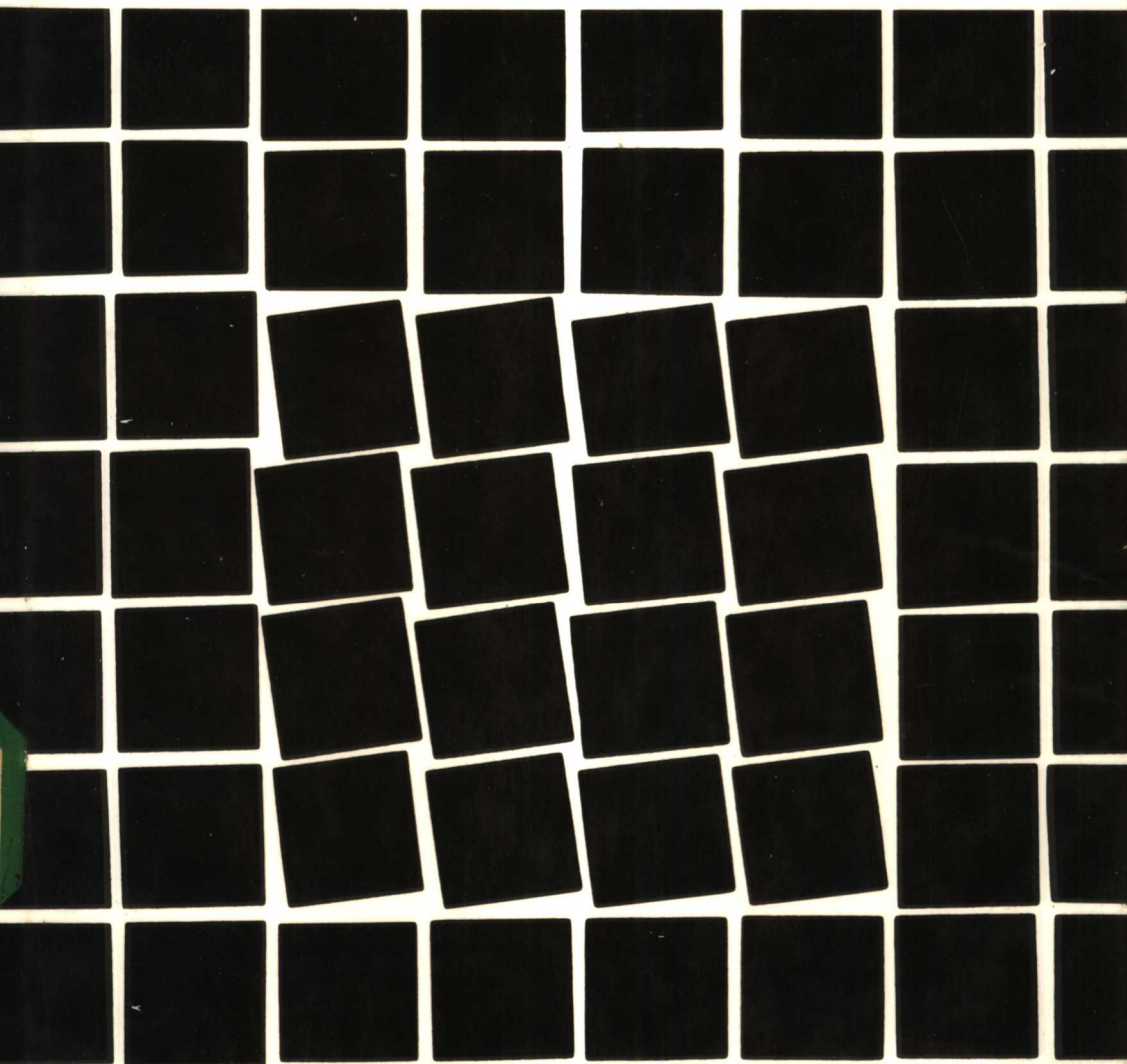


# THE PSYCHOTIC PERSONALITY

LEON J. SAUL, M.D. • SILAS L. WARNER, M.D.



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*To those who are dedicated to easing human suffering and preventing  
the human race from destroying itself*

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# PROLOGUE

*It is very hard that a person through no fault of his own should possess a character, perverse and difficult, which condemns him to an unhappy life.*

Somerset Maugham

*But he was now so pulled about by different alarms that, while one portion of his mind was still alert and cunning, another trembled on the brink of lunacy.*

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Markheim*

*Man is in bondage to his passions; these and his environment determine his actions, and his will is powerless against them . . . man is a bundle of contradictions and given time will reveal himself to be the opposite of what he seems . . . there are hidden possibilities of savagery in the most respectable of women.*

K. Pfeiffer, *W. Somerset Maugham*

Here is how one of our best and most conscientious current authors struggles to understand one of his own characters—a girl who seems to fit the category “psychotic personality” because she is superficially pseudonormal in her daily relations but nearly psychotic in her views and behavior:

