"Woman understands children better than man does, but man is more childish than woman.

"In the true man there is a child hidden; it wants to play. Up there, ye women, discover, I pray you, the child in man!

"Let woman be a pastime-object, divine and fine, like the precious stone, illumined with the virtues of a world not yet dawned.

"May the beam of a star shine in your love! Let your hope be - may I bear the overman!

"May there be valour in your love. Ye must attack with your love him who inspires you with fear!

"Let your honour be in your love! Woman understands little about honour otherwise. But let this be your honour: always to love more than ye are loved, and never be the second.

"Let man be afraid of woman when she loves; she then makes every sacrifice, and regards everything else as worthless.

"Let man be afraid of woman when she hates; for man is merely evil in his innermost soul, woman, however, is bad there.

"Whom does woman hate most? Thus spake the iron to the magnet: 'I hate thee most, because thou attractest, but art not strong enough to pull to thee.'

"The happiness of man is: 'He will.' The happiness of woman is: 'We will.'

"'Lo, the world has now become perfect!' - thus thinks every woman when she obeys with all her love.

"And woman must obey and find a depth for her surface. Woman's nature is surface, an unstable, stormy film on a shallow water.

"Man's nature, however, is deep, its current rushes in subterranean caverns; woman conjectures its power, but does not comprehend it.

Here the old girl replied to me: "Many pretty things has Zarathustra said, especially for those who are young enough for them.

"It is strange! Zarathustra knows little about women, and yet he is right with regard to them. Does that happen because nothing is impossible with women?

"And now accept a little truth by way of thanks! I am surely old enough for it!

"Swaddle it up and hold its mouth, otherwise it will cry too loud, the little truth."

"Give me thy little truth," said I. And thus spake the old girl:

"Thou goest to women? Do not forget thy whip!"

Thus spake Zarathustra.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. 'One should only speak to men about women.' What might this suggest about the way in which philosophers, including Nietzsche, have formulated their views on women?

2. According to Nietzsche, 'Woman's nature is surface... Man's nature... is deep.' How might this idea relate to Kant's ideas on the nature of the sexes?

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Introduction and Background

While some would not characterize Freud's work as 'philosophical', this would seem to take too narrow an account of his work. In defining the parameters of psychoanalytic discourse, Freud employs philosophical ideas. If philosophy is understood as a method employed to expose lazy or uncritical thinking, then Freud's work is profoundly philosophical. Moreover, his impact upon many aspects of contemporary western thought remains.
As Rosalind Miles documents, the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century saw increased activity on the part of women not only to achieve the vote, but to take charge of their own bodies. The demand for universal suffrage was paralleled with an increased demand for women to take control of their sexuality, and primarily the reproductive process. From 1840 onwards came the development of better and more effective contraception; 1882 saw the world's first birth control clinic. The quality of women's lives seemed to be improving. An end to the all-too-frequent deaths on the 'birthing' bed was in view. With this assurance came the possibility that control over their own fertility would enable women to compete on equal terms with men in the male world.

Analysis of Freud's ideas is profitably on two fronts. On the one hand, his ideas of female sexuality are grounded in ideas of the nature of woman consistent with the western philosophical canon. In particular, Freud re-states male sexual experience as the 'norm'. Male experience is taken as normative, and woman is defined in relation to the male. Aristotle's claim that women are 'mutilated males', defined in relation to men and found wanting, resonates in Freud's writings on female sexual development. Like Augusteine, Freud moves from writing of 'gender' (i.e. 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits and qualities) to associating these 'qualities' with the sexes. So, men are 'masculine', women are 'feminine'. The claims of Kant and Schopenhauer that a woman's sexuality hinders her ability to act in a truly moral way is reiterated in Freud's comments on 'feminine' morality.

At the same time, Freud's writings do more than reiterate notions of woman present in the western philosophical tradition. His ideas exemplify the connection between a writer's ideas and his 'socio-historical context. Freud's account of human sexuality was formulated through his work with the bourgeois of nineteenth-century Vienna. Family life in this social group was governed by strict rules of conduct; in some cases this resulted in extreme repression of the emotions. The strongly patriarchal structure of the family resulted in distant, rather cold relationships between husband and wife, which in turn determined the way in which children developed emotionally. Is it possible or indeed adequate - to move from conclusions grounded in this specific social setting to make universal claims about human relationships and development? While such a comment is not primarily concerned with issues of philosophical clarity, the connection between ideas and their context is important, for it suggests that all philosophers should be wary of making false generalizations.

**SOME PSYCHICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE ANATOMICAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SEXES**

In examining the earliest mental shapes assumed by the sexual life of children we have been in the habit of taking as the subject of our investigations the male child, the little boy. With little girls, so we have supposed, things must be similar, though in some way or other they must nevertheless be different. The point in development at which this difference lay could not be clearly determined.

