

THE ARGUMENTUM AD COMPLEXUS

BY A. A. ROBACK

TO the long collection of time-honored fallacies which have helped in some degree to offset the truculence of the traditional text book in logic, we must add a new species, which has come into being with the advent of the psychoanalytic movement.

In a sense this habit of the mind—assuming that a fallacy belongs to the province of habits—is delightfully fresh. Aristotle surely could have had no inkling of it, nor any of the line of illustrious logicians who followed him, from Porphyry down to Goclenian. And yet if we talk of a species, it would almost be necessary to relate the fallacy to a genus, which task is not difficult to accomplish. The genus is of course the familiar *argumentum ad hominem*, which covers a multitude of alibis.

The *argumentum ad complexus* is a first cousin, therefore, of the *petitio principii* (begging the question) on the one hand, and the *argumentum ad verecundiam* (appeal to authority) on the other; and the credit for begetting this Sigfried of the psychoanalytic camp must be accorded to Sigmund Freud. It was he who made the *complex* such a *simple* thing that to hear it was to repeat it. Understanding it was not a *sine qua non*. Colorful like the rainbow, it could be appreciated even by a child; and indeed I am told that in Vienna it is not rare to find small children, in their games, proclaiming their Oedipus or Electra complexes.

The complex, however, as a weapon with which to silence an opponent is a weapon brandished only by adults, and naturally those only who have had a smattering of psychoanalysis; and its effectiveness is increased in accordance with the prestige of the proponent.

Its force came home to me once when a votary of the Viennese

movement somewhat intimately "wondered" why I did not have myself psychoanalysed by one of the many Freudians who charged only twenty-five dollars an hour. Naturally I protested that there was nothing the matter with me, that I managed my affairs fairly well under the circumstances. To be sure, I had my problems, as everybody else has his or hers, but I rather prided myself on reducing the extent of their insistence.

My academic friend, who had evidently been contemplating my lot, here took occasion to point out that I could not be well adjusted, for a man of my ability should have been more firmly established—this especially, I suppose, with reference to my financial standing. It was of no use to deny that my interlocutor had hit the nail on the head. Of course, I was not being treated by the world in accordance with my desserts; nevertheless I explained the situation and added that under the circumstances I was content, that gradually I should be able to overcome the drawbacks and that I was especially gratified to be able to carry on my work in accordance with my plans.

"Rationalizations," my friend interposed, "there must be some complexes which hinder your progress. Psychoanalysis will bring them to the surface in a few months." Had I been more suggestible, I suppose, this little incident would have added one more conflict to the bundle of conflicts, both conscious and unconscious, viz., the question of deciding whether I could sooner afford to part with my rather doubtful complexes or with the very certain cash.

In the light of what happened later my skepticism was justified, for I was led to the conviction that a thorough psychoanalysis was no prophylaxis against nervous breakdowns, mental troubles, conflicts and what not; and to judge from some of the results obtained even with persons of culture and capability, the removed complex is not unlike the grease spot which is supposed to have totally disappeared from the chemically treated suit.

There was a time when contentions against a theory would be at least read by the adherents of the theory. Darwin was said to have sought out every bit of writing tending to disprove his doctrine and note it for his consideration. The result was that when his "Origin of Species" appeared, it was a veritable scientific bulwark. Every possible attack was warded off in anticipation.

Psychoanalysis does not feel the urge of this method. You set down before a disciple of Freud or any of his former lieutenants (Although Jung and Adler are now leaders of their own schools, they have this point at least in common with Freud's present followers. As a matter of fact, Freud himself appears to be the most responsive of all psychoanalysts, with the possible exception of Ernest Jones, who is the controversialist, the pamphleteer of the cult) an article criticizing in detail the views they cherish, and the reaction, as suggested by the manner of a number of psychoanalysts in actual cases, will be: "Me (I) read this? Why should I waste my time reading this stuff? You can tell by the first sentence that the man is full of complexes."

