

1945

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### Recommended Citation

Curt Bondy, Psychological Interpretation of Waywardness, A, 36 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 3 (1945-1946)

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# A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF WAYWARDNESS

Curt Bondy

A better understanding of waywardness is essential in the treatment of delinquents and criminals. Waywardness is explained through a combination of the theories of Plato and of Freud.—The author, now Associate Professor and head of the Department of Psychology at the Richmond Professional Institute of the College of William and Mary, was, before Hitler's rise to power, superintendent of a reformatory for juveniles in Thuringia and Professor at the University of Goettingen. He became a citizen of the United States in May, 1945. Paper presented at the meeting of the Virginia Academy of Science, 1944—EDITOR.

Never before in history have there been so many criminals, delinquents and neurotics. There will be still more after the war. The underlying psychic state of mind of many of them is waywardness.

In the hope of contributing to a clarification of the problem, I offer for discussion a hypothesis which has helped me a great deal in understanding and handling people in social work, especially in prisons and other institutions, and in concentration and refugee camps.

If you should ask for a definition of waywardness, one would say that a man's neglect of the external matters of clothing, cleanliness, and bearing is waywardness; another would point to a man who uses dirty language; a third to a man who steals or commits a crime; a fourth would call every prostitute wayward. But all these are only symptoms, of which the underlying psychic condition *may* be waywardness, but it may not necessarily be so. They *can* be the actions of men who are not wayward at all.

An example may make this clear. I was once accosted on the street in Hamburg by a young man who had known me since his days in a reformatory. He asked me to get him a job. He would take any kind of work which would enable him to live a respectable life. It was a time of very great unemployment, and I was completely unable to find any work for him. For some reason he was not receiving unemployment relief. The young man set before me his only possibilities of getting money: he could go back to stealing, or he could become a prostitute. In this case, not the man's psychic condition but his dire need was the reason for his criminality.

To find out what waywardness is we must not be satisfied merely to consider the symptoms, but must try to understand and interpret certain fundamental psychologic elements in the individual make-up. Thus I shall use the term "waywardness"

as designating a certain state of mind—the psychic state of personality which we often find in people who become unstable, neurotic, delinquent, and criminal.

An understanding of the state of mind of normal people helps us to understand that of the wayward. The hypothesis to be presented is built upon theories of two psychologists who lived more than two thousand years apart—Plato and Freud. It was the philosopher, Herman Nohl, who revived Plato's theory of the *layers* and his theory of *waywardness*.<sup>1</sup>

In *The Republic*<sup>2</sup> Plato compares the layers of the soul to the layers of people in an ideal state. He differentiates three groups of citizens in the state. The highest layer is formed by the rulers or the philosophers. They are the most intelligent people, they have received the best education, and they are models of moral behavior. This group directs the state, it makes the laws, and it decides what is right and what is wrong.

The second layer of the population consists of the guardians or warriors. They defend the state and guarantee internal order. They constitute a distinct group, and receive an education and training that is especially designed for them.

The third and most numerous group of citizens is the common people. They are the farmers, the artisans, and the shopkeepers. Diagram A represents these layers of population.

A	B
RULERS	REASONS
GUARDIANS	PASSIONS
COMMON PEOPLE	APPETITES

In a pattern corresponding to this structure of the State, Plato saw the layers of the human soul. The layer of the common people corresponds to the layer of the "Appetites." Here are the instincts, the drives or desires—or whatever else these fundamental impulses may be called. Hunger, thirst, self-preservation, and the sexual drive are here. (Diagram B)

To the layer of the rulers corresponds the layer of the "reasons" or the "interests." Here we find the aims and the motivations which lead man to devote himself to a thing or cause. Intellectual, religious, and artistic interests lie in this part of

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Herman Nohl, *Charakter und Schicksal, eine paedagogische Menschenkunde*. Gerhard Schulte-Bumke. Frankfurt A. M. 1938. Pgs. 31-39.

<sup>2</sup> Book IV.

the soul—in short, all that differentiates man from beast, the spiritual man from the “Philistine.”

