

THE PROBLEM OF VALUES IN THE LIGHT OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

A. T. BOISEN
The Chicago Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT

A study of the ethical and religious factors in 176 cases of dementia praecox in the Worcester State Hospital indicates that moral self-judgment is among the most important causative factors. This is shown in the case of a patient who in his acutely disturbed period was occupied with the idea of effecting a reconciliation between God and Satan. The standards by which this man judged himself appear to have been functions of his social relationships, particularly to those whom he accounted supremely worthy of love and honor. Like the others in this group he was one of those who accept the standards implanted by their early guides and have succeeded neither in conforming to them nor in growing into a larger loyalty or a more comprehensive understanding. His religious concern was associated with his attempt to face his difficulties and to bring himself into accord with those loyalties and to realize those values which he felt to be of cosmic importance.

Nowhere better than in a mental hospital do we have opportunity to examine into the emotional and volitional springs of human behavior and the standards of moral judgment. In the majority of cases which come to us each year the causative factors are not to be found in demonstrable organic disease. The difficulty is rather one of emotion and volition, of belief and attitude. We are dealing with individuals whose behavior is guided and controlled by certain desires and value judgments. And we see these individuals breaking or broken under the stresses and strains of love and hate and fear and anger. We see them grappling with the issues of spiritual life and death, of survival and destruction; and we are able to observe the end results of the diverse ways in which individuals deal with failure to measure up to the moral standards which they have accepted as their own. In these end results we see in exaggerated form processes which are present in health together with their logical outcome. If, therefore, we have eyes to see and wisdom to interpret, we may be able to discover the laws which have to do with the attainment of the moral objectives of particular individuals. We may be able to throw some light upon the factors which enter into the determination of these objectives and of their associated hierarchy of values. And we may be able to draw some conclusions in regard to

the social implications and consequences of different types of moral objectives and ethical systems.

A particular case may serve as an illustration and point of departure for some generalizations concerning the problem of values which have been arrived at through the study of the religious and ethical factors in 176 cases under investigation in the Neuroendocrine Research in Dementia Praecox, which has been under way during the past five years at the Worcester State Hospital under the direction of Dr. Roy G. Hoskins of the Harvard Medical School.

James G., a grocery clerk of 29 years, with 9th grade education, fair intelligence, good physique, and without demonstrable organic pathology, was brought to the hospital in an acutely disturbed condition. From the patient himself and from his relatives, the following facts were learned regarding his life. He was born in the home of a Southern clergyman who died when he was twelve years old. As a young boy he had certain difficulties in learning to manage his sex drive. At the age of sixteen he left home without having reached any solution of this problem and fared forth into the great world, finally landing in the army. Here he stayed nine years, making a fairly good record and serving most of the time as a non-commissioned officer. In the army, along with a majority of his mates, he found an outlet for the troublesome sex drive by going to houses of prostitution. Supported thus by group opinion, he was quite comfortable about his manner of life, especially in view of the fact that he was always careful to report after any indulgence and get his prophylactic treatment and the protection against disease which this insured. At the end of the nine years he married and, in due course of time, a child arrived. With the birth of the child came a mental disturbance, something which sometimes happens to fathers as well as to mothers. To use his own words, there was "something funny about the way his child was born." When the news came, his mind "began running and jumping." A million things were passing through his head. He was under a spell of fear. He felt that he had a lot of responsibility, but he wasn't thinking so much about the baby. He was thinking about human nature and its mechanisms. He was trying to understand what was the cause of all emotion and he wrote an article expounding his theory of the human emotions.

This he sent to a local newspaper and he took great satisfaction in the fact that it was published.

