

Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology¹

The starting point of psychoanalysis was a therapeutic one. Psychic disturbances were explained in terms of the damming up of sexual energy and its pathological transformation in some symptomatic manifestation; or they were explained as defenses against libido-charged ideas that were not allowed into the person's consciousness. The sequence, libido → defense through repression → symptom, was the Ariadne thread of early analytic investigations. Related to this was the fact that the objects of analytic study were almost exclusively sick people—most of them having physical symptoms.

As psychoanalysis developed, another question also came under study: What was the origin and significance of certain psychic characteristics found in both sick and healthy people? Like the original investigations, these studies sought to uncover the instinctual, libidinous roots of psychic attitudes. But now the sequence did not run from repression to *symptom*; it ran from sublimation (or reaction formation) to *character trait*. Such investigations necessarily proved fruitful for our understanding of both sick and healthy character types; thus they became especially important for the problem studied in social psychology.

The general basis of psychoanalytic characterology is to view certain character traits as sublimations or reaction formations of certain instinctual drives that are sexual in nature—"sexual" being used in the extended sense that Freud gave to it. This genetic derivation of psychic phenomena from libidinal sources and early childhood experiences is the specifically analytic principle that psychoanalytic characterology shares with the theory of neurosis. But while the neurotic symptom (and the neurotic character) is the result of an unsatisfactory adaptation of the instincts to social reality, one can speak of a non-neurotic character trait when libidinal impulses are transformed into relatively stable and socially adapted traits—through reaction formation or sublimation. In any case, the distinction between normal and neurotic character is quite fluid; it depends primarily on the degree of the lack of social adaptation.

It is important to recall that Freud related the problem of sublimation predominantly to pregenital sexual drives: i.e., oral and anal sexuality, and sadism.² The difference between reaction formation and sublimation is essentially that the former always functions to resist and keep down a repressed impulse, from which it draws its energy, while the latter represents a direct transformation, a "canalization" of instinctual impulses.

The theory of pregenital sexuality was treated extensively by Freud for the first time in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. It starts from the observation that even before the

genitals play a decisive role for the child, the oral and anal zones—as “erogenous zones”—are the focal point of pleasurable sensations analogous to genital ones. In the course of the child’s development, these erogenous zones surrender part of their sexual energy to the genitals, while retaining a smaller share either in its original form or in the form of sublimations and reaction formations within the ego.

Building on these observations about pregenital sexuality, Freud published a brief article, “Character and Anal Eroticism,” in 1908,³ which formed the basis for psychoanalytic characterology. Freud starts from the observation that in analysis one frequently encounters a type of person who “is distinguished by a combination of specific character traits, while the behavior of a specific bodily function and its associated organs attracts attention to itself in their childhood.” (*Ibid.*, p. 261.)

In individuals where pleasure in bowel evacuation and its products plays an especially large role in childhood, Freud finds three character traits: orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy. He placed particular stress on the equation of feces and money (gifts) found in neurosis and in many myths, superstitions, dreams, and fairy tales. On the basis of Freud’s fundamental study, a number of other psychoanalytic authors have made contributions to psychoanalytic characterology.⁴ In many respects, there is one point, however, that is not brought out clearly enough in these works, and will enable us to have a better understanding of these problems. I refer to the distinction between sexual goal and sexual object, or between organ pleasure and object relationships.

Freud establishes a close connection between the sexual drives and the “erogenous zones,”⁵ and assumed that the sex drives are called forth by stimulation of these erogenous zones. In the first stage of life, the oral zone and its associated functions—sucking and biting—is the center of sexuality. After the nursing stage, however, this shifts to the anal zone and its functions—stool evacuation or stool retention; then, from three to five, the genital zone gains in importance. Freud designates this first blush of genital sexuality as the “phallic phase,” because he assumes that for both sexes it is only the phallus (or the phallically experienced clitoris) that plays a role, along with tendencies toward forceful invasion and destruction. After a period of “latency,” which lasts approximately until puberty, genital sexuality develops in association with physical maturation. The pregenital sexual strivings are now dominated by, and integrated into, genital sexuality.

It is important to make a distinction between this erogenous lust and the person’s object relationships. The latter are the person’s (loving or hating) attitudes toward himself or other people he encounters; in a word, they are his emotions, feelings, and attitudes toward the surrounding world in general. These object relationships also have a typical course of development. According to Freud, the suckling infant is predominantly narcissistic and concerned solely with the satisfaction of his own needs and wants. Around the end of the nursing period, a second stage sets in where there is an increase in sadistic, hostile attitudes toward objects; these same attitudes also play an important role in the phallic phase. Only with the growing primacy of genital sexuality in puberty do loving, friendly attitudes toward objects clearly become dominant.

These object relationships are seen as having a very close connection with the erogenous zones. The connection is understandable when we consider the fact that specific object relationships first develop in connection with specific erogenous zones and that these connections are not fortuitous. At this point I really do not want to raise the whole question as to whether the connection is really as close as much of the psychoanalytic literature would have it; nor do I want to consider whether and to what extent an object relationship, typical of a particular erogenous zone, can also develop independently of the particular fate of that zone. So let me just lay stress on the importance of making a basic distinction between organ pleasure and object relationships.⁶

In the first stage of life, the central sexual drive is *oral eroticism*. In the infant there is a strong feeling of pleasure and satisfaction, originally associated with sucking; later it is associated with biting, chewing, taking things into the mouth, and wanting to swallow them up. Closer observation shows that this is definitely not an expression of hunger; that the very activities of sucking, biting, and swallowing up are pleasurable activities in themselves. Although the direct oral-erotic needs and satisfactions wane after the nursing period, more or less large vestiges of them are retained in later childhood and adulthood. We need only think of the prolongation of such habits as thumb-sucking and nail-biting, to the perfectly “normal” practice of kissing, and to the libidinous, oral-erotic roots of smoking.