Between the drives and the reasons lie, then, the layers of the passions, which corresponds to the warrior layer in the state. Here are courage, daring, perseverance, energy. These are all properties of the soul that are neither drives nor “interests.”

The diagram of this structure of the soul, which corresponds to that of the state, is shown in chart B.

Plato had already seen the unity of personality which is so much emphasized, and rightly, in modern psychology. Nohl calls it the fourth layer of the soul.

From this theory of the layers in the state, as well as from those of the soul several fundamental principles can be drawn. These principles are the basis of the Platonic ethic, and they can serve as dependable guides in character education.

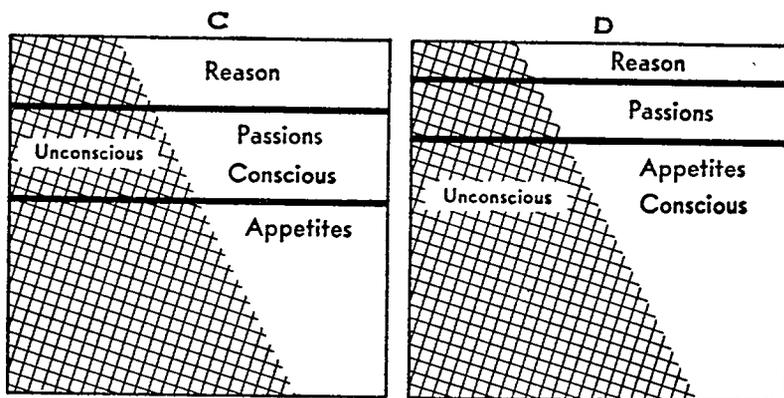
1. Every one of the three layers has its definite rights and duties, must find its own satisfaction, but may not overstep its boundaries. It must be especially observed that the drives, which are never fully satisfied, and which demand stronger and stronger excitement, must stay within their established bounds.

2. The three layers of the soul must be brought into harmonious accord. The aim of character education is the creation of a harmonious personality.

3. The “reasons” should govern the whole life. To what extent the “passions” and “appetites” may be satisfied, how the total psychic energy is to be distributed among the various layers, is to be determined by the “reasons.”

Let us now try to see how Freud’s theory can be combined with that of Plato. In the attempt to understand the human soul more fully, we find no idea in modern psychology deeper or more constructive than Freud’s conception of the importance of the unconscious. We know now the extremely important role which the unconscious plays in our lives, and that much of our psychic life is not perceptible to us. This conception of the unconscious can be combined with Plato’s idea of the layers. Assuming that much more is unconscious in the layer of the “appetites” than in that of the “reasons” we can now understand the following diagram C:

The diagonal line represents the boundary between the unconscious and the conscious. The shaded area is the unconscious, the light area the conscious. Just where and how the diagonal line would run for an individual person depends on his personality and especially on his degree of consciousness.



### *Application to Waywardness*

Let us now apply this hypothesis of the structure of the human soul to an understanding of waywardness. For the wayward it is typical, first, that his actions are not directed by the reason, and second, that a relatively larger part of the total psychic energy at his disposal is devoted to the satisfaction of the lower layers. To put it differently, waywardness is a special state of mind in which spiritual control falters and the psychic energy is directed principally to the satisfaction of the drives. In the harmonious personality there is an optimum distribution of psychic energy in the various layers. In the wayward personality the relationship of energy is upset, because the lower layers use more energy, and the higher layers are deprived in proportion. Bearing in mind our earlier picture, we may now represent waywardness as in diagram D. The "appetites" here claim much more energy—space—at the cost of the "passions" and "reasons".

Has it been made clear what the distribution of the total psychic energy means? Let us compare it with a budgeting of our time. A normal division of time for one day would be the following: eight hours of work, eight hours of sleep, and eight hours for meals, recreation, etc. Now, if I give more time to one of these activities, the equilibrium is necessarily disturbed. If I spend more time on recreation and if I sleep longer, I do not have enough time for work. Or take another example. If I have a certain amount of money, and spend a disproportionate amount of it for pleasure, I must make inroads on my supply for food or for books.