This disturbance gradually subsided and he remained well until things began to go wrong with him economically. He set up in business for himself and was burnt out. He obtained and lost several jobs, and he became involved in debt. Then he broke mentally, and once more, as at the time of the birth of his child, he became concerned about cosmic affairs. When he came to the hospital he told the following story:

How did it start? I hardly know. I think it was the smell of the fish. I had dreams of crawling along the bottom of the sea among the fish and the oysters and everything. I had to give up work and sit around and brood. Then ideas came to me. I didn't have to search for words. It was just as if I had been commanded to say certain words I had never heard of before. I had a vision and it seemed to me that I could see way back to the beginning of all creation. I could see the evolution of man up to his present being. And then it came to me that from the beginning of the world there have been two rulers over the peoples of the world, God and Satan. One was just as powerful as the other. It seemed to me that a greater effort should be made so that both should become one. God should be brought to meet Satan and then Satan could go and teach the people the right. Of course this would take years and years. It was to be my job to start it and to get the spirit working. It was my vision that in time all humanity would love absolutely and perfectly and without any nourishment and that God intended all people to be just one living piece of humanity. The Church would continue but it would have to draw under one heading, that is, under the teachings. Yes, of course, that will be what I call the millennium, that is, all humanity striving for one goal and for the kingdom of heaven.

You see it has always been my nature to do right. There has been a lot of talk about this thing and that thing, about the farm problem and so on. It was my idea that I could see no earthly reason for some of these animals that were roaming around in the forests preying on the domesticated animals. I thought it would be just the thing to go back to the jungles and clean up the snakes and the reptiles and the alligators.

Yes, I have always been a thinker. I have read about some of our famous characters. I have also read fiction and vice and have indulged in all the little things of life. I have always been a double personality. I have had two consciences.

You see, I interpret it that there has always been a battle between the two for supremacy. I could see no earthly reason why such a conflict should be kept up. I didn't see why the Lord intended that people should be always and forever fighting each other. Thinking it was the true light of God, it seemed to me that in some way I might bring this to Satan's attention so that he could

bring all his following into the light. It is my belief that people of the Protestant faith—well, I must bring it back to myself. I am the true spirit of God and the product of the earliest stages of man after it was evolved from the seas. When I was in the rage, there was something telling me that I was the true spirit of Christ.

Rather a grotesque set of ideas! And yet they are thoroughly typical of such disturbances. They also have a meaning and the task of the psychiatrist, in the words of Dr. Adolf Meyer, is to discover the sense in the nonsense.

For the purposes of this study the first thing to notice is the marked religious concern which this patient showed. Each of the two disturbances began with the sense of mystery. It was the idea that there was something strange about the way his baby was born which set his mind running and jumping. And in the second disturbance, ideas came to him which he had never heard of before and with which he seemed to have nothing to do. We notice that he goes on to concern himself with cosmic affairs and that he personalizes the forces which he conceives to be in control. This is thoroughly characteristic of the acute disturbances and upheavals.¹ They begin almost invariably with an eruption of the lower strata of consciousness which is interpreted as a manifestation of the superpersonal. To the individual concerned the effect is overwhelming. It shatters the foundations of his entire mental structure. It sweeps him away from his moorings out into the uncharted seas to the unknown lands of the inner world. He is no longer concerned about

¹ In the 176 cases studied in connection with the Neuro-endocrine Research in Dementia Praecox at the Worcester State Hospital, the percentage distribution according to types of onset and characteristic ideation is as follows:

TYPE OF ONSET	CHARACTERISTIC IDEAS						Absent
	Sense of Peril			Ideas of Self			
	Cosmic Catastrophe	Death Accepted	Death Resisted	Cosmic Identification	Mission	Rebirth	
Acute (54 cases)	54	63	15	50	13	19	13
Subacute (70 cases) . .	36	37	17	36	23	19	24
Insidious (52 cases) . .	4	2	13	2	2	0	77

Of those who had ideas of cosmic identification, there were 12 who identified themselves with Christ, 10 with God, 2 with the sun. The rest were undefined.