Insofar as oral eroticism is not retained in its original form or superseded by other sexual impulses, it appears in reaction formations or sublimations. Here we shall just mention the most significant example of such sublimation: the transfer of the infant’s sucking pleasure to the intellectual realm. Knowledge takes the place of mother’s milk; we commonly use such expressions as “drinking at the breasts of wisdom.” This symbolic equation of drinking and intellectual receptiveness is found in the language and fairy tales of various cultures as well as in the dreams and associations of psychoanalytic patients. As far as *reaction formations* are concerned, they can remain unsublimated, as in inhibitions about eating, or be sublimated in inhibitions about learning, working, being curious, etc.

The object relationships that appear in the first stage of infant life are extremely complicated.⁷ At first the infant is narcissistically oriented—extremely so in the first three months of life; there is no distinction between the self and the world outside. Gradually, loving and friendly attitudes toward objects develop alongside this narcissistic attitude.⁸ The attitude of the infant toward the mother (or mother substitute) becomes friendly and loving; the infant expects love and protection. Mother is its guarantee of life, and her love provides a feeling of protection and security. To be sure, she is in large measure the means by which the child’s needs are satisfied; and the child’s love is in large measure composed of wanting and taking rather than giving and caring. Nevertheless, the child’s traits of loving and being interested in other objects are important in this first stage.⁹

The child’s object relationships gradually change. As his bodily growth proceeds, so do his demands. Because of this fact and because of other factors in the environment, he increasingly encounters frustrations in the world around him. To these frustrations, the child reacts with anger and rage, and his physical growth has created conditions that facilitate these

manifestations. Alongside and in place of his friendly orientation toward other objects, hostile feelings enter in increasing measure. Feeling stronger in himself and raging over various disappointments, the child no longer trusts in loving satisfaction of his wishes, which are still primarily oral in character. He no longer waits for such satisfaction to come to him; he begins to try to take by force what is denied him. The mouth and teeth become his weapon. He develops an aggressive attitude, which looks on objects with hostility; he wants to attack them, devour them, destroy them. Conflicts and aggressive-sadistic impulses take the place of the relative harmony that originally marked his relationship with the surrounding environment.¹⁰

These, then, are the elements that come together to form the “oral” character traits of adults: on the one hand, an attitude of trust and friendship toward others, a desire to be loved and pampered; and on the other hand, continuation into aggressive, hate-filled, predatory tendencies.

Abraham makes a distinction between the characterological consequences of two different childhood situations. The first is one where the child’s oral satisfactions are undisturbed and happy. The second situation is one where much disturbance and displeasure are intermingled: e.g., sudden separation from the breast, insufficient milk, or, in terms of object relationships, a lack of love on the part of the mothering person. People who come from the first childhood situation and its happy connotations

have often brought along a deep-rooted conviction that things must always go well for them. They face life with an unshakeable optimism, which often helps them to actually attain their practical goals. Even here, however, there can be a less fortunate type of development. Many people fully expect that there will always be a good, caring person around, i.e., a mother substitute, from whom they will certainly get all the necessities of life. This optimistic faith in their destiny condemns them to inactivity. Among these people we see those who were pampered in childhood. Their whole behavior in life shows that they expect to drink at mother’s breast forever. Such persons make no personal efforts. In many cases, they disdain any notion of personal achievement.¹¹

In these people we frequently note a marked liberality, a certain lordly manner. Their ideal is the mother who gives unreservedly, and they try to live up to this ideal.

People who come from the second childhood situation mentioned above suffered deep oral frustrations. In later life they frequently develop traits that have to do with robbing other people or sucking them dry. They seem to walk around with a long trunk, sucking up everything in sight. When correspondingly strong sadistic tendencies are intermingled, they go around like beasts of prey looking for victims to devour.

In their social behavior, they are always demanding something for themselves, either pleading or commanding. The way they make their requests has an aura of tenacious sucking about it. Neither facts nor rational objections can put them off. They keep pushing and insisting. It is as if they really meant to attach themselves to other people like leeches. They

are particularly sensitive about being alone, and react against it, even when only a short time is involved. Impatience is particularly evident in these people. Among some people of this type, the behavior just mentioned takes on a more cruel aspect. Their attitude towards other human beings has something of the vampire about it. (*Ibid.*, p. 44.)

The first type of person described above evinces a certain nobility and magnanimity; he is serenely merry and sociable. The second type is hostile and sarcastic, reacting with rage when his requests are denied and deeply envious of those who have it better than he does. Another fact noted by Abraham is of particular importance to sociologists: persons with an oral character formation are readily open to new things, “while those with an anal character formation have a conservative attitude that is hostile to any and all innovation...”

Anal does not begin to play a role until only *after* the period of oral eroticism. Right from the start, the unrestricted discharge of body products is associated with pleasurable stimulation of the anal mucous membrane in the child. In like manner, the evacuated products—their appearance, their smell, their contact with the surface of the trunk, and hand contact with them—are a source of intensely pleasurable sensations. The infant is proud of his feces; it is his first “possession,” the embodiment of his first productivity.

A basic change takes place with the ongoing toilet-training of the child, which presupposes the gradually developing function of the bladder and anal sphincters. As the child adapts himself to the new demands of the training, as he learns to hold back his stools and let them go at the right time, the retention of his stools and the associated physiological processes become a new source of pleasure. His original love for feces is, to some extent, replaced by feelings of disgust; but the primitive pride in the feces is partly increased by the pride of those around him in his punctual evacuation.

