the dilemma was correspondingly more meaningful and rocked her very foundations. The forces of the commanding and all-embracing intrapsychic conflict were strong on each side and fairly evenly balanced, which accounted for its tenacity and long duration. As I knew this patient I could observe many of the phases which I have described, this time not all telescoped together, but living out their filtered effects in discreetly visible segments of time. Thus one could observe either in the one hour or over a period of days or weeks how the patient would be dominated at one time by the victory and excitement of the instinctual drives, at another by the ascendancy of the nagging, tormenting, and threatening superego, and at still another overtaken by the state of sometimes controllable and sometimes uncontrollable anxiety. Some of these states were quite transitory, others lasted longer, and some were fused in various combinations. Again to illustrate the details would take time of an order which I do not have. Many other such cases could be adduced.

In a recent paper “Beyond and Between the No and the Yes” (1963a), I spoke of the realm of the ambivalent and the undecided, of those who spend their lives in this in-between region. I described between the No and the Yes the world of the “Nyeh” (meaning “Who cares?” and accompanied, as it is spoken, by a shrug of the shoulders), and gave clinical examples. Different from the true ob-sessional or even the ambivalent, it portrays a type of character who has developed a certain specific, albeit I believe common, character attitude toward conflicting forces.

In opposite vein from the interior view of the discreet components of intrapsychic conflict, I would like to balance these now by pointing out that at the other end of the spectrum, as in the final clinical state, we see a tendency not to dissect and to separate, but to fuse and to combine, so that the clinical picture we see is more likely to be a composite behavioral mass, composed of the various ingredients cohered together. This is what I meant at the start as a macroscopic as contrasted to a microscopic view of the ingredients and products of the conflict state.

The presenting picture might by this time be expressed by a nondescript cover-all, “I don’t know, I just feel nervous,” or “I just feel terrible,” or “all in”—characterizations which are not necessarily evasive but are indicative of this agglutination process. I recently described (1955), as a case in point, the multiplicity of background factors which lay behind the façade in a patient who could only describe that he felt “weird.” This was again seen to be a composite compounded out of many separate ingredients which would take pages to include. The free associations of any analytic hour demonstrate this.

In keeping with the ego’s synthetic function, what we are confronted with clinically is not only the symptom, which is already a compromise of impulse and defense, but a total clinical picture which might contain within it still-pressing instinctual tensions, derivatives and equivalents of anxiety itself, evidences of superego actions, and intricate secondary elaborations. The clinical picture is much like the dream, kaleidoscopic in its contents and distorted in its syntax. Besides the secondary gain of symptoms, I have described (1954b) a tertiary gain, relating to changes in body image and the concept of the self. There are probably other elaborations, as complex and as hierarchic as is the development of the psychic apparatus itself.

All this is what the patient does, with and around and on top of his conflicts. Our task as analysts is to reverse the direction, to separate, to decompose, and thus to be able to analyze. In spite of his resistance, the patient welcomes this, at least with that part of his ego which is in therapeutic alliance with us. To get at the intrapsychic conflicts, and the succession of events around them, aimed eventually at the infantile neurosis, comprises the center of our task. The uncovering of the successive events, the accurate reconstruction not only of their subtle contents, but of their syntactical interrelationships, is what our modus operandi consists of and what we offer to the patient, “with which to build a better life.” With every degree to which we accomplish this reordering, the patient receives added hope of eventual complete understanding and mastery.

This brings me to a final point of interest. It often happens that
the modern American character as due to deficiencies in their ego identity, so that "they do not know who or what they are or what they want to be," but many analysts also offer similar explanations as the basis for many of our present-day "borderline" or character problems. At times this is done, as Waelder (1961) points out, as a defense against, or at least at the expense of, libidoinal conflicts.

The same mechanism is reminiscent of the differences between psychotherapy, which stops at intermediate formulations, and psychoanalysis, which addresses itself toward the nuclear infantile conflicts as its ultimate goal (Rangell, 1954a).

I would contend instead that such ego disturbances are as much the results as they are the causes of psychopathology. Thus a disturbance in identity, just as a disturbance in the concept of the self, or of the body image, evolves first as an outcome of intrapsychic conflict rather than being a satisfactory explanation of the cause of it. It is then likely to serve as a further stimulus to maladaptive functioning. An age-specific "crisis" of ego identity is an intrapsychic conflict (or combination of conflicts) composed of elements specific to the instinctual and ego problems of that particular age, such as occurs notably at adolescence. Erikson (1950) frequently refers to such identity conflicts, and Jacobson (1963) has stressed at length such interaction.