In boys the situation of the Oedipus complex is the first stage that can be recognized with certainty. It is easy to understand, because at that stage a child retains the same object which he previously catheted with his libido - not as yet a genital one - during the preceding period while he was being suckled and nursed. The fact, too, that in this situation he regards his father as a disturbing rival and would like to get rid of him and take his place is a straightforward consequence of the actual state of affairs. I have shown elsewhere how the Oedipus attitude in little boys belongs to the phallic phase, and how its destruction is brought about by the fear of castration - that is, by narcissistic interest in their genitals. The matter is made more difficult to grasp by the complicated circumstance that even in boys the Oedipus complex has a double orientation, active and passive, in accordance with their bisexual constitution; a boy also wants to take his mother's place as the love-object of his father - a fact which we describe as the feminine attitude.

As regards the prehistory of the Oedipus complex in boys we are far from complete clarity. We know that that period includes an identification of an affectionate sort with the boy's father, an identification which is still free from any sense of rivalry in regard to his mother. Another element of that stage is invariably, I believe, a masturbatory activity in connection with the genitals, the masturbation of early childhood, the more or less violent suppression of which by those in charge of the child sets the castration complex in action. It is to be assumed that this masturbation is attached to the Oedipus complex and serves as a discharge for the sexual excitation belonging to it. It is, however, uncertain whether the masturbation has this character from the first, or whether on the contrary it makes its first appearance spontaneously as an activity of a bodily organ and is only brought into relation with the Oedipus complex at some later date; this second possibility is by far the more probable. Another doubtful question is the part played by bed-wetting and by the breaking of that habit through the intervention of training measures. We are inclined to make the simple connection that continued bed-wetting is a result of masturbation and that its suppression is regarded by boys as an inhibition of their genital activity - that is, as having the meaning of a threat of castration; but whether we
are always right in supposing this remains to be seen. Finally, analysis shows us in a shadowy way how the fact of a child at a very early age listening to his parents copulating may set up his first sexual excitement, and how that event may, owing to its after-effects, act as a starting-point for the child's whole sexual development. Masturbation, as well as the two attitudes in the Oedipus complex, later on become attached to this early experience, the child having subsequently interpreted its meaning. It is impossible, however, to suppose that these observations of coitus are of universal occurrence, so that at this point we are faced with the problem of 'primal phantasies'. Thus the prehistory of the Oedipus complex, even in boys, raises all of these questions for sifting and explanation; and there is the further problem of whether we are to suppose that the process invariably follows the same course, or whether a great variety of different preliminary stages may not converge upon the same terminal situation.

In little girls the Oedipus complex raises one problem more than in boys. In both cases the mother is the original object; and there is no cause for surprise that boys retain that object in the Oedipus complex. But how does it happen that girls abandon it and instead take their father as an object? In pursuing this question I have been able to reach some conclusions which may throw light precisely on the prehistory of the Oedipus relation in girls.

Every analyst has come across certain women who cling with especial intensity and tenacity to the attachment to their father and to the wish in which it culminates of having a child by him. We have good reason to suppose that the same wishful phantasy was also the motive force of their infantile masturbation, and it is easy to form an impression that at this point we have been brought up against an elementary and unanalyzable fact of infantile sexual life. But a thorough analysis of these very cases brings something different to light — namely, that here the Oedipus complex has a long prehistory and is in some respects a secondary formation.

The old paediatrician Lindner once remarked that a child discovers the genital zones (the penis or the clitoris) as a source of pleasure while indulging in sensual sucking (thumb-sucking). I shall leave it an open question whether it is really true that the child takes the newly found source of pleasure in exchange for the recent loss of the mother's nipple — a possibility to which later phantasies (fellatio) seem to point. Be that as it may, the genital zone is discovered at some time or other, and there seems no justification for attributing any psychical content to the first activities in connection with it. But the first step in the phallic phase which begins in this way is not the linking-up of the masturbation with the object-cathexes of the Oedipus complex, but a momentous discovery which little girls are destined to make. They notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis.

There is an interesting contrast between the behaviour of the two sexes. In the analogous situation, when a little boy first catches sight of a girl's genital region, he begins by showing irresolution and lack of interest; he sees nothing or disavows what he has seen, he softens it down or looks about for expedients for bringing it into line with his expectations. It is not until later, when some threat of castration has obtained a hold upon him, that the observation becomes important to him: if he then recollects or repeats it, it arouses a terrible storm of emotion in him and forces him to believe in the reality of the threat which he has hitherto laughed at. This combination of circumstances leads to two reactions, which may become fixed and will in that case, whether separately or together or in conjunction with other factors, permanently determine the boy's relations to women: horror of the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her. These developments, however, belong to the future, though not to a very remote one.