As is the case with the original oral impulses, a portion of the anal impulses is retained to some extent in the life of the adult. This fact is readily recognizable in the relatively strong affective reactions of many people to the anal insult and the anal joke. The vestiges of earlier anal eroticism can also be seen clearly in people’s loving interest in their own feces, which appears under all sorts of rationalizations. But normally a substantial portion of anal-erotic strivings merge into sublimations and reaction formations.

The further development of the child’s original anal eroticism lies in a twofold direction: (1) in the characterological continuation of the original functions, which results in pleasure or inability to retain, collect and produce, furthermore in the development of orderliness, punctuality, cleanliness, and stinginess; (2) in the continuation of the original love for feces, which finds expression primarily in love for possessions. Particular significance is attached to the feeling of duty that develops during this stage. Anal weaning is closely tied up with the problem of “must,” “should,” and “ought not”; and clinical experience shows that exceptionally intense feelings about a sense of duty often go back to this early stage.

The object relationships associated with the anal stage are marked by growing conflict with the surrounding world. Now, for the first time, the environment confronts the child with demands, whose fulfillment is enforced with rewards or punishments. When mother approaches the child, she is no longer the good, self-giving one who provides and ensures

pleasure; now she is someone who frustrates and punishes. The child reacts accordingly. He remains fixed in his narcissistic, indifferent attitude, which is heightened to some extent by his diminishing physical helplessness and his growing pride in his own accomplishments. At the same time there is a marked increase in his stubborn, sadistic, hostile attitude toward others, and his angry defense against all invasions into his private life.

The sublimations and reaction formations of anal eroticism, and the continuation of the object relations that are typically associated with this stage, combine to form the anal character traits described in psychoanalytic literature in both their normal and pathological manifestations. Here I shall simply allude to several traits particularly important for social psychology.

I have already mentioned the first characterological findings of Freud: a love of orderliness that often runs over into pedantry, a parsimony that borders on stinginess and avarice, and a stubbornness bordering on insolent defiance. A host of psychoanalytic writers, Jones and Abraham in particular, have added many more details to these general traits. Abraham points to certain overcompensations for this original stubbornness,

under which the original stubborn maintenance of the right to self-determination lies hidden, until it bursts out into the open now and then. I am thinking here of certain children and adults who display special goodness, correctness and obedience, but explain their deep underlying rebelliousness by the fact that it was suppressed in their early life. (*Ibid.*, p. 9.)

Closely associated with pride is their feeling of uniqueness that was first underlined by Sadger: "Anything that is not Me is dirt." Such people enjoy a possession only if no one else has anything like it. They are inclined to regard everything in life as property and to protect everything that is "private" from outside invasions. This attitude does not apply to money and possessions only; it also applies to human beings, feelings, memories, and experiences. The strength of the underlying libidinous tendencies, which associate property with the private sphere, can readily be gauged by their rage over any invasion into their private life, their "freedom." Here, too, belongs a trait noted by Abraham: the sensitivity of the anal character to any outside invasion. No one is to butt into "their business."

Related to this is also another trait noted by Jones: the stubborn maintenance of a self-devised regimen, or the tendency to force such a regimen on others.¹² Such people frequently exhibit unusual delight in devising ritual schedules, tables, and plans. Of particular importance is the fact (stressed by Abraham) that the anal character exhibits an unconscious tendency to regard the anal function as the most important productive activity and as something superior to the genital function. Earning money, accumulating possessions, amassing bits and pieces of knowledge without transforming them into something productive—all these are expressions of this attitude.¹³

Along with their high estimation of anal, accumulating productivity there is characteristically a high esteem for possessions and things accumulated. As Abraham notes:

In marked cases of anal character formation, almost all the relationships of life are viewed in terms of having (keeping) and giving: i.e., in terms of possessions. It is as if the motto of many such people were: “The person who gives something to me is my friend; the person who demands something from me is my enemy.” (*Ibid.*, p. 20.)

The case is no different with their love relationships. With people of an anal character it is characteristic that genital need and genital satisfaction are restricted to a greater or lesser extent. This restrictedness is frequently accompanied by moralistic rationalizations or anxieties. To the extent that love does play a role, it takes a typical form. A woman is not loved, she is “possessed.” The emotional feeling toward the “love” object is the same as that toward other objects of possession: i.e., there is a tendency to possess as much and as exclusively as possible.

The first attitude (possessing as much as possible) is to be seen in a type of person who seems quite capable of love, but whose love is basically just another form of the passion to collect. A particularly telling example of the first attitude was offered by one client of mine, who had a scrapbook in which he placed all the souvenirs of his encounters with women—and there were many: theatre programs, used tickets, letters, etc. The second attitude (possessing as exclusively as possible) we find in a type of person who is extremely jealous and concerned with “fidelity.”

Closely associated with this attitude is the intense envy that is found in many people with an anal character. They use up their strength, not in productive activity of their own, but in envying the achievements and (above all) the possessions of others. This brings us again to one of the anal characteristics that is most important clinically and sociologically: their particular relationship toward money and, above all, their parsimony and stinginess. This particular trait has been widely confirmed by psychoanalytic experiences, and it has been treated extensively in the pertinent literature.¹⁴

Parsimony and avarice do not relate solely to money and monetary values. Time and energy are treated in a similar way, and such people abhor any waste of either.¹⁵ It is worth noting that these anal tendencies are subjected to extensive rationalizations. Economic considerations, of course, are the first to be put forth. Also noteworthy is the fact that alongside the keen concern for cleanliness, parsimony, orderliness, and punctuality, we frequently see breaking through the very opposite traits, which had been kept down through these reaction formations. Lastly, because of its relevance for social psychology, we should mention Abraham’s reference to the characteristic need of the anal character for symmetry and “proper balance.”

