Bulletin of the
Anna Freud Centre
(1985). Bulletin of the Anna Freud Centre, 8(4):223-244

Towards a Reconsideration of the Psychoanalytic Theory of Motivation

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The topic of motivation is an extraordinarily difficult one to study, and has preoccupied psychologists for many years. One of the major difficulties has been the fact that neither in the field of general psychology nor in the more specific area of psychoanalysis is there agreement on what a motive really is. And even when we turn to the relatively restricted area of psychoanalytic theory we find that we cannot be sure whether the term 'motive' refers to drives, drive derivatives, affects, feelings, needs, wishes, aims, intentions, reasons or causes. The term is one of those which can be said to possess, to a remarkable degree, the quality of elasticity, and its meaning is highly dependent on the context in which it is used. It reflects a multidimensional concept, and in this connection I have commented elsewhere that such concepts

> play a very important part in holding psychoanalytic theory together. As psychoanalysis is made up of formulations at varying levels of abstraction, and of part-theories which do not integrate well with one another, the existence of pliable, context-dependent concepts allows an overall framework of psychoanalytic theory to be assembled. Parts of this framework are rigorously spelled out, but can only articulate with similar part-theories if they are not tightly connected, if the concepts which form the joints are flexible. Above all, the value of such a loosely jointed theory is that it allows developments in psychoanalytic theory to take place without necessarily causing overt radical disruptions in the overall theoretical structure of psychoanalysis. The elastic and flexible concepts take up the strain of theoretical change, absorbing it while more organized newer theories or part-theories can develop…. Such an approach to psychoanalytic concepts regards each as having a set of *dimensions of meaning*, as

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A note of appreciation for valuable suggestions is due to the members of an ongoing seminar for staff and students conducted at the Anna Freud Centre under the chairmanship of the author. The final version of the paper was presented at a symposium on Motivation held in New York as part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Columbia Psychoanalytic Institute, April 1985.

> existing in a meaning-space, in which it moves as its context and sense changes. (Sandler, **1983**, p. 36)

It follows that in addressing oneself to the concept of motivation one has to consider, so to speak, a meaning-space rather than a point in such a space. There are many paths one can take in one's explorations of the meaning of the concept, and the one I shall describe will only be that which reflects my own struggles with the concept. Moreover, these conceptual struggles were for the most part not explicitly connected with the theory of motivation, but were rather implicit in much of the work reported by my close colleagues and myself. In retrospect, it seems clear that our own pre-occupations were in many respects the same as those which occupied the minds of many of those associated with the Columbia Institute, pre-eminently Rado and Kardiner, although our own solutions to the problems concerned were, I think, rather different.

Having given myself a licence to be imprecise, I want to take as a starting point for my paper a story which may give some indication of what it is I want to talk about today. Some time ago—in 1959-I had the opportunity to present a paper to the British Psycho-Analytical Society. The paper consisted of two parts. The first was a theoretical discussion of what was referred to as a background feeling of safety, while the second was a short account of some analytic work with a lady I had commenced treating some nine years previously, and who had been, in fact, my first control case. The first, theoretical part of my paper (which was later published as 'The background of safety', **1960a**) can be summarized as follows:

> the act of perception [can be regarded as] a very positive one, and not at all the passive reflection in the ego of stimulation arising from the sense-organs;…the act of perception is an act of ego-mastery through which the ego copes with…excitation, that is with unorganized sense data, and is thus protected from being traumatically overwhelmed;…the successful act of perception is an act of integration which is accompanied by a definite *feeling of safety*—a feeling so much a part of us that we take it for granted as a background of our everyday experience;…this feeling of safety is more than a simple absence of discomfort or anxiety, but a very definite feeling quality within the ego;…we can further regard much of ordinary everyday behaviour as being a means of maintaining a minimum level of safety-feeling; and…much normal behaviour as well as many clinical phenomena (such as certain types of psychotic behaviour and the addictions) can be more fully understood in terms of the ego's attempts to *preserve* this level of safety. (p. **352**)

The feeling of safety or security was, I argued, something

positive, a sort of ego-tone. It was more than the mere absence of anxiety, and as a feeling it could become attached to the mental representations of all sorts of different ego activities. Because of this it was possible to postulate the existence of safety signals in the same way as we do signals of anxiety. I suggested that the safety signals were related to such things as the awareness of being protected by the reassuring presence of the mother. The paper ended with the suggestion that we could see, in what had been described, the operation of what could be called a *safety principle*.