the merely individual but about the cosmic and the universal. And very commonly he thinks of himself as in a central rôle in the cosmic drama. Such experiences are as old as the human race. Their destructive effects led to the ancient question, "Can a man see God and live?" But their effects are not wholly destructive. They seem rather analogous to fever or inflammation in the physical organism. They may be regarded as attempts at reorganization in which the entire personality, down to the profoundest depths of the subconscious, is aroused and its forces marshaled to meet a crisis situation. Our figures show that these emotional upheavals make for change either for the better or for the worse. In contrast to the cases characterized by a gradual onset and by a lesser degree of disturbance, the acute disturbances show a large proportion which go out of the hospital completely recovered or else find their way to the back wards as hopeless wrecks.² The authoritative "Thus saith the Lord" of the old Hebrew prophets together with their frequent references to the coming day of doom suggests that they may have shared this experience. And men of such outstanding religious genius as John Bunyan and George Fox, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Saul of Tarsus seem to belong in the same group. These men, together with other great mystics, have passed through searching inner experiences in which they have found the end and meaning of their lives.

Such experiences have been variously accounted for.³ The indi-

² In our Neuro-endocrine Research cases, the percentage distribution according to type of onset and present condition is as follows:

TYPE OF ONSET	PRESENT CONDITION						
	At Home			In Hospital			
	Social Recovery	Improved	Unimproved	Institutional Social Adjustment	Institutional Adjustment	Unadjusted	Temporary Recovery and Setback
Acute (54 cases)	13	7	2	18	35	16	9
Subacute (70 cases) . . .	6	7	4	21	42	16	4
Insidious (52 cases) . . .	0	9	15	24	31	21	0

³ Cf. Freud, *Psychoanalytische Bemerkungen ueber einen autobiographisch beschriebenen Fall von Paranoia*, Neurosenlehre. Vol. III, s. 258; Sullivan, "Conservative and Malignant Features of Schizophrenia," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, January, 1924; Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1928.

viduals themselves who pass through such experiences agree in feeling themselves in touch with some mighty personal force to which generally they give the name of God. From the standpoint of this study the important point is the terrific impact of the experience with which the disturbance begins and the tendency to personalize the forces which seem to be involved. When we see the results of such experiences in lives destroyed or in lives made over and sent forth sometimes into new and creative work, the suggestion comes that, of all human desires, the deepest and most fundamental is that for response and approval by that social something which is symbolized in the term, God, and that this fact has important implications for the social sciences as well as for psychiatry and psychology. These implications may become apparent when we consider the significance of our patient's interesting proposal to bring about an understanding between God and Satan.

In reviewing our patient's history, we may notice first of all that he was born and reared in a religious home. His father was a clergyman of the conservative type and his mother a devoted church worker. From childhood on, as he says, it had always been his nature to do right. That is, he accepted without question the teachings of his parents and of the church to which they belonged. But he had also been a "double personality." This means that, while he wanted to conform to the parental teachings, he found within himself certain difficulties which he was unable to resolve in accordance with the accepted standards. At the age of sixteen he left home and, after a short period of wandering, he enlisted in the army. He not only put on the uniform but with it he accepted also its easier standards of sex morality. Supported now by the group and its attitudes he was able to give expression to the troublesome sex drive and to be quite frank and comfortable about it. He seemed to have made a real adjustment. But, with his marriage and then with the birth of his child, the situation changed. It was no longer sufficient for him to feel himself a member of the army group. The responsibilities of parenthood identified him once more with his own father and with his other early guides and their teachings. He begins now to think of his father's God, the symbol of the group ideal, whose authority he had never questioned but from which he had run away. It is quite

clear that, measured by the standards of his father and of his father's God, he would be weighed and found wanting.

But our patient had already socialized his inner conflict. He had identified himself with the army group and he believed in this group and in its ways of looking at things. Their standards were, of course, easier standards, standards which for him represented a concession to his own weaknesses. This being the case, it is obvious that Satan is for him the symbol of the army and its code of sex morality. But his army mates were good fellows after all and he was one of them. Hence, his proposed solution. He must try to bring about an understanding between the symbolic representatives of the two groups with which he had been identified. He is to go and see God and get God to come and meet Satan in order that Satan may be converted and bring all his following into the light.