Of greater cogency are explanations whose scope encompass the broad range of the relevant intrapsychic conflicts and which take into account the nature of the forces and the structures of which these are composed. Thus, explanations for many of the stubborn and frustrating cases on today's scene might include, among other elements, specific new types of crippling suffered by the psychic systems of persons brought up in a particular segment of today's cultural soil. I would also predict such findings as that they may not know whom to love or hate, so that instinctual object is only hesitantly attached to instinctual aim. The identifications of which the ego is a precipitate may have been spotty, shifting, and unreliable, leaving these characteristics behind in the patient's ego itself. But above all, the motives for defense are often not clear and crisply known, so that such a patient is apt to ask clinging, "Should I be afraid? Am I supposed to feel guilty, or to be ashamed?" Such stamps cannot fail to have a profound effect upon and to bring about new

constructs arise, valuable and informative ones in themselves, which are in a sense midway and intermediate formations in this psychic unfolding, whether one thinks of it in terms of the direction from origins toward the final presenting picture, or in the reverse, the direction from the presenting clinical façade working backward, as we do therapeutically, toward origins. Such constructs, which usually have abundant validity as empirical phenomena as well as widespread theoretical significance, may then be used misleadingly as a central explanatory concept, presumably of irreducible import. As examples, I would mention the very useful concepts of the self, the self- (and object) representations, ego identity, and other closely related phenomena, which have received a great deal of attention in our recent literature. Broad and lucid investigations of these psychic formations, in particular by Jacobson (1954, 1963) and by Erikson (1950), have enriched our understanding of many aspects of human behavior. However, there is also a tendency on the parts of many to use such concepts without proper perspective.

Both the concept of the self and that of ego identity are in themselves complex psychic achievements, each culminating from a combination of maturational factors, conflict solutions, and conflict-free experiences and activities. Each in turn can serve as a nub which contributes further either to conflictful or to conflict-free activities, and from which emanate either bland or charged affective experiences. They thus result from as well as contribute to complex psychic derivatives. The major writers in these fields, referred to above, have described extensively the weblike genetic and structural determinants going into the formation of "the self" or "an identity" as well as the complexities which follow from them and which depend upon their status and composition.

I can demonstrate, however, as an example of the misuse of these concepts, the use of "disturbances in ego identity" as an ultimate explanatory concept for a multiplicity of clinical states. While the recognition of this type of disturbance was a valuable addition which enriched our knowledge of psychopathology, this concept has been used excessively and, to my mind, inappropriately, to explain the origins of many symptoms, character defects, and conflict states. Thus, not only did I recently hear a well-known psychoanalytically influenced author in a public interview diagnose the troubles of
qualities of intrapsychic conflict. These certainly leave their mark on the identity and the self, but secondarily, and these then further influence the course of events.

As a general formulation, however, it can be said that the etiologic core of a piece of psychopathology lies in an otherwise insoluble intrapsychic conflict, or group of conflicts, associatively linked through a series of less and less distorted derivatives to the infantile neurosis.

The goal of treatment is not the removal of all conflict or even of the potential for conflict, which is part of the human condition, but rather of the pathogenic conflicts and their derivatives, and of the entire sequential processes of which they are in the center. "Conflict-free," Erikson (1962) writes, "is a miserly way of characterizing our access... to the world of deeds." It is rather "an ego state of active tension" for which one strives. This, according to Jones (1942), results in the "gusto" of the healthy individual. Civilization, Freud (1930) has pointed out, owes its advances largely to the price of frustration, conflict, and neurosis. All students of the normal mind, as Jones (1942), Hartmann (1939b), Reider (1950), and Anna Freud (1959), concur in the fallacy of equating normality with the conflict-free. Gill (1963), discussing whether defenses can disappear after an analysis, writes, "In a hierarchical conception, the defenses are as much the wof of personality functioning as the drives and drive derivatives are its warp." Anna Freud (1962) emphasized the valuable and widespread use of regression, not only in the service of the creative and noble in human accomplishment, but in the daily lives of "little people."

Actually, the goal is to achieve optimum conditions for both the conflictful and the conflict-free spheres of operation, and the possibility for a mutually enhancing relationship between them. The ego should be free to benefit from the advantages accruing from each, which Kris described as stemming from peaks of comfort and discomfort in the developing infant. By various combinations of such experiences, as well as the "lowgrade discharges with lower peaks, but more steady and sustained" which Jacobson describes, there can result the "sublime pleasurable states" of the adult which have been described by Jacobson, Rapaport, Fenichel and other psychoanalytic students of affect.

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STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS IN INTRAPSYCHIC CONFLICT

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In my first paper on intrapsychic conflict (1963), I attempted to assess the scope of intrapsychic conflict in human psychology, tracing briefly the historical changes and leading up to our present thinking. I then attempted to have us observe the course of an intrapsychic conflict, in somewhat stripped and “model” form, in what I called a microscopic view of the processes which take place from the time of the advent of the precipitating stimulus to its final resolution in one form or another. This was contrasted with a macroscopic view of what we see clinically and in the therapeutic situation in the manifest surface derivatives of this composite process.

This was a broad approach which traversed a long psychogenetic arc. While certain sections of this arc were selected for more detailed examination, other areas were dealt with only tangentially. Among the latter was the question of the structural characteristics of intrapsychic conflict. The present paper represents an amplification, extension, and a more detailed exposition on this particular segment of the problem. It is accorded separate treatment in the hope that the ambiguities inherent in excessive condensation can thus be avoided.

Such a more extensive treatment is also indicated to take into sufficient account the valuable new views put forth on this specific aspect by Hartmann and by Hartmann and Loewenstein. The former, in his detailed inquiry into the structure and functions of the ego (1950), and the latter, in their similar investigation more recently on the superego (1962), have pointed to the possibilities of intrapsystemic conflicts within these respective agencies. The need for a proper perspective and orientation toward such conflicts came up for extensive discussion in the course of the panel on intrapsychic