In principle, *genital sexuality* has a different significance for character formation than do oral and anal sexuality. While only a relatively small measure of the latter can survive the period of early childhood in direct form, and are chiefly applied to sublimations and reaction formations in later life, genital sexuality is primarily designed to maintain direct physical discharge. Simple as it is to describe the sexual goal of genital sexuality, it is difficult to say anything about the specifically genital character traits. It is certainly true that the object

relationship attached to genital sexuality is one of friendliness and relative freedom from ambivalence.¹⁶ But it should not be forgotten that a physiologically normal sex act does not necessarily imply the corresponding psychic attitude of love. From the psychological standpoint, it can be experienced as predominantly narcissistic or sadistic.

If we turn to the characterologically important reaction formations and sublimations of genital sexuality, the formation of will seems to be the first important reaction formation. As far as sublimations are concerned, I think it necessary to distinguish between male and female sexuality. (One should not forget, however, that both masculine and feminine sexual impulses exist in every individual.)¹⁷

We still know very little about their sublimations. We may perhaps conjecture that the sublimation of masculine sexuality tends predominantly toward intellectual effort, creation, and synthesis and that the sublimation of feminine sexuality tends toward assimilating, sheltering, producing, and showing unconditional motherly love.¹⁸

We have briefly sketched the psychoanalytic theory concerning the development of sexuality and object relationships. It is still a rough schema that is hypothetical in many respects. Further analytic research will have to alter many important points and introduce many new ones. But it is a starting point that enables us to understand the instinctual basis of character traits, and opens the way for us to explain the *development* of character.

This development is conditioned by two factors that operate in different directions. The first is the physical maturation of the individual. This means, first and foremost, the growth of genital sexuality and the physiologically diminishing role of the oral and anal zones, it also means the maturation of the whole personality and the concomitant diminution of helplessness, enabling the person to develop an attitude of friendliness and love toward others.

The second factor that contributes to the process of development operates on the individual from without. It is composed of the social rules, transmitted most vividly through the educational process, which call for the repression of pregenital sexual strivings in large measure and thus facilitate the forward march of genital sexuality.

Frequently, however, this march is never fully completed. Either in a direct or sublimated form, the pregenital areas remain extraordinarily strong. There are two basic reasons why pregenital aspirations may remain so strong: (1) fixation—because of the especially strong satisfaction or rejection experienced in childhood, pregenital wishes resist the maturation process and maintain their power; (2) regression—after the normal process of development has ended, a particularly severe internal or external frustration leads the person to turn back from love and genitality to the earlier pregenital stages of libido organization. In reality, fixation and regression ordinarily work together. A given fixation represents a disposition which, under certain circumstances, can readily bring about a regression to the fixated instinctual stage.

By pointing out the libidinal basis of character traits, psychoanalytic characterology can help to explain their dynamic function as productive forces in society. On the other hand, it can also serve as the starting point for a social psychology that will show how the character

traits common to most members of a society are conditioned by the distinctive nature of that society.

This social influence on character formation operates first and foremost through the family; it is the chief medium through which the child's psychic formation is oriented toward the surrounding society. In what way and to what degree a child's pregenital strivings are suppressed or intensified, and the manner in which sublimations or reaction formations are stimulated, depends basically on the educational process—the latter being an expression of the overall society's psychic structure.

But society's influence on the formation of character extends beyond childhood. Certain character traits are the most useful—and do most to advance the individual—within a given economic, social or class structure. For these traits there is something that we can call a “social reward”; it operates to insure the adaptation of the individual's character to what is considered “normal” and “healthy” within the given social structure.¹⁹ Character development, then, involves the adaptation of the libido structure to a given social structure—first through the medium of the family, and then through direct contact with social life.

Here the sexual morality of a society plays a very special role. As we pointed out, the major portions of the individual's pregenital strivings fade away into genital sexuality. To the extent that the sexual morality of a given society restricts genital satisfaction, there must be a corresponding intensification of pregenital impulses or their concomitant character traits. When stress is placed on prohibitions against genital satisfaction, the libido flows backward to the pregenital zones and we see increased evidence of oral and anal character traits in the life of the society.

Since character traits are anchored in the libidinal structure, they remain relatively stable. They develop as adaptations to the given economic and social structure, to be sure, but they do not disappear as fast as these structures and relationships change. The libidinal structure, from which these character traits develop, has a certain inertia; a long period of adaptation to new economic conditions is required before we get a corresponding change in the libidinal structure and its consequent character traits. This is the reason why the ideological superstructure, which is based on the character traits typical of a given society, changes more slowly than the economic substructure.

At this point I shall try to apply the findings of psychoanalytic characterology to a concrete sociological problem. My remarks are simply meant as an illustration of the way to proceed in these matters, not as a definitive answer to the problem broached.

The problem of the “spirit”—i.e., the psychic basis—of capitalism seems to be a particularly suitable example for two reasons. First, because the most relevant part of psychoanalytic characterology for an understanding of the bourgeois spirit—the theory about the anal character—happens to be the most developed part of psychoanalytic characterology. Second, because there is an extended sociological literature concerning this problem, so that the introduction of a new viewpoint seems in order.

