

"THE SOCIOLOGY OF PSYCHOANALYSIS"¹

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There are changes in society which affect the development of neuroses and their treatment. Our present society is quite different from that in which Freud lived and developed his theories.

The medical approach to suffering in the 19th century became that of finding an organic basis for the symptoms. The neuroses were frustrating because no organic basis could be found. Hysteria had long been recognized, at least unconsciously, as based on suppressed sexual drives, illustrated by its name. Although originally thought limited to women, Charcot found hysteria in men. Charcot's clinic treated patients primarily from the exploited laboring classes. In the society of Charcot's time, the traditional patriarchal authoritative relationship between the lord and the servant was being disrupted by displaced, rootless people, and the concept of devoted service was deteriorating into a slavery-like relationship between the managing classes and the exploited laborers. In this chaotic situation, many attempted a retreat into illness to arouse legitimate compassion, and the State soon became active in caring for the sick. Men with traumatic hysterias claimed their right

1. Summary of the scientific meeting of the Southern California Psychoanalytic Society on October 1, 1983.

to public welfare facilities, and their illnesses could be seen as an effort at self-healing through the reestablishment of lost human relationships.

Freud returned from Charcot's clinic to Vienna, where he dealt with patients living in the progressive upper-middle classes. At this time, the formerly rigid and fixed social structure was beginning to allow more class mobility, and the emphasis was shifting from social position to self-made achievements. The paternal authority was beginning to topple, and families were less secure, with possessions and power determining social position. The father's power degenerated from automatic respect into violence and tyranny, leading to increasing conflicts between the sexes and the generations. These deteriorations in interpersonal relationships made intimacy and devotion more difficult and the eros instincts less capable of gratification.

Freud replaced the tradition-bound attitude of obedience with free association, which led to a concept of free self-acceptance and what some now call "existential responsibility." Freud found that resistances to the uncovering of unconscious material could be traced to unresolved conflicts with authority figures, and these conflicts had to be dealt with before the treatment could proceed. People lived through a "guiltful obedience" which needed no insight. They tried to avoid the bad and do the good, and were

compelled to live against their impulses, rather than with them. Character could be transformed by self-acknowledgment, replacing the obedience-oriented attitude by that which a person is, rather than what he ought to be. A self-responsible attitude could be developed.

In our present culture, we are dealing with an age of loosening family ties, in which the family's influence is no longer binding and self-reliance and self-identity are uncertain in a way different from Freud's generation. Children no longer are raised with as much experience with admonishing parental figures. Parents and teachers no longer instill binding standards and clues for behavior, and there is no preconceived reality. Personal authority has withdrawn behind the authority of facts. Roles are assigned, and there is a constant danger of losing one's self-identity in roles offered by the environment, accompanied by a susceptibility to indoctrination and a lack of fundamental belongingness. There are feelings of being lost and falling into chaos.

Aggressive and sexual actions may occur in an effort to deal with this feeling. These actions are sought with no feeling of guilt or shame but in order to achieve a feeling of belonging by joining a gang, etc.,. This effort at solution is soon found to be empty and meaningless, and the anguish and distress sometimes called existential despair appears. In the ideal psychoanalysis, love and hate are

reactivated in the relationship toward the analyst and worked through in the transference. The crumbling reality makes a difficult background for our treatment, and the present-day realization that reality does not exist indefinitely is a vast change from the attitudes during Freud's time. The task of psychoanalysis remains that of revealing and structuring an appropriate character to make life worth living.

Dr. Arnold Mandell questioned whether we need a new model or are we using new words and new dialect for older concepts? Some of the older psychoanalytic concepts of causality were modeled on the biological scheme, whereas present-day concepts stress the complexities of causality. Rather than seeking a single cause, we now seek the conditions, which, taken together, could lead to the development of the symptom. It is possible that existential dread is another name for the feeling of being overwhelmed and engulfed by biological impulses. The existential emphasis is not incompatible with the biological model.

Dr. Franz Alexander described some of his own problems in adapting to life in the United States and pointed out how the adaptive problem of second generation Americans was particularly difficult because of their need to separate themselves from their European traditions in order to become Americanized. A rigid superego does not work in such a situation, and ego must be substituted for superego to allow

adjustments to the ever changing external situation. This is an arduous task which makes life difficult and may lead to existential anxiety, anguish and distress.

Too much flexibility implies a loss of character structure and a loss of ego identity. There is an inability to rely on the inner-directed gyroscope, particularly found in the generation of transition which has one foot in the traditions of the past and one in the present.

Psychoanalysis sometimes neglects to study the group of normals who have accepted a new security system. They are the conformists to whom the corporation gives security and acts as a superego. They mix well, do not make trouble and are far removed from the traditional adventurous American type. For these normal people, the social system directs, gives rules and standardized roles. True individualism is still seen in the creative groups such as artists, actors, writers, and so on, who are less concerned with the mass modalities of economic production. The question arises whether the traditional psychoanalytic goal of self-realization is still realistic or is psychoanalysis really doomed in a mass civilization? Perhaps it will be restricted to certain portions of society, the non-adjusted creative groups.

Dr. Frederick Hacker pointed out how the first part of Dr. Sully's paper read somewhat like a historical survey

of Marxism whose formulations led to the concept of intrapsychic pain as coming from the master-slave relationships, leading to the alienation of people from one another and the removal of old human relationships. It was thought that the removal of old authoritarian obedience-oriented ties would lead to a liberation, but it is found that a new kind of anxiety is substituted which is more pervasive and harder to treat. Behind the obedience orientation is not automatic freedom but often a search for other obediences. Thus, individuals now freed from patriarchal tradition look for substitute sources of authority in the mass movements of society, corporations, etc. It is as though modern man sees now that his security is within himself and that he has no anchors in things outside himself. Man now realizes there is nothing in the universe except himself, and this lies behind what we now call existential anxiety.

Dr. Gustav Bally responded by saying that perhaps what we need is to ask new questions, not to change or modify Freud but to interpret him in a new manner. Freud saw reality as something unquestioned and objectively seen as by physicists. It is now recognized that reality is for man his contact with other people and other objects, and it is seen through the eyes of each individual, not purely objective and scientific, but steadily developing. We do not know what reality will be in the future. Modern tradition is less personal and communicated through the mass media rather than

from within the family. Both Freud and Marx talked of alienation and both felt man had been free at some point in the past, without family frame, living in an aboriginal herds, promiscuous and free. There is now evidence that this never was true.

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