To those who still remember some of the old illustrations in their logic books, this remark will have a familiar ring. Of course it's the old outburst "No case, abuse the plaintiff." But while this attitude used to be singled out for ridicule, it is being at present flaunted as a precept of psychoanalysis. Surely, if a writer has complexes, how can anything he has to say be worthy of a hearing?

The complex is only a new name for "sin" or the "Devil" in medieval terminology. Even the testimony of a person so possessed could not be accepted, until the Evil One is exorcised.

And if the psychoanalyst cannot convince the critic of his folly it is because of the stubborn *resistance* which the latter's complexes offer. Again, history repeats itself, for the Devil too was always a hard customer to deal with. Practicing psychoanalysts invariably complain of the resistance of patients at the crucial moment in accepting their interpretations. Only one psychoanalyst, Burrow, has lately had the courage to ask (*Psyche*, 1926) whether after all it was not a relative matter, whether the patient has not a right from *his* point of view to maintain that the physician is exhibiting a marked resistance; in other words, we may gather that the healer is governed by *his* complexes just as the sufferer is possessed by his. Of course this is a heresy, and the probability is that the questioner is no longer an orthodox Freudian.

It may be that my readers will begin to suspect that being averse to psychoanalysis, I may have exaggerated the case. Yet I count myself among the prophets, even if I am only on the outer ring. No psychologist can afford to disregard the contribution of Freud.

And as for the possibility of my exaggerating, let us go to the source for evidence.

In an article on *Behaviorism and Psychoanalysis*, Theodore Schroeder, the well-known advocate of free speech, undertakes the task to explain why Watson, the chieftain of the behaviorists, is so eager to deny the existence of consciousness.

Watson, who asserts there are no images, and yet writes in a picturesque style which gains the conviction of many an uncritical reader, has allowed himself quite harmlessly, I believe, in one place to observe that "As a science psychology puts before *herself* the task of unravelling" etc. . . . The personification of sciences, in journalistic writing especially, is still in vogue, and does not, in my estimation, constitute a ground for investigation.

Schroeder, however, thinks otherwise. In this figure of speech he sees the clue to Watson's whole philosophical outlook, his hankering after behaviorism, indeed, even his affective life. Let me quote here verbatim from Schroeder's own abstract of his article.

"By thus writing of 'psychology' as a female, Watson made a choice which I venture to guess was not determined by conscious or discovered bio-chemical processes, of which he was aware at that time, and which he can now explain as he then understood them.

"Others, working under a different set of affect-values, would have construed a different sentence to express the same thought. Thus: Psychologists put before *themselves*; or: Psychology puts before *itself*. A woman psychologist, more obsessed by maleness than by the rhetorical habit of male predecessors, might have written, 'As a science, psychology puts before *himself* the task of unravelling,' etc. From the psychoanalytic approach each of these choices but reveals the present dominating affect-value, which was probably acquired through the past sexual life of the person who makes the choice.

"Now then the psychoanalyst, seeking to understand the Watson personality in terms of a dominant compulsion, and of the psychogenetics thereon, can see a quite clear causal unity between the above choice of femaleness and several other of Watson's choices. First, we have the relative

obsession with femaleness which compelled him to feminize psychology. Second: His feminized psychology has a will, of which he does not know the meaning. Third: A fearful attitude towards the popular sex-phobias. Fourth: A corresponding aversion to the psychoanalysts' claim that they can trace such fearful affects, back to their causes in the individual's sexual past, and to the emotional tones (of shame and fear) then acquired. Fifth: The psychoanalyst may also see in such past the genesis and development of an impulse to exclude some painful experience from consciousness, and a resultant declaration by Watson that he does not know what others mean by consciousness. Sixth: From a deductive application, of psychoanalytically revealed mechanisms, one can easily get a working hypothesis to explain Watson's necessity for defending an absolute materialist monist philosophy, and for repudiating a concept of consciousness, sensation, perception, will, image, etc."

