

## The Four Great Errors

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*Error of imaginary causes.* – I'll begin with dreams: a particular sensation, for instance, a sensation due to a distant cannon shot, has a cause imputed to it afterwards (often a whole little novel in which precisely the dreamer is the protagonist). In the meantime, the sensation persists in a kind of resonance: it waits, as it were, until the drive to find causes allows it to come into the foreground – not as an accident anymore, but as “meaning”. The cannon shot shows up in a *causal* way, and time seems to flow backwards. What comes later, the motivation, is experienced first, often with a hundred details that flash by like lightning; the shot *follows*... What has happened? The representations *generated* by a certain state of affairs were misunderstood as the cause of this state of affairs. – In fact, we do just the same thing when we're awake. Most of our general feelings – every sort of inhibition, pressure, tension, explosion in the play and counter play of the organs, and in particular the state of the *nervus sympathicus* (sympathetic nervous system) – arouse our drive to find causes: we want to have a *reason* for feeling that we're in *such and such* a state – a bad state or a good state. It's never enough for us just to determine the mere fact *that* we find ourselves in such and such a state: we admit this fact – become *conscious* of it – only *if* we've given it some kind of motivation. – Memory, which comes into play in such cases without our knowing it, calls up earlier states of the same kind, and the causal interpretations that are rooted in them – but *not* their causation. Of course, memory also calls up the belief that the representations, the accompanying occurrences in consciousness, were the causes. In this way there arises a *habituation* to a particular interpretation of causes that actually inhibits and even excludes an *investigation* of the cause.

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*A psychological explanation of this error.* – Tracing something unfamiliar back to something familiar alleviates us, calms us, pacifies us, and in addition provides a feeling of power. The unfamiliar brings with it danger, unrest, and care – our first instinct is to *do away* with these painful conditions. First principle: some explanation is better than none. Since at bottom all we want is to free ourselves from oppressive representations, we aren't exactly strict about the means of freeing ourselves from them: the first representation that serves to explain the unfamiliar as familiar is so beneficial that we “take it to be true”. Proof of *pleasure* (“strength”) as criterion of truth. – Thus, the drive to find causes is conditioned and aroused by the feeling of fear. Whenever possible, the “why?” should not so much provide the cause for its own sake, but instead provide a *type of cause* – a relaxing, liberating, alleviating cause. The fact that something already *familiar*, something we have experienced, something inscribed in memory is posited as the cause, is the first consequence of this requirement. The new, the unexperienced, the alien, is excluded as a cause. – So we not only look for some type of explanation as the cause, but we *single out* and *favor* a certain type of explanation, the type that eliminates the feeling of the alien, new, and unexperienced, as fast and as often as possible – the most *customary* explanations. – Consequence: one kind of cause-positing becomes more and more prevalent, concentrates itself into a system, and finally comes to the fore as *dominant*, that is, as simply *excluding* any *other* causes and explanations. – The banker thinks right away about “business”, the Christian about “sin”, the girl about her love. [..]