What do I mean by the “spirit” of capitalism (or of bourgeois society)? I mean the sum total of character traits that are typical of human beings in this society—the emphasis being

on the dynamic function of character. I use “character” here in a very broad sense and by and large I could use Sombart’s definition of the “spirit” of an economic system. He defines it as “the sum total of psychic characteristics that are involved in economic activities. This would include all the expressions of intellectual life and all the character traits that are present in economic endeavors, as well as all goals, value judgments and principles that affect and regulate the behavior of people engaged in this activity.”²⁰

Insofar as I am concerned with the spirit of a society or a class, however, my definition goes beyond the spirit relevant for economic activity but refers to the psychic traits of individuals in a given class or society, which, after all, are the same, whether it is a question of economic activity or not. Moreover, in contrast to Sombart, I am not primarily concerned with “principles” and “value judgments” but with the character traits in which they are rooted.

We shall not deal with the problem of the connection between the bourgeois spirit and Protestantism and Protestant sects. This problem is so complex that even a few fleeting observations would lead us too far afield. For the same reason, we shall not explore the *economic* roots of capitalist society. This is methodologically permissible when we are at this point only trying to describe the specific *character* of a society and to study the question how this character—the manifestation of a specific *libidinal structure*—is a productive force which participates in shaping the development of that society. A complete social-psychological investigation would have to start with the description of the economic facts and show how the libidinal structure adapts itself to these facts.

Finally, we shall neglect another complicated and much debated question of a historical nature: At what point in history can we really begin to talk about capitalism and a bourgeois-capitalist spirit? We shall rather start from the assumption that there is such a spirit and that it has certain uniform traits—whether we meet it first in fifteenth-century Florence (as Sombart claims), or seventeenth-century England, in Defoe, or in Benjamin Franklin, or Andrew Carnegie, and the typical nineteenth-century merchant.²¹

The specific nature of the bourgeois-capitalist spirit can be most readily described in negative terms, by noting the features of the pro-capitalist spirit (for example, that of the Middle Ages) which it no longer possesses. Getting pleasure and enjoyment out of life is no longer a goal that is taken for granted by the bourgeois psyche, no longer a self-evident purpose that various activities, particularly economic activities, seek to serve. And this holds true whether we are talking about the worldly pleasures enjoyed by the medieval feudal class, the “blessedness” that the Church promised to the masses, or the enjoyment that a person got out of sumptuous festivals, beautiful paintings, and splendid buildings, and a great number of feast days. It was understood that man had an innate right to happiness, blessedness, or pleasure; this was viewed as the proper goal of all human activity, whether it was economic or not.

The bourgeois spirit introduced a decisive change in this respect. Happiness or blessedness ceased to be the unquestioned goal of life. Something else took first place on the scale of values: duty. Kraus regards this as one of the most significant differences between the

scholastic and the Calvinist attitude: “The thing that sharply distinguishes Calvin’s work ethos from that of the scholastic period is the former’s removal of goal-directedness and its emphasis on formal obedience to one’s calling in life. The material on which a person was working no longer made any difference. Iron discipline was demanded to act out of a deep feeling of obedience and duty.”²² Despite his many differences with Max Weber, Kraus seconded him on this point: “Weber was certainly right when he noted that ‘the primitive church and the Middle Ages had never known the notion that the fulfillment of duty within one’s worldly calling is the highest form of ethical self-regulation.’” (*Ibid.*) The evaluation of duty (in place of happiness or blessedness) as the highest value runs from Calvinism through the whole gamut of bourgeois thought—in either theological or other rationalizations. Another change occurred when the notion of duty became central. People no longer engaged in economic activity to maintain an appropriate, traditional livelihood; acquiring possessions and saving as such became ethical norms regardless of whether one enjoyed what one had acquired or not. There is so much reference to this fact in the pertinent literature that we need only offer a few suggestive examples.

Sombart mentions the “family books” of the Alberti family as a particularly striking example of the new value placed on savings and economizing. Here are a few quotes:

Avoid superfluous expenditures as you would the plague.

Any expenditure that is not absolutely necessary is madness.

Thriftiness is as praiseworthy and good, as wasteful expenditure is abominable.

Thriftiness hurts no one, and it helps the family. Thriftiness is a blessing.

Do you know the type of people I like best? Those who spend money only for what is absolutely necessary, and save the surplus; those I call thrifty householders.²³

Alberti also preaches economy in the use of one’s energy:

True *Maserizia* should involve the use of three things that are ours: 1) our soul, 2) our body and, above all, 3) our time!

To avoid wasting this precious commodity, time, I follow the following rule: Never will I give in to laziness. I will shun sleep until I am ready to drop from exhaustion... Thus I avoid laziness and sleep by setting some task for myself. To accomplish what must be accomplished, I draw up a time schedule when I get up in the morning and plot out the day. I make time for everything that has to be done, planning out the morning, afternoon and evening. Thus I keep all my affairs in order without any difficulty...In the evening before I go to bed, I review everything I have done that day...Better to lose sleep than time.²⁴

This same spirit suffuses the Puritan ethic,²⁵ the maxims of Benjamin Franklin, and the conduct of the nineteenth-century burgher.

Closely associated with this attitude toward property is another trait characteristic of the bourgeois spirit: the importance attached to the *private sphere*. Quite apart from its content, which may be material or psychic, the private sphere is something sacred; any invasion into this sphere is a major offense. (The strong affective reactions against socialism, to be found even among many who have no property, can be explained in large measure by the fact that it represented a threat to the private sphere.)

