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Commentary on the Film "The Sorrow and the Pity"

David Wrench

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David Wrench

“Commentary on the Film *The Sorrow and the Pity*”

February 19, 1974

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DAVID WRENCH: I don't know if this is actually working or not. If you find you can't hear me in the back, you can move down; otherwise I'll just talk loud.

I think it's appropriate that we should have a fairly informal atmosphere, because primarily what I intend to do is to make some comments on the film rather than to deliver any great formal lecture setting out any sort of general principles of psychology or psychohistory. Instead, I'd simply like to tell you why, as a psychologist, I found this a perfectly fascinating film to watch, why I hope you'll get a chance to go and see it, and I think probably the best chance to go to see it is on the Tuesday and Thursday evening showings, because then you can see the whole thing through on an evening, which I think is the best way to see it.

For this reason, I will comment on a number of fairly diverse sorts of things that you might pull out of the film, and maybe start with one that Michael Reardon was talking about in his comments on the film last week. This is the role that history plays for each of us as an individual in justifying our conception of ourselves and of the groups that we identify with. In other words, the ways in which we tend to distort our conception of our own history, our national history... and perhaps I'll use as an example of this, the sort of ideas that I, as a non-historian, initially had about the United States' role in the First World War.

I tended to get a fairly strong impression that Britain had been fighting against Germany for very humanitarian goals; that President Wilson tried to keep the United States out of this conflict; that there was unprovoked German aggression against the United States which made it impossible for him to keep us out of the war; that therefore we came in and aided Britain in her humanitarian struggle; that Wilson's Fourteen Points that he enunciated during the war were what we were fighting for and what Britain was fighting for, and that—to a large extent—these were achieved in the Treaty of Versailles, which for then, for some inexplicable reason, the United States Congress had some doubts about.

Now, probably, most of you aren't quite as ignorant about the First World War as I was, but in reading a bit about Wilson, I find quite a different sort of history of it. The British secret war aims included the following: destruction of the German navy, confiscation of the German merchant marine, elimination of Germany as an economic rival, the annexation of German East Africa in the Cameroons, the annexation of all German colonies in the Pacific (south of the equator), control of Mesopotamia, Trans-Jordan, Palestine, and as much of Syria as they could get away from the French, extension of the British sphere of influence over Persia, and recognition of their protectorates over Cyprus and Egypt. I find that Wilson, in the fall of 1915—considerably before U.S. entry into the war—carried out secret negotiations with Britain in order to bring about U.S. entry into the war on the British side; that he attempted to do this in a way which would make both Britain and the United States committed to the public war aims of Britain; and that this offer was turned down by Britain, who preferred to fight on alone during that struggle, than to give up their secret war aims and become publically committed to their public war aims.

When the U.S. did enter, then, it was not entirely through German aggression, because the United States was not carrying out a role of strict neutrality at that time but was in fact giving considerable aid to Britain, which might have been seen as justifying any German hostility to the United States. When we did enter, it was then under conditions which failed to secure British commitment to the sorts of aims that Wilson enunciated in the Fourteen Points, and it's perhaps not too surprising that when peace was made, it was more on the basis of the secret British and French war aims than it was on Wilson's Fourteen Points. In fact, every one of the British war aims that I've listed here was achieved by Britain in the peace of Versailles, as well as demanding reparations payments from Germany which amounted to complete financing of the British cost of the war, including paying for the pensions of the British soldiers who fought against Germany.

Now, I mention this not as a particularly bad example of the ways in which we distort our conceptions of history to see ourselves and our country in a favorable light, but as just one sort

of run-of-the-mill example of this. Part of my excitement about *The Sorrow and the Pity*, therefore, is this: while it too is somewhat ideological—perhaps no history, no work of art, certainly, can be without some particular ideological stance—it's a far *less* ideological presentation than the sorts of conceptions of this period that most of us have built up in our own minds, unless we happen to be professional historians. This is partly because the method that's used of portraying the reactions of these people enables things to get through even where the emphasis of the filmmaker is quite different. So that when, again, Dr. Reardon pointed out some of the points that were *deemphasized* in the film—some of the points he felt could have been stressed more, and would have been stressed more by a professional historian—I had become aware of many of these points through watching the film, not having known them before. In other words, the tremendous amount of personal testimony that people give of their experiences during this period enables a lot of facts to come through, whether or not they agree with the ideological orientation of the filmmaking. So this is one of the reasons why I feel this film is really worth seeing.

The second area that I'd like to venture on is to talk a little bit about some psychological principles that I feel are illustrated in the film. And in doing this, I am not trying to suggest that these are universal principles of human behavior or anything like that; psychology simply isn't developed to that point. We do have some hunches—some hypotheses—about why people react to things the way they do, and some of these sorts of hunches and hypotheses that we have are illustrated by the people that you see in the film. And here also, I want to apologize for my mispronunciation of the names of the people in the film. I do not speak French; most of the names appear as subtitles and are never pronounced in the film, which leaves me somewhat in the dark as to how to pronounce some of their names so if you'll bear with me and try to guess who I'm talking about from what I say.

