

# EMOTIONAL BLOCKS TO CREATIVITY<sup>1</sup>

A. H. MASLOW

*Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass.*

The kind of creativeness in which I am interested here is that which comes out of the unconscious, that which is the source of new discovery, of real novelty, of ideas which depart from what exists at this point. It can be illuminated by a study I have made of specially creative people (1), and also by the study of those who lack this kind of creativity, in the extreme case the compulsive-obsessive neurotics (2).

## PRIMARY CREATIVENESS

Out of the unconscious, out of the deeper self, out of this portion of ourselves of which we generally are afraid and therefore try to keep under control, out of this comes the ability to play, to enjoy, to fantasy, to laugh, to loaf, to be spontaneous—and creativity, which is a kind of intellectual play, a kind of permission to be ourselves, to fantasy, to let loose, and to be crazy, privately. (Every really new idea looks crazy, at first.)

I shall give an example that everyone has probably experienced for himself. We know that in dreams we can be more creative than we are in waking life. We can be more clever, wittier, bolder, more original, and so on.

Again, let us think of the way in which a really young child looks at the world, looks at itself and at other people. The young child is illogical and “primary” in the sense of having no negatives, no contradictions, no separate identities, no opposites, no mutual exclusions. Aristotelian classes do not exist for the young child. It is independent of control, taboos, discipline, inhibitions, delays, planning, calculations of possibility or impossibility. It has nothing to do with time and space, or with sequence, causality, order, or with the laws of the physical world. This primary-process world is, like the dream world, quite other than the physical world. When it is placed under the necessity of disguising itself from conscious awareness, to make things less threatening, it can condense several objects into one as in a dream. It can displace emotions from their true objects to other harmless

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ones. It can obscure by symbolizing. Such primary creativeness has nothing to do with action, for it can make things come to pass without doing or without acting, simply by fantasy.

#### RATIONALITY VERSUS CREATIVITY

The compulsive-obsessive gives up his primary creativeness. He gives up the possibilities for being artistic, his poetry, his imagination. He drowns all his healthy childishness. Beyond the neurotic, this applies also to what we call a good adjustment, and what Ross Mooney described very nicely in a lecture as being able to fit into the right harness, that is, getting along well in the world, being realistic, having common sense, being mature, taking on responsibility. Certain aspects of these adjustments would seem to involve turning one's back upon what is threatening to the good adjustment. That is, these are kinds of dynamic efforts to make peace with the world and with the necessities of common sense, with the necessities of physical and biological and social realities, and this is generally at the cost of giving up a portion of our deeper selves. It is not as dramatic in the rest of us as in the case of a compulsive-obsessive, but I am afraid that it is becoming more and more apparent that what we call a normal adult adjustment involves a turning one's back on what would threaten us as well. And what does threaten us is softness, fantasy, emotion, "childishness."

One interesting observation in my work with men has been the horrible fear of anything that the person himself would call "femininity," "femaleness," which we immediately call "homosexual." If he has been brought up in a tough environment, "feminine" means practically everything that is creative: imagination, fantasy, color, poetry, music, tenderness, languishing, being romantic, —in general, everything walled off as dangerous to one's picture of one's own masculinity. Everything called "weak" tends to be repressed in the normal masculine adult adjustment. And many things are called weak which we are learning are not weak at all.

The primary processes, those unconscious processes of cognizing, are very different from the secondary processes in which we are logical, sensible, and realistic. When secondary processes are walled off from the primary processes, then both suffer. At the extreme, the walling off of or the complete splitting off of logic, common sense, and rationality from the deeper layers of the personality produce the compulsive-obsessive person, the compulsively rational per-

son, the one who cannot live in the world of emotion at all, who does not know whether he has fallen in love or not because love is illogical, who cannot even permit himself to laugh very frequently because laughing is not logical and rational and sensible. Such a person not only loses much of the pleasures of living, but also becomes cognitively blind to much of himself, much in other people, and even in nature.

#### FUSING THE DICHOTOMY

In the healthy person, and especially the healthy person who creates, we find that he has somehow managed a fusion and a synthesis of primary and secondary processes, of conscious and unconscious, of deeper self and of conscious self. And he manages to do this gracefully and fruitfully. I can report that this is possible, even though it is not very common. It is certainly possible to help this process along by psychotherapy; deeper and longer psychotherapy can be even better. What happens in this fusion is that both the primary processes and the secondary processes, partaking of each other, then change in character. The unconscious becomes no longer frightening. The person can live with his unconscious; live with, let us say, his childishness, his fantasy, his imagination, his wish fulfillment, his femininity, his poetic quality, his crazy quality. This is the person, as one psychoanalyst said in a nice phrase, "who can regress in the service of ego." This is voluntary regression, and such a person has at his disposal, readily available, that kind of creativeness in which we are interested.

Perhaps I can now say something more about this openness to the unconscious. The whole business of psychotherapy, of self-therapy, and self-knowledge is a difficult process because, as things stand now for most of us, the conscious and the unconscious are walled off from each other. How do you get these two worlds, the psychic world and the world of reality, to be comfortable with each other? In general, the process of psychotherapy, is a matter of slow confrontation, bit by bit, with the help of a technician, with the uppermost layers of the unconscious. They are exposed and tolerated and assimilated and turn out to be not so dangerous after all, not so horrible. Then comes the next layer, and then the next, in this same process of getting a person to face something which he is terribly afraid of, and then finding when he does face it, that there was nothing to be afraid of in the first place. He has been afraid of it because he has been looking at it

through the eyes of the older child that he used to be. This is childish misinterpretation. What the older child was afraid of and therefore repressed, was pushed beyond the reach of common sense, learning and experience, and growing up, and it has to stay there until it is dragged out by some special process. The conscious must become strong enough to dare friendliness with the enemy.