A disturbance of the psychic equilibrium can also take place in the opposite direction, toward the reasons, but this would not be referred to as waywardness. To illustrate, I want to tell you an interesting story about one of the inmates in my charge

in the reformatory at Eisenach—a young Austrian printer's apprentice.

This boy read many good books, had many intellectual interests; he was uninterested in food; he had no interest in physical work, and was completely unambitious in sports. As I was lecturing on one occasion to a group of prisoners about waywardness, he suddenly asked: "Am I then wayward in reverse?" One could certainly not call this condition waywardness, but he had at any rate understood what I meant.

Let us then, set down once more the chief psychological characteristic of waywardness: an enlarged allotment of energy to the lower layers of the soul and the abandonment of control by the "reasons". Plato long ago understood this condition and from it developed his theory of waywardness in the individual and in the people.<sup>3</sup>

We can easily observe in the wayward person this allotment of insufficient energy to the upper layers. He has in general no higher interest. He doesn't want to read a good book or hear good music, and he shows a lack of moral and social sensitivity and insight. Also the energy devoted to the passions is diminished. The wayward person shows an astonishing unconcern about honor, shame, and ambition, and is, generally, very weak-willed and cowardly; he is uncooperative and extremely egocentric. The correctness of our hypothesis of waywardness is also demonstrated by the fact that to satisfy a wayward person it is generally sufficient to give him plenty to eat, drink, and smoke, to allow him to satisfy his sexual drive, and to give him opportunity to go to movies.

There are innumerable gradations of waywardness. A person can be only slightly wayward: then the amount of energy apportioned to the layer of "appetites", and accordingly taken away from the other layers, is relatively small. The stronger the waywardness, the stronger the transfer of energy to the layer of the "appetites". So far I have not known an absolutely wayward person. Here lies the hope of the educator, that there is something in the higher layers of every man which can be used in the work of re-education.

We must, however, understand that, unless complicated by other factors, the wayward is not necessarily basically and continuously abnormal. The sexual drive, for example, is stronger in the wayward, not because it is absolutely stronger, but because more energy is directed to it. On the whole, waywardness is a relative condition.

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<sup>3</sup> Book IX.

There is no inborn inherited waywardness, just as there is no inborn criminality. There are only a multitude of inherited and environmental influences that may or may not cause waywardness or criminality. Case studies of criminals show clearly that in every instance various causes lead to various degrees of waywardness and criminality. No social worker or criminologist should try any longer to find out *the one* cause of waywardness.

Symptoms are neither positive signs of waywardness nor of its degree. If a soldier uses rough and indecent words when he is with his comrades only, we would not call him wayward, but the same words and expressions may be symptoms of his waywardness if he uses them with his family or in the presence of ladies. Take another example: three young people who stand before the judge for the same offense can represent varying degrees of waywardness. It may be that one is already in a state of serious and continuing waywardness, that the second is only slightly or not at all wayward, and the third's offense can be easily traced to a temporary unbalance due to puberty. It is clear that the treatment of the three, in spite of the fact that all have committed the same offense, must vary, unless the judge looks at the matter purely from the standpoint of retaliation.

Whether we are to call a person wayward or not depends also on his age, on his social level, on the whole cultural situation. We can speak of waywardness only in the case of an actual departure from the normal distribution of energy demanded by any particular environment. In the juvenile court in Jerusalem I saw how difficult it was for an English judge to determine whether an Arab youth was wayward or not, because the conception of good and bad and the total philosophy of life of the Arabs is completely different from that of the English.

The connection between waywardness and criminality is not hard to establish. It can easily be seen why wayward people often move on to criminal acts. They lack the customary moral norms, and the necessary inhibitions as well; they work irregularly and unreliably. Demanding a larger satisfaction for the appetites, they need much money for pleasure, etc., which they may have to get in an illegal way. Thus, it is not at all to be wondered at that the greater number of inmates of industrial schools, reformatories, and similar institutions are wayward.

