



Check to the Compulsive Neurosis Character

While the anxiety neurotic, on account of his character structure, merely inclines towards uncertainty and towards 'dwelling on thoughts', the compulsive neurotic deals with an obsessive character disposition that urges him to pedantry, fanatic cleanliness and scrupulous ideas. A striving for absoluteness would suit the compulsive-obsessive neurotic. He wants to make everything perfect and to be blameless from any evil in order not to be abandoned, outlawed, or damned by any authority. Often a chastising view of God lurks in the background, conscious or unconscious, that leads to an exaggerated and overpowering anxiety of imperfections, which proves to be the greatest error.

Common to both anxiety neurotic and compulsive-obsessive neurotics are

- a) a negative anticipatory attitude towards life;
- b) an irrational anxiety (the anxiety neurotic fears for the I, *i.e.*, about himself; the compulsive-obsessive neurotic rather fears himself);
- c) a tendency to work oneself up into a state of great anxiety about trivialities.

The obsessive character is the breeding ground in which a compulsive neurosis can grow but does not have to. Whether it develops into a disease or not has fundamentally to do with the attitude of the person concerned toward his character disposition and this attitude is the 'scope of free action'. A narrow, overly correct and moralizing upbringing of someone with an obsessive character structure is by no means pleasant and impedes his struggle to free himself of compulsive

impulses. In this regard, when one of the parents is of a similar character, innate and acquired pressures come upon each other.

The manifested disease reveals itself again in a vicious circle that requires paradoxical intention to interrupt it. At the beginning of the vicious circle process there is something fateful, the compulsive neurotic notion (similar to the anxiety neurotic event). It mostly involves an absurd notion that the person in question could behave disgracefully. That in a moment of delusion, at the loss of self-control, he could throw a baby out of the window, stab a neighbor, or push a waiting commuter in front of an oncoming bus and so on.

Where these strange notions stem from is unknown. Even in a healthy life, we do not know how notions come into being. We do not know from where the composer takes his melodies or the discoverer, his inspirational flashes. The fate of compulsive neurotics is to harbor extremely unlikely, pessimistic fantasies about himself and his behavior. In principle, they are not fantasies apart from reality, as with psychotics (e.g., that he is the devil incarnate), rather 'just possible' catastrophes that are thought of by him (e.g., that he could infect someone with deadly bacteria because his hands are not clean enough). They are simply horror fantasies that are generated out of extreme anxiety of guilt and excessive self-distrust.

We know that compulsive notions of neurotics are not derived from a secret wish. One would do a grave injustice to a compulsive neurotic if one would assume he secretly strives for what he fears (e.g., that he rejects the baby or disapproves of the neighbor, etc.) His fear is real; otherwise he could not and may not be helped by means of paradoxical intention. One ought to reflect how dangerous it would be to advise someone who compulsively fears he could injure other people, to 'arrange a giant blood bath', if in fact, a hidden intention to kill would underlie it. But this is not the case.

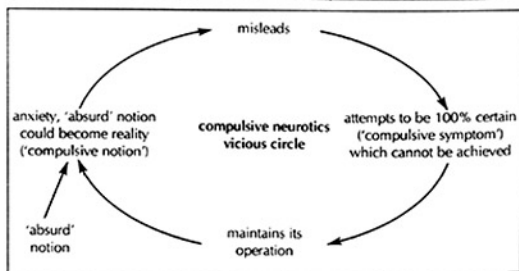
Back to the 'vicious circle'. When a human-being who is handicapped with such a character predisposition succeeds, in not taking his compulsive notions as serious, then everything is well. However, if he allows himself to be enticed to assess them as a critical threat, despite the improbability, the matter does not end well. Then he actually fights against a supposed threat and endeavors to avoid it at any price. He no longer goes near the baby; he removes all knives

from his home; he no longer uses the bus; he washes his hands a hundred times etc., in order not to inflict any harm to anyone. Since the horror film continues in his mind, all his precautionary measures do not reassure him. He begins to check for any sharp objects, whether the neighbor is well and safe. He ponders for hours, which paths he recently took and whether in fact he did come across a bus stop; or whether the soap he uses is really disinfecting. In reality, he seeks absolute certainty in a world in which nothing is absolutely certain.

