

"THE SOCIAL BASIS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A STUDY IN ORGANIC PSYCHOLOGY BASED UPON A SYNTHETIC AND SOCIETAL
CONCEPT OF THE NEUROSIS."¹

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PREFACE

I do not know whether I can make clear in what manner the conception embodied in the following pages first arose. Conceptions derived from data of reason and observation necessarily proceed from a mental basis. Scientific and philosophical treatises are the outcome primarily of scientific or philosophical ideas. With both inductive and deductive methods of reasoning the conclusions that flow from the assumptions are our accepted basis of procedure. With the method of the present study, however, we are upon other ground, for the inception of this work was in no such wise; and yet to say that it is based upon no conceptual premise would, of course, not be true. The difference is that what follows here has been the outgrowth of events that were prior to and independent of any conceptual formulation of them. Biological necessity preceded and argument followed after. My meaning may for the moment be best understood when it is considered that these events are the processes of personal experience inseparable from the sequences here embodied. While this is not the place for detailing personal history, the presentation of a thesis as intimate as this would not be complete without some concrete account of its origin.

Having years ago been "analyzed" in preparation for my work in psychopathology, I had been for years duly "analyzing" others. It unexpectedly happened one day, however, that while I was interpreting a dream of a student-assistant, he made bold to challenge the honesty of my analytic position, insisting that, as far as he was concerned, the test of my sincerity would be met only when I should myself be willing to accept from him the same analytic exactions I was now imposing upon others. As may be readily judged, such a proposition seemed to me nothing short of absurd. Had I not been "analyzed"? Needless to say I had heard this proposal from patients many times before, but while my reaction to the suggestion in the present instance was chiefly one of amusement, my pride was not a little piqued at the intimation it conveyed. So with the thought that in the interest of experiment it could at least do no harm to humour for a time the waywardness of inexperience, I conceded the arrangement.

¹ Burrow, T. (1927). *The Social Basis of Consciousness. A Study in Organic Psychology Based Upon a Synthetic and Societal Concept of the Neuroses* (Preface, XV-XVIII). New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. Inc.

Not many weeks after I had taken the patient's chair and yielded him mine I realized that a situation to which I had agreed with more or less levity had assumed an aspect of the profoundest seriousness. My "resistances" to my self-appointed analyst, far from being negligible, were plainly insuperable, but there was now no turning back. The analysis proceeded on its course from day to day and with it my resistances took tighter hold upon me. The agreement to which I had voluntarily lent myself was becoming painful beyond words. Whatever empirical interest the situation may have held for me at the outset was now wholly subordinated to the indignation and pain of the position to which I had been brought.

It is possible to indicate only in their broadest lines the progressive events of these trying months. I need hardly record the growing sense of self-limitation and defeat that went hand in hand with this daily advancing personal challenge, nor the corresponding efforts of concealment in unconscious symbolizations and distortions on my part. What calls for more vital emphasis, however, is the fact that along with the deepening, if reluctant, realization of my intolerance of self-defeat, there came gradually to me the realization that my analyst, in changing places with me, had merely shifted to the authoritarian vantage-ground I had myself relinquished and that the situation had remained essentially unaltered still.

This was significant. It marked at once the opening of wholly new vistas of experience. In the light of its discovery I began to sense for the first time what had all along underlain my own analysis and what, as I now see it, really underlies every analysis. I began to see that the student before me, notwithstanding his undoubted sincerity of purpose, presented a no less personal and proprietary attitude toward me than I had held toward him and that all that had been needed was the authoritarian background to bring this attitude to expression. With the consciousness of this condition I saw what has been for me the crucial revelation of the many years of my analytic work -- that, in its individualistic application, the attitude of the psychoanalyst and the attitude of the authoritarian are inseparable.

As from day to day this realization came more closely home to me, and with it the growing acceptance of the limitation and one-sidedness of the personalistic critique in psychoanalysis, my personal self-vindication and resistances began in the same measure to abate. At the same time the analyst too, Mr. Clarence Shields, came at last into a position to sense the personalism and resistance that had unconsciously all along actuated his own reaction. From now forward the direction of the inquiry was completely altered. The analysis henceforth consisted in the reciprocal effort of each of us to recognize within himself his attitude of authoritarianism and autocracy toward the other. With this automatic relinquishment of the personalistic or private basis and its replacement by a more inclusive attitude toward the problems of human consciousness, there has been not alone for myself but also for students and patients a gradual clearing of our entire analytic horizon.

It will later become clearer how this newer formulation of psychoanalysis on the wider basis of its more inclusive impersonal meaning has occurred entirely apart from the commonly predictable processes of logic. Only the accidental circumstance of a student's protest against my own personal bias, and my subsequent observation of an identical personalism in himself, as empirically disclosed upon our interchanging places, are answerable for the altered insight into psychoanalysis that the recent years have afforded me -- an insight which the investigations of the small group of students working along analytic lines identical with my own have more and more substantiated. It was due,

then, entirely to this unexpected turn of the tables, which placed me in the role of the patient and the patient in the analytic role, that I was fortuitously launched into six years of social experimentation upon the discrepancies of an individualistic analysis. If the outcome of the process has been the retraction of my earlier analytic outlook, it has not been the expression of any personal acumen or distinctive asset on my part.

The chance eventuality I have mentioned is alone responsible for enforcing the relinquishment of my habitual personalistic basis in psychoanalysis and bringing me to feel the need of a more comprehensive interpretation of the unconscious. Coming to sense, through a wider recognition of the unconscious, the correspondingly larger meaning of the consciousness of man, I have come to feel the need of its more adequate interpretation in such an organismic view as I have here attempted to outline under the theme of "The Social Basis of Consciousness."

I cannot consistently cite authoritative reference in support of this work. There is none. It is sponsored alone in the spirit of common endeavor actuating the group of students who have united in its common realization. But if I am loath to shift to others the responsibility for my own venturesomeness, I need not forgo the pleasure of acknowledging --as I do with whole-heartedness-- the impetus that was given me in the beginning of my psychoanalytic work through the sympathy and encouragement of Dr. Adolf Meyer.

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