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THE HOBO:
MYTHS AND REALITIES

The hobo is a man of many legends; these legends are contradictory because they "serve" opposite goals. Like Snow White, Mickey Mouse, or Sherlock Holmes, he has become a hero of comic-strip cartoons for children. Sometimes he is a bugaboo, whose mournful fate serves as an example of punishment for "laziness, that mother of vices." At other times he is the protagonist of proud and lofty freedom. And is not freedom the purpose of our actions and the reward for the greatest virtues?[1]

Hobo is a popular term which designates today the formidable "vagabond" of earlier times. "Vagrancy" is a concept of penal law. The vagrant has always been regarded, according to the terms of an English statute of 1388, as "the questionable individual, living questionably." He was banished everywhere, whipped, marked with a branding iron, condemned to prison or to the galleys, and sometimes to the gallows or to the rack. The

Translated by Elaine P. Halperin.

1. Cf. my book, *Le Clochard* (Etude de Psychologie sociale) in which the psychological, sociological, and juridical theories of vagrancy are discussed, from which some elements of this article have been borrowed. The reader will find these mainly in the description and analysis of the present-day hobo's living conditions, based upon more than sixty individual cases.

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hobo has, however, the advantage of an indulgent public opinion as well as an indulgent judge, who always gives him the benefit of attenuating circumstances by referring, on his behalf, to a law which goes back to the seventeenth century in France and elsewhere.[2]

The two legends or myths which we have just mentioned seek to explain the hobo's enigmatic situation—enigmatic for those who lead a normal life. Such individuals are supposed to possess either an insurmountable psychological predisposition to laziness or a temperamental structure that makes "bohemians" of them—anarchists smitten with freedom, unstable characters inclined to errancy. Others see in the hobo a victim of society, or of a certain kind of society.

The hero of these legends, by his own assertions, never fails to stress these differing "theories." At times he cynically admits to being hopelessly lazy or a "bohemian" in love with freedom; at other times he bewails the fact that he is currently out of work. He knows that either one of these versions is apt to provide him with his "two bits," depending upon his audience.

Actually, the question of psychological predisposition as well as that of social pressures arises in another way. The psychological potentialities or limitations of an individual are manifest solely in concrete social situations, which can be favorable or unfavorable to varying structures of the personality.[3] "Tendencies" toward laziness or love of freedom are widespread in a "normal" population, as is instability or isolation. This superficial statement shows that individual "asocial" tendencies can find socially acceptable avenues of adaptation. These satisfactory adaptations depend essentially upon the *social props* from which individuals derive unequal benefit, props without which they would have found themselves as helpless as sheep in a desert.

Certainly, individual predispositions toward instability and errancy exist, but they alone cannot explain the condition of the great mass of hoboes, of "vagabonds." It is, of course, useful to examine these predispositions, as we have done. But one can hardly ignore the fact that the great mass of detached men is recruited mainly from definite socio-professional milieus: agricultural hands, first of all, laborers in the building trade and in public works, common workmen, and those employed in specialized industry.

What matter, however, from a psychological point of view, are the

2. I have studied vagrancy from the socio-psychological and historical points of view in *Introduction à la Sociologie du Vagabondage* (Paris, Ed. Marcel Rivière, 1956).

3. Cf. R. Benedict, *Echantillons de Civilisations* (Paris, Gallimard, 1950), p. 250 ff.

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

profound changes which the personality, even the adult one, experiences in the course of the asocial life it leads. The following paragraphs will be devoted to this question.

What stamps the personality of the hobo is that he has been subject to a long period of privations of all kinds: material, affective, moral, and social. It is true that in certain cases he may not have been capable of achieving that which would have provided him with these satisfactions. He has been deprived not only of food and shelter but of justice and of affection as well, not merely deprived, but actually rejected. Having reached a definite stage, he becomes indifferent to these "values." Sometimes he has not even known them. He has felt the void around him, the absence of friendship, of compassion; his pitiful condition has occasioned only sarcasm. He has decided that he will no longer go anywhere, or at any rate that he will not make any adaptive effort which, for so long, turned out to be futile. What he has renounced is the social effort, that form of effort which is the most costly (Janet). This relinquishment of effort, however, masks what is essential in the personality of the hobo: the degradation of his needs. In all domains, including that of food, he is satisfied with very little. He is without choice, without discrimination; and it is precisely choice and the possibility of choice that characterize the human manner of satisfying needs. This renunciation relieves him of the necessity of making an adaptive effort.

