

A SUMMARY NOTE ON THE WORK OF TRIGANT BURROW

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A SUMMARY NOTE ON THE WORK OF TRIGANT BURROW

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THE concepts and procedures introduced by Trigant Burrow represent a pioneer undertaking in the field of social psychiatry. He early took the unorthodox position "that an individual discord is but the symptom of a social discord",⁽¹⁰⁾ and that "it is futile to attempt to remedy mental disease occurring within the individual mind as long as psychiatry remains blind to the existence of mental disease within the social mind".⁽¹¹⁾ Some of Burrow's views are accepted or paralleled by other students of behavior and in some measure also by the culturally alert layman. Other aspects of his work, although inadequately understood in his time, offer perspectives which seem particularly applicable to the community problems with which we are confronted.

Kurt Goldstein wrote Burrow in 1948: "You are one of the few scientists who make one feel that for him life and work are closely related."⁽²⁵⁾ This comment gives a clue to much of Burrow's endeavors. He early suggested that "the psychopathologist must awaken to his wider function of clinical sociologist and recognize his obligation to challenge the neurosis in its social as well as in its individual intrenchments".⁽⁸⁾ Acting upon this altered insight, Burrow included in his observation his own behavior as enacted in family, social and professional situations. With this application of theory to life, Burrow was questioning accustomed self-identity and its elaborate security devices which impede basic capacities for freedom and creativity. He hoped that other behavior students, interested in the deeper penetration and reevaluation of accepted forms of behavior, would do likewise.

Viewing theory and practice as aspects of total experience and development, we may distinguish different periods in Burrow's life and activities, namely: (1) 1875-1909: youth, medical and psychological studies; (2) 1909-20: training with C. G. Jung in Zürich, charter member of the American Psychoanalytic Association, psychoanalytic practice with much activity in psychoanalytic and psychological societies, beginning emphasis on social as well as physiological aspects of behavior disorders (16 papers); (3) 1920-32: development of group- or phylo-analysis, focusing investigation on socially sanctioned forms of destructive and morbidic trends (*the social neurosis*), organizing The Lifwynn Foundation for Laboratory Research in Analytic and Social Psychiatry (1927) (23 papers, and 2 books); (4) 1932-50: intensive group work with increasing emphasis on proprioceptive aspects of man's behavioral health and illness, differentiation of contrasting attentional patterns, and recording of associated physiological changes (26 papers, and 3 books).

With regard to Burrow's psychoanalytic background, although he had studied with Jung in Zürich (1909-10), he did not side with him when it came to Jung's break with Freud (1913). Rather he considered the positions of Freud, Jung and Adler⁽⁶⁾ as complementary and not as mutually exclusive. Burrow thus anticipated the trend to recognize converging principles in various behavior theories—a trend that has come to the fore in recent years. Throughout, he showed the highest regard for Freud's work, and wrote him in 1925 that he had

tried to extend and apply "the principles first enunciated by you to the social as well as to individual repressions".⁽²⁵⁾

Even in his early psychoanalytic papers Burrow emphasized social factors. He drew attention not only to harmful environmental influences occurring in a patient's early family situation, but also to the close interrelation of the individual's neurosis with noxious processes embodied in accepted social interrelations generally, that is, in the customary norm of behavior. "Society too has its elaborate system of defense-mechanisms, its equivocations and metonymies, its infantile make-shifts and illusions."⁽⁴⁾ In the years before he entered upon his group-analytic studies, Burrow referred again and again to what he called "the hideous distortion of human values embodied in the repressive subterfuge and untruth of our so-called moral codes and conventions"; "normality" was in his view "nothing else than an expression of the neurosis of the race".⁽⁷⁾