Christian de la Mazière I think, is one of a couple of examples that show the importance of the *ideas* that people have. He talks a good deal about the sort of ideology which he held at that time. He mentioned how the Great Depression and the Spanish Civil War had led many people of his generation to believe that present political systems did not work and that radical change of some sort was necessary. He, like many other people, perceived two possible choices: one towards the left represented by communism, one towards the right represented by fascism. And he tried to give some idea to people of our generation as to why it was that he chose the latter of these two; why he eventually volunteered for a French military outfit which fought in support of the Germans. He talked a bit about the threat to his conception of himself when instead of doing this wearing a French uniform, he was asked to wear an S.S. uniform as a French recruit to this army group. I think that he gives some feeling for how he developed the

ideas which led him into a choice which, to most of us at this time, might seem hard to understand.

Another person that I think gives a very clear impression of the importance of his ideas and his ideology leading him into actions which, for him, were very difficult and unlikely, it might seem—and again here, I hope you’ve already seen the film so you know who I’m talking about, but if not, you can look for these people when you do see the film—the Englishman Denis Rake. I often have wondered what spies do when they’re not spying, but I think very few of them do what Denis Rake did, which was to appear on nightclub stages in occupied France under his own name. He was an actor and nightclub entertainer. [*chuckling*] He had no other way to support himself while he was in occupied France; although he had appeared there before the war, he trusted that not many people would remember him, those who did would remember him with enough affection to not turn him in, and a lot of the people he was associating with thought he was Belgian rather than English and so he appeared before audiences, undisguised, as an enemy agent in occupied territory. This seems like almost bravery to the point of foolhardiness, and yet he isn’t the sort of swashbuckling character that you imagine behaving in this way; he’s a very gentle sort of person who behaved the way he did in order to prove that a homosexual could act as bravely as a person of “normal” sexual preferences. Here, too, I think we see some sort of triumph of ideas and ideology over difficulties in carrying out the behaviors they might lead you to.

The most striking thing to me about the film, however, I think is best summed up in the story that Colonel Gaspard told, and for those of you who haven’t seen the film yet, I think I’ll repeat this. He told how, after the war, people would come to him and they’d say, “Ah, Colonel Gaspard, if only you knew the things that I did in the resistance.” And he said, well, he was in a job that he had to work with the public and he couldn’t defend them, so he’d say, “So, tell me what you did in the Resistance.” And the man would say, “I used to keep a gun in my dresser,”—and of course it was dangerous for a person to keep a gun in occupied France—and his wife would say, “Yes, it used to terrify me,” and the man would say, “And I knew that when the time came, I would do what was necessary.” “But,” Colonel Gaspard said, “the time came, and they never did what was necessary.” And this, to me, is one of the major themes of the film. That is, that often people who had certain beliefs—certain values—which might have led them into acting in certain ways, found themselves *unable* to act in the ways that their beliefs and values might have indicated. This, it seems to me, is largely the province of psychohistory, to try to understand the personal factors which may make a person able or unable to act in different kinds of ways.

So, this is the main thing I want to talk about is a little bit about the approach of psychohistory, and I might start by saying a bit about how it differs from experimental psychology.

Experimental psychology, it seems to me, makes two very important assumptions in the research that they carry out. One is that the important things about people are ways in which they react the same way to some situation; you carry out a certain manipulation in the experiment and in order to get significant results, this has to have similar effects on different people, so what's implicit in this approach is that you're studying the ways in which people are alike in their reaction to the situation you've created. The second thing that you're assuming is that the kinds of manipulations you can carry out in an experiment have powerful enough effects on people to create the kind of phenomena that you're interested in studying. I think that psychohistory is important partly because it involves an intensive study of individuals to find out why individuals act differently in situations, rather than simply studying the ways in which they're the same. And because it tends to assume that the creations of real life are so much more powerful than those that you would ever want to create in an experiment, that we cannot generalize about people from the experimental studies.

