

SCIENTIFIC MEETING

December 1, 1939

(555 North Wilcox Avenue)

Speaker: Dr. Siegfried Bernfeld

Topic: The Psychology and Logic of Interpretation

The meeting was called to order by the president, who introduced the speaker, Dr. Bernfeld. The subject was "The Psychology and Logic of Interpretation".

The speaker announced that his talk would deal with the subject of psychoanalysis as a science. He compared psychoanalysis with the other sciences and pointed out that the psychoanalytic method fulfils the basic requirements of a definition of science, but there are certain differences from other scientific methods. In psychoanalysis the chief concern is the removal of obstacles to interpersonal communication (resistance). Dr. Bernfeld illustrated this by an example of ordinary conversation in everyday life in which one person wanted to make a request from another about which the first felt some embarrassment. He was enabled finally to make the request after the second, the listener, had arranged for a feeling of privacy.

Psychoanalysis has been criticized and called unscientific, the critics saying that the presence of the analyst affects the results. While it is true that any person is influenced by the presence of another person, in the psychoanalytic situation theoretically the observations (secrets) are uninfluenced by the analyst. When the analyst and the patient attack the problem of removing the resistance, the analyst may have no idea of the content (the secret).

The speaker discussed the interpretation of errors, saying that many scientists probably would criticize such work. He gave an example and stated that the law of causality is not readily demonstrated in single errors; furthermore psychoanalysis reconstructs a situation (a partial life history) and does not attempt to determine causality in the ordinary scientific sense. A purposive connection can be demonstrated which the psychoanalyst believes (clicks).

Dr. Bernfeld used the example of picture puzzles to illustrate the way in which the hidden meanings can be seen in the psychoanalytic material and finally pointed out that an interpretation may be of two general types: first, a simple reconstruction (historical), and second, a topological one (geometrical). In this latter the whole matter of sharper definitions has to be considered.

The paper was discussed by Professor Epstein, Dr. Brunswick, Dr. Timme, and Dr. Fenichel.