Personality is a continuous creation; it is formed in the course of experiences that tend to accomplish an adjustment to reality. From this point of view, personality can be defined as *a persistent tendency to achieve certain forms and qualities of adjustment*. It is the conflicted or dissociated situations which indicate the moment when man must find a new avenue of adjustment. Individuals differ not only in the mechanisms they utilize and in the quality of their adjustments, but also in their ability to tolerate conflictive situations and frustrations; this last idea has become one of the most important for psychology.

It is the adjustment to conflicts which structures the personality, beginning with the central core of needs and with the possibilities (or the limitations) of realization, action, and effort. Between these two absolute poles of conduct there is a constant interaction. It is the needs which, at a certain stage, give rise to the development of the possibilities of action and, in the last analysis, needs can condition aptitudes. Thus, in certain cases (if not in every case), a lack of aptitudes, a weakness of effort, find their origin in a defect or in an atrophy of needs and interests. Inversely, the exercise of

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

aptitudes, particularly if it is crowned with success (law of success[4]), causes new needs to appear, or tends to refine, to sublimate existing needs. In practice, this dialectic is complicated by the role of others' needs, and the psychological integration of the individual is subordinate to and rounded out by his social integration.

We will now undertake a concise description of the phases of desocialization.[5]

The shaping of the hobo's personality. At this point we will characterize the first phase of desocialization as an *aggression* in response to frustration; the second phase is *regressive;* the third is that of *fixation;* the fourth is marked by *resignation.*

1. *The first, aggressive phase* is a period of activity. Here we find attempts to readapt to external conditions; the personality and its internal world remain unchanged. A more or less brutal and serious occurrence provokes this phase (a death in the family, infirmity, disappointment in love, loss of social position, etc.). The individual's preoccupation then becomes the reestablishment of what seems to have unsettled him; he wants to return to the past, to a "normal" (in other words, customary) existence.[6] The person and his intimate universe still remain intact; there is not yet awareness of the "original newness" of the situation, nor of its equally new demands.

However, at this very first stage, the old, familiar mechanisms which enable the individual to live and to satisfy his elementary or superfluous needs are no longer at play as they were in the past. His life is impoverished; his possibilities of action, his liberties are lessened, diminished, degraded; his contacts with his surroundings are filled with uneasiness (others might think that he wants something from them); unforeseen and unexpected obstacles arise with every small tendency toward self-realization. What matters at this moment is the re-creation of the past, "at any cost." It is the values attributed to this past, as regards the stimuli of action, which will determine the attitudes and the behavior of the individual. The strength of the attachment to these values, or if you wish, the power of the needs that they symbolize, will play an important role in the outcome of the conflict. It is the attachment to these norms which helps determine the threshold of resistance to desocialization. The individual achieves self-

4. D. Lagache, *L'Unité de la Psychologie* (Paris, P.U.F., 1949).

5. A. Vexliard, *Le Clochard*, ed. Desclée de Brouwer, to appear in 1957.

6. This is also the hope of communities after a crisis, a war.

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

realization in proportion to the strength of his needs. Of course, his self-realization also depends upon his abilities and the conditions of his milieu. But, without needs, neither capacities nor the milieu play a role. This is why it is important to concentrate far more upon needs than upon capacities or aptitudes for effort.

During the course of the first phase, however, the future hobo rubs shoulders with a world new to him, one that he does not yet recognize as his own. The aggressiveness which develops in the effort to re-create the past is equally at play, in an inverse sense, in his rejection of new companions. But the new need is such that these men have common interests. They must communicate in order to exchange insights. In this way, a new world opens up which one does not wish, as yet, to acknowledge.

2. *The second phase, regressive*, withdrawn, is introduced by the duration of a new, alien, strange situation which is beginning to become familiar. To deny the new situation is to avoid becoming aware of it and to refuse to perform the actions it implies; for example, to sign up as an unemployed, an indigent, as someone having the right to seek help. During the first period, the "old," "normal" world was still seen as familiar, humane, and benevolent. From now on, under the influence of a feeling of self-depreciation in regard to that world, its affective aspect will alter; it will appear to be hostile, alien, unfamiliar; it is no longer "my" universe wherein I used to live; the welcoming universe in which I had my place. The universe which is apprehended from now on rejects me, it is a universe that does not love me. The vision of the world changes with the settings and the form of the new activity.

But the new actions, having become inevitable, even though the person might not be aware of this, call for a change in his concept of the universe. A person expresses a certain notion of the universe; he expresses it by his acts. Inversely, an action imposed from the outside will sooner or later determine a new orientation in his vision of the universe and of himself. Subsequently, actions become regressive, that is to say, they are on an inferior plane socially as well as psychologically, although they require a fresh and exhausting effort. A protracted or repeated setback likewise entails a sudden change, often moving from individual competition toward a desire for social cooperation.