What kind of relationships to others are characteristic for the “spirit” of bourgeois capitalism? The most striking is the limitation on sexual pleasure that was imposed by bourgeois sexual morality. Catholic morality is not in favor of such pleasure either, to be sure, but there is no doubt that in *practice* the conduct of the bourgeois-Protestant world was wholly different in this respect from that of the pre-bourgeois world. The feelings of a man like Benjamin Franklin reflect not only an ethical norm but also bourgeois practice. Under his treatment of the virtues, he has this to say about chastity (point 12): “Do not take pleasure in the delights of the flesh except for the sake of health or progeny. Never use them to the point of exhaustion or debilitation, or to the detriment of any one’s peace and quiet.”²⁶

This devaluation of sexual pleasure corresponds to the reification of all human relationships within bourgeois society. Love relationships, in particular, were largely subordinated to economic considerations. Along with this reification, an indifference to the fate of one’s fellowman characterized relationships within the bourgeois world. This is not to say that there was no or less cruelty in the pre-capitalist period. The point is that bourgeois indifference had its own distinctive nuance and tone: there was no trace of individual responsibility for the lot of others,²⁷ no hint of love for one’s fellowmen as such without any conditions being attached.

Defoe provides us with a classic statement of this bourgeois indifference. He describes the poor “as a mob of whining ne’er-do-wells who are a disagreeable burden on the nation, requiring special laws.”²⁸ As we know, capitalism actually operated with this outlook, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even as late as 1911, the American tobacco trust is accused of having the same attitude: “In the realm of competition, human beings were mercilessly pushed aside.”²⁹ The lives of many nineteenth-century American industrial leaders provide ample illustrations.

In the bourgeois consciousness, this total lack of compassion did not seem unethical at all. On the contrary, it was anchored in certain religious or ethical conceptions. Instead of the blessedness guaranteed to those who were faithful children in the church; in the bourgeois concept, happiness was the reward for doing one’s duty. And this idea was reinforced by the notion that in the capitalist system there was no limit to the success attainable by the competent individual.

This lack of compassion in the bourgeois character represented a necessary adaptation to the economic structure of the capitalist system. The principle of free competition, and the concomitant notion of the survival of the fittest, called for individuals who were not inhibited

by compassion in their business dealings. Those who had the least compassion had the greatest chance of success.

Finally, we must mention another trait whose importance has been stressed by a wide variety of authors: rationality, the principle of accounting and purposefulness. It seems to me that this bourgeois rationality, which has nothing to do with higher forms of reasoning activity, corresponds in large measure with the psychological notion of “orderliness” that we have described. Franklin’s *Autobiography* provides typical examples of this peculiarly bourgeois “orderliness” and rationality.³⁰

A fine example of this “orderliness” is Franklin’s daily schedule, which he includes in his autobiography: The demands of order required that every portion of my activity have its proper time and place. So I drew up the following type of schedule for the entire day.

Early morning What good must I do today?	5) 6) 7)	Get up, wash, pray to the Godhead, plan my day and get to work, breakfast, etc.
Noon	8) 9) 10) 11) 12)	work Read, go through my accounts, and eat lunch
Afternoon	1) 2) 3) 4) 5)	work
Evening What good have I done?	6) 7) 8) 9)	Put things in order; eat supper; Music, relaxation, conversation; review the day.
Night	10) 11) 12) 1) 2)	sleep

	3)	
	4)	

Franklin also made up a list of his thirteen virtues, and checked off his offenses against them. This, too, embodies the same “orderliness” described by Abraham above.

To sum up: as the chief traits of the bourgeois-capitalist spirit we have recognized: (1) restriction of the role of pleasure as an end in itself (particularly sexual pleasure); (2) retreat from love, with the emphasis instead on collecting, possessing, and saving as ends in themselves; (3) fulfillment of one’s duty as the highest value; (4) emphasis on “orderliness” and exclusion of compassion for one’s fellowman.

If we compare these character traits with the typical traits of the anal character described earlier, we can readily see that there seems to be a wide spectrum of agreement and correspondence. If this agreement is a fact, then we would be justified in saying that the typical libidinal structure of bourgeois man is characterized by an intensification of the anal libido. A thorough study would provide a complete psychoanalytic description of bourgeois capitalist character traits. It would also show how and to what extent these traits have developed as an adaptation to the requirements of the capitalist economic structure and to what extent, on the other hand, the underlying anal eroticism itself served as a productive force in the development of the capitalist economy.¹

As I noted earlier, this paper does not deal with the question when to date the beginning of capitalism and the capitalist spirit. But to avoid some serious misunderstandings, we must give some consideration to development in monopolistic capitalism. It is clear that the typical character traits of the bourgeois of the nineteenth century gradually disappeared, as the classic type of the self-made, independent entrepreneur, who is both the owner and the manager of his own business, was disappearing. The character traits of the earlier business man became more of a handicap than a help to the new type of capitalist. A description and analysis of the latter’s psyche in present-day capitalism is another task that should be undertaken by psychoanalytic social psychology.

In one social class, however, the earlier character traits persisted: i.e., among the lower middle class. In capitalistically advanced countries such as Germany, this class is economically and politically powerless; yet it continues to perform its economic task in the outmoded forms of an earlier (eighteenth to nineteenth century) capitalist epoch. In today’s *petite bourgeoisie* we find the same anal character traits that have been ascribed to the older capitalist spirit.²

The working class seems to exhibit these anal character traits to a far lesser degree than the lower middle class.³ This particular difference is easy enough to understand, when we consider that the worker’s place in the process of production makes these traits obsolete.⁴ The much more difficult question is this: Why do so many members of both the *proletariat* and the lower middle class, who have no capital, and no savings to speak of, still exhibit bourgeois-anal traits and the corresponding ideologies? The decisive reason, it seems to me,

is that the libidinal structure underlying these traits is conditioned by the family and other traditional cultural factors. Thus it has a weight of its own, and it changes more slowly than the economic conditions to which it was adapted earlier.