Along with his emphasis upon the "social neurosis",^(12, 37) Burrow early proposed concepts which for him were basic in understanding the human organism as an inherent element in the social and phylic setting, and in interpreting behavior pathology. That is, he drew attention to the "preconscious"* phase of development, and to the infant's "primary identification" with the mother.⁽³⁾ Ferenczi⁽²²⁾ also had considered the influence of prenatal and early infantile experiences upon subsequent periods of life, emphasizing the phenomena of "magical hallucinatory omnipotence" in what he considered a purely self-centered stage of development. But for Burrow the "preconscious" or primary subjective phase—preceding the stage of objectivation, cognition, desire and sexual acquisitiveness—was one of tranquil quiescence, of oneness with the mother. In his *Problems in Dynamic Psychology*,⁽²⁸⁾ John T. MacCurdy stated (1922): "It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this work, for their [Ferenczi's and Burrow's] speculations are probably the only truly original, rather than elaborative, productions of those who follow Freud strictly."† Burrow's concept of the "preconscious" is related to, although not identical with, Jung's ideas on the presexual phase of childhood. For Burrow, the recognition of the "preconscious" and preconative phase of prenatal and postnatal existence with its psychophysiological continuity with the mother, entailed "no dissent whatsoever from Freud and the unconscious as envisaged by him"; in fact, it was "not only not incompatible with Freud, but . . . a requisite correlate of his teaching".⁽⁶⁾

The evaluation of this early stage of development, with its "primary identification", was essential to Burrow's interpretation of neurotic reactions. While still engaged in psychoanalysis, he suggested that the neurosis is an accentuation and fixation of the original subjective mode of continuity which has not been brought to mature social expression. Thus homosexuality was not interpreted as resulting from the repression of love for the mother on the objectifying level of the Oedipus situation, but rather as a direct outgrowth or extension into adult life of the pre-objective feeling identification with the mother. That is, mother

* Burrow's "preconscious" is to be distinguished, of course, from the concept of the preconscious as generally used in present-day psychoanalysis for those phases of psychological function which are not conscious but not repressed and to a large extent capable of becoming conscious.

† More recently Clarence P. Oberndorf (ref. 30) wrote that one of the four "most noteworthy" and original among American contributions before 1920" in the field of psychoanalysis was "Trigant Burrow's emphasis of a 'primary subjective phase' in the infant chronologically preceding the Oedipus situation".

fixation, narcissism and latent homosexuality were seen as different aspects of a single basic principle.⁽⁵⁾

A second, but interrelated, phase of interpretation was the concept that the organism's basic physiological harmony and feeling-continuity with the mother-organism and with the world has been interfered with by the processes of objectivation and cognition, leading to a divisive and acquisitive state of function, to oppositeness, obsessive desire and neurotic self-defence on an individual and social scale. Burrow considered incest-awe as an expression of an inherent protest against encroachment of the cognitive, objective process upon the spontaneous, subjective process of the "preconscious", pre-libidinal phase—as a reaction against the affront to the basic psychobiological principle of unity. "Incest is not forbidden, it forbids itself."⁽⁷⁾

During his psychoanalytic period Burrow assembled a great deal of evidence from everyday life, from dreams and pathological conditions, from the phenomena of creative, aesthetic and religious experience, to show the significance of the powerfully unifying and integrative urge which is commonly expressed in incomplete, distorted or symbolically substitutive forms.‡

In these early formulations we find also an emphasis upon physiology which characterized Burrow's work throughout. ". . . When we speak of psychic events we, of necessity, posit a physiological substrate."⁽²⁾ The principle of the infant's "preconscious" identification with the mother lays stress, of course, on physiological foundations. From these conceptions Burrow advanced consistently toward his later neurophysiological interpretations, and to the practical procedure in which proprioceptive awareness of significant motor activations plays an important rôle.

These interpretations embody a far-going change in perspective. As mentioned above, Burrow considered neurotic disorders not primarily as individual events but rather as symptoms of a general social or phylic disturbance. Conflict was not traced primarily to the social interdiction of instinctive and aggressive trends, to an antagonism between primitive impulses and supposedly mature and socially co-ordinative forces. The essential conflict or interference was seen to consist rather in the internal imposition of the objectivating, symbolizing function upon the early unitary mode of existence. This basic interference, as Burrow increasingly emphasized, constitutes a pathogenic complication which, aggravated by social conditioning, is a source of everyday antagonism, detachment and image-preoccupation, as well as a cause of repression and neurotic developments. That is, the normal reaction average, in which the investigator or therapist is an integral participant, becomes in itself a serious problem and is included as material for investigation. But together with this challenge of "the social neurosis", there was with Burrow a consistent recognition of the co-ordinative kernel in human nature, of an integrative matrix for individual growth and phylic cohesion. This positive emphasis again represents a significant departure from Freud's concept of instinctive antisocial forces—a pessimistic position shared by many other students of behavior who stress that instinctively self-limited trends, or later acquired neurotically defensive features, are basic in human organization.