But although the hope of finding the old world again still remains, repeated setbacks give rise to the fear of fresh disappointments and decrease the energy and enthusiasm required for those undertakings that might reright the situation.

On the other hand, privations and physical restrictions are accentuated.

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All that one owned was sold for a niggardly price and objects of value found their way to the pawn shop. A fourth, or perhaps only a tenth, of the real value was realized. The person hopes to see them again, since he did not sell them. Actually, he will never see them again.

The tacit disapproval of those that surround the person aggravates the situation from a psychological point of view. Our social philosophy is such that he considers himself responsible for his failures and this he explains by his lack of ability. From then on he becomes aware of the social barriers which exist at all levels insofar as his personal distress is concerned. The occasional triumphs of others only emphasize his own feeling of personal inadequacy. And this is precisely the kind of feeling that further decreases his chances of subsequent success. In this restricted universe, harassed by obstacles, the individual will tend to exaggerate the objective difficulties.

A new world enters into his personality; he is upsetting the moral, social, conceptual norms that he acquired in the course of his education. Society, which was portrayed as a benevolent refuge, offering security in exchange for a few sacrifices, becomes a hostile step-mother.

A return to the past is increasingly problematical. The situation which only yesterday seemed to be accidental, unbelievable, unreal, becomes the unique and inevitable reality. But this new reality is unbearable because of the unaccustomed material privations it imposes, as well as the spiritual conflicts it arouses.

Salvation lies in action, in an act that will tend to determine a new world. This is the third phase.

3. In the course of the *third phase*, the unbearable conflict must be resolved by an *act* that calls for a break with the past. During the first phase, the man was subject to external pressure, but he rejected the reality in the midst of which he had lived, nonetheless, for a few weeks or months.

When, during the second phase, he becomes aware of the definitive nature of his position, he is already lagging behind reality: the "normal" situation that he was seeking to re-create no longer exists. From now on he is already part of another category of men than the one to which he previously belonged. He preserves, however, an awareness of the man that he was and that he no longer is.

All the elements which, in the past, had insured a continuation of material life, an impression of mastery and at times of perfection, everything that was likely to inspire admiration, respect, or at least approval in those about him, and which gave him a feeling of peace, of security, of confidence—all these are hanging by a thread, have vanished; but they are not, or so he thinks, dead.

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It would scarcely be honest to say, as is often done, that men resign themselves easily to physical, psychological, and social failure.

From the very first shock, the individual experiences a decrease in his social contacts: friends disappear, and anyway, does he really care about seeing them? Yet this desertion is accompanied by a painful sense of frustration, of disappointment, of failure and self-deprecation which is far from furthering any sustained effort. Too, he must bear up under the more or less veiled attitude of contemptuous pity in those around him. Failure carries with it social disapproval: "he meant well," "he's imprudent," "he's no good at anything and lazy," "irresponsible," "he better take himself in hand," etc. The more or less deliberate lack of understanding of others' misfortunes and the evaluating rationalization of this attitude are fairly general. An uneasy conscience hides behind irony. Contempt and disparagement represent society's powerful defensive weapons against those who have come to grief. Not so long ago people laughed openly at the infirmities of hunchbacks, cripples, and blind people. Theatrical farces and comedies give proof of this state of mind. In such an atmosphere the peace of mind of a man who has met with misfortune is disturbed and he yields to self-doubt, worry, and anguish.

During the first phase, a *new fact* heralded a break with social ties. In the course of the third phase it was again a *new fact* that opened the door wider upon a new universe: upon that universe that existed outside of organized society; an asocial, at times anti-social universe. From then on, the way back was to become even more difficult, for objective reasons.

The new fact of the third phase is the *means* that the individual is obliged to utilize in order to meet the elementary needs of life, since socially acceptable means have become inaccessible. No longer able to obtain what he needs by offering the usual exchange, he learns to receive without giving anything.

His new life is characterized by its basic irregularity. Everything is temporary: work as well as begging, ransacking hovels as well as thieving. What matters above all is the need to escape hunger, cold, and slow death, whose close presence has become familiar.

It is mainly during the course of the third phase that the apprentice hobo begins to drink. At first he drinks to forget; then drink becomes a need in itself. From now on the new companions from whom he had fled are accepted; his way of speaking changes; former contacts are forgotten, abandoned. The new way of life has begun in *fact* even though it is not yet acknowledged officially.

But the factual situation is not yet accepted and the individual does not

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belong to either of the two worlds. This is the most acute moment of the conflictive crisis. When the evolution becomes fixed at this level the result is frequently suicide.