What is the significance and importance of this kind of a social psychology for sociology? Its primary value lies in the fact that it enables us to understand the libidinal forces that find expression in character, in their role as factors which work to further (or inhibit) the social development of a society and its productive forces. It thus becomes possible to give a concrete, scientifically correct sense to the notion of the “spirit” of an epoch. If the notion of the “spirit” of a society is understood in these terms it will make obsolete many of the controversies that are found in the sociological literature. For many of these controversies result from the fact that the notion of “spirit” refers to ideology rather than to the character traits that can find expression in a wide variety of different and even opposing ideologies. The application of psychoanalysis will not only provide sociologists with useful viewpoints in their study of these questions; it will also prevent the uncritical use of false psychological categories.⁵

¹ “Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology” was first published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Hirschfeld-Leipzig, 1932.

² Thus one greatly misconstrues the Freudian standpoint when he equates the problem of sublimation with the problem of genital-sexual abstinence. This is done, for example, by Scheler in *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, Bonn, 1923, pp. 238 ff.

³ *Ges. Schriften*, V, 260ff.

⁴ See the instructive remarks and extensive bibliography of Otto Fenichel, *Perversionen, Psychosen, Charakterstörungen: Psychoanalytische spezielle Neurosenlehre*, Vienna, 1931.

⁵ It is easy to see why Freud attributed a central role to the erogenous zones. Such an assumption readily resulted not only from his empirical observations but also from his theoretical presuppositions, which were those of a mechanistic, physiological standpoint. They exerted a decisive influence on the formation of psychoanalytic theory. Any fruitful discussion of various psychoanalytic theses would have to begin with a critique of the central role given to the erogenous zones. We shall not undertake such a critique here, since our purpose is to present the *findings* of psychoanalysis. But it is an important question.

⁶ This paper, like the two others of 1932 and 1934 published in this volume, is written from the standpoint of acceptance of Freud’s libido theory, and thus does not conform any longer with my present point of view. Nevertheless, in the foregoing paragraphs, as well as in some other points, critical questions are raised which are the basis for my later revisions of classic theory. (1970)

⁷ See Bernfeld, *Psychologie des Säuglings*, Vienna, 1925.

⁸ In the psychoanalytic literature, stress is laid on the narcissistic attitude of the young child, while his friendly attitude toward others is given short shrift. I shall not delve into this important problem here, except to point to the existence of such friendly traits together with the hateful, sadistic ones.

⁹ It should be obvious that in the whole process of human development we can only talk about an increase or decrease of various tendencies, not about the clear-cut alternation of sharply separate structural types.

¹⁰ Here we cannot delve into such questions as to what extent the will to devour things and possess things are primitive tendencies of man in relationship to the environment.

¹¹ Karl Abraham, *Psychoanalytische Studien zur Charakterbildung*, Vienna, 1925, p. 42.

¹² One mother draws up a written program in which she minutely details her daughters day. The morning, for example, is divided up as follows: (1) out of bed, (2) potty, (3) washing, etc. From time to time during the morning, she knocks on her daughter's door and asks: How far are you? The little girl is supposed to respond: I'm at 9 (or 15, or whatever). Thus the mother keeps tight control over the execution of the daily program (*ibid.*, p. 12).

¹³ "Such people like to give money and similar gifts. Many of them play the benefactor or the philanthropist. But their libido remains more or less distant from the objects, so their work efforts are essentially unproductive. They certainly do not lack perseverance—a common trait of the anal character—but they utilize *it* in unproductive ways to a large extent. For example, they may stubbornly hold on to established forms in an unproductive way. If the worst comes to worst, their interest in content gives way to an interest in purely formal procedure." (*Ibid.*, p. 18.)

¹⁴ Here a few remarks of Abraham are noteworthy: There are cases where the connection between deliberate stool-retention and systematic thriftiness is perfectly obvious. I know of a rich banker who always urges his children to retain their bowel movements as long as possible, so as to derive as much benefit as possible from the food they have eaten.

Also noteworthy is the fact that many neurotics restrict their parsimony to specific types of expenditure, but are quite free with their money in other areas. There are patients, for example, who refuse to spend money on "transitory" things. A concert or a journey costs money, and one gets no permanent possession from the expense. I know one person who avoided going to the opera for this reason, but readily spent money for the sheet music of arias he had not heard; the latter was something permanent that he could hold on to. Many such neurotics are reluctant to spend money for food, because it does not remain as a permanent possession. Another type is quite willing to spend money for nourishment, in which they show extraordinary interest. Such people are deeply interested in the care of their body, their weight, etc. They are really concerned to know how much of what they imbibe remains as a lasting possession. It is evident that these people equate body content with money.

In other cases we find an attitude of parsimony towards their whole way of living. Sometimes this is carried to such extremes that they fret over negligible economies. I know

one man who used to run around the house with his trousers open, in order to save the buttonholes. One can readily guess that other drives are at work here also, but it is characteristic that they can hide themselves underneath the anal tendency of thrift.

In many patients we find a specialized form of this thriftiness: they are very economical in their use of toilet paper. Here the co-determining factor is the dread of soiling clean things [*ibid.*, p. 22-23].