This suggestion may not be so funny as at first it seems. It is to be noted that he got well and that he has now been for five years out of the hospital, apparently in excellent condition. He seems to have succeeded in bringing about some sort of working agreement between the conflicting elements in his own personality. It is also to be noted that the proposal seems to be rather in line with the teachings of psychoanalysis and of the mental hygiene movement. It is quite likely that our patient's father and his other early guides may have been oversevere and puritanical in the matter of sex morality. And it is hardly to be questioned that organized religion has much to learn about human nature and about the more enlightened ways of managing the powerful sex urge. But the point for us to notice is that this man's standards were determined by the group with which he was seeking identification and whose approval he therefore needed. His primary loyalty had been to his parents and the other early guides upon whom he had been dependent for support and affection and whose composite impress had become represented in his idea of God. Failing to measure up to the standards taken over from these early guides, he had made a temporary adjustment by taking refuge with a group whose sex morality was not determined by the motive of race perpetuation. The conflict was precipitated by the experience of fatherhood, which brought to the fore the motive of race perpetuation and therefore required reconciliation

with that in his social experience which, for him, represented the abiding and the universal.

In a previous article,⁴ I have attempted to give an interpretation of the different types of personality disorder and maladjustment in the light of group psychology. I have there sought to show that the mentally disordered individual is one who, by standards which he has accepted as his own, stands condemned to such an extent that he is unable to bring himself before the inner bar of judgment. He cannot bear the thought that those whom he counts supremely worthy of love and honor should know him as he is. He thus becomes isolated from those with whom he is seeking identification and whose approval he wants. His battle is being fought out within. The true delinquent and the criminal, on the other hand, is one whose imagination has never been kindled by any commanding ideal and who has refused to accept for himself the primary loyalty to his early guides and the ethical standards which they have sought to implant. Instead he has taken refuge in some gang with ideals and with a code of its own. The thief must belong to some group and have some sense of honor in order to escape psychosis. It seems safe to say that no man will have a psychosis so long as he can belong to some group whose standards he can accept as final; and this fact accounts for many of our important group phenomena. There are multitudes of men and women who, like our patient, attempt to solve their sense of moral failure by identifying themselves with groups of easy standards. The average, or "normal," man is thus apt to seek the solution of his conflicts by socializing them with a somewhat lowered conscience threshold and comforting himself by the thought that he is no worse than his neighbor. And even the Church, the institution which stands for that which is held to be permanent and universal in human society, tends constantly to introduce short-cuts and protective devices in order to bolster up the moral self-respect of its members. It becomes overparticular about creedal conformity or ritualistic niceties and in other ways tends to substitute minor for major virtues and loyalties. Our patient is therefore not alone in trying to get God to come and meet Satan. He is merely giving ex-

⁴ "The Sense of Isolation in Mental Disorders: Its Religious Significance," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXXIII (1928), 555-67.

pression to the common tendency to seek divine sanction and approval for compromises made in the interests of human frailty. There is thus constant interaction between the needs and the frailties of the individual and the standards and ideals of the group. The individual judges himself by the standards of the person or group with whom he is seeking identification, and to be unable to bring himself before the inner bar of judgment means for him isolation and destruction. For the sake of his own mental health he must belong to some group; and his frailties may lead him either to shift his loyalties to a group of easier standards or else to join with others in modifying the exacting requirements of the group to which he may belong through the accident of birth and early influences. The presence of the protective devices with which organized religion is so encumbered means simply that the church is made up in large part of individuals who are not ready to meet the conditions of growth.

