

THE LABORATORY METHOD IN PSYCHOANALYSIS, ITS INCEPTION AND DEVELOPMENT¹²

BY

TRIGANT BURROW, M. D., PH. D.

With the new basis of thought and procedure which emanated from the evolutionists there was introduced into scientific method a new instrument for the determining of scientific processes. This instrument is the scientific laboratory. The distinction of the scientific laboratory is its precision of judgment with respect to the data under investigation. In order to our own subjective processes, we shall be helped if we will first demand of ourselves that we understand more clearly what is the meaning of the laboratory as applied to its commonly accepted objective materials--if we will ask ourselves what the mind requires of itself and determine definitely what are its criteria in entering upon the method of the laboratory. Until we recognize the processes of mind that determine the function of this instrument of precision we shall not be able to adhere to the uncompromising criteria that everywhere characterize the discipline of laboratory procedure.

The laboratory presumes a basis of observation that rests upon a principle that is phyletic and inherent. In the absence of this phylogenetic basis there is no biological observation because there is lacking the underlying principle of all laboratory procedure. Through this principle the laboratory establishes a method of comparison whereby the particular element of the species is seen in relation to its phyletic substrate. The study of comparative anatomy demonstrates that the elements of a species represent a phyletic continuum that forms a common basis for comparison throughout the elements of the species in question. Blood platelets are scientifically recognizable as blood platelets because of their structural identity or generic consistency. Likewise the pathology of a structure or tissue is recognized as a deflection from the norm because of its divergence from recognized healthy elements. But, owing to habitual inadvertencies of outlook traceable to man's personal inhibitions, there has not as yet been recognized within the mental or functional sphere the primary continuum that constitutes the substrate of individual life and that makes possible the recognition of pathological divergences. It has not been recognized that under the conditions of our complex society these divergences exist throughout the species as a whole.

Within the subjective sphere--the sphere of man's own inherent thought and function--Sigmund Freud was first to employ a laboratory technique through the application to consciousness of dynamic biological principles. The introduction of this dynamic factor marked the beginning of the

¹ Paper read before the Ninth Congress of the International Psycho Analytic Association, Bad Homburg, Germany, 1925 Paper to appear in its German version in the Internationale Zeitschrift für **Psychoanalyse**.

² American Journal of Psychiatry Vol. V, pp. 345-355, January, 1926, No. 3.

scientific method within the unconscious sphere of our human behavior. Thus it was in the hands of Freud that the scientific instrument afforded by the method of the laboratory came to be utilized within the sphere of man's mental processes. But this innovation of Freud's within the subjective spheres paralleling, as it does, principles long recognized by science in the objective sphere, has been socially opposed by obstinate inhibition on the part of the human organisms whose habitual prejudices, social as well as personal, were necessarily affronted by this laboratory scrutiny. These inhibitions, contrary to our common interpretation, are by no means confined to those outside our psychoanalytic ranks. They are also operative among those comprising our own number.³ Indeed it is precisely within ourselves as psychoanalysts that the real impediment lies. And it is this impediment which has automatically diverted us from the original laboratory intention of Freud.

It is my position that because of this resistance intrinsic to ourselves, the indispensable instrument of science, namely the laboratory of scientific research, has yet to come into its rightful place among us. In order to arrive at a phylogenetic substrate within the mental sphere, we need to observe the unconscious from a social basis of technique that is analogous to the individual basis of technique originally applied by Freud to the individual neurosis. For if we will observe the unconscious from a social basis, we shall find, I think, that there is the need for a laboratory study of consciousness in its social mechanisms that corresponds to the study of consciousness in its individual mechanisms. We shall find that there is the possibility of a laboratory approach to distortions of consciousness existing socially that is identical with our approach to the mental distortions which through Freud we first learned to recognize in the unconscious processes of the individual patient.