A little girl behaves differently. She makes her judgment and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it.

Here what has been named the masculinity complex of women branches off. It may put great difficulties in the way of their regular development towards femininity, if it cannot be got over soon enough. The hope of some day obtaining a penis in spite of everything and so of becoming like a man may persist to an incredibly late age and may become a motive for strange and otherwise unaccountable actions. Or again, a process may set in which I should like to call a 'disavowal', a process which in the mental life of children seems neither uncommon nor very dangerous but which in an adult would mean the beginning of a psychosis. Thus a girl may refuse to accept the fact of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she does possess a penis, and may subsequently be compelled to behave as though she were a man.
The psychical consequences of envy for the penis, in so far as it does not become absorbed in the reaction-formation of the masculinity complex, are various and far-reaching. After a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority. When she has passed beyond her first attempt at explaining her lack of a penis as being a punishment personal to herself and has realized that that sexual character is a universal one, she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least in holding that opinion, insists on being like a man.

Even after penis-envy has abandoned its true object, it continues to exist: by an easy displacement it persists in the character-traits of jealousy. Of course, jealousy is not limited to one sex and has a wider foundation than this, but I am of opinion that it plays a far larger part in the mental life of women than of men and that is because it is enormously reinforced from the direction of displaced penis-envy. While I was still unaware of this source of jealousy and was considering the phantasy 'a child is being beaten', which occurs so commonly in girls, I constructed a first phase for it in which its meaning was that another child, a rival of whom the subject was jealous, was to be beaten. This phantasy seems to be a relic of the phallic period in girls. The peculiar rigidity which struck me so much in the monotonous formula 'a child is being beaten' can probably be interpreted in a special way. The child which is being beaten (or caressed) may ultimately be nothing more nor less than the clitoris itself, so that at its very lowest level the statement will contain a confession of masturbation, which has remained attached to the content of the formula from its beginning in the phallic phase till later life.

A third consequence of penis-envy seems to be a loosening of the girl's affectionate relation with her maternal object. The situation as a whole is not very clear, but it can be seen that in the end the girl's mother, who sent her into the world so insufficiently equipped, is almost always held responsible for her lack of a penis. The way in which this comes about historically is often that soon after the girl has discovered that her genitals are unsatisfactory she begins to show jealousy of another child on the ground that her mother is fonder of it than of her, which serves as a reason for her giving up her attachment to her mother. It will fit in with this if the child which has been preferred by her mother is made into the first object of the beating-phantasy which ends in masturbation.

There is yet another surprising effect of penis-envy, or of the discovery of the inferiority of the clitoris, which is undoubtedly the most important of all. In the past I had often formed an impression that in general women tolerate masturbation worse than men, that they more frequently fight against it and that they are unable to make use of it in circumstances in which a man would seize upon it as a way of escape without any hesitation. Experience would no doubt elicit innumerable exceptions to this statement, if we attempted to turn it into a rule. The reactions of human individuals of both sexes are of course made up of masculine and feminine traits. But it appeared to me nevertheless as though masturbation were further removed from the nature of women than of men, and the solution of the problem could be assisted by the reflection that masturbation, at all events of the clitoris, is a masculine activity and that the elimination of clitoral sexuality is a necessary precondition for the development of femininity. Analyses of the remote phallic period have now taught me that in girls, soon after the first signs of penis-envy, an intense current of feeling against masturbation makes its appearance, which cannot be attributed exclusively to the educational influence of those in charge of the child. This impulse is clearly a forerunner of the wave of repression which at puberty will do away with a large amount of the girl's masculine sexuality in order to make room for the development of her femininity. It may happen that this first opposition to auto-erotic activity fails to attain its end. And this was in fact the case in the instances which I analysed. The conflict continued, and both then and later the girl did everything she could to free herself from the compulsion to masturbate. Many of the later manifestations of sexual life in women remain unintelligible unless this powerful motive is recognized.

I cannot explain the opposition which is raised in this way by little girls to phallic masturbation except by supposing that there is some concurrent factor which turns her violently against that pleasurable activity. Such a factor lies close at hand. It cannot be anything else than her narcissistic sense of humiliation which is bound up with penis-envy, the reminder that after all this is a point on which she cannot compete with boys and that it would therefore be best for her to give up the idea of doing so. Thus the little girl's recognition of the anatomical distinction between the sexes forces her away from masculinity and masculine masturbation on to new lines which lead to the development of femininity.
So far there has been no question on the Oedipus complex, nor has it up to this point played any part. But now the girl's libido slips into a new position along the line – there is no other way of putting it – of the equation 'penis-child'. She gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child: and with that purpose in view she takes her father as a love-object. Her mother becomes the object of her jealousy. The girl has turned into a little woman. If I am to credit a single analytic instance, this new situation can give rise to physical sensations which would have to be regarded as a premature awakening of the female genital apparatus. When the girl's attachment to her father comes to grief later on and has to be abandoned, it may give place to an identification with him and the girl may thus return to her masculinity complex and perhaps remain fixated in it.