Our ethical standards and ideals are therefore determined by our personal and group loyalties. Freud and his followers are quite right in insisting upon the importance of the early influences. The father, the mother, the early guide stand to the small child as embodiments of that in the Universe upon which he is dependent for support and affection, and that in a way and to a degree which is never repeated in the course of his development. The impress of their influence therefore goes with him throughout his life and implants in him ideals and standards from which there is no escape except through growth into a larger loyalty and a more comprehensive understanding. This is seen very clearly in the case of our patient. He has recognized and accepted the parental ideals and standards, but he has found difficulty in measuring up to them. He has therefore followed the line of least resistance and has sought to escape from them by taking refuge in a group of easy standards. Even though he succeeds thus in finding social support and approval for the indulgence of his unmanageable sex drive, he still feels the superior claim of the parental group and its ideals. He has not grown into a larger loyalty or into a more comprehensive understanding. He has merely made a concession to his weaknesses. He is, therefore, a divided personality. In such cases Alexander is quite right in talking about an "unconscious super-ego" which is distinct from the "con-

scious conscience" or "ego ideal."⁵ Such a cleavage is however pathological. It is this which constitutes the "divided self," which Professor James has so brilliantly described.⁶ It is this which made our patient subject to the catastrophe which befell him. He had identified himself with the army group and outwardly accepted its standards without giving up his allegiance to the family group and to the ideals implanted in his early training. The coming of the child, together with the blocking of the outflow of energy through vocational thwarting, brought him face to face with his primary loyalty. This meant for him a day of judgment. But such a cleavage should not exist in the healthy personality. In any healthy development the implanted loyalties and ideals are assimilated and embodied in the expanding personality with a constant outreach after the best and the true which may result in an outgrowing of the early ideals. It may be said that the entire social structure, internalized in the form of conscience, is built on a principle which forbids the disregard or evasion of a primary loyalty but which does permit that primary loyalty to be incorporated in a loyalty more comprehensive. According to this view, then, the Freudians are right in emphasizing the importance of parental influence in the formation of ideals and standards. Just as truly as the child receives from his parents a physical structure, so also does he take over from his early environment a mental structure organized around his primary loyalties. But the ethical ideals and standards which are thus implanted are not fixed and rigid except perhaps in pathological cases. Conscience is not just backward-looking but, as Hocking expresses it, it lies on the growing edge of human nature. It represents the awareness of success or failure in maintaining one's status and one's growth.⁷ It is the artistic sense which tells us what is or is not fitting in social relationships long before our clumsy reasons are able to pronounce judgment. And the ideals and standards by which we judge ourselves are determined, not so much by the group to which we have belonged as by that to which we aspire, not so much by the yesterdays as by the tomorrows.

⁵ Franz Alexander, *Psycho-analysis of the Total Personality*, pp. 20 ff.

⁶ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures VI-VIII.

⁷ Hocking, *Human Nature and Its Re-making*, pp. 123-24.

The concern about cosmic affairs and the tendency to personalize the cosmic forces manifested by our patient is characteristic of those disturbances which represent awareness of danger and attempts at reconstruction. It is not characteristic of those cases in which the patient drifts unresistingly down to destruction or in which he attempts to conceal the situation.⁸ This is equivalent to saying that in the first type we have religious concern and in the others we do not. We are thus justified in saying that religious concern tends to appear wherever men are facing their difficulties and seeking to become better. The religious attitude may be characterized by the outreach after the best and the true and by the attempt to elevate the personal and group loyalties to a cosmic level and make them something more than contemporary and local. Religion is thus social in origin and it seeks to meet the need for social response and security in the attempt to identify the individual self with that which is felt to be universal and abiding in human society. The personalization of this conception in the idea of God is a consequence not merely of the social origin of religion but also of the need of the struggling individual for social support and for relief from the sense of isolation. Because of the social utility and therapeutic value of the belief in a personal God it seems very doubtful if a purely humanistic religion can ever make any headway outside of University centers.