> This would simply reflect the fact that the ego makes every effort to maintain a minimum level of safety feeling…through the development and control of integrative processes within the ego, foremost among these being perception. In this sense, perception can be said to be in the service of the safety principle. Familiar and constant things in the child's environment may therefore carry a special affective value for the child in that they are more easily perceived—colloquially we say that they are known, recognizable, or familiar to the child. The constant presence of familiar things makes it easier for the child to maintain its minimum level of safety feeling, (p. 355)

The second part of the paper (also published later under the title of 'On the repetition of early childhood relationships in later psychosomatic illness', **Sandler, 1959**) described the case of a lady of 35, who had been referred for sexual difficulties, more specifically for the symptom of vaginismus. She was able to have a good analysis, as her sexual problems readily transferred themselves to the whole area of communication in the analysis. She had an obstinate though intermittent tendency to silence, and I commented that

> It soon became clear that this paralleled, on a psychological level, the physical symptom of vaginismus. The similarity between the two was striking, and it seemed as if she suffered an involuntary spasm of a mental sphincter. In time we could understand something of her inability to tolerate penetration of a mental or physical kind, and as the silence disappeared in the course of analysis, so there was an easing of her physical symptom. It became clear that she wished me to attack her, to make her speak and to force my interpretations upon her. She was able to recall how her sexual fantasies in childhood had been rape fantasies, and the thought of being raped…had been a very exciting one. (p. 189-190)

I noted at the time that a central feature of her personality was her intense masochism and a highly sexualized need for punishment. The analysis resulted in the disappearance of the vaginismus, and a general lessening of the patient's need to do damage to herself.

Four years after we stopped I heard from my patient again. She was very anxious, as her husband, from whom she had separated, had been threatening suicide if she did not rejoin him. She started treatment again, and I saw her for a year. She did not have her vaginismus, but it transpired that she had another symptom. She was now mildly but noticeably deaf. At the time I noted that it seemed 'that this new symptom derived from the same unconscious processes which had led to her vaginal spasm' (p. 193). In spite of working through all this material again, her deafness persisted. However, an understanding of her deafness occurred suddenly and rather unexpectedly. I suddenly became aware that my need to talk loudly so that she could hear me also caused me to shout pedantically, as if to a naughty child. This realization led me to the understanding that

> by being deaf she could force me to shout at her as her grandmother had done when she was very small. It became clear that she was unconsciously recreating, in her relationship with me, an earlier relationship to the grandmother, who had been, in spite of her unkindness to and constant irritation with the patient, the most permanent and stable figure in [her] childhood, (p. 193)

With the working through of feelings of loss of her grandmother, and her need to recreate her presence in many different ways, her hearing improved.

I took the position in this paper that my patient was not only obtaining masochistic gratification through her symptoms, but was defending against an intense fear of abandonment by recreating a feeling of the physical presence of the grandmother, 'whose mode of contact with the child had been predominantly one of verbal criticism or of physical punishment' (p. 193). I added that 'the pain and suffering was the price she paid for a bodily feeling of safety, for the reassurance that she would not undergo the miserable loneliness and separation which characterized her first year of life…' (pp. 193-4).

The week after I presented this paper, I received the following letter, dated 1 March, 1959, from Anna Freud in reply to a short note of mine:

> *Dear Dr Sandler*,
>
> *It was very nice of you to write after the lecture. I really felt that I should write and excuse myself for not having taken part in the discussion. The explanation was that I did not feel quite in agreement with various points and I thought it would be much more profitable to discuss that in private than in front of the whole Society.*
>
> *Actually, I liked the first, namely the purely*

theoretical part of your paper very much. Your description of a background feeling of safety brought about by the correctness of perception was very convincing. It always reminded me very vividly of an experience with a former patient of mine, a severe alcoholic who lost all control of reality and himself when drunk, or after a drunken bout. A psychiatrist in whose care he had been before analysis had taught him to recover control by merely Verbalizing his perceptions of reality, for example: 'this is a table', 'this is a stone in the pavement', etc. He reported that this had been a real help to him. I believe many patients do similar things spontaneously when under alcohol, drugs, or in fever states: they test the correctness of their perceptions for reassurance about their own intactness. And, like all defences, this can become greatly over-emphasized.

I felt quite differently when it came to the second, clinical part. I think what your patient tried to reactivate with the symptom of deafness was not the familiar perception of the Grandmother's voice but the familiar masochistic pleasure to which she had become accustomed. There seems to me a world of difference between the mild, all-pervading 'functional' pleasure of perception and a drive, an instinctual urge, such as the one for passive, masochistic experience. The latter is an id-urge and, as such, can set action in motion; the former is nothing of the kind, i.e. does not belong to the instinct world. To minimize the difference between the two concepts seemed to me a very dangerous step, namely a step from our instinct-psychology to an ego psychology independent of the drive-world.

I hope you do not mind me being so outspoken about my objections. I bring them up gust because I liked the theoretical part.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Freud

Anna Freud was, of course, quite correct in her view that the pleasures associated with direct instinctual gratification have a quality which is markedly different from what she referred to as 'mild, all-pervading "functional" pleasure'. And, without doubt, her major concern was, as she put it, the possibility of the dangerous step 'from our instinct-psychology to an ego psychology independent of the drive-world'. I think that we can understand this very well in view of the need psychoanalysis has had, throughout its history, to protect its basic notions from those who wished to minimize the importance of infantile sexual and aggressive drives, as well as the central role of persisting impulses of this sort in adult life.

I must confess that although I felt somewhat abashed by Anna Freud's comments, a niggling feeling remained that neither of us had really come to grips with the problems involved in the disagreement between us, and it is only now, some 25 years later, that I find myself able to be somewhat more precise about where these problems lie. In what follows I shall attempt to work towards a suitable response to Anna Freud's comments, and shall do this by a somewhat less than direct route.