But not all criminals are wayward. So in times of political upheaval there are many people in prison, especially the polit-

ical criminals, who are not at all wayward, but who may, on the contrary, possess splendid psychic equilibrium and a high degree of consciousness. These people are often of very high moral caliber.

Our attempt to represent waywardness as a problem of the distribution of energy among the various levels of the soul does not prevent our looking upon waywardness as caused by and affecting the *whole* personality. It is proper that we try to recognize a man's state of mind from his facial expression, his posture, his gait, his speech, his handwriting, etc. Accordingly, we must be able to recognize waywardness too from these same personal functions. It is undoubtedly possible to do so, and anyone who has worked much with the wayward can get a good insight through such observations. Facial expressions and posture seem to me to be especially typical of the wayward. We know also how they change when a wayward child or youth comes out of his waywardness.

Depth-psychology as the psychology of the unconscious will also help us to a clearer and better understanding of waywardness. Plato also knew of the Unconscious. He realized that in dreams man is often in a wayward state in which he doesn't hesitate to commit crimes that he would never commit in a waking state. "Let us sum up in a word . . . the character of the worst man: he is the waking reality of what we dream."

The relationship between the unconscious and waywardness is treated in many articles and books. Here it will be sufficient to be reminded of two books. You probably all know August Aichorn's book, "Wayward Youth,"<sup>4</sup> with an introduction by Sigmund Freud himself, written twenty years ago in Austria. In this book Aichorn tries to build up his whole theory of waywardness on Freud's psychoanalysis. In some very instructive case studies, he shows how often the reasons for waywardness are completely in the unconscious, and also how they can be brought into the conscious. Thus the causes can be removed which have built up this wayward state of mind. The whole book gives a convincing bit of evidence of the fact that a great many of the reasons for waywardness are completely unknown to the victims themselves.

The other book I want to mention is Anna Freud and Dorothy T. Burlingham's "War and Children."<sup>5</sup> I regard this book as one of the most important publications in the field of personality psychology written in recent years. It is a study in

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<sup>4</sup> August Aichorn, *Wayward Youth*, Viking Press: New York, 1935.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Freud and Dorothy T. Burlingham; *War and Children*; Medical War Books: New York, 1943.

child psychology, and gives much more than the title indicates. It is based on experiences made in three war nurseries in and near London. "Whenever certain essential needs are not fulfilled, lasting psychological malformations will be the consequence. These essential elements are: the need for personal attachment, for emotional stability, and for permanency of educational influence." (Page 11.) These psychological malformations are principally neurosis and waywardness in the different forms.

I personally found the same phenomena with refugee children in Holland. It was extremely astonishing and depressing to observe the high degree of neurosis and waywardness among them though the situation as far as food, physical care, housing, and education were concerned was not bad at all. It was just before the invasion of Holland by the Germans. The children, especially the younger ones, were, of course, completely unaware of their development from normality to neurosis and waywardness, and of the reasons for this. Even the adults who were working with these children seldom saw the real, underlying reasons, and were only too easily inclined to blame the children and not the circumstances.

I hope I have succeeded in making clear my interpretation of waywardness. It cannot be the task of this paper to show in detail the different conclusions which may be drawn concerning the treatment and re-education of the wayward. However, there are two important conclusions which I want to mention briefly:

1. We must try to conduct more of the psychic energy to the higher layers by finding new interests, new aims and ideas, and by arousing the ambition and pride of the wayward. The greater the energy that is directed to the higher layers, the less will be the energy available for the satisfaction of the appetites, and the more normal and harmonious the psychic life of the wayward will become.

2. To overcome his difficulties, the wayward has to be helped to become as conscious as possible. One of the many additional difficulties in the treatment and re-education of the wayward is that he has to be brought to a higher degree of consciousness than the normal people of his group.

Referring to our chart D, we can express it thus: We have to extend the area of the higher layers at the cost of the layer of the appetites, and we have to push the diagonal line to the left as far as possible.