‡ Burrow left much unpublished material on the "preconscious" which was collected and edited by the late W. E. Galt and is now being prepared for publication.

The recognition of the "preconscious" mode also implies a modification of the concept of "transference".⁽¹⁴⁾ A discrimination is made between (1) an organismically rooted feeling continuity inherent in the mother-child relationship and forming the organic basis of inter-individual cohesion at any stage of development, and (2) image-dependent, egocentric complications which characterize "transference" relations throughout. This differentiation seems important for the understanding of behavioral pathology as well as for the therapeutic or reconstructive process.

In Burrow's view the individual, in his destructive as well as constructive phases of behavior, was always considered as an interreactive part of the larger socio-biological structure, as an entity whose growth and freedom springs from its integration within the phylo-organism. The conception here developed agrees with the view that the organism always attempts to use its constructive assets (Goldstein⁽²⁶⁾), and that disease, implying recovery, always embodies a reassertion of inherent potentialities and of healthy co-ordination (Riese⁽³²⁾).

Burrow's concepts, as stated above, include elements of the widened frame of reference developed in his later writings when his insight had become deepened and extended by experience gained in his group-analytic studies. These took their start in 1918 when he accepted the proposal of his student assistant, Clarence Shields, that they reverse the rôles of analyst and student.⁽¹³⁾ The mutual analysis undertaken by them was later extended to include other participants, both normal and neurotic. The *group analysis*^(16, 34) which thus developed took place in formal laboratory meetings as well as in connection with everyday activities. Its purpose was not the recall of early unsettled issues, but the uncovering and recognition of affects and motives existing in group interactions at the moment of exploration. This approach was a phenomenological one and at the same time revaluative, sharpened by insight into behavior dynamics gained on the basis of psychoanalytically oriented contact with neurotic patients. It meant dealing practically and directly with a social situation in which the psychiatrist's, the observer's, own experience and actions were deeply involved. That is, the analysis included examination of the observer's own perception, attitudes and concepts as part of the social reaction tissue inquired into. The attempt was made to relinquish the restrictions of outlook and feeling due to established social rôles and status, and to get in closer touch with discrepancies of behavior, with dependencies, moralistic pretences, self-justifications and defences, as they are commonly enacted in habitual social interchange, in neurotic compromise formations and in overtly destructive trends. The purpose was to determine the latent content of these manifestations which could be observed in the individual's self-structure, in the interactions of the participants, and pervading the mood and motivation of the group as a whole. After consistent and long-continued observation, these interrelated phenomena appeared increasingly as variations of a common theme, as interreactive aspects of a total constellation in which the defensive emphasis upon the symbolically isolated self played a major rôle (Burrow's *social images*⁽⁸⁾ and "*I*"-*persona*⁽¹⁵⁾). The investigative group effort centered upon further clarification of this socio-individual⁽³⁵⁾ problem of autistic image-bondage⁽⁴³⁾ and its relation to the dynamics of wasteful and unproductive interchange, as well as to clinically neurotic and overtly antisocial behavior.

A development of this social analysis took place in 1927 with the incorporation of The Lifwynn Foundation for Laboratory Research in Analytic and Social Psychiatry. This Foundation, whose economic structure is based on a small initial endowment and on contributions from member-participants, was established by Burrow and a few of his co-workers in order to sponsor and give a community setting to their group- or phylo-analytic studies. A distinguishing mark of the Foundation's function was that its own administrative and organizational activities, in which its members participated, were again material for the study which it was organized to sponsor. In other words, an important function of the organization was to advance its studies by applying them to its own behavior processes. Thus a modest beginning was made in investigating, by specific procedures, distortions of community organization. The question presents itself whether similar procedures might be applied to those antagonisms and blockages of communication which impede effective functioning of organizational structures everywhere.

The further pursuance of this investigation with its consistent frustration of accustomed self-identity and its socially sanctioned value systems, led to an unforeseen development. Gradually it became evident that behavior analysis had definite limitations in dealing with the socially patterned autistic trend. Under the stress of the social self-inquiry the exploration shifted to another aspect of the organism's total function, namely, to the perception of tensions related to specific neuromuscular activations.^(17, 20, 38) Local strain in the forepart of the head (in Burrow's *affecto-symbolic segment*) came to awareness which seemed to be directly related to self-referent affect-imagery. With continued experimentation, this oculo-facial stress was increasingly sensed against the tensional pattern perceptible throughout the organism as a whole. This proprioceptive reconstellation was found to go along with a dissipation of self-reflective and affect-laden images of others and oneself, and concomitantly, with the affirmation of an inclusive feeling attitude, with more objective observation and insight, and with more direct application to immediate tasks. § While the shift of attention from behavioral imagery to the "feeling sensation" of end-organismic patterns was at first only momentary, it gradually became possible to maintain the integrative mode of feeling and action for longer periods and to carry it into everyday activities.