A vagabond who has reached this stage can be recognized by his characteristic behavior: in the streets and the cafés he makes long speeches to explain his situation; he blames himself. What he is doing is bad, he knows it; he would like to find a way out, he would like to reform. But this man, who is already part of the "other" world, if only in his appearance, does not appeal to the audience of "this world." He merely inspires contempt and irony. Action entails still more decisive victories. The way back is barred if the vagabond is going to subsist, to meet his needs, in this strange world; "a man overboard," Paulian writes in this connection.[7] Furthermore, privations have decreased his needs. If powerful needs subsist despite privations, resistance is stronger, more stubborn.

One final conflict remains to be dealt with: to come to terms with the objective situation. In order to be acceptable, the situation will be rationalized, given some merit. New actions and a new way of life must be justified in the individual's own eyes as well as in those of others. He must be able to say and to demonstrate that "what I do is a good thing."

The internal travail will take place during the fourth phase.

4. The *fourth phase* of *resignation* in regard to his former world is also that of evaluating the new one. It is at this stage that the formula "nothing to do about it" is predominant; and one observes the "classic" hobo, living at peace with himself, "philosopher," "libertarian," content with his lot, even proud of his condition and determined to remain a hobo until death. Here we find the mechanism of an autistic rationalization, minimizing others and the "normal" world; a negation of old values, even censure of them.

In the beginning, the individual was called upon to struggle against objective difficulties and obstacles that were beyond his control. From now on the main obstacle to his social integration lies within himself. This internal metamorphosis which affects the very foundations of his personality enables him to liquidate his conflicts, to discover new channels of adaptation, of relative internal harmony and stability. Self-approbation becomes a vital condition of this stability, a guarantee of survival.

Henceforth, the social values which constituted the normal stimuli for action are rejected; they are unnecessary, cumbersome, and awkward. The

7. L. Paulian, *Paris qui mendie* (Paris, Ollendorf, 1894), p. 24, 8th ed.; Eng. ed.: London & New York, Arnold, 1897.

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

previous stages created a favorable climate for the internalization of new norms that gravitate around two poles: refusal to work and an attachment to what the hobo calls his "freedom."

While the third phase was one of self-accusation, of self-reprobation, the fourth phase will be one of finding merit in the present situation. The individual begins to appreciate certain companions with whom he has had useful contacts. His way of life causes him to drop old habits, old ties, affective bonds; past needs create new ones whose principal characteristic is weakness: he concentrates upon being attached to nothing and to no one. The new world has become familiar. The old world inspires only contempt and indifference. This is the means of solving the acute conflict of the third phase and of living at peace with oneself.

The essential value of this new life is mainly its negative characteristic: the rejection of social and moral disciplines and, above all, the rejection of the value of work as a symbol of human dignity.

Social non-cooperation and negativism entail important psychological consequences because the disciplines of work are normally man's guides in all his acts. These psychological consequences will be examined more closely. The analysis will center on the relationships between the dissolution of needs and aptitudes, on the notions of instability and steadfastness, and finally on the hobo's immaturity.

Needs and aptitudes. To describe the metamorphosis in the hobo's personality is one way of demonstrating that even the adult individual can experience profound changes. Of course a historical link between actual changes of the personality and the structures established in the past exists; this is not necessarily a genetic link. Specifically, infantile experiences do not completely explain the *socialized* forms of the metamorphoses and do not enable one to predict them.

Certainly all the vagabonds that we have studied have not gone through the four phases in as typical a fashion as those we have described. In many instances, we were dealing with "incomplete" personalities, whose lives were lacking those important elements necessary to the normal course of social development.

There are some individuals—"uprooted" people, for example—in whom not only did those aptitudes that might have sustained them in life never have the chance to evolve, but whose experience of life as well was so impoverished that, lacking models, opportunities for identification, their elementary needs never even had the chance to develop. The result is

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a corresponding atrophy of emotional life. Those who have arrived at the threshold of adult life in so incomplete a state are incapable of understanding the complexity of relationships and adjustments that they must maintain with the external world which is their environment. They have not learned that success and failure can exist and they do not know how to face them. They are ignorant of the role of love as well as that of hatred. Confronted by other people, they do not know how to trust or to suspect, how to accept or reject them. In other words, lacking a socialized development of their needs, they have not worked out emotional responses and are ignorant of the possible adjustments as well as the possible hazards these entail.

This is not a matter of an affective morbid development, as in the case of a neurosis, but rather of an incomplete development. The situation of these people was not created by a decisive factor originating in affective conflicts, but by a lack of development that makes such conflicts impossible. In the neurotic, "the emotional responses suffered a defeat at the start, in an abnormal way, by producing a series of increasingly intolerable situation. . . ."[8]

The development of a capacity to work is subordinate to the development of needs, without which effort is vain and becomes absurd.