Though the development of Freud's thesis introduced into science the possibility of a laboratory method with respect to man's mental processes, psychoanalysis continued to be consistent with its medical tradition of the clinic. Having had its inception in the clinical approach it was inevitable that psychoanalysis should adhere more and more to the therapeutic method of the clinic and depart to the same degree from methods pertaining to the technique of the laboratory. As a result of this unperceived circumstance the tendency has been for psychoanalysis to wander so far from its original basis of research as now to require very exacting processes of reconstruction if we are to restore it to the scientific postulates that originally underlay Freud's basic discovery. Sensing the need for a more encompassing procedure, my students and I began to center our interest upon methods that would insure a greater precision of laboratory technique. With my associates I came to realize the necessity of applying under conditions of actual laboratory —or group analysis— the method which Freud had developed in the treatment of individuals. The outcome of our work has been the gradual recognition of the necessity to base the processes of our observation upon methods involving a social or consensual technique that is as definite as that of the laboratories of objective biology.⁴ For as to the objective criteria of the laboratory reside in a consistent continuum or phyletic substrate comprising the species, so its subjective criteria are equally indispensable and reside equally in 'a subjective continuum that unites the subjective processes of the several observers. Consensual data are only recognizable through a consensual basis of sense impressions.

³ "Psychoanalytic Improvisations and the Personal Equation", Paper read at the Fifteenth Annual meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, Richmond, Va., May 12, 1925.

⁴ "Psychiatry as an Objective Science", paper read at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the American Psychopathological Association, Washington, D. C., May 7, 1925.

Thus it is becoming more and more evident that, in the absence of a social recognition of the need among us of this social instrument of precision, we are as psychoanalysts unconsciously lending our support to social dissociations that are as definitely unconscious substitutions as the symbol substitutions which we have come to study clinically in the underlying displacements within the unconscious of the individual.

In a paper read before the American Psychoanalytic Association in 1917⁵ I attempted to establish a principle representing, in what I spoke of at that time as the "nest instinct" or the "preconscious," the primary subjective phase of man's mental life. This principle was posited with a view to the recognition of a biological, phyletic continuum in relation to which might be compared not only individual correspondences but also their divergences in pathological reactions.

In its original position this early principle of primary identification had significance merely as an accidental, isolated laboratory finding, and was limited in its application to the individual neurosis. As an isolated phenomenon it was, in its ontogenetic significance, necessarily applicable alone to an ontogenetic or individual basis of analysis. But, because of the evident approximation of this principle to that which is fundamentally organismic or phyletic, it quite inevitably led to wider phylogenetic bases of inference. It is interesting that in its ontogenetic bearing this principle of primary identification has been fully substantiated analytically not only by my own studies of dementia praecox and adjacent disorders but also by studies made by Dr. L. Pierce Clark in the psychology of essential epilepsy and kindred manifestations.⁶ Basing his observations on the principle of primary identification, Dr. Clark has also definitely traced to this source the equally organic reactions embodied in the psychoneural regressions of the epileptic. But, as I have said, while the divergence represented in the individual neurosis is traceable to this principle of primary identification as the original substrate of mind, its application is adequate only to the individual analysis. But man is not an individual. His mentation is not individualistic. He is part of a societal continuum that is the outgrowth of a primary or racial continuum. As the individual finds his basis in an individual continuum with an ontogenetic matrix or maternal source, so the social organism has its basis in a continuum with a phylogenetic matrix that is societal or racial. It is my thesis that this racial continuum is the phylogenetic basis of man's societal life precisely as the individual's early continuity with the maternal organism -his primary identification with the mother- is the ontogenetic basis for his subsequent development as an individual. **In brief, just as we may trace the mental life of the individual to a physiological source corresponding to this primary identification, so within our societal life we may trace man's common source to a principle of primary identification that is racial.**

⁵ "The Preconscious or the Nest Instinct," paper read at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, Boston, Mass., May 25, 1917. This paper forms the nucleus of material that is being gathered into a book subsequently to be published. Preliminary reference to this principle was made in the "Genesis and Meaning of Homosexuality," paper read at the Fourth Annual Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, Albany, New York, May 5, 1914. Published in The Psychoanalytic Review, Vol. 4, No. 3, July, 1917.