I think maybe the experimental approach is well-illustrated in the [Stanley] Milgram research, which some of you will see if you go to the film on obedience which is also going to be shown here. Very briefly, Milgram created a situation in which subjects were deceived, led to believe that they were acting as a teacher in a learning experiment and that in their role as teacher, they were delivering electric shocks to a protesting victim. The study is fairly well-known by people these days; many of you have probably heard of it before this. His most striking finding was that if the experimenter told the subject that he was responsible for what happened, a very large number of subjects remained obedient to the experimenter in giving electric shocks to this victim. When the victim protested, when he complained that he had a heart ailment, when he screamed, when he stopped answering the questions, and when the voltage levels that were supposedly being delivered rose through the 200-volt range and the 300-volt range on up to magnitudes of electric shock which, in reality, might well have proved fatal to the subject—under these circumstances, few people would expect or predict that subjects would remain obedient to the experimenter, and in fact, in the experiment I've just described, slightly over half of the subjects did remain obedient to the experimenter right up until the end of the study. Now, I mention this because I think this is one of the few experiments which creates pressures on individuals which do approach those that exist in real-life situations, and in doing so, it raises, I think, very serious ethical problems. I think it's easy to see from Milgram's study why we don't usually *do* experiments that create the kinds of pressures that exist on people in real-life situations. Milgram's study then indicates that many people are quite obedient to an authority that they perceive is legitimate—one of the same points made in the film. It does not

give any indication of why one person obeys and why another doesn't; this, I think, is something that psychohistory *can* give.

Let's talk a bit about the sort of evidence that's utilized in psychohistory. First, because it assumes that much of our reaction to a situation is because of the pressures in the situation, it's very important that you understand what the historical setting of a person's reactions are; how he perceives that situation. This, I think, poses one of the problems that psychohistory has, which is that many of the works in this field are either done by a person with a good knowledge of history and little knowledge of psychology, or done by someone with a good knowledge of psychology and little knowledge of history. It's hard to find a person with really good knowledge of both, and it's essential that a person have really good knowledge of both to do this kind of work. Unless you really understand the historical situation, you can't tell what aspects of the person's response to that situation were so dictated by the situation that virtually *anyone* in that time and place would have acted in that way, and what aspects of it are so idiosyncratic, so peculiar to this individual, that they reveal important things about that individual.

Let me give some examples from the film of the importance of the situations that people were in. And here again, I don't want to generalize too broadly; we don't know to what extent the people that we've seen in the film are typical of all of those who might have been shown, or to what extent some bias and sampling is involved. Still, we do see a fairly strong tendency in the film for the people who were *most* able to go against authority and conformity pressures in their society to be people who, in one way or another, were somewhat set apart from that society prior to the events we see in the film. One of the characters actually suggests that *all* of the people involved in the resistance were social isolates of one kind or another. I think that's an overgeneralization in two ways. First, it talks about one period of the resistance rather than the entire period of the resistance. I think that you see, perhaps, at the very beginning, the first few people who became active were more likely to be people who were social isolates. Later on, as this became a more accepted thing, as there was some organization buildup, people who *needed* group support to be able to participate, I think, increasingly were able to participate in the later stages.

The other thing is that different people respond to different authorities and different reference groups, and there were some, I believe, who were not social isolates at all but who obtained some support from reference groups that were important to them right at the beginning. Some members of the communist party, I think, obtained such group support. I think the farmer Louis Grave whom we saw exemplified somebody who was far from being a social isolate. Let me give something that makes me believe that: when he described his experiences when he came

back after having been informed on, turned in to the Germans, taken, tortured by them, eventually got back to his home, and friends of his came and said to him, "If you should want revenge, just tell us and we'll kill the person who informed on you but we'll never tell you who it was." And he said, "I know who it was," and they said, "Who told you?" and he said, "I figured out for myself." A person who's a social isolate doesn't have a group of people coming, offering to kill someone who is their enemy for them; he doesn't have the channels of information that enables him to find out who informed on him. I don't think this person was at all a social isolate; I think instead, he's a person who got social support from groups that were important to him. Again, I don't want to overgeneralize too much.

For psychohistory, then, it seems to me that one of the most important principles I can give is that you particularly pull out, as significant, those ways in which a person reacted that *are* atypical, that *do* characterize *their* response to a situation in a way a different from how other people would have responded. Let me just give a simple example. In a group I was in not long ago, a person who usually is extremely diplomatic, usually would not say anything to offend another person, responded to something that a female member of this group said with a very strong, hostile reaction. Now, this could have been caused by any one of a number of different things. It could be that this person had certain sexist characteristics that made them respond to all women this way; it could be that they knew something about this person, or had some past relationship to them, that made them have a particular hatred of this one person; it could have been that they always responded this way to people, although as I've said, in this particular case that wasn't true; it could've been what this particular person had said that made them respond in this way. The approach of psychohistory, then, would pull out this incident as a very significant incident in revealing something about the person who is involved because they *did* respond in a way that is not called for by the situation, but instead of feeling that this indicated anything in particular about that person, it would indicate a number of possible hypotheses which you would then test out by further evidence of similar sorts of reactions. And this means that the second point about the evidence is that the main criterion you use in judging that evidence is consistency. That you don't regard it as giving final answers to things, but instead, are always working with a number of hypotheses, some that have more consistent evidence in support of them than others.