In 1960, the year following the presentation of the 'Safety' paper, I found myself referring, in a paper 'On the concept of the superego' **(Sandler, 1960b)**, not only to feelings of safety, but also to feelings of well-being and self-esteem, certainly under the influence of writers such as Edith Jacobson, Edward Bibring and Annie Reich. In connection with such feelings it was possible to comment, for example, on the topic of identification as follows:

> If we recall the job with which the very young child imitates, consciously or unconsciously, a parent or an older sibling, we can see that identification represents an important technique whereby the child feels loved and obtains an inner state of well-being. We might say that the esteem in which the omnipotent and admired object is held is duplicated in the self and gives rise to self-esteem. The child feels at one with the object and close to it, and temporarily regains the feeling of happiness which he experienced during the earliest days of life. Identificatory behaviour is further reinforced by the love, approval, and praise of the real object, and it is quite striking to observe the extent to which the education of the child progresses through the reward, not only of feeling omnipotent like the idealized parent, but also through the very positive signs of love and approval granted by parents and educators to the child. The sources of 'feeling loved', and of self-esteem, are the real figures in the child's environment; and in these first years identificatory behaviour is directed by the child toward enhancing, via these real figures, his feeling of inner well-being. (p. 151)

I went on to suggest that the same feelings can be obtained through compliance with the precepts of the superego introject, or by identification with that introject and wrote that, in contrast to unpleasant feelings such as guilt and unworthiness,

> An *opposite* and equally important affective state is also experienced by the ego, a state which occurs when the ego and superego are functioning together in a smooth and harmonious fashion; that is, when the feeling of being loved is restored by the approval of the superego. Perhaps this is best described as a state of mental

> comfort and well-being.…It is the counterpart of the affect experienced by the child when his parents show signs of approval and pleasure at his performance, when the earliest state of being at one with his mother is temporarily regained. It is related to the affective background of self-confidence and self-assurance…. There has been a strong tendency in psychoanalytic writings to overlook the very positive side of the child's relationship to his superego; a relation based on the fact that it can also be a splendid source of love and well-being. It functions to approve as well as to disapprove…. (pp. 154-155)

On looking back at that paper it now seems clear to me that I was struggling to deal with a conflict over my deep conviction that psychoanalytic theory had, in addition to the drives, to take account of strong motives that were not instinctual drive impulses. In this connection I was, I think, beginning to be involved in much the same sort of problem that concerned Sullivan and Horney, Rado and Kardiner and, of course, others. But my way of dealing with the conflict involved was to do what was perhaps rather more commonly done, that is, to follow Freud in making use of his own solution to this theoretical conflict by shifting the emphasis from the drive impulse itself to the hypothetical energies regarded as being derived from the drives, and making the assumption that such energies entered into all motives. So I wrote, for example, that in identification with another person 'some of the libidinal cathexis of the object is transferred to the self' (1960, p. 150). And, in a footnote in this paper I commented that

> The problem of what it means to 'feel loved', or to 'restore narcissistic cathexis', is one which has as yet been insufficiently explored. What the child is attempting to restore is an affective state of well-being which we can correlate, in terms of energy, with the level of narcissistic cathexis of the self. (p. 149)

But, having said this, I was then able to go on to put drive energies to one side and to talk again about feeling states.

> Initially this affective state, which normally forms a background to everyday experience, must be the state of bodily well-being which the infant experiences when his instinctual needs have been satisfied (as distinct from the pleasure in their satisfaction). This affective state later becomes localized in the self, and we see aspects of it in feelings of self-esteem as well as in normal background feelings of safety…. The maintenance of this *central affective state* is perhaps the most powerful motive for ego development, and we must regard the young child (and later the adult) as seeking well-being as well as pleasure-seeking; the two are by no means the same, and in analysis we can often observe a

conflict between the two. (p. 149)

The connection between the state of well-being and libido distribution was reiterated—but now, I think, with more manifestly mixed feelings—in a 1962 paper entitled 'Psychology and psychoanalysis'. But there was also more emphasis placed on the child's object relationships.

> From a psychological point of view it makes a great deal of sense to speak of the child's feeling of well-being as located in his self representation, when a particular representational relationship exists between the self and mother representation. We can then link the state of the child's libido with the particular relationship of the two images at the time—those of himself and of the loving parent. (Sandler, **1962**, p. 97)

This theme was reflected in a paper published more or less simultaneously with B. Rosenblatt under the title 'The concept of the representational world' **(Sandler & Rosenblatt, 1962)** in which, among other things, feelings of well-being were linked—I would say simply through force of habit and quite unnecessarily—with the notion of the narcissistic libidinal cathexis of the self representation. The year after, two colleagues and I discussed the concept of the ideal self in 'The ego and the ideal self' **(Sandler, Holder & Meers, 1968)**. There we said that

> One of the shapes which the self representation can assume is that which we can call the *ideal self*, i.e. that which, at any moment, is a desired shape of the self—the 'self-I-want-to-be'. This is that shape of the self which, at that particular time, in those circumstances, and under the influence of the particular instinctual impulse of the moment, is the shape which would yield the greatest degree of well-being for the child. It is the shape which would provide the highest degree of narcissistic gratification and would minimize the quantity of aggressive discharge on the self. The ideal self at any moment is not necessarily simply that shape of the self which represents instinctual impulses as being fulfilled but will be determined as well by the child's need to gain the love and approval of his parents or introjects, or to avoid their disapproval, (pp. 152-153)