In vain you will protest that Watson was only following a rhetorical practice, that any other pronoun would be less appropriate, that no woman, no matter how much obsessed she were by maleness, would, in her right senses, say "psychology puts before himself." For your disagreement will direct the barrage against yourself, and your own complexes will be ruthlessly hauled out before the gaze of the reader.

It would be in order to call Schroeder's attention to the fact that in personifying psychology as a woman, Watson reveals himself as a misogynist, for has he not disowned this science in order to espouse behaviorism? But the psychoanalyst, I fancy, would reply that the very thought of femaleness discloses an obsession (read "Complex").

The complex in the life of the *intellectual* is beginning to assume such proportions that we shall have to add to the imposing list of phobias one more—the fear of complexes—and to coin the term "*symplexiphobia*."

Your erstwhile confidant who has made good in the commercial world somehow takes it into his head that you ought to give up your present job, whether it is academic, scientific, or literary, and turn to something else, so that you may be provided when you

reach the uncertain age of discretion and decrepitude. Naturally you are flabbergasted at the suggestion. You express your astonishment at your friend's ignorance of your ambitions and plans, and especially at the impracticalness of the advice to give up a firm position for a speculative advancement in the future. The answer to your protest is "Complex."

Perhaps the startling suggestion may have also arisen out of a complex on the part of your well-to-do chum who may be unconsciously fearful lest he be obliged to contribute toward your comforts in old age. But therein lies the danger of such methods of argumentation, in contradistinction to the good old canons of commonsense logic.

The very mention of logic is taboo to the patented psychoanalyst, and upon examination, it may transpire that the complex which is weighing heavily upon him is just the *fear of clear thinking*. Assuming that there is no norm or standard in thinking, he will not be obliged to offer his proof in any demonstrable manner, and his assumption will rest on the fact that the average man seldom thinks logically. But again we have a glaring fallacy before us, for even if the whole world were to consist of low-grade imbeciles who could never grasp that $5 \times 5 = 25$, the rule of the multiplication table would still be valid.

It may be true that we accept our premises largely as a result of our feelings, and in the majority of cases, I am willing to concede, even the conclusions are arrived at through emotional channels, but if our views are to carry in the long run, if they are to be embodied into the warp and woof of a universal culture, then we must choose reason as our imparting instrument, not *rationalization* but *ratiocination*.

There is one precaution which cannot be too much emphasized and that is to *overhaul our arguments from the point of view of our adversaries*. In our present era of intellectual revolutions we know that there is nothing apodeictically true in the factual world but we should also learn that there are innumerable assertions which are apodeictically absurd in the theoretical world.

Before we make our assertions or build our hypotheses, let us examine the material from the point of view of *informed common sense*. That there are complexes functioning in our subcon-

scious can hardly be denied. Our dreams testify to an elaborate incubation of emotionally toned ideas of which we seem to have but little awareness in our waking life; but granting the operation of these complexes, we shall not do well to hang the most trivial things on such pegs. *And if we do court the insignificant, we should have ample evidence for relating the known to the unknown.*

Above all our own *personal bias* should be ruled out as much as possible. What seems to us personally ill-adjusted, queer, vile, etc., may not after all appear as such to many others. Our initial inquiry should be: does this type of behavior serve a purpose? And if it does, what is that purpose?

"Complex" hunters are ready to look for motives everywhere, and in their search of the motive, they lose sight of the larger purpose. Thus at present, I write with the back of my penpoint, because holding the pen in the regular position would make the writing too thick. A "complex" fan would ascribe to this mode of handling the pen some hidden motive in my unconscious. All the reasons I should muster to explain just why I happen to make this deviation would be of no avail of course, just as the very writing of this article will be set down undoubtedly to the manoeuvring of goodness-knows-what complex. But as Tweedledee says in *Through the Looking Glass*

"If it was, it might be; and if it were so, it would be:
but as it isn't, it ain't."