⁶ Clark, L. Pierce. "A Psychologic Study of Abraham Lincoln," The Psychoanalytic Review, Vol. VIII, No. I, January, 1921; "The Nareism of Alexander the Great," The Psychoanalytic Review, Vol. X, No. I, January, 1923; "Some Psychological Data Regarding the Interpretation of Essential Epilepsy," The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, Vol. 61, No. i, January, 1925.

In recent years the attempt has been made on the part of myself and a few students to establish a means for the practical recognition among us as individual organisms of this common substrate of feeling and reaction first posited theoretically under the symbol of the preconscious. Regarding this preconscious principle as the phyletic basis of individual mentation, it has been our practical endeavor to relate individual manifestations to this common racial principle shared among us and to study the pathological divergences of our various feeling reactions in the light of this common feeling continuum. The result has been the establishment of a practical laboratory of psychoanalysis in which a consensual agreement concerning the subjective material has rendered possible an exact observation of individual deflections precisely as the laboratory of structural biology has made possible the scientific observation of structural divergences from a commonly accepted phyletic norm. Under this laboratory discipline reactions which, in accordant with the personal technique of psychoanalysis, are studied in private confidence from a necessarily private basis of observation, have come to be observed commonly among a consensus of individuals recognizing and sharing among themselves a common basis of comparison. **In this laboratory approach the method of psychoanalysis no longer confines itself to the study and treatment of an isolated individual by another individual who, through his private function as an analyst, is no less isolated. But the Social repressions common to the social consciousness or to groups of individuals, presumably united within the confederacy known as normality, come equally under the challenge of a scientific laboratory analysis.**

As we have said, the criteria of the objective laboratory of biology reside in a structural basis among the organic elements that is phyletic and continuous. Concomitantly, the criteria of the subjective laboratory of biology reside in a condition of continuity that equally unites the processes of the individuals or elements comprising the several observers. But in the subjective field the individuals who observe are the objects observed as well as the subjects observing, and just as the basis of observation in the objective laboratory resides in a homogeneity of objective sense impressions among the observers, so in the subjective sphere the test of accurate observation depends no less upon a homogeneous basis or continuity of the subjective sense impressions among the several observers. In this interpretation the method of the laboratory becomes the method of consensual observation no less in the subjective than in the objective sphere. For this consensus of observation establishes the conditions for dependable scientific judgment in that it precludes the element of personal bias with respect to the data observed. In all subjective experiment, therefore, the requisite condition for its proper conduct is the elimination of this personal equation and its necessarily deterring influence upon processes that determine the observation.

By virtue of the inclusive basis afforded by this consensual laboratory approach, psychoanalysis may come to occupy the same broad relation to mental disorder that medicine elsewhere represents with respect to disorders within the structural sphere. It has been the merit of the laboratory study of tuberculosis or typhoid fever that these abnormal processes have now come to be envisaged in their social or collective implications. These disorders were formerly quite isolated personal conditions calling only for isolated and personal treatment on the part of the individual physician. But by virtue of the evolutionary and phyletic basis provided by the structuralists, with their instrument in the laboratories of histology and bacteriology, these disorders are now studied in their social significance and receive the recognition that makes possible their study and treatment from a social as well as from an individual basis of outlook.