It can be proven that the typical neurotic compulsion for repetition can be attributed to an insufficient feeling of conviction and the compulsion to control to an insufficient certainty of instinct. E. Straus quite correctly pointed out that the compulsive neurotic is characterized by an aversion for all temporality. No less typical, in our consideration, is intolerance about all casualness. When it is about discoveries, nothing may be casual and when it is about decisions nothing may be temporal. Rather, everything ought to be defined and to remain definitive. The compulsive neurotic would love to prove everything, even that which rationally cannot be proven at all, e.g., his own existence or indeed the reality of the external world. The external world is indisputable as well as not disprovable. (Frankl, 26)

Any attempt to absolutely safeguard oneself therefore must fail. The avoidance behavior of compulsive neurotics has as a consequence, that they do not experience the naturalness (evidence) that an absurd notion (extreme improbability) is just absurd. When all the knives are removed, they become even more uncertain whether a murder would still occur if a knife were available. All the removed knives do not provide a guarantee that in a fit of insanity any other 'murder tool' would not be used. So the anxiety about what is dreaded keeps constantly 'burning', although what is dreaded does not occur at all (in contrast to autonomic body reactions of anxiety neurotics).

Here is an opening for the paradoxical wish with its well-tryed pattern that aims at, 'that nothing would be more advisable than to carry out, of all things, what is dreaded'. When the neutralized anxiety decreases through the paradoxical wish, then every reason for



striving to be certain and every reason for avoidance decreases as well. Then the patient can again accept the risk to allow himself to depend on how he experiences, that everything runs along utterly harmless, then in reality he would not harm a fly, let alone put his notions of horror into action. This provides him with the 'mini-certainty' that he so essentially needs, to not doubt the self so incessantly, despite his scrupulousness.

A patient who was constantly troubled with the notion that he could indecently touch unfamiliar girls or even rape them in an unsupervised moment, especially when his young daughter brought friends home to play. Although he was profoundly decent and religious, this dreadful vision haunted him so that he usually locked himself in his study when the youthful visitors were in the house, locking the notion shamefully within himself. Naturally neither the daughter nor his wife could understand this peculiar behavior. The daughter believed he disapproved of her friends and was angry with her. The wife reproached him for withdrawing from his fatherly duty. It led to marriage quarrels and a deterioration in school performance of the child.

With instruction, the patient learned the method of paradoxical intention. He must risk being out of the study when his daughter and schoolmates are there. As soon as he opens the door of the study, to resolve to 'ravish at least two of them before afternoon coffee' and keep the rest for the evening'. In between he ought to 'attempt it with his daughter', so as not to get 'out of practice' by evening. Facing his

God he may confidently trust that 'he knows' exactly how it truthfully looks in his heart and that the immoral paradoxical wish serves no other purpose than to re-establish the health of his soul' (which God wants). With this, the compulsive neurotic episode disappeared within a few months and what remained was a loving father and husband, which the man was prior to the illness.

With compulsive neurosis one can apply paradoxical formulas without reservation. One can advise these patients 'to throw babies in a wide arch out of windows', or 'to wound a series of neighbors', 'to eradicate entire city areas by means of bacteria ...' without any repercussion in reality, except one, that a tormented human-being will be relieved from suffering. A compulsive neurotic would never ever do what he dreads for reasons that his obsessive character tends to perfectionism. He wants to make everything accurate, absolutely accurate and as a result gets tangled up in the problem; and for sheer wanting-to-make-it-accurate, in the end takes utterly incorrect action. As soon as his pathological anxiety disappears under the protection of paradoxical intention, his tendency for order and accuracy are within the normal range and there is not the slightest reason for worry that he would commit a psychopathic faux pas.

Experimental psychology has found a so-called U-function of anxiety according to which the failure of human-beings (generally understood) increases in cases of very high and very low levels of anxiety. For example, in mountain climbing there are actually only two types of people that are in danger of plummeting: the reckless who would want to attack the summit in ordinary shoes and disregard for weather conditions; and the timid-hesitant ones who for sheer anxiety misstep.

Compulsive neurotics belong to the anxious, hesitant, inhibited persons (see sketch, right). The concerns of compulsive notions could however, become realities only with extremely reckless and uninhibited behavior, if at all. (One must be extremely reckless and uninhibited to indecently assault schoolmates of one's daughter, or to wound other people in a fit of rage, or to spread germs by being covered in filth!) What consequently torments the compulsive neurotic so nightmarishly is that it could happen to him. It could only happen to someone, who is the sheer opposite, the reckless daredevil, the corrupt psychopath,