These aspects of the evidence I think apply to both of the two main types of psychohistory. Again, it's very important—and this is implicit in the consistency criterion—that you don't base any conclusion on one or two pieces of evidence. The thing that you look for is recurring patterns that you have many, many pieces of evidence for. And I think maybe this—to give a somewhat lighter example—is best illustrated in Erik Erikson's work on Mahatma Gandhi. Erikson looked at an earlier psychoanalytic history of Gandhi which had a great tendency to

draw hidden meanings from everything in his life, and this earlier author had looked at an occasion when Gandhi led a protest march from India to the Caspian Sea in order to protest the new tax on salt, and he asked, "What does salt signify?" Well, Erikson reviewed all of the various interpretations that were given to what salt signified, looked at the way in which this was an important necessity in the lives of the poor on which a new tax had been imposed, and concluded that salt signified salt. And I think that's a good lesson to keep in mind [*some applause from the audience*] in working in psychohistory—that we don't overinterpret our data, that we are very cautious in our generalizations.

Psychohistories, it seems to me, were of two main types. One type is a study of how a number of different people all respond to the same historical events which are so important that they must have some impact on the lives of all those involved with them. Robert Coles' book *Children of Crisis* would fit into this category. Work on the survivors of Hiroshima would fit into the category. Studies of the reactions of Japanese Americans to being interned in camps during the Second World War... there are a number of other examples that could be given. This is of the type that *The Sorrow and the Pity* is viewed as psychohistory; it takes a series of events and looks at differences in how different people respond to those events.

The other type is an intensive study of an individual life. I think there's some similarities and some differences in what each of these types of study can tell us. I think, for example, the former type can give us some understanding of why people do tend to obey authority. Here, I don't want to digress too much and I think it's difficult to make the ideas clear briefly, that I might mention, but I think this is so central to what this conference is about that maybe I should venture a few comments on this even if I can't amplify them as much as I might. The notion of anxiety is central to a psychoanalytic interpretation of why people obey authority, and I think anxiety is a difficult thing for people to get much feeling for... and I think you do have to have a feeling for it. We are also accustomed to being more or less in control of our environments... having relative confidence that our basic needs will be met from day to day, that it is sometimes difficult for us to really feel ourselves into a situation where you can't have that sort of confidence.

I think maybe an example that was in a textbook by Robert Janus, maybe would be as good an example of this as any. It actually deals with someone here from the state of Oregon. A member of the Corvallis football team a number of years ago—a year when that particular team went to the Rose Bowl—who, while swimming in the Pacific, got caught on an outgoing tide and swept out to sea. He had grown up in Oregon. He had thought more than most people do about what would... what his reaction would be if that ever happened to him. He had known people to drown in the Pacific—he knew he was running some risk when he swam there—and

as a member of this particular football team, he was in far, far better physical condition than most of us, I think, can even imagine being in. He had decided that if he was ever caught by the tide, the mistake other people made was to fight against it, so what he'd do was just the opposite. He'd swim out to sea and swim around for a while until the tide changed. Those of you who've been in the Pacific off the Oregon coast know how cold it is—know what an incredible thing that is to set out to do. He didn't panic to the extent most people would, then, when he was caught in the undertow; he swam with it, managed to keep himself above water often enough to breathe, and, as a result, got far farther out than the searchers looked for him, so that they had long since given him up as drowned and stopped the search while he was, in fact, still swimming around out there. He became confused as to how much time had passed—he greatly overestimated how much time had passed—and convinced himself that the tide had now changed and was coming in. In fact, it wasn't running out as strongly as it had been before, it wasn't coming in yet. But, confident now in his ability to swim to shore because now the tide had changed, he did manage to swim ashore. He—by this time it was dark—he crawled a considerable distance up the beach before anyone found him. And then, what made this case possible is that the person who went to the beach with him, who was an English major, sat up all night by his bedside, and while the swimmer was sort of reliving the experiences that he'd had in the ocean, his friend wrote down everything that he'd said.

This account of what he said is interesting, it shows some of the—again, some evidence that you can only understand an individual—that there're few generalizations that apply about people, for example, of the motives that would inspire him to go on struggling when he was tempted to give up and let himself drown. One was a very personal one: he had asked a girl for a date some time before and she'd turned him down, and he thought it was because she felt that since she came from Seaside, she was of higher socioeconomic class than he was; that she was stuck-up and thought she was too good for him. And when all other motives to go on fighting failed, he didn't want to give her the satisfaction of his [*chuckling*] having drowned. [*gasps and reaction from audience*] Now, I don't think you'd ever in a million years guess that that, you know, would be the motive that would keep you trying to stay alive.