I have now said the essence of what I had to say: I will stop, therefore, and cast an eye over our findings. We have gained some insight into the prehistory of the Oedipus complex in girls. The corresponding period in boys is more or less unknown. In girls the Oedipus complex is a secondary formation. The operations of the castration complex precede it and prepare for it. In boys the Oedipus complex is a primary formation. The corresponding period in boys is more or less unknown. In girls the Oedipus complex is a secondary formation. The operations of the castration complex precede it and prepare for it. As regards the relation between the Oedipus and castration complexes there is a fundamental contrast between the two sexes. Whereas in boys the castration complex is destroyed by the castration complex, in girls it is made possible and led up to by the castration complex. This contradiction is cleared up if we reflect that the castration complex always operates in the sense implied in its subject-matter: it inhibits and limits masculinity and encourages femininity. The difference between the sexual development of males and females at the stage we have been considering is an intelligible consequence of the anatomical distinction between their genitals and of the psychical situation involved in it; it corresponds to the difference between a castration that has been carried out and one that has merely been threatened. In their essentials, therefore, our findings are self-evident and it should have been possible to foresee them.

The Oedipus complex, however, is such an important thing that the manner in which one enters and leaves it cannot be without its effects. In boys (as I have shown at length in the paper to which I have just referred) and to which all of my present remarks are closely related) the complex is not simply repressed, it is literally smashed to pieces by the shock of threatened castration. Its libidinal cathexes are abandoned, desexualized and in part sublimated; its objects are incorporated into the ego, where they form the nucleus of the super-ego and give that new structure its characteristic qualities. In normal, or, it is better to say, in ideal cases, the Oedipus complex exists no longer, even in the unconscious: the super-ego has become its heir. Since the penis owes its extraordinarily high narcissistic cathexis to its organic significance for the propagation of the species, the catastrophe to the Oedipus complex (the abandonment of incest and the institution of conscience and morality) may be regarded as a victory of the race over the individual. This is an interesting point of view when one considers that neurosis is based upon a struggle of the ego against the demands of the sexual function. But to leave the standpoint of individual psychology is not of any immediate help in clarifying this complicated situation.

In girls the motive for the demolition of the Oedipus complex is lacking. Castration has already had its effect, which was to force the child into the situation of the Oedipus complex. Thus the Oedipus complex escapes the fate which it meets with in boys: it may be slowly abandoned or dealt with by repression, or its effects may persist far into women's normal mental life. I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. Character-traits which critics of every epoch have brought up against women – that they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility – all these would be amply accounted for by the modification in the formation of their super-ego which we have inferred above. We must not allow ourselves to be deflected from such conclusions by the denials of the feminists, who are anxious to force us to regard the two sexcs as completely equal in position and worth; but we shall, of course, willingly agree that the majority of men are also far behind the masculine ideal and that all human individuals, as a result of their bisexual disposition and of cross-inheritance, combine in themselves both masculine and feminine characteristics, so that pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content.
I am inclined to set some value on the considerations I have brought forward upon the psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes. I am aware, however, that this opinion can only be maintained if my findings, which are based on a handful of cases, turn out to have general validity and to be typical. If not, they would remain no more than a contribution to our knowledge of the different paths along which sexual life develops.

NOTES

1. [Ed.] Oedipus complex: Freud’s term for what he viewed as the key stage of child sexual development. The developing child/boy views the father as a rival for his mother’s love, and wishes him dead. ‘Oedipus’ is taken from the name of the King in Greek mythology who kills his father and marries his mother.

2. [Ed.] S. Lindner: Freud is citing his work ‘Das Saugen an den Fingern, Lippen, etc., bei den Kindern (Ludeln)’, published in 1879.

3. [Ed.] Freud is referring to ‘The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex’ (1924), which can be found in the Standard Edition of his works, vol. 19, published by the Hogarth Press.


6. [Ed.] super-ego: the internalized external authority, related to the capacity to make moral decisions; the ability of the ego to comment on its own actions.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. ‘They notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall victim to envy for the penis.’ Compare Freud’s account of ‘penis-envy’ with that given by Shulamith Firestone: ‘It is safer to view this as a metaphor. Even when an actual preoccupation with genitals does occur it is that anything that physically distinguishes the envied male will be envied …’ (S. Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex (London: Women’s Press, 1979), p. 57).

   In a male-dominated society, why might women ‘envy’ the possession of a penis?

2. To what extent can Freud’s account of the psychological development of women be related to the philosophical texts considered so far in this reader?