In our patient's commission to "get the spirit working" and in his desire to enlist Satan in the task of bringing all men into the light we see an expression of the missionary motive which is commonly characteristic of vital religion. This may be regarded as the reverse side of the motive which prompts the delinquent to seek refuge in a gang. Just as the delinquent seeks social validation for his antisocial tendencies, so the individual, who is reaching out after the best, seeks to share any new insights which may have come to him and to enlarge his circle of influence. This impulse may be regarded as the root of all organized religion and a necessary consequence of the attempt to elevate one's loyalties to the cosmic level. Organized religion is thus the attempt to provide for the perpetuation and extension of the profounder insights and the moral achievements of

Cf., footnote 1; also Boisen, "Psychiatric Approach to the Study of Religion," *Religious Education*, March, 1928.

the race and for the co-operative pursuit of the better personal and social life on the basis of an accepted ideal toward which we are moving and of its concomitant hierarchy of values.

We see, thus, in the case of our patient, that the problem of values is very closely associated with the problem of religion. In his religion we see the attempt to raise his loyalties and his value judgments to the level of the cosmic. In his idea of God we see the symbol with which is associated the thought of those whom he counts most worthy of love and honor and which represents to him that in his social life which he feels to be abiding and universal. The idea of God thus represents to him that which is supreme in his hierarchy of loyalties. It represents the composite image of those whose fellowship and approval he seeks. He therefore judges himself by the standards which are imposed by his religion and associated with his idea of God. In thus relating the problem of values to that of religion, it must be admitted that we are recognizing its personal and subjective nature. Our religion and the ethical ideals and standards which it represents are subject to the accidents of birth and early influences and to personal affinities and choices. All this is true. But it is also true that religion stands for the earnest outreach after the true and after the best in our social relationships. On the basis of clinical observations, it may be asserted that no individual is likely to remain permanently satisfied with a loyalty which is for him a lesser one and that protective devices and subterfuges which block growth are seldom effective. Inner unrest and social maladjustment almost invariably result. In the fact that there seems, thus, to be no escape from the primary loyalties and the ideals and ethical standards which they have inculcated, except through growth into a higher loyalty and a more comprehensive understanding, we may find the basis for a synthesis of the conflicting loyalties and differing standards. In the enduring and inexorable quest, not of the good—a formula which implies a fixed code and a static morality—but of the best—a formula which implies relativity and provides for continuous growth—we are pointed toward what our patient calls, "the millennium," when all men shall be striving together for one goal and for the kingdom of heaven."

It is perhaps not wholly accidental that, out of a personal problem

with an unmanageable sex drive, our patient has thus been led to concern himself with the problem of world peace. Chance may have had something to do with his enlisting in the army, where he had ample opportunity to become aware of the unhappy state of this sick old world in which "men are always and forever fighting each other." But the problem of loyalties and values which was responsible for his personal conflicts is not without its bearing upon that of war and peace. Conflicting loyalties and diverse standards have in the past been a fruitful source of war and social difficulty, and the tendency toward discord has been greatly accentuated by those who find it much easier to fight for a cause than to live up to their ideals. Many a man who falls far short of his accepted ethical standards and is rather careless about his church attendance will get a glow of righteous satisfaction out of fighting for the Protestant faith in the white nightgown of the K. K. K. Some of the fiercest of wars have been fought in the name of religion, while the super-patriotism so largely responsible for the recent catastrophe seeks ever to give the finality of religion to its own aims.

If any one enters the objection that the problem of values belongs in the field of philosophy rather than in that of science, there is no need to quarrel about words. The point of this paper is that values are functions of man's relationship to his environment and ethical values of his relationship to his social environment, particularly to those persons who are accounted supremely worthy of love and honor. Such being the case, the problem cannot be approached through abstract reasoning but must be approached empirically on the basis of actual observation and inductive reasoning. And no human behavior is likely to throw more light upon this problem than that of individuals who are grappling with the overwhelming sense of moral failure and isolation and are breaking or broken under the strains of emotional crisis.