It must be clear by now that the states of safety and well-being considered in all these papers must be intimately connected with the problem of motivation, although it was not explicitly referred to. A motivational statement is implicit, for example, in such remarks as

> the construction of an ideal self, and the efforts to attain it, constitute an attempt to restore, sometimes in a most roundabout way, the primary narcissistic state

> of the earliest weeks of life. But the effort to attain the ideal self is not always successful. If the individual cannot change the shape of his self so as to identify it with his ideal self, then he will suffer the pangs of disappointment and the affective states associated with lowered self-esteem. (Sandler, Holder & Meers, **1963**, p. 156)

This statement contains references to two sets of motivating forces. In the first place there is the attraction of the ideal self, of the set of good feelings which accompany identification with one's own ideal of the moment. But, secondly, there is also the motivating power of the feelings which accompany the discrepancy between the representation of the so-called actual self—the 'self-of-the-moment'—and the representation of the ideal self at that moment. I should mention that the notion of an ideal self was to be expanded soon after this into that of the 'ideal state', as the wished-for state 'of affairs at any given time may involve more than a representation of the self, as in the representation of a wished-for self-object interaction. The presence of an ideal object may be just as much a part of the ideal state as the ideal self. The emphasis on object relationships was increasing, while at the same time the strain of beinging the energy theory into the picture in order to reduce all motivation to drives and drive-derivatives was becoming too great, and in 1964 W.G. Joffe and I presented our thoughts in this latter connection to the mid-winter meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association in New York. (For reasons I am unable to explain, this paper, 'On skill and sublimation', was not published in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* until **1966**.) We suggested that sublimation might be better dealt with by 'a theory of displacement and affect change rather than [by] one of energy transformation', and commented as follows:

> The fact that the functioning of the ego apparatuses yields pleasurable feelings means that we have a whole hierarchy of affective feeling tones within the ego, associated with the hierarchy of ego functions and apparatuses. These range from crudely sensual experiences to feelings of safety and well-being and the more subtle feelings which Hartmann has called 'positive value accents'… the component which differentiates constant object relationships from need-satisfying ones is a contribution of the ego, an additional affective ego value cathexis which we could describe in such terms as 'non sensual love', 'esteem for the object' etc. This is not the same as the aim-inhibited instinctual components. (p. 343)

Now, however, we can find more specific reference to 'motive forces' and to what was referred to as ego motivation. We said:

> We have suggested that there is a hierarchy of positive

> feelings which the ego is capable of experiencing. Similarly we could postulate a hierarchy of 'unpleasures' of all gradations. If we take the view that the ego functions to maintain a positive feeling of well-being in the self, then the experiencing of any degree of unpleasure will set in motion the adaptive and defensive functioning of the ego apparatuses. This homeostatic view enables us to consider the dynamics of independent ego functioning in the light of motive forces associated with the various ego apparatuses, which have as their aim the avoidance of unpleasure and the preservation of well-being. We can thus contain a theory of ego motivation within a structural framework. These motive forces can be seen as 'demands for work' (similar to that imposed by the drives) on the ego apparatuses. This 'demand for work' is again quite different from the energy which 'powers' the apparatus, (pp. 343-344)

(It may be of some interest that the discussion became rather heated, and Joan Fleming, who was in the chair, permitted it to run some hours over time. Heinz Hartmann cordially disagreed with our ideas, but Rudolph Loewenstein warned us most emphatically that we were treading an extremely dangerous path which could only result in our ruination. Looking back, I can only say that what we had to say at that meeting must have aroused substantial anxiety in our listeners as well, of course, as in ourselves.)

In the following year, in a consideration of depression in childhood ('Notes on pain, depression and individuation', **Joffe & Sandler, 1965**), we made extensive use of the concept of pain as a motivating factor in mental life, pain as an affective state, or as a potential state which could be defended against. Pain was connected with a discrepancy between what we called the actual (or current) state of the self on the one hand, and an ideal state of well-being on the other. To quote:

> 'Ideal' in this context refers to a state of well-being, a state which is fundamentally affective and which normally accompanies the harmonious and integrated functioning of all the biological and mental structures…. The striving towards the attainment of an ideal state is basic in human development and functioning. It represents the feeling component which is attributed to the state of primary narcissism (Freud, 1914). Much of the dynamics of ego functioning can be understood in terms of the ego's striving to maintain or attain a state of well-being, a state which even in the child who has been unhappy from birth exists as a biological goal. Freud put it: 'The development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous attempt to recover that state.' The ideal state of well-being is closely linked with feelings of safety and security. It is the polar opposite of

feelings of pain, anxiety or discomfort, and bears the same relation to these as the state of physical satiation and contentment in a small infant bears to the unpleasure of instinctual tension. The attainment of this state may follow or accompany successful drive-discharge, but there are circumstances in which drive-satisfaction does not lead to the development of well-being, but rather to the experiencing of its opposite, as in states of mental conflict.