Instability and steadfastness. Every man's behavior is a changing one; so that one cannot infer with any certainty from past behavior what future behavior will be. One cannot postulate a rigid determinism in this domain. This means that, to a certain extent, the behavior of all men is unstable. In order to clearly explain the notion of instability, many writers have tried to relate it to psychomotor instability (which is valid in studying the instability of children).[9] Marie and Meunier had already written that "vagabonds are essentially maladjusted people because of psychomotor instability."[10] Other writers link unstable behavior to mental instability, to delusions (*Ideenflucht,* a term used by the German psychologists). The Anglo-Saxons explain this same behavior by a prior affective instability. There are even some who use the expression "unstable person" as the equivalent of a psychopathic personality, or one afflicted with some kind of mental disorder.

8. D. Stafford-Clark, *Psychiatry Today* (London, Penguin Books, 1952), 2nd ed., 1953, p. 76.

9. J. Abramson, *L'Enfant et l'Adolescent instables* (Paris, P.U.F., 1940), cf., G. Huyer, the preface to this work. A.P.-L. Beley, *L'Enfant instable* (Paris, P.U.F., 1951), G. Neron, *L'Enfant vagabond* (Paris, P.U.F., 1952), p. 39.

10. Marie and Meunier, *Les Vagabonds* (Paris, Giard & Brière, 1908), p. 306.

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Unstable adults rarely show evidence of unstable psychomotor characteristics. What do we know about them? A study of their lives reveals a series of different employments, of different professions. Many of these jobs were given up after a few days. Such individuals never experienced permanent affection, but some of them had many affairs; unhappy, they sought only immediate pleasures.

A deeper analysis of their behavior shows that they react impulsively; at times they are filled with enthusiasm, at other times they are quickly disappointed. They do not accept the consequences of their experiences and seem incapable of profiting by them. Occasionally they give evidence of great effort but they always lack perseverance. They are not very sincere because they are not very convinced; they change their opinion readily, influenced by an impulse or a suggestion of the moment.[11] Although they seem to be very demanding, they are indifferent to the needs of others. They function solely on the basis of their aversion to any permanent attachment; they are without roots, without bonds, rebellious, and often unhappy. They are only faithful to their unfaithfulness. Since they are the friends of no one, they are their own worst enemies. If, as sometimes happens, they possess some gift or talent, they may achieve spectacular success. But they are not able to derive any benefit from this because of their perverse, rebellious, turbulent attitude. However, their intellectual level is usually low; they let the opportunities and possibilities available to them slip away. A succession of setbacks and disappointments causes them to seek refuge in alcoholism, in drugs, in prostitution or in suicide; or else, because of their weakness they merely await their turn to die.[12]

We are excluding from the above the several millions of people who join the ranks of the unstable and could present an analogous picture, as a consequence of unfavorable social conditions. For, as we have seen, agriculture and industry "need a great number of temporary workers."[13]

The unstable person's cycle can also serve as a description of emotional immaturity which frequently explains the anti-social conduct of the delinquent.[14] The lack of a need for attachments among unstable people stems

11. V. Cyril-E. Berger, *Têtes baissées* (Paris, Ollendorf, 1908), p. 260.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

13. H. A. Phelps, *Contemporary Social Problems*, 3d ed. rev. (New York, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1932), p. 437.

14. D. Lagache, "Rapport de Psycho-Crimogénèse," *Actes du Congrès international de Criminologie* (Paris, P.U.F., 1950), reprinted in *Bulletin de Psychologie*, II (Paris, Sorbonne, Nov. 31, 1950), p. 64; K. Friedlander, *The Psychoanalytical Approach to Juvenile Delinquency* (New York, International Universities Press, 1947).

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very understandably from the fact that their first infantile experiences did not teach them to love, to grow fond of a person who was worthy of their affection. As Elizabeth Rotten so aptly writes, what the young vagabonds are deprived of is "experience of the elementary loyalties that bind members of a healthy family together and which are the prototype of steadfastness."[15] The absence of an apprenticeship in elementary loyalties is reflected in their entire affective life and this permeates thoroughly their needs and their behavior.

However, an unstable person can also manifest a certain kind of affective richness, unknown in the "normal" world. The unstable hobo does not strive toward a single goal, he does not seek gain or profit, he knows no responsibilities. His freer spirit is more inclined to be moved by the accidents of life, by the hazards of the road. He has renounced in advance all hope of improving his lot and permits himself to live a life that is beyond the reach of social regulations, that is full of diversity and of the unforeseen. This represents the "bohemian" aspect of the vagabond's life, his "liberties" which are basically so illusory.