These observations led Burrow to distinguish between two basic attitudes or modes of attention, between *ditention*, the usual self-reflexive attitude, and *cotion*, in which a more direct and organismically oriented contact is established with the world. Instrumental recordings indicated that changes in respiration, eye-movements and electrical brain-wave patterns accompanied the shift from ditention to cotion, further supporting the conclusion that we are dealing with a deep-seated organismic reorientation (ref. 19, Appendix).

The sweeping discrimination between two major attentional modes cuts across academic and conventional classifications, and implies a unifying interpretation of behavior disorder. Viewing the social neurosis always from the background of the organism's inherent capacity for co-ordination and species solidarity, Burrow introduced the terms *phylobiology*, *phylopathology* and *phylo-*

§ The various motor theories of consciousness, for instance, Nina Bull's Attitude Theory of Emotion (ref. 1), assist an understanding of the factors involved in these psychophysiological processes.

analysis.^(18, 23, 39) These concepts take full account of the pervasive character of the defective biosocial dynamics which in Burrow's view could not be relegated to any specific type or phase of personality or culture. Biology and the behavior sciences provide increasing evidence for this phylo-organismic^(24, 36, 41) basis. Burrow proposed that the integrated mode of attention (cotention), which he actualized and defined, be investigated further with regard to its potential significance as a criterion of behavioral health. The altered perspective thus developed by practical measures seemed to substantiate the common denominator to which Burrow, in his group-analytic studies, had related important dynamics of behavior disorder.

In discussing the genesis of the social neurosis, of universal pathogenic trends, Burrow, in his later formulations, followed up the interpretations proposed in his early writings. He continued to emphasize noxious implications that came about in man's use, or rather misuse, of image-symbol and language, of those very capacities which are the basis of his creative potentialities. The recourse in this human dilemma was not seen as a return to a primordial state of unity, but as an application and further development of measures which would reinstate basic, phylic integration on a mature and culturally advancing level.

It would seem that, as in other scientific fields, the determination of comprehensive principles and concepts, if substantiated by observation and experiment, is a significant step in the further development of our understanding and effective handling of the behavioral problems with which we are confronted.⁽⁴⁰⁾ But together with conceptualization, Burrow always stressed the experiential aspect, the investigation of feeling and behavior as it is enacted and experienced in the immediacy of living. This approach has parallels in the work of other behavior students, for instance that of H. Cantril who points out that basic motivations in human nature can be determined only if we consider man's life and experience as "a continual process of transactions" within "the total environment-person situation".⁽²¹⁾ E. Straus⁽³³⁾ and other existentialists⁽²⁹⁾ stress the circumstance that we must make contact with an individual's existence, with his "being-in-the-world", through participation and interactive experience. Some of them hold that the various theories of behavior and of human nature are not only incomplete or erroneous, but also that conceptualizations may be an essentially inadequate tool for the understanding of human reactions and experience. On the basis of the studies introduced by Burrow, I would propose that types of conceptualization (for instance, configurational-organismic concepts) may be developed which, while not replacing the experiential approach, are not essentially incompatible with it. That is, they may not impede but rather reinforce and make more generally available the insight gained by participating interaction.

Most existentialists see man's condition as a problematic, perhaps tragic, situation. But in Burrow's interpretation this problematic situation is significantly associated with a behavioral ineptitude shared by observer and society, and is subject to scientific definition and control. It was his endeavor to submit this common problem to "consensual observation"⁽⁹⁾ and to establish a frame of reference which would permit a challenging inquiry into the socio-individual defect, with the ultimate aim of its effective handling.

Many current projects in social psychiatry and cultural anthropology^(27, 31) are concerned with various phases of the interrelation between behavior disorder and special characteristics of the socio-cultural setting. They tend to emphasize the multiplicity of the factors involved. But it would be provocative and perhaps productive of new insights, if the attempt were made to examine in how far the great variety of behavioral data, individual and social, thus uncovered, can be related to