In this there is a qualitative difference between the systems id and ego. The drives are characterized by states of tension and demands for discharge (and the body-pleasures associated with such discharge) which change in the course of development. The dynamics of ego functioning appear to be much more related to the maintenance of affective states of well-being which do not change as grossly in the course of development (although the ideational content associated with the ideal state may change markedly) … we shall use the term ideal state to refer to the affective state of well-being, and the term ideal self to denote the particular shape of the self representation at any moment in the individual's life which is believed, consciously or unconsciously, to embody the deal state. As the representational world of the child becomes increasingly structured, his system of self representations includes images which reflect affective states of well-being. The 'ideal self' derives its content not only from affect representations, but also contains ideational components which originate from various sources. These sources include memories of actual states of well-being previously experienced, or of fantastic or symbolic elaborations of such states. The elaborations in fantasy may subserve defensive functions, in which case we may get magical and omnipotent components in the ideal self. The specialized form of ideal which enuses when the child needs to aggrandize himself for the purpose of defence can be referred to as the 'idealized self', but it should be borne in mind that idealization is only one possible source of the content of the ideal self. Similarly, where the ideal self is based on identification with an admired object, we can distinguish between qualities which the child attributes to the object because of its infantile perception of the object at that time, and those which are attributed to the object representation in fantasy…' (pp. 397-398)

The relation to the object was seen as being of crucial importance in the attainment and maintenance of an ideal state. We said:

> Object love, like the whole development of the ego, can be seen as a roundabout way of attempting to restore the ideal primary narcissistic state. The perception of the

> presence of the love object when its presence is expected is, moreover, a source of feelings of well-being and safety.... And this is true even when the object is fulfilling no drive-reducing role. It is clear that if the presence of the object is a condition for a state of well-being in the self, then loss of the object signifies the loss of an aspect of the self, of a state of the self. One might say that for the representation of every love object there is a part of the self representation which is complementary to it, i.e. the part which *reflects the relation to the object*, and which constitutes the link between self and object. We can refer to this as the object-complementary aspect of the self representation, (pp. 398-399)

An attempt to look more closely at the concept of narcissism in 1967 ('Some conceptual problems involved in the consideration of disorders of narcissism', **Joffe & Sandler, 1967**) included an extensive discussion of the relation of affects to the energy theory, and we remarked that

> from the moment the infant becomes a psychological being, from the moment it begins to construct a representational world as the mediator of adaptation, much of its functioning is regulated by feeling states of one sort or another. The demands of the drives, and the reduction of these demands, have a major influence on feeling states, *but they are not the only influence*. Feeling states are produced and influenced by stimuli arising from sources other than the drives, for example, from the external environment; and *it is an oversimplification to assume that the vicissitudes of the development of affects are a direct reflection of the vicissitudes of the drives*. (p. 62)

We went on to say:

> Freud drew attention to the function of the affect of anxiety as a signal which initiates special forms of adaptive activity **(1926)**, and we believe that there is a strong argument in favour of the idea that all adaptive activity, defensive or otherwise, is instigated and regulated by the ego's conscious and unconscious scanning and perception of changes in its feeling states. We can assume that, from the very beginning of life, the development of the individual is influenced not only by the search for pleasurable experiences and the avoidance of unpleasurable ones.... During the course of development affective experiences become increasingly integrated with ideational content, and aspects of both self and object representations become linked with affective qualities, often of the most complicated sort. In this connection, the notion of an *affective cathexis* of a representation becomes meaningful and valuable; and affective cathexes can range from the most primitive

feelings of pleasure and unpleasure to the subtle complexities of love and hate. (p. **63**)

We then gave a definition, of narcissistic disorder related to the need to deal with a latent threatening state of pain by particular sorts of defensive and adaptive manoeuvres. Perhaps of interest in the present context is the reintroduction in this paper of the idea of a cathexis of *value* (mentioned in our previous paper on sublimation: **Sandler & Joffe, 1966)**. We said:

> By 'value'…we do not refer specifically to moral value, but the term is used rather in the sense of feeling qualities which may be positive or negative, relatively simple or extremely complicated. It is these affective values, sign-values, so to speak, which give all representations their significance to the ego. (Joffe & Sandler, **1967**, p. 65)

The line of thought we were pursuing was continued in a paper on the psychoanalytic psychology of adaptation in the following year **(Joffe & Sandler, 1968)**, in which we commented as follows:

> Although thus far we have spoken of the discrepancy between actual and ideal states of the self representation as being linked with feelings which have a painful component, it should be remembered that from early in the infant's development, the self representation is closely linked with various forms of object representation; we cannot consider any shape of the self representation in isolation. It would probably be more correct to consider (after a certain stage of development has been reached) the actual and ideal shapes of the self representation in terms of self-object representations; for all psychological object relationships are, in representational terms, self-object relationships. In more general terms we can refer to representational discrepancy as being linked with feelings of pain or unpleasure, and lack of representational discrepancy (i.e. states of representational congruity) being associated with feelings of well-being and safety. (p. 450)

We could then put forward what was perhaps the closest we came to an explicit view of motivation.