Human needs develop, become enriched, and change in the very process of being satisfied. Satisfying old needs engenders new ones. Inversely, premature, imposed renunciation of the satisfaction of needs is the result of precocious frustrations which go back to the first contacts of the organism with its environment. It is the habit of renunciation that creates the hobo. However, the social organization must regard the satisfaction of human needs as its principal task. It tends, indeed, to disappear when it no longer fulfills this role.[16] The socialization of an individual is above all an adaptive socialization of his needs, and "the social nature of man is a complex system of responses to needs."[17]

It is the lack of organization, of hierarchization of needs that explains in the first place the hobo's instability and lack of steadfastness. It is, actually, needs that organize "perception, apperception, intellection, the will (conation) and action, so that action takes a certain direction for the purpose of changing an existing situation which seems unsatisfactory."[18]

The fundamental tie that binds man to the world around him is estab-

15. E. Rotten, *Enfance vagabonde* (Paris, UNESCO, 1951), p. 12.

16. R. Linton, *Science of Man in the World Crisis* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1945; 1947), p. 18.

17. R. M. MacIver, *The Web of Government* (New York, Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 20.

18. H. A. Murray, *Exploration de la Personnalité* (Paris, P.U.F., 1947), p. 44; Eng. ed.: New York & London, Oxford University Press, 1938.

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lished by the nature of his needs, which stimulate his activity; his life depends upon the external world because he is engaged in continuous exchanges with it. But man has contact with nature solely because of the social environment in which he evolves. His most "natural" needs are always socialized. Their most immediate object assumes the character of an institution, in the broadest sense of the term, an institution that entails rites, traditions, and, above all, a spatiotemporal and interpersonal discipline. These are so many stabilizing elements.

Needs represent, then, the real bond between man and the world, between the organism and the situation. Seen in this light, man depends upon something other than himself. On the other hand, needs, as a stimulant for action and for effort, determine the direction of activity as well as its intensity, and confer upon man his "personality," the special trait of the individual.

Therefore, one can legitimately affirm that the personality is molded, structured, oriented, and directed by needs. The evolution of needs and the creation of the personality depend, in large measure, upon the *gratifications* and the *frustrations* which have the same repercussions on an individual's awareness of self as do triumphs and defeats. It is the succession of these "episodes" (Murray) that represents the history of the individual.[19]

The degradation of the vagabond's needs results in the disorganized conduct that characterizes an unstable existence. The hobo obeys his internal impulses far less than external, elementary stimulants; he responds to the change of times and of seasons; his relations with other men have no continuity, his ties to social institutions are of the weakest, the most inconsistent. The vagabond's instability as well as other traits of his nature which are so often stressed—his laziness, his love of freedom—are the consequence mainly of the low, degraded level of his needs, of their lackof socialization.

If it is true that the hobo's condition is characterized by a decrease in his needs, and that this attenuates their qualitative role in the personality structure, then we are dealing with a category of human beings to whom classical concepts of psychology can be applied only with the greatest reservations.

Indeed, a degradation of needs results in:

1. An attenuation, almost a total absence in certain areas of conflicts and tensions.

2. To the extent that the matter of "resolving conflicts" does not arise,

19. H. A. Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 42 and *passim*.

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the question of the individual's adaptation does not arise, either. The hobo is a man who achieves to the fullest complete adjustment to himself and to his environment. This adaptation, it is conceded, stems in substance from a lowering of the standards of aspiration.

This situation enables us to understand why the hobo is commonly considered a "happy" man and why cynical philosophy, which is traditionally the philosophy of vagabonds, places happiness where there is a suppression of needs.

3. A lack of needs results in behavior devoid of goals, of motivation, of any definite orientation or anticipation; this is the consequence of prolonged frustrations and leads to resignation.

4. If, in the last analysis, personality can be defined by a hierarchy and by the reciprocal relations of needs, it would seem that the problem of the hobo's personality would be considerably reduced. But if one approaches this problem from a practical point of view, one must begin with the development of needs and not with a reeducation of effort.

5. The hobo acknowledges only a very limited area to which he can attribute superior or inferior values, in which he can express preferences, a choice. That is why he cares about nothing. It is also the reason for and the origin of his instability. We have used the term "lack of steadfastness" because it best expresses the absence of an attachment to things, to men, to ideas. This term is also preferable to the word "disloyalty" often used by psychologists. Indeed, the word steadfastness expresses the idea of interpersonal relations, while the concept of loyalty derives from law, which implies impersonal, objective relations.