The reason that I talk about his case is that after he... for a considerable period of time did sort of relive the experiences that he'd had in the ocean; he then did sleep soundly and long, and when he woke up from this sleep he had almost no memory of who he was or the events of his life. He had some very early childhood memories; he could remember having visited the town of Corvallis once as a young child but had no memory, for example, of being a student there or playing football or anything like that. Now, this wasn't because he had lost the physical memory trace; in fact, over a period of months he did gradually regain most of his earlier memories. The interpretation that is made of cases like this is that the experiences that he had when he was

fighting for his life in the ocean were so unbearably unpleasant, so painful, that he could not stand to be reminded of this, and that almost everything that he might think of or remember, in one way or another, was tied to this this experience and would remind him of it. So, the way in which he could deal with this overwhelming, unbearable memory was to force it and all other memories out of his consciousness.

Now, I think it's easier to understand this is a case of anxiety; that is, the initial traumatic experience, and then the memory for it, being so unbearable that it couldn't be reexperienced easily, I think that's easier to understand than the notion that young children all experience some anxiety as a normal part of growing up. It's easier for us to identify, to remember, to imagine what it would be like to be the swimmer than it is for us to imagine what it would be like to be totally dependent upon another person, to have so little continuity of personal memory that we never knew when we were hungry that we were going to be fed again. These are the kinds of things that for a young child may cause serious anxiety, and which I think it's very difficult for us, as adults, to remember or imagine. Because the child, according to this interpretation, finds it overwhelmingly threatening that they might be rejected by their parent, it's easier for them to control themselves in areas where there is some threat that their behavior might cause their parent to reject them. In other words, what I'm trying to suggest is that, for a young child aware of their dependence upon their parents, a threat of parental rejection is a far more threatening thing than you and I might easily be able to imagine, and that one basis for acquiring ideas about what they should or shouldn't do, on the part of the child, is to try to control their own impulses in ways that won't lead to this threat of parental rejection or attack.

What this... since this isn't... well, let me back up. This is not the only mechanism by which children come to acquire their conception of what they should and shouldn't do. There's also a process of spontaneous imitation of people that you feel affection for without these threatening sorts of qualities. To jump ahead a bit and overgeneralize a little bit, one generalization that we can draw about who is most obedient to authority is that people tend to be obedient to authority who have been socialized primarily *by* very harsh threats and punishments, because they experience so much more anxiety at the thought of violating the principles that they acquired through avoiding those threats and punishments. The cases of battered children perhaps are the clearest evidence of this. Again, I'm simply hinting at the conclusion here without going through all of the material that I might present if I wanted to talk about this at length.

Even if we can draw this sort of conclusion, though, from studies of how individuals respond to situations, this doesn't enable us to say who is a legitimate authority or who is an important

reference group for any given individual. An individual, on this basis, might find it very difficult to go *against* those people that he perceived as authorities, but it wouldn't enable us to say who he *would* perceive as authorities. To do this, you need the sort of intensive study of an individual life that I thought I'd give one example of fairly briefly—the one I've mentioned earlier of Thomas Woodrow Wilson. A psychobiography of him was written by Sigmund Freud and William Christian Bullitt. It wasn't published until quite recently, because they waited until after Wilson's widow had died before publication of the book, so it was published long after Freud's death. It hasn't had as much attention as it might, because Anna Freud suggested that Sigmund Freud really didn't have very much hand in writing this book; that really this was Bullitt's work and not her father's. I don't know why this was. There are a number of reasons why it might be. It does not present the most sophisticated psychoanalytic analysis of Wilson's life, but instead, is an attempt, I think on Freud's part, to present the basic principles of psychoanalysis yet one more time; to show how even these most basic principles will enable you to understand many aspects of an individual's life. I think a second reason why Anna Freud might have been unhappy about it is that I think Sigmund Freud's sexism comes out more clearly in this work than it does in some others. I don't think, however, that's central to the theorizing in the book, so that it is possible to keep the structure of the theory without having to keep the sexist bias which is apparent. I believe that it was largely done by Freud as well as Bullitt, because when Bullitt's correspondence was published after his death by his brother, his brother comments in the introduction of that, that he has studied the original manuscript of the psychobiography of Wilson and that while much of it is in the type-writing—which meant that the first draft was written by Bullitt—all of those sections have extensive handwriting changes in Freud's handwriting, and there are some sections where the original draft is in Freud's handwriting. So it seems that Freud and Bullitt did have this as a true collaboration rather than it simply being a work by Bullitt which he attached Freud's name to also in order to get the prestige of that, or something.

In looking at something as interpretive as a psychobiography, probably the personalities and histories of the authors are important, too, in understanding it. And I think William Christian Bullitt is, in himself, a very interesting person. He twice negotiated terms by which the United States might recognize the Soviet regime in Russia. The first of these times was during the Versailles Peace Conference—secretly acting for Wilson, and also for David Lloyd George—and he obtained far more favorable terms of recognition from Lenin than any that we were offered at a later date. When he returned with these terms, the peace conference was already falling down around Wilson's ears. Wilson just didn't have time to seriously consider the Soviet proposal which had a very short deadline on it, and as a result, he and Lloyd George denied that Bullitt had carried out this mission for them. The terms, incidentally, gave to the Soviet regime only a very small land area, most of it around Moscow, and involved them assuming the deaths

of imperial Russia—that's somewhat different from the terms which were ultimately accepted. The ones which were ultimately accepted Bullitt also negotiated, this time representing Franklin Roosevelt.