> From the point of view of the ego's functioning we are now in a position to say that the prime motivators are conscious or unconscious feeling states; and that these are, in turn, associated with various forms of representational congruity or discrepancy. *The aim of all ego functioning is to reduce conscious or unconscious representational discrepancy and through this to attain or maintain a basic feeling state of well-being*. From this

> point of view we can say that the ego seeks to maintain a feeling-homeostasis, and this is not to be confused with the notion of energic homeostasis, (pp. 450-451)

In 1974, in an attempt to deal with problems in conceptualizing psychic conflict arising from discrepancies between the structural theory of mental functioning and clinical psychoanalytic experience, it was pointed out that the understanding of mental conflict was hindered by the common error of equating the *general* concept of the unconscious wish with the *particular* case of instinctual wishes. But rather than go into the question of the relation between motivation and mental conflict, I want to return to two papers published in 1978, one on unconscious wishes and human relationships **(Sandler, 1978)**, and the other, written jointly with Anne-Marie Sandler, on the development of object relationships and affects **(Sandler & Sandler, 1978)**. In both emphasis was placed on the role of conscious and unconscious *wishes* as motives in mental functioning.

> 'instincts' and 'drives' … are constructs relating to basic psycho-biological tendencies of the individual, and to the force and energy implicit in these tendencies. From a psychological point of view it is sufficient for us to take, as a basic unit, the *wish*. (Sandler, **1978**, pp. 5-6)

In addition to the emphasis on the wish, the link between wishes and object relationships can be reinforced. Object relationships were seen as valued *role relationships*, and those wishes and wishful fantasies with which we are concerned as psychoanalysts can be regarded as containing mental representations of self and object in interaction.

> Thus, for example, the child who has a wish to cling to the mother has, as part of this wish, a mental representation of himself clinging to the mother. But he also has, in the content of his wish, a representation of the mother or her substitute responding to his clinging in a particular way, possibly by bending down and embracing him. This formulation is rather different from the idea of a wish consisting of a wishful aim being directed towards the object. The idea of an aim which seeks gratification has to be supplemented by the idea of a *wished-for interaction*, with the wished-for or imagined response of the object being as much a part of the wishful fantasy as the activity of the subject in that wish or fantasy. (Sandler & Sandler, **1978**, p. 288)

Again we emphasized that

> There is a substantial part of the mental apparatus which is unconscious in a descriptive sense, but which is not id. Many wishes arise within the mind as responses to motivating forces which are not instinctual. Perhaps

> the commonest of such motivators are anxiety and other unpleasant affects, but we must equally include the effect of disturbances of inner equilibrium created by stimuli from the outside world (including the subject's own body) as motivators of needs and psychological wishes. The wishes which are aroused may be conscious, but may not be, and very often are not. They may have a drive component, or be developmentally related to the instinctual drives, but this is not a necessary current ingredient of an unconscious wish. Such a wish may, for example, be simply to remove in a particular way whatever is (consciously or unconsciously) identified as a source of discomfort, pain or unpleasure. The wish may be (and often is) motivated by the need to restore feelings of well-being and safety, or may be connected with any one of a whole variety of needs which are very far from those which we normally label as 'instinctual'. Wishes are aroused by changes in the object world as much as by internal pressures, (p. 286)

It is now possible to speak of the need for 'affirmation' by the object world, and in this way to link, wishes with object relationships. We said:

> If…a toddler [who has been playing happily with his mother]…notices that his mother has left the room, a need to perceive her and to interact with her, to hold on to her, will immediately become apparent. This will express itself in the form of a very intense wish with a very definite content. Here we can see that this sort of object relationship is certainly very much a continual wish-fulfilment, in which the wish is to obtain reassurance that the mother is nearby (thus fulfilling the need to feel safe). Later in life, the child (and adult) will increasingly be able to make use of an unconscious dialogue with his objects in fantasy in order to gain reassurance, (pp. 286-287)

We can add to this the view we took that there is a constant need in every individual to externalize his 'internal objects', his introjects, in order to anchor his inner world as far as possible in external reality. Externalization of introjects (with all the distortions which have occurred due to past projections of aspects of the self on to these introjects) can, of course, be into the external world or into the world of fantasy. But while all of this is manifestly relevant to the theory of motivation, I need hardly comment that the idea of intense object-related wishes of the sort I have described has not met with universal acceptance.

It is perhaps useful at this point to turn to some of the classical formulations in this area to see where we stand in relation to them. And what can be more appropriate than to turn to Anna Freud herself? Some ten or twelve years ago a group of us at the Hampstead Clinic (as the Anna Freud

Centre was then called) met regularly with Anna Freud in order to discuss her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* **(1936)**, and for many of us the reconsideration of what we had read a number of times in the past was extremely enlightening. We were able to see things in the text which we had been blind to before, but which were now glaringly obvious (*The Analysis of Defence*, **Sandler & Freud, 1985**). In Chapter 5 of Anna Freud's book, a chapter called 'Orientation of the Processes of Defence According to the Source of Anxiety and Danger', under the subheading 'Motives for the Defence Against Instincts', she describes how the ego's mechanisms of defence are motivated by anxieties of various sorts. The adult neurotic's defences are prompted, she says, by superego anxiety. The superego, Anna Freud wrote,