The hobo's immaturity. It is the sum of characteristics resulting from a degradation of needs that is interpreted as the vagabond's lack of maturity. We have already observed that a comparison of the vagabond with the child or the adolescent who refuses to grow up has become a classical one. Analysis of the vagabond's conduct reveals, in reality, that, like the child, he seems dependent, suggestible, irresponsible, incapable of cooperating, of taking into account the needs of others, and, on the other hand, he is incapable of making an efficacious and sustained effort, of meeting new situations; this is mainly due to the rigidity of his attitude and to his inhibitions. According to accepted concepts, these are regressive characteristics associated with the hobo as well as with the child or the neurotic. It would then seem that in the hobo's case, as in the neurotic's, the complex behavior adapted by the adult is replaced by the naïve, over-simplified behavior of the child.

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But the hobo's maladjusted behavior originated in different psychological mechanisms and should not, it seems, have the same significance as that of the neurotic; so that it is valid to wonder whether the terms "immaturity" and "regression" are altogether applicable in his case.

It is useful to bear in mind that the notion of immaturity is used in a very general way to explain "deviant" behavior as contrasted to the socially recognized norms of conduct. In the last instance, one could say that the term "immaturity" applies to the undesirable behavior or state of being. From a psychological point of view such undesirable states exist; this characteristic seems most often to be valid when the notion of immaturity is applied to backwardness or deficiencies of an intellectual order, which often originates in an under-developed nervous system.[20] But the term "immaturity" is also applied to behavior that is undesirable from a moral or social point of view. We know the importance attributed to "affective immaturity" in the genesis of anti-social behavior, mainly in adolescents or in children.[21] It is true that according to the observations of writers who uphold this thesis, such a concept is valid; but the generalization and the extension of this hypothesis to include the whole sphere of criminal acts seem far less valid, especially when one remembers the high degree of organization and of cohesion which professional criminality demands.[22] On the contrary, the theory of affective or even intellectual immaturity is understandably applicable to the majority of semi-delinquents, to delinquents who are still minors and who act almost without any discretion. Their offenses are poorly conceived and end immediately, or at least very soon, in failure. This concept, it must be understood, is applied to offenses that are but symptoms of neurotic conflict. In any case, it is wise to remember that perhaps we are too inclined to use the word "immaturity" to mean socially undesirable behavior.

One point on which all the writers agree is that the notion of maturity implies that of independence, in the psychological sense of the word. "A complete adult," H. Mounier writes, "is one who acts by himself, which does not mean that he acts and judges alone, but he does so as a last resort even if this last resort might bid him to willingly trust, not for support or out of weakness, in another's judgment, in another solution than his own."[23]

20. As cerebral pneumography reveals in particular.

21. K. Friedlander, *op. cit.*

22. E. H. Sutherland, *The Professional Thief* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1937).

23. E. Mounier, *Traité du Caractère* (Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 1947), pp. 453–54.

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

However, in fact if not in theory, we judge the independence or dependence of a person, psychologically speaking, in relation to his conduct in economic and social matters. This concept certainly seems valid in many instances where psychological dependence or certain neurotic tendencies cause people to live the lives of parasites, like beggars, pimps, thiefs, or vagabonds. But here again, hasty generalizations tend to classify as "dependents," in the psychological sense, all those individuals who have not acquired a sufficient economic independence; and this judgment is made in a society such as ours, which maintains a large number of people in a state of social dependence, even of infantilism "which the word paternalism very aptly describes."[24]

A more shrewd approach to the notion of maturity further illustrates its conventional and conformist nature. For this reason, American writers, in defining maturity from a psychological point of view, place particular emphasis on two specific points: an adult must be relatively well-satisfied with his lot, not rebellious toward his superiors, and, above all, he must be capable of tolerating frustrations.[25]

The emphasis placed upon the ability to tolerate frustrations is somewhat suspect, not psychologically speaking, but from the social and moral viewpoint. It is quite accurate to say that maturity implies the capacity to face the obstacles and difficulties of new situations even when they are frustrating. The adult must be able to stand up to this with a minimum of affective disturbance. But it is going much further to declare that life is nothing but conflict, frustration, and tragedy and that, after all, "we must break once for all with the confused dream of an existence simply beyond the reach of chance and tragedy. Absolute protection against conflict or suffering is a mirage."[26]

This states in clear terms that man must give up any attempt, any battle, to ameliorate his existence. While it is true that conflict and frustrations are inevitable in life, one has at least the right to ask the question: "What conflicts? What frustrations?" Although it is understandable that in earlier days, because of a lack of necessary goods, man had to suffer hunger and cold, are these same frustrations normal in our society? Frustrations and

24. P. Chauchard, *La Physiologie des Moeurs* (Paris, P.U.F., 1953).

25. L. Cole, *Psychology of Adolescence* (New York, Rinehart, 1947), p. 631; E. F. Williams, *Adolescence* (New York, Fusser & Richmond, 1930), p. 16; R. G. Kuhlen, *The Psychology of Adolescent Development* (New York, Harper & Bros., 1952), p. 573.