*I pondered the question [of her behavior] . . . reviewing her motivation as I understood it. It wasn't sex, because her behavior with Nazrullah, Zulifiqar and Stiglitz had an almost sexless quality; she was neither driven by desire nor faithful to anyone who fulfilled it. I wondered if she might be suffering from some kind of schizophrenia, but I could find no evidence that she was; no one was persecuting her; she persecuted herself. At one point I had thought she might be a victim of nostalgia for a past age, but she would have been the same in Renaissance Florence or Victorian England; history was replete with people like her, and although she despised this age, no other would have satisfied her better. It was true that like many sentimentalists she indulged in an infantile primitivism; if bread was baked over camel dung it was automatically*

*better than bread baked in a General Electric range, but many people were afflicted with this heresy and they didn't wind up in a caravan at Balkh. There remained the possibility that she suffered from pure jaundice of the spirit, a vision which perverted reality and made it unpalatable; but with Ellen this was not the case. She saw reality rather clearly, I thought. It was her reaction to it that was faulty. And then I heard the dry, emotionless voice of Nexler reading from the music professor's report: I saw her as a girl of good intention who was determined to disaffiliate herself from our society. This didn't explain why she acted as she did, but it certainly described what her actions were.*

James Michener, *Caravans*  
New York: Random House, Inc. 1963

*... though the man's even temper and direct bearing would seem to intimate a mind peculiarly subject to the law of reason, none the less, in his soul's recesses, he would seem to riot in complete exemption from that law, having apparently little to do with reason further than to employ it as an ambidexter implement for affecting the irrational. That is to say: towards the accomplishment of an aim which in wantonness of malignity would seem to partake of the insane, he will direct a cool judgment sagacious and sound.*

*These men are true madmen, and of the most dangerous sort—it is secretive and self-contained: so that when most active it is, to the average mind, not distinguished from sanity, and for the reason that whatever its aims may be (and the aim is never disclosed) the method and the outward proceeding is always perfectly rational—can it be this phenomenon, disowned or not acknowledged, that in some criminal cases puzzles the courts?*

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*

*Between his heart and mind—both unrelieved  
Wrought in his brain and bosom separate strife.  
Some said that he was mad; others believed  
That memories of an antenatal life  
Made this, where now he dwelt, a penal hell . . .*

Shelley, *Prince Athanase*

## PREFACE

This book presents some of our clinical observations, deductions and tentative conclusions as to the diagnosis and psychodynamics of the "psychotic personality." This subject is no small circumscribed problem, but an entire area of psychopathology. Some cases even suggest an organic etiology in some part—but organic or hereditary elements are beyond our scope or concern here. Our purpose is limited to the application of the psychodynamic approach to the problems of definition and cause. Science is a collective, cooperative, and self-correcting procedure, and classification of phenomena is one of its basic tools. We are well satisfied if this effort adds something to the clarification of an important area of human psychological suffering in individuals and in society.

The interested analyst and psychodynamicist have ample opportunities for observing people other than the few they see in their offices over a year. Such opportunities for observation are greater if they are consultants to certain institutions and agencies. Without citing statistics, it is obvious that, as Freud pointed out, in many if not most people, the ego (the orderly operation of the conscious mind) is under constant pressure from the forces of instinct, conscience, and the outside world. The more one observes this, the more natural it seems that many people are living under the threat of neurosis or psychosis. We can all identify with these struggles, and they provide the material for fiction and drama. Many people, not just a rare few, are under such severe stress from an early age that they barely control powerful tendencies toward psychosis. They are just now being recognized and studied, and upon them this book is focused.

Our procedure has been to write out vignettes of all the 60 patients and other individuals we have seen in therapy or in consultation who were more than simply neurotic but not clearly psychotic. We then studied our vignettes for what impressed us as the most striking of the



deeper, more permanent characteristics, trying these out as criteria for diagnosing the psychotic personality. They seem to work for us in defining those pathodynamics but must of course be critically tested by others to see if they help narrow down this particular syndrome to something sufficiently definable to be recognizable and useful as a diagnosis.

### CRITERIA FOR THE PSYCHOTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER (PPD)

This condition is characterized by the depth, level, or age of the fixation or regression, in which the frustration or trauma and the consequent fight-flight reaction to it cause:

1. an *intensity of hostility* which creates difficulties of some kind or at least is prominent and usually is in part handled by *projection*;
2. serious *withdrawal* from human relations (i.e., repressed or deficient object interest and relations);
3. heightened *narcissism* in the form of emotional absorption with self and self-interests (possibly like Freud's amoeba with pseudopods withdrawn from object interest into itself);
4. warping of *the sense of reality*, somewhat repressed;
5. the psychotic elements *diffuse* throughout the personality or ego; they are not apparent as specific psychotic symptoms but are repressed behind a mask of reality.