Following this, he was our first ambassador to Moscow. At the time of the fall of France he was our ambassador in Paris and very, very close to the government of France at that time. He had a falling out with Franklin Roosevelt shortly after this and Roosevelt was so powerful that he not only kept Bullitt from getting any job with the government, he kept him from being able to join the U.S. armed forces during the Second World War. So Bullitt went and joined De Gaulle and fought with the free French during the Second World War. I mention all this partly to indicate that Bullitt had a very good knowledge of the events of his time and a major role in them, which of course gave him his own biases. Also, perhaps, to make a passing comment that I think Bullitt shows the lasting impact of McCarthyism on our culture. Bullitt—another thing that he did in his greatly varied life, was that he married the widow of John Reed. I think that it's inconceivable that anyone who had married a comparable figure in our own time should serve as our ambassador to such an important place as Paris, or perhaps to any place.

Freud and Bullitt had so much to say about Wilson that I think perhaps there's no possibility of my summarizing it. I think I *might* say that I think there are some useful principles in the books which can be used to approach the field of psychobiography. I might just say a few words about some aspects of Wilson's life. Like Bullitt's, Wilson's life was enough different from that of most of us that it's fairly difficult to imagine. I'd say it was probably more like the life of Abner Hale in *Hawaii* than anyone else that I'm familiar with. His father was a Presbyterian minister, his paternal grandfather was a Presbyterian minister, his mother's father was a Presbyterian minister, and ultimately he married the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. Presbyterianism was fairly important in his life. Throughout his lifetime, for example, he prayed publicly six times a day and his family with all of the rest of... leading his family in prayer six times every day. Unlike most of us, he didn't start school until the age of 13. He was such a sickly child, they decided to educate him at home, and here he was completely dominated by his father, a person who might have dominated *most* gatherings. His father, besides being a Presbyterian minister, had been a professor of rhetoric—he was a [*chuckling*] rhetorician almost without equal—and all of this turned loose on a small boy, as you can see, might have quite an overwhelming sort of effect.

Children tend to see their parents larger than life, anyway. Their parents are a lot larger than they are, and it perhaps isn't too surprising that in some ways Wilson identified his father with God. This isn't that unusual a reaction among children, particularly when your father is accepted by all of your friends and acquaintances as God's representative on Earth, as his

father was. One result of this was that as the, for many years only and always eldest son of his father, he also tended to identify himself, to some extent, with Christ. Without giving the data on which this is based, it seems really far out to suggest that at an unconscious level, Wilson thought of himself as Christ. Maybe the single most convincing fact I can give, without giving all the ones that are involved, is to point out that when Wilson was President, a man by the name of George Herron published a very enthusiastic book about him comparing him to Christ, and Wilson's comment on this book was, "Only Herron understands me." [*murmurs from the audience while speaker chuckles*] To give another example: successful candidates for the presidency say a variety of things to their campaign managers when the election returns come in, but I think that what Wilson said stands by itself. This is a direct quote: "Whether you did little or much, remember that God ordained that I should be the next President of the United States. Neither you nor any other mortal or mortals could have prevented it." Uhh...

One of the themes of Bullitt and Freud's book on Wilson, then, is the strengths and weaknesses of identifying yourself with Christ. The major weakness of identifying with Christ is perhaps best... again, I'll give a fairly long quote: "The individual who identifies himself with Christ is not Christ, and the world of man's submission does not often lead to triumph. The neurotic who has lodged a considerable portion of his libido in identification with Christ convinces himself that by submitting he will achieve his aims, and if he has not a strong grip on reality, he is apt to convince himself—after he has submitted—that he has, in fact, won a victory." This orientation, the authors believed, was very important in understanding why Wilson could come away from Versailles having drawn up a peace treaty which violated every one of the principles which he publicly committed the United States to fighting for during the Second World War, and claim that that treaty was a great victory. This, of course, is only one case, but another comes to my mind. Another person who similarly saw himself as the instrument of God, and who seems to have reacted to a similar circumstance in much the same way, was Chamberlain coming away from Munich, also convinced that he had achieved a great victory.

There's much else in this book that would illustrate the approach of psychohistory. One important point is who people identify with... and maybe I can best say this by saying that almost all of Wilson's life, he had a younger protégé to whom he was very much emotionally attached. These were different people, because as soon as one of these protégés went very much against Wilson's own opinions and attitudes, Wilson tended to have a violent break with this person and not speak with them again. In many ways, this younger protégé seemed to represent Wilson. That is, in doing things *for* this person, he identified himself with this person who was similar to himself as a young man, and therefore got the gratification of receiving his help, counsel, kindness just as he got from giving.