26. Charles Hartshorne, "Chance, Love and Incompatibility," *Philosophical Review*, Sept. 1949, No. 3, p. 447.

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

conflicts, as well as almost all the concepts that psychology deals with, are historical categories; in order to make sure of the validity of these concepts, one should demand that they be expressed in concrete terms at every moment so that one can verify whether or not they correspond to the realities of time and place which serve as their framework.

If immaturity is characterized by a lack of independence, the hobo would be entirely adult for, actually, he depends upon no one. To the extent to which he is confused with beggars, which is far from being justified, he can be described as dependent only in regard to the economic order, and not the psychological. Moreover, we must point out that the notion of economic dependence has undergone important changes in the course of the last few years; these changes are deserving of closer study. Millions of individuals who would have been considered "dependents" twenty or thirty years ago (the unemployed, the poor, the crippled, the sick) today have acquired "rights" and society has acknowledged its "obligation" toward them; this new concept tends to restrict considerably the notion of economic dependence.

As this concept, whose importance from a psychological and sociological point of view has not been adequately emphasized, is extended to those whose personalities have been twisted or broken by society, the number of people classified as "dependents" will tend to decrease still further.

If we define maturity, as do most writers, in terms of psychological independence, then the notion of immaturity is a very inadequate explanation of the hobo's condition. The most we can say here is that, as in other cases, we are dealing with a socially undesirable situation. And so it would be well to seek another answer and to extricate our thinking from psychological fatalism.

The preceding phenomenological description enables us to draw some conclusions which, without pretending to be original, are nonetheless deserving of attention.

In the study of vagrancy, as in the somewhat similar field of criminology, our knowledge, theories, methods, and explanations have a normative goal: that of combatting the dangerous evils of society and of rescuing individuals.

In the social sciences pure empiricism is a myth that we must defeat. We study a problem because it exists in reality, in other words, it possesses *a priori* positive or negative "values." The search for the "remedies" of social evils is also part of the social sciences and it is futile not to acknowl-

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219215600401604 Published online by Cambridge University Press

edge this. "Disinterested" research in this connection can constitute only one phase of the sociologist's or the psychologist's activity.

"It is evident," Daniel Lagache writes, "that concepts of the normal and of the pathological are also axiological concepts, that diagnosis of neuroses or of psychoses implies value judgments."[27]

The "fatalistic" conclusions of some researchers or practitioners who have studied vagabonds (or criminals) are only partial ones; according to them "nothing can be done" for these men, they can no longer be integrated into the community. Such conclusions are possible only if one fails to take into account the profound metamorphoses that the adult personality undergoes under the stress of certain kinds of life situations. We have described these metamorphoses.

If we want to reintegrate these isolated and forgotten men, whom we call hoboes, into a normal life, we must first of all allow for these personality changes. Not so long ago one might have thought of tubercular patients, even those who were cured, as "lazy." Today we understand that one must not only treat the illness and teach the patients new trades, but also provide for a period of "readaptation of effort."

We must make use of the same principles in regard to hoboes, while utilizing methods suitable to their situations and which they themselves would, in part, create, as is done in group psychotherapy or in psychodidactics. But these methods, which can serve as a point of departure, must be refashioned by the participants themselves.

Social measures alone are powerless to remedy the fact of vagrancy; no more can psychological methods be applied without the help of society. The hobo can become a social threat, as the penal theory suggests. But he becomes a threat because he finds himself in a situation conducive to this outcome. Penal repression has never been an effective remedy.

We know, for example, that in present-day France more than 80,000 people migrate yearly from the country to the city without any prior preparation for this entirely new mode of life. The majority of these 80,000 are young people. It is easy to predict that sooner or later the isolated ones will become hoboes. Foreseeing this, has anything been done to make welcome these new arrivals to the city?

The first task to be undertaken should be that of receiving and orienting these isolates. The second task should be that of readapting to a normal life those who have remained out of circulation for too long.

But any action of this kind should avoid standardized methods. Above

27. D. Lagache, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

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all, in order to achieve satisfactory results, one must take the individuals themselves into account—their essential differences, their hopes, their potentialities, as well as their limitations. These are the realities which we must frankly face. At the same time, we must be wary of the myths and legends deeply rooted in public opinion, specifically those that depict the hobo as "a happy man."

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