> is the mischief-maker which prevents the ego's coming to a friendly understanding with the instincts. It sets up an ideal standard, according to which sexuality is prohibited and aggression pronounced to be antisocial. It demands a degree of sexual renunciation and restriction of aggression which is incompatible with psychic health. The ego is completely deprived of its independence and reduced to the status of an instrument for the execution of the superego's wishes; the result is that it becomes hostile to instinct and incapable of enjoyment. (**1936**, p. 59)

Anna Freud then goes on to write of objective anxiety, anxiety felt by the child as arising from the outside world. The ego's defences can be 'motivated by dread of the outside world' (p. 61). She then adds, as a source of anxiety, and as a motivator of defence, the ego's dread of the strength of the instincts, but points out that the *source* of the anxiety is not what is important; it is rather the anxiety itself which prompts defence.

In this chapter Anna Freud introduces the idea of defence against affect (as opposed to defence against instinct). She says:

> There is, however, another and more primitive relation between the ego and the affects which has no counter-part in that of the ego to the instincts…. If the ego has nothing to object to in a particular instinctual process and so does not ward off an affect on that ground, its attitude toward it will be determined entirely by the pleasure principle: it will welcome pleasurable affects and defend itself against painful ones….It is all the more ready to ward off affects associated with prohibited sexual impulses if these affects happen to be distressing, e. g. pain, longing, mourning. On the other hand it may resist a prohibition somewhat longer in the case of positive affects, simply because they are pleasurable, or may sometimes be persuaded to tolerate them for a short time when they make a sudden

irruption into consciousness. (p. 66)

Anna Freud now refers to *The Ego and the Id* **(Freud, 1923)** and to *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* **(1926)**, and quotes Freud in his statement that

> What it is that the ego fears from the external [world] and from the libidinal danger cannot be specified; we know that the fear is of being overwhelmed or annihilated, but it cannot be grasped analytically. (Freud, **1923**, p. **57**)

What is true in regard to the motives for defence must also be true in regard to the motives for adaptation in general, for in a sense everything we do has a defensive aspect, and all defensive activity can be regarded as adaptive.

On looking back it becomes clear that Freud's second theory of anxiety, introduced in 1926, in which anxiety was seen as a danger signal to the ego, functioning to warn it of the eventual possibility of being traumatically overwhelmed, was a major stimulus to Anna Freud's formulations. We find ourselves very much at one with Ernst Kris, who said in 1947 that he was convinced that the reformulation by Freud in 1926 of a considerable set of his previous hypotheses reaches further than was realized at the time of publication possibly by Freud himself.

We can now return to the point at which this somewhat circuitous journey started. You will recall that Anna Freud's criticism of the idea that the patient I described might have become deaf because of the need to recreat the presence of a highly critical internal grandparent figure in her current external world, was based, as she put it, on the 'world of difference between the mild, all-pervading "functional" pleasure of perception and a drive, an instinctual urge, such as the one for passive, masochistic experience'. She went on to say, 'The latter is an id-urge and, as such, can set action in motion; the former is nothing of the kind, i.e. does not belong to the instinct world.'

It is interesting that Anna Freud could permit herself to make such a statement, because it testifies to an interesting split which has existed in psychoanalytic thought in the area of the theory of motivation, ever since the publication of *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* in 1926. On the one hand it is as if we have to maintain the idea that all driving forces in behaviour are motivated by the instinctual drives, or by derivatives of the drives, and of course, in this connection the first theory of anxiety, in which it was seen as transformed libido, fitted the theory well. On the other hand the revision of the theory of anxiety in 1926 put into our theory a formulation which fitted much better with clinical experience, namely that anxiety could function as a signal of danger which could initiate intense defensive and

adaptive activity. Anna Freud herself has made it abundantly clear that unpleasant affect *of any sort* can set action in motion, and by no stretch of the imagination can we simply equate unpleasant affect with instinctual drive urges; nor indeed is instinctual drive tension the only source of uncomfortable or painful affect. So we have another set of motives, the motives for defence and defensive adaptation, and indeed these have been spelled out by Anna Freud in her book on defence **(1936)**. What has happened, I believe, in the development of our thought in this area, is that the different theories of motivation have been kept quite separate, and psychoanalysts have moved easily from one to another, following the dictates of their particular theoretical and clinical needs at the time. So we have a theory of motivation which equates motives with instinctual drives, a theory which goes back to the end of the last century. Simultaneously we have a theory of motivation deriving from the radical reformulations in Freud's *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, based upon unpleasant affect—in particular, anxiety—as a driving force in human behaviour. These two theories need, in my view, to be brought face to face, and the differences between them dealt with. Let me emphasize that a psychoanalytic psychology of motivation which does not take instinctual drives into account is an impoverished psychology. But so is a drive psychology which does not recognize motives other than the drives.