I think this is an important point because all people identify themselves with some people. In a psychobiography, for example, of Heinrich Himmler, it was pointed out that there were times on which he had great affection and emotion for people—where he would break down and weep because of what was happening to some other person—but in almost all those cases you can see that that other person, in some way, was similar to Himmler, so that he, rather than loving the other person, was loving the other person as a representation of himself. And one important distinction between people, then, is the extent to which they are capable of loving other people or only capable of loving representatives of themselves in someone else. Now, Wilson, while he did love representatives of himself in other people, also was capable of loving other people for themselves rather than for their similarity to him.

Without, then, having given a comprehensive view of the principles in this psychobiography, I may, perhaps, have given you some sort of feeling for the types of data that psychobiography uses—the types of interpretations that it may draw. Some of the important principles that I've mentioned or implied were the importance of conflict between our impulses and the moral feelings which we develop. Our identification with certain people that makes us respond to them as symbolic representations of someone else rather than in terms of who they really are, and some differences between people and how much they're aware of their own impulses or how much they act out their impulses *unbeknownst* to themselves, because those impulses do conflict with their moral commitments.

Finally, let me return to a few more examples from *The Sorrow and the Pity*. Although I haven't gone into the evidence on this, people who are most obedient to authority tend to be out of contact with their own impulses. They tend to have very severe conflict between what their impulses are and what they believe is right and proper. And I think that you can see, to some extent, the difference in awareness of impulses in the individuals you've seen in the film. Louis Grave, for example, could be aware of his desires for revenge and yet not act upon them because he could also be aware of his reasons for not wanting to act upon them. He could be consciously aware of the conflict and deal with it. A man who, to me, was a hero of the film, although he might not appear such to everyone, was pharmacist Marcel Verdier. He didn't do as much in the resistance as some people did, but given his position in life, I think it may have been more difficult for him to do much than it was for some people. At the time that the resistance started, he had a wife and young children, in contrast to many of the people in the resistance, who did not have the hostages to the future that this represents. He took in two Jewish girls to work in his pharmacy at a time that nobody else would employ them—which, of course, he did publicly and everyone knew—and he even, to some extent, had some participation in the actual resistance later on. He, too, struck me as extremely aware of the impulses that he was feeling. He, too, could look honestly in the face his most antisocial

impulses and, having recognized them, could reject them. I'd contrast them with Madame Solange or Marius Klein—Marius Klein, you may remember, is the person who ran the advertisement in the newspaper saying that he was not a Jew regardless of what his name was—who struck me as quite unable to face what their impulses were on which they were acting, who were self-deceived.

Finally, to return once more to Wilson, Freud and Bullitt considered the advantages and the disadvantages of a superego that demands much of one, such as Wilson's conception that, at some level, he was Christ. They felt that this kind of neurotic, unrealistic, demanding superego often causes people to achieve extraordinary things, but also brings with it weaknesses that are likely to lead to ultimate downfall. So that in terms of success in the world, neurotic impulses might often be adaptive qualities, but that the kind of success that it built was a fragile kind, as it was in Wilson's case, so that they said the qualities of his defects raised him to power but the defects of his qualities made him, in the end, not one of the world's greatest men, but a great fiasco. A character who is of major importance but only briefly appears in the film, General De Gaulle, might also be used as an example of the demands of an extraordinary superego.

The last point I'd like to make has to do with the use and misuse of the type of psychoanalytic theory that I've been presenting here. It's often used by people to put down others, to somehow belittle their behavior, to attribute it to undesirable causes. It's sometimes used by people to justify their own faults, that they can't be any different because something that happened in their childhood obviously made 'em that way, so that's the way it is. I don't think the theory originally was devised for either of those goals. Freud was a great believer in the power of people if they *learned* what the influences had been on their lives, to then change then and rise above them, so that he would never have used psychoanalytic insight as a basis for *excusing* your characteristics, but rather as a basis for attempting to conquer them and to rise above your past.

So those are the main things that I got from the film. We do have a bit of time left, which I'm glad of because it gives me a chance to see what impressions, thoughts, questions, comments you all have on this. [*to audience*] Yeah.

AUDIENCE 1 [*off microphone, partly inaudible*]: Isn't what you just said rather [...]?

WRENCH: Rather what?

AUDIENCE 1: Negative, serious, that impacts this whole [...] conferences [...] positive [...].

WRENCH: I think that's a good point. The world does tend to be made up of optimists and pessimists, and Freud was very clearly one of the latter. Bullitt, however, seems to have been much more one of the former, though that's somewhat less apparent in their joint work than it is in Freud's works. I've perhaps overemphasized the gloomy aspect because I think that I, like Freud, tend to be one of those that looks more on the dark than the light side sometimes, but I agree that in Freud's work, that is a very definite mark. Any of the rest of you have a comment on that point? Or on something else?