¹⁵ “Many neurotics are terribly worried about wasting time. Only time spent on work seems to be time well spent. Any interruption of their work irritates them greatly. They hate inactivity and pleasure. These are the same people whom Ferenczi describes as ‘Sunday neurotics.’ They can brook no interruption in their work. As in the case of many such neurotically motivated tendencies, they often fall short of their goal. They save time in small things, and waste it in important things” (p. 23).

¹⁶ This raises a central problem, the psychology of love, which has not been really tackled yet by psychoanalysis.

¹⁷ See Freud’s observations in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Leipzig, 1923, p. 16, n.

¹⁸ The problems touched upon here lead to questions that are little discussed within psychoanalysis. See Wilhelm Reich, “Der genitale und der neurotische Charakter,” in: *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* (1929).

¹⁹ The distinction between “normal” and “neurotic” character traits is itself conditioned by social factors to a large extent. It can only be dealt with in connection with a specific society: any character structure that is not adapted to this society is “sick.” The character of a nineteenth century capitalist merchant would seem quite “sick” to a feudal society, and vice versa.

²⁰ Sombart, *Der Bourgeois*, Munich and Leipzig, 1913, p. 2.

²¹ See in particular: Sombart, *Der Bourgeois*, Munich 1913; Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Tübingen, 1920, Vol. I; Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, London, 1927; Brentano, *Die Anfänge des modernen Kapitalismus*, Munich, 1916; Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirche*, Gesammelte Schriften, Tübingen, 1919, Vol. I; Kraus, *Scholastik, Puritanismus und Kapitalismus*, Munich and Leipzig, 1930. All have extensive bibliographies for the reader.

²² Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

²³ L. B. Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, Florence, G. Mangini, 1908; cited by Sombart, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

²⁴ Cited by Sombart, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143.

²⁵ See Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

²⁶ Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*.

²⁷ Franklin lists these virtues as the most important ones: moderation, taciturnity, orderliness, resoluteness, thriftiness, diligence, sincerity, impartiality, temperance, cleanliness, imperturbability, chastity, and (later added!) humility. Characteristically enough, we find no

mention of charity, love, and kindness.

²⁸ Daniel Defoe, *Giving Alms No Charity*, London, 1704, p. 426.

²⁹ Cited by Sombart, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

¹ Here I shall merely mention several important related questions. The relationship with a kind, unconditionally loving mother, which played a dominant role in medieval Catholicism (see my comments on the maternal significance of Mary, God, and the Church in *The Dogma of Christ*, *op. cit.*), retreated into the background as the (typically ambivalent) relationship to the father came to the foreground. This father is a rival of the son, and he makes his love dependent upon the fulfilment of certain conditions.

I have stated earlier that it makes relatively little difference for the main thesis of this paper whether one speaks in terms of the libido theory or, as I have done in later years, in terms of energy-charged passions. At this point I want to mention that I have found the description of the anal character by Freud and others confirmed by the observable clinical data. My revision in *Man for Himself*, where the term “hoarding” is used instead of “anal” character, referred only to the *explanation* of the syndrome, which I see in a specific attitude toward others and things, rather than as being rooted in the anal erogenous zone. (It is true that feces and their equivalents play a special role in the hoarding character, but as symbolic expressions, rather than as “causes.”) The term “hoarding character” used in *Man for Himself* is more adequate than “anal character,” and could be used in this paper without changing the application to the spirit of capitalism. 1970.

² The analysis of the lower middle class is also an important task for social psychology. Particularly worthy of study is the revolutionary attitude peculiar to this class. It contains a mixture of rebellion and respect for paternal authority and discipline, which is characteristic of the anal attitude. The rebelliousness is not directed against the father’s authority as such, which remains untouched despite everything. This ambivalent attitude is satisfied by splitting up the objects. The desire for authority is channeled toward the strong leader, while other specific father figures become the objects of rebellion.

The difference between the upper-class and lower-class bourgeoisie is clearly illustrated in the contrast between the anal jokes of the lower-class beer hall and the genital jokes of the upper-class wine cellar.

³ Another important question is to what extent we can talk about an increase of genital character traits among the upper middle class. It is a difficult question to answer, precisely because the “genital character” has not been studied well enough in clinical and personal psychology.

⁴ It should be clear that an analysis of the proletariat’s character traits is very important for an understanding of the success and failure of socialism among this class. Here we shall merely note the contrast between the Marxian position (which places man’s dignity and freedom above and beyond his economic activity, proclaims his unconditional right to happiness and satisfaction, and criticizes the reified character of human relationships within capitalism) and the anal traits of the bourgeois spirit which erroneously views Marxism as an attempt to

demand an equal division of individual portions.

Closely related is another question, that we shall merely mention here. It concerns the retreat of paternal authority on the psychic level and the emergence of mother—centered traits. For example, the earth becomes a generous, giving mother for all her children. Related to this is the emancipation of women while the stress on masculine authority and the subjection of women is characteristic for lower middle class fascism. The relation of nationalism to the patriarchal structure of fascism also is part of this problematic area.

⁵ The use of false and superficial psychological categories is typified by Sombart. He says of procapitalist man: “He is natural man, man as God created him...His economic attitude is clear to see, deriving from human nature itself” (Sombart, *op. cit.*, p. 11).

The same superficiality is found in his analysis of the psyche of the capitalist entrepreneur, which he claims is that of the child:

The ultimate values of such men represent a reduction of all psychic processes to their most simple elements...a regression to the simple state of the infantile psyche. Let me prove this. Four elementary value-complexes dominate the child’s life: 1) physical size; 2) quick movement 3) novelty; 4) the feeling of power. These same values, and only these I think, are also found in the value systems of modern man (Sombart, *op. cit.*, pp. 221 ff).