The time has come when the laboratory method initiated by Freud through the principle he applied to the study of the individual neurosis must extend itself to the larger application envisaged by a laboratory study of the neuroses in their wider social implications. The neurotic is no more an isolated phenomenon than the tubercular. In both, the ontogenetic nature of their disorders has its counterpart in a phyletic substrate that is societal. Accordingly, the process of their therapeutic adjustment cannot be met upon a basis that is restricted to an ontogenetic source but must extend itself equally to a source that is societal and phyletic. **With the recognition of the socially continuous or communicative nature of infectious diseases there was made possible an inclusive laboratory study of the common source of these disorders and the tracing of this source to the common continuum of tissue represented in some healthy phylum. Correspondingly, with the recognition of the socially continuous or communicative nature of neurotic diseases and the tracing of their common origins through proper laboratory inquiry, there is made possible the recognition of the common source of these disorders within the sphere of consciousness.**

Thus, after twelve years devoted to psychoanalytic work based upon the method of the personal analysis, it became apparent to me that the personal basis of the individual analyst is necessarily but the social counterpart of the presumably isolated reaction of the individual before him. I began to realize that no theory of the common or phyletic nature of neurotic processes could offset the quite contradictory ontogenetic basis of actual procedure whereby my patient became closeted with me, as it were, in our confidential contemplation of his private inadvertencies. It became apparent that the ontogenetic basis upon which the personal analysis inevitably rests necessarily excludes the consensus of judgment that is coterminous with the phylogenetic principle of consciousness. In the absence of this consensual basis requisite to laboratory prevision of judgment the factor of the personal equation of the analyst necessarily operates unconsciously to inhibit more or less the direct and unprejudiced estimate of the data submitted.

It is this element of the personal equation which only a group or inclusive analysis is competent to challenge. Under its discipline we shall find that within the restrictions of the private analysis it is inevitable that this element of the personal equation unconsciously influences the personal judgment of the individual analyst. It is my position that because of this factor of the personal equation on the part of the analyst, the repression and personal secrecy that characterize the patient's neurosis can never be completely eliminated as long as we confine ourselves only to the personal process embodying the confidential rapport between patient and analyst. From a more inclusive societal approach such a type of rapport, with its necessarily individualistic limitation, may be recognized as an added factor in the repression and secrecy already dominating the unconscious of the individual patient. In short, it is too often the snare of the private analysis, as it is too often the snare of marriage, under our present social system, that it unconsciously substitutes for the isolated neurosis of the individual a socially reciprocal relationship that is no less secret and repressed in its mutual exclusiveness. **This disclosure exposes a condition that is the embodiment of a social neurosis shared unconsciously by physician and patient, the mechanism of which consists in an unconscious pooling in a mutual situation of what had been the individually closed psychic compartment of each. It was the recognition of this mutual element of the personal equation that led to the gradual opening among my associates and myself of mixed secret and unconscious social situation.**

The very natural culmination of such reflections as these was the quite spontaneous development of practical measures that led gradually to the establishment of a social or group method of analysis on

the basis of a consensual laboratory technique. It may be of interest to mention briefly something of the actual situation that first led to our group basis of analysis. One of my patients, a student of unusual analytic insight and training, sensing the incongruity in the situation, challenged the discrepancy between my theoretical statements regarding our socially common basis of consciousness and the individualistic position which, as an analyst, I arbitrarily continued to maintain. I was straightway caught up by his protest against the inconsistency of these conflicting positions and by the interest this recalcitrant attitude seemed to me to offer experimentally, though unconsciously I was still skeptical of its practical value, and so I reluctantly agreed to an arrangement whereby the student should become the analyst and I the analysand, it being presumed that the social basis I advocated only in theory would be adopted actually and without prejudice by him. The arduous months of this experiment served only to prove that the patient's opposition to the inconsistency of my personal method was actuated by an equally personal and inconsistent method on his part and that the theory of a social approach to individual consciousness was, from the unbiased point of view of the laboratory, no more actual in his case than in my own. This finding led to a further extension of my experiment which consisted in the gradual development of a technique involving groups of individuals, first smaller groups and finally larger, the smaller groups consisting of as few as four, the larger of as many as twenty individuals. **In such groups there was abrogated entirely the distinction between analyst and analysand, each individual automatically becoming both.** There was here presented a social continuum of affects, and the need of a common recognition of their social basis in our common societal phylum. **The gradual result of our group inquiry was the reluctant exposure of social repressions that are as definite as the presumably personal repressions that have hitherto occupied us as individual analysts. This became the more apparent in the circumstance that individuals who have undergone an individual analysis because of their personal resistances and who represent presumably analyzed personalities are, when subjected to the more inclusive inquiry of a group analysis, still the victims of repressions having their seat in the collective repressions of our social life.**