AUDIENCE 2: What you said about the superego...

WRENCH: Yeah.

AUDIENCE 2: Wilson and De Gaulle [...] but without it, I mean, where would our egos come from? What other motivation besides a giant superego would cause [...]

WRENCH: I know and that's a point that Freud and Bullitt make, too, that an ordinary sort of non-neurotic superego doesn't ask much from you, and you don't get much from it. One which asks a great deal, you may get much, but you may also, in the end, get psychosis. In the last days of his life, Wilson was very close to this. What is best? Perhaps if we had social institutions which didn't require superhuman feats from people it would be best, but I don't know of any. Yeah.

AUDIENCE 3: The thing that you mentioned earlier, this idea that anxiety is one reason people obey authority—

WRENCH: Yeah.

AUDIENCE 3: And it occurred to me that there're a couple kinds of anxiety that might be involved, and maybe others, and I wondered if you could maybe focus on that... One, for example, is anxiety that you're... that comes with confronting the authority, [...] one kind of anxiety. Another would be the anxiety, say, refer to in the film, people had in [...] short [...]

WRENCH: Right.

AUDIENCE 3: ...and there's a war coming. Do you mean either of these kinds of anxiety or another?

WRENCH: Yeah...

AUDIENCE 3: or all?

WRENCH: I think that I do mean both of these. I think that the importance of understanding a historical setting is so that you can understand the realistic sources of anxiety that people had, for example, in those times. However, the most powerful effects perhaps come from the reexperiencing of those anxieties that we have had before. So powerful that research shows, for example, that a person who, in war time...

[recording skips to next questioner, who is barely audible]

WRENCH: *[responding to inaudible question]* That's a good point that I missed through not being an historian. Yeah.

AUDIENCE 4: Would you comment on anxiety in terms of adult [...]?

WRENCH: That's what I thought would have taken me longer than I could... maybe I will just add one or two sentences: that in terms of the conception that I've been giving of the role that anxiety plays in normal childhood development, we shouldn't be so surprised at finding a great deal of obedience to people that the subjects perceive as legitimate authorities.

[recording skips; WRENCH is responding to a question that was not recorded] I think that's a very interesting idea. If that could well be, it would be interesting to know more about that. The extent to which you perceive yourself as having made a willing choice may influence your willingness to obey the decisions that result from that choice. If you can view it as forced on you by someone else, you may not feel as great commitment to it; that's a good point. Other questions, comments? Yeah, John.

JOHN: One more question to clarify something you said toward the end, that people who are obedient with authority tend to have a conflict between their impulses and their values.

WRENCH: Yes.

JOHN: Does this... am I generally right there?

WRENCH: As long as you say "tend to," yes, because one major theme of what I'm saying is individual differences and unwillingness to draw grand generalizations about people, but in terms of statistical probability, right.

JOHN: But what I gathered from what you went on to say was more of something like this: people who are *unconscious* of this conflict can be obedient, but people who are aware of it, not so much. Is that a more accurate way of putting it?

WRENCH: Yes... I guess what I was suggesting was that one consequence of very severe conflict is to cut yourself off from your own impulses, because you may use such strong defenses to try to deal with conflict that you really don't know what you're feeling anymore, so as a result, you've got a sort of mechanical person whose cut off from contact with their own impulses in contrast to a person who is aware of, and manages to deal with, those impulses. Thank you for clarifying that; I gave that rather quickly and sloppily.

AUDIENCE 5: Is there a possibility a social isolate [...] hypothesized as being [...] original resistors, as perhaps being a case of something like Louis Grave [...]. He's isolated but he's not in the sense of [...] or someone who's physically apart. He's isolated only in that he's folded in on himself. And that, perhaps, allows him to see certain kinds of perspective that does... which will have him [...] necessary [...] social structure, couldn't.

WRENCH: Yeah, I *do* believe that the experience of being forced to stand outside of society brings a person to some kinds of awareness that you wouldn't otherwise have. It may also be possible that the person may go the other way, too, that through greater self-sufficiency, may not be as dependent upon some groups and so on. But I'd argue—and you know it's very hard, and this is why I hate to make generalizations here—I got the impression that Louis Grave was one of the few who was not socially isolated, in fact, he was very well integrated into the...

AUDIENCE 5: Except, perhaps, that he was autonomous in himself.

WRENCH: Right. [*AUDIENCE 5 still talking in background*] Right, and I don't want to identify autonomy and isolation with each other, I think they're two very different things; good point. Any other comments? Or questions, or thoughts? Well, again let me conclude by saying that I hope all of you who haven't seen the film, and many of you who have, will go see it again this week. Thank you.

[*program ends*]