A fair parallel can be found in the relations between men and women throughout history. Men have been afraid of women and have therefore dominated them, unconsciously, for very much the same reasons I believe that they have been afraid of their primary processes. Remember that the dynamic psychologists are apt to think that much of the relationship of men to women is determined by the fact that women will remind men of their own unconscious, that is of their own femaleness, their own softness, their own tenderness, and so on. And therefore fighting women or trying to control them or to derogate them has been part of this effort to control these unconscious forces which are within everyone of us. Between a frightened master and a resentful slave no true love is possible. Only as men become strong enough, self-confident enough, and integrated enough can they tolerate and finally enjoy self-actualizing women, women who are full human beings. But no man fulfills himself without such a woman, in principle. Therefore strong men and strong women are the condition of each other, for neither can exist without the other. They are also the cause of the other, because women grow men and men grow women. And finally of course, they are the reward of each other. If you are a good enough man that is the kind of woman you will get and that is the kind of woman you will deserve. Therefore, going back to our parallel, healthy primary processes and healthy secondary processes, that is, healthy fantasy and healthy rationality, need each other's help in order to fuse into a true integration.

Chronologically, our knowledge of primary processes was derived first from studies of dreams and fantasies and neurotic processes, and later of psychotic processes. Only little by little has this knowledge been freed of its taint of pathology, and of irrationality, immaturity and primitiveness in the bad sense. Only recently have we become aware, fully aware, from our studies of healthy people, of the creative process, of play, of aesthetic perception, of the meaning of healthy love, of healthy growing and becoming, of healthy education (1), that every human being is both poet and engineer, both rational and non-rational, both child and adult, both masculine and feminine, both in

the psychic world and in the world of nature. Only slowly have we learned what we lose by trying daily to be *only* and *purely* rational, *only* "scientific," *only* logical, *only* sensible, *only* practical, *only* responsible. Only now are we becoming quite sure that the integrated person, the fully evolved human, the fully matured person, must be available to himself at both these levels, simultaneously.

Certainly it is now obsolete to stigmatize this unconscious side of human nature as sick rather than healthy, the way Freud thought of it originally. We can no longer call this side "evil" rather than "good," lower rather than higher, selfish rather than unselfish, beastly rather than human. Throughout human history and especially the history of Western civilization, and more especially the history of Christianity, has there tended to be this dichotomy. No longer, however, can we dichotomize ourselves into a cave man and a civilized man, into a devil and a saint. We can now see this as an illegitimate dichotomy, an illegitimate either-or, in which by the very process of splitting and dichotomizing we create a sick "either" and a sick "or," that is to say a sick conscious and a sick unconscious, a sick rationality, and sick impulses.<sup>2</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Once we transcend and resolve this dichotomy, once we can put these two aspects of human nature together into the unity in which they are originally, for instance in the healthy child, the healthy adult, or specially creative people, then we can recognize that the dichotomizing or the splitting is itself a pathological process. And then it becomes possible for our civil war to end. This is precisely what happens in people whom I call self-actualizing. It seems true, although it sounds like a contradiction, that the most mature human

<sup>2</sup>Dreikurs has expressed similar thoughts as follows: "Emotions, which are presently held in considerable disdain, are not irrational; they do not dominate man, but are his tools. He uses them for his purposes, just as he uses his ability to reason. And objectivity is by no means always preferable to subjectivity; we need to be subjective, to have preferences and dislikes, in order to participate actively in the social evolution. Besides, a 'biased apperception' is an intrinsic human feature. Subjectivity and objectivity are a continuum, are complementary modes of functioning; together they permit apperception and movement on the social plane. . . . Contrary to the assumption to which the patient is exposed in his environment, he learns in psychotherapy to trust his emotions, his unconscious processes, to accept his inevitable subjectivity, and to enjoy both the freedom and the obligation to choose and to prefer. He stops trying to 'control himself,' as he has been advised to do since early childhood, by realizing that he is going to do what he decides anyhow, regardless of how much he may pretend to object to his actions" (*J. Individ. Psychol.*, 1957, 13, 156-157).

beings are childlike. The most mature people are also the ones who can have the most fun.

These are also people who can regress at will, who can become childish and play with children and be close to them. It does not seem to be any accident that children generally tend to like them and get along with them. Involuntary regression is, of course, a very dangerous thing; but voluntary regression apparently is characteristic of healthy people.

Any technique of psychotherapy, including the possibilities of self-analysis and self-therapy, which will increase self-knowledge in depth should in principle increase one's creativity by making available to oneself these sources of fantasy, play with ideas, being able to sail right out of the world and off the earth, getting away from common sense. Common sense generally means living in the world as it is today. But creative people do not want the world as it is today; they want to make it another, a better world.

A recipe for being creative may be gotten from people who have already successfully been creative. In the early stages of their thinking they let themselves be completely uncritical. They allow all sorts of wild ideas to come into their heads, and in great bursts of emotion and enthusiasm they may scribble out the poem or the formula or the mathematical solution, or work up the theory, or design the experiment. Then, and only then, do they become secondary, become more rational, more controlled and more critical. If you try to be rational and controlled and orderly in this first stage of the process, you will never get to it. The "brain-storming" technique which recently has come into use, as I remember it, consists in just this—in not being critical, letting yourself play with ideas, free association, letting ideas come out on the table in profusion, and then, only later on, tossing away those ideas which are bad or useless, and retaining the ones which are good.

Healthy, creative people are able to be like that *when they want to be* (regression in the service of the ego). These same people can afterwards become grown-up, rational, sensible, orderly, and can examine with a critical eye what they produced in a great burst of enthusiasm, and creative fervor. A truly integrated person can be both secondary and primary, both childish and mature.

#### REFERENCES

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