Perhaps the work of our group can best be described as the development of a social technique in the handling of problems which being personal or ontogenetic, are equally social or phylogenetic. From the basis of a common societal accord we have tried to secure conditions which permit an objective evaluation of the unconscious elements socially represented by each of us in his single isolation. The situation was from the first difficult even to envisage. The reason is, as I see it, that the individual with all his personal subordination to the social system about him is at the same time an integral and necessarily contributory part of this same unconscious social organism. At one and the same time the individual is both victim and aggressor. He is at once both the aggrieved and the offender. And the effort on the part of our group to reunite these two artificially separated trends represented for many months an almost insurmountable difficulty in our work. In spite of its difficulties the outcome of our group work has been the development of an analytic technique that grants to the individual a perspective upon these inhibiting social conditions and materially enlarges his outlook as well as his possibilities of function as an element in man's homogeneous social organism. We have been able to demonstrate that there exists a definite and as yet unrecognized confederacy of self-protection and resistance throughout the social system that is as definite as those of the individual, and it has been shown that in this social consolidation of repression we are all equally unconscious constituents. But it has become clear that, in spite of this mass fixity and its **stolid resistance to self-inquiry**, these processes are as susceptible to definite analysis and resolution as the equally stolid resistances we have learned to recognize through our analysis of the reactions of the individual patient.

It is the authority of the laboratory that its basis is evolutionary and phyletic. In a broad phyletic encompassment it may be said that through the application of the principles of biology to the objective or structural sphere, as demonstrated in the laboratory, science and evolution have become synonymous. It may be as truly said that within the subjective field of inquiry the authority of all scientific investigation resides alone in the laboratory. Submitting to this authority my associates and I have been forced to accept a phyletic basis as the structural continuum of consciousness in which individual men represent organically identical elements. Accordingly, our group work has endeavored to envisage the artificial differentiations and dissociations comprising the neurosis from a principle which being ontogenetic is of necessity phylogenetic also. **For it is obvious that in our complex society these artificial differentiations and dissociations have ruthlessly separated and distorted not only the single individual within himself but the integral organism uniting all individuals in their common societal consciousness.**

I well recognize that this position frankly questions the completeness of our present psychoanalytic basis, that it is the frank acceptance of the fact that psychoanalysis has reached a definite impasse. I feel we must face the circumstance that psychoanalysis has been concentrating its efforts on improving methods of applying its principles rather than on the development of the principles themselves. The approach presented in this paper, which recognizes the individual not as an individual but as part of a common societal organism, has by actual experimental test provided an instrument for the wider development of our essential psychoanalytic atoms. The work of our group is not a theory of social values or a prescription for the betterment of social institutions. It is the definite analysis of social values and social institutions as they exist. This consensual approach is not a theory any more than the private approach to the neurotic individual is a theory. It is an investigation, and what we are insisting upon with respect to social groups is this recourse to investigation, not a theory of what social groups should be or might become. We can only reply to our critics as Professor Freud has from the beginning time and again replied to his critics. Said Freud, in effect: *“Do not argue with me as to the nature of my findings but go directly to the source to which I have had recourse and where you may establish your own findings.”* For it was Freud's position that there exists something in human life that is definitely in need of investigation. This statement that Freud has applied over and over again to the individual needs now to be applied as insistently to the mass expression of consciousness represented among these same individuals in their collective social life.