We assume that the reader of these vignettes describing what we call "psychotic personalities" will have in mind for a control series an adequate background of relatively normal or neurotic individuals with which to contrast these cases and criteria.

Not all psychotic personalities are tyrants, but many a tyrant—petty or major—is a psychotic personality. The frustration caused by feelings of inferiority stemming from the depth of the fixation or regression to an early age and stage of development generates more than average feelings of inferiority, reactively heightened narcissism, and therefore frustration and the fight-flight reaction, with consequent hostility and withdrawal. Often the hostility is too freely vented

because of the lack of identification with the victims, which is part of the failure and deficiency of object relations and interest, the withdrawal of human sympathy, the remoteness from people. The hidden distortion of the sense of reality is often revealed if the tyrant meets reverses; he then complains that he did nothing wrong but is simply misunderstood and mistreated by others. When the tyrant is in a family, one or more of the children will be ruined for life. Many of these psychotic personalities who are ubiquitous in society come to the attention of lawyers and the courts, where they are mostly as poorly understood as they are in the world of business, in universities, and elsewhere.

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Susan (Mrs. Vernon) Bender, my ever-reliable, unsurpassable secretary, has most directly made this book possible with her always practical suggestions, her prompt and accurate typing and retyping, and her saving of my energies in a thousand ways. June Strickland, librarian of the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital has been indispensable in her willing and rapid providing of books, articles, and references. Mr. Eugene Falken and his fine, friendly, and efficient staff—Ella Harwood, secretary, Alberta Gordon, editor—have been a pleasure to work with on the endless details involved in publishing this book, and I am most appreciative of their attitude and substantial help. Indirectly but no less importantly, the understanding and devotion of my wife, Rose, and of my children and grandchildren—especially Mark and Anne, who are old enough to understand—have given me the emotional replenishment to write this book, as well as to practice and carry other responsibilities.

LEON J. SAUL

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SILAS L. WARNER

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# **SECTION I THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**



# 1

## INSTINCTS AND REALITY

*For my part I am of the opinion with mad Johnson that all mankind are a little mad.*

John Adams

*We often hear of prisoners at large. The majority of mankind are madmen at large. They differ in their degrees of insanity. . . .*

Benjamin Rush

(Both quotations from *The Spurs of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush*)

*Whether we have a crisis or not depends on who wins the race between belief and disbelief. . . . We [gnomes] stand for disbelief. We are basically cynical about the ability of men to manage their affairs rationally for very long.*

Adam Smith, *Paper Money*

### CIVILIZATION

Civilization is a term used broadly and in many ways. (1) It seems to imply a social organization, i.e., a gathering of people who are related to each other, whether closely or at a distance, having in common their existence as part of the organization of the group, the group being relatively permanent. An obvious example is a nation. (2) Another characteristic of civilization is the treatment of one another in a "civil" manner. (3) Most civilizations are also characterized by some degree of surplus of life's necessities, so that there is time available beyond the constant struggle to obtain the indispensable essentials of food, clothing, and shelter. (4) This makes possible some amount of culture, which arises from sublimation of the animal instincts into the



#### 4 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

products of thought and art, i.e., mostly artistic and scientific creation. Science is at bottom a cooperative, systematic way of learning the facts about nature and ourselves as part of it. It is a method of learning about reality, both physical and psychological.

Which instincts are sublimated? Here we tread on shaky ground, because there is still disagreement on the meaning of *instinct*. Psychoanalysts have long believed that their field lacks a sound theory of instincts. Yet if we keep to the obvious, instincts mean simply the most basic and constant motivations of a living organism as a unit. We can reduce the question to: What main motivations and reactions do we see in humans throughout their lives, from birth onward, during their entire life cycle? The experienced analyst finds in his clinical work ample opportunity to study this question.

The following list includes obvious, powerful, and permanent drives in the life of every human being, drives which motivate the organism as a unit and not, for example, a part reflex like breathing. This list is of course only a first approximation, but it is based entirely on clinical analytic observations. The more simple and comprehensive a theory is, the better. However, at this stage of psychodynamics as a science, it is not possible to list exclusively pure, fundamental, permanent, irreducible, unanalyzable urges. Freud (1930) tried to achieve this goal but had to sacrifice a close relevance to clinical usefulness and come down to his Eros-Thanatos, love and death, instincts which correspond to anabolism and catabolism in biochemistry. However correct, these concepts are so broad and the gap to biology is so wide that they are of little practical use in dealing with the true basis of science, namely, observable and verifiable facts (as Planck's thermodynamics, Einstein's theory of relativity, and Darwin's theory of evolution do). A list of instincts includes the basic emotional forces as they are observable in the human mind, where they are rarely seen in pure form but appear mostly in interplay with other emotional forces and reactions (Saul, 1979, Part II). Further experience will lead to a better instinct theory. For the present we will sacrifice depth, breadth, and elegance of theory for closeness to observable facts. It is a consoling thought that the atom as known to modern physicists is far different from the unit of matter envisioned by Democritus.