It could, of course, be argued that Freud's pleasure-unpleasure principle does in fact act as a unifying principle in this area. But, as Max Schur has effectively shown **(1966)**, the pleasure-unpleasure principle has been used differently at different times, essentially either in an economic-energic context or linked with the death instinct and the Nirvana Principle. Schur, who proposed that the pleasure and unpleasure principles be divorced rather than brought together in marriage, also commented as follows:

> Few analysts…who use the concepts pleasure-unpleasure, pleasure-pain principle, spell out precisely which of Freud's formulations they are actually referring to. This is especially confusing in any consideration of the relationship between the regulating principles and the affects pleasure and unpleasure, and in any discussion of those modes of functioning which Freud tried to explain in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.… (pp. 126-127)

In the papers referred to earlier the urge to gain feelings of well-being and safety is regarded as very powerful indeed, even though such feelngs lack the excitement associated with instinctual drive gratification. But the need to gain feelings of safety and well-being must at times be stronger than the urge to experience the feelings associated with instinctual satisfaction, because otherwise we would simply be gratifying our instinctual drive wishes as they arise. The whole of the reality principle is, after all, based upon the need to delay instinctual gratification because it is unsafe. What

is it then that can make feelings of non-sensual well-being or security more attractive than, let us say, the direct sexual pleasure associated with sexual drive satisfaction?

Perhaps we can move a little further forward by making use of the concept of 'value cathexis' referred to earlier in this paper. This is ultimately the feeling state with which a particular mental representation is invested, and which is a measure, in a sense, of its positive or negative attractiveness, of (in a sense) the pressure which motivates one towards it. An object or an activity can have a sexual erotic value cathexis, but it can also have a cathexis of love, which is not quite the same thing. Equally it can have a cathexis of anger and a cathexis of hate, and here again the two are not identical. But, perhaps of the most importance in the present context, *it can have a cathexis of safety or a cathexis of well-being.*

It must be apparent by now that the idea of an affective value cathexis is relevant to our discussion of motivation and consistent with the line of thought I described earlier in this paper. I should like to approach the end of this paper by trying to tie a further pair of loose ends together, and I want to do this by adding the proposition that the value cathexis—and therefore the attractiveness—of an activity or of an object is a variable quantity; it can even vary from one moment to the next. The value cathexis attached to a particular wished-for state, goal, aim or object is a function, not only of the intrinsic potential for pleasant feelings associated with that state, goal, aim or object, but it is also a function of an added investment provided by the need to do away with *unpleasant* feelings. These unpleasant affects arise from instinctual tensions and also from threats and dangers of the most varied sort. And foremost among these painful affects is anxiety, no matter whether its source be instinctual or otherwise.

Let me formulate this in another way. Imagine the normal child who feels safe when with his or her mother. We can say that the mother is invested with a certain affective value cathexis of safety for the child. Margaret Mahler **(Mahler et al., 1975)** has described very vividly how the toddler 'checks back to mother' in order to receive a 'refuelling', and we can say that in this way the child modulates his level of safety feeling and maintains it at an appropriate level. But when the toddler falls and hurts himself, or when he suddenly loses sight of mother, or is threatened in some other way, her value as a source of safety feeling rises dramatically, for the feeling of safety with which the mother is invested also contains the element of *the absence of non-safety the absence of danger.* The same sort of fluctuation in cathexis of value occurs, of course, in relation to the drives. The stronger the sexual urge, the greater the value attached to the sexual object or activity. Here again, the sexual cathexis of value attached to the object at that particular

time contains the affective promise of relief from sexual tension. And, from a clinical point Of view, it is extremely common in our psychoanalytic work to see impulses of all sorts compounded of the two kinds of elements I have been describing.

The view of motivation put forward here provides, I believe, a framework for the closer integration of object relations theories with drive aspects of motivation, and certainly provides us with an understanding of object relationships somewhat more satisfactory than the simple formulation that objects are cathected with libido. In every situation of anxiety, for instance, there is a reaching towards the object that can provide safety, and this applies as much to the introjects as to external objects. This was certainly the case with the patient I described earlier in this paper. By being deaf she created the illusion of the presence of the object, and we can say that the drive to interact with the object in her own particular way was intense. True, she paid a price in pain and suffering in this relationship, but the function of the object as a source of safety and reassurance against threat of abandonment and disintegration outweighed all other factors. And, of course, while we can also assume that she had a perverse sexual investment in the suffering she endured, this element was not, to my mind, the major motivating factor. This is absolutely in line with the clinical reality that, in our masochistic patients, the analysis of guilt-motivated self-damaging behaviour so often plays a far greater role than the analysis of perverse sexual pleasure—and we know that guilt, as an affect, is a form of anxiety. So my answer to Anna Freud's letter, if I were to write it today, would be ‘Yes, you are right, when there is no threat then feelings of safety are mild when compared with instinctual pleasure. But situations of safety, particularly those associated with familiar interaction with the (internal or external) object, can become even more attractive than instinctual drive satisfaction when danger threatens. No-one has demonstrated this more convincingly than you have done in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence.'*

I want to end this paper by emphasizing my belief that we need to develop an approach to motivation which allows us to take into account much more satisfactorily than in the past what we know about external and internal object relationships. We know how difficult it is to place a theory of object relations into a drive-reductionist framework, and the answer must surely lie not in a distortion of what we know about object relationships, but rather in a modification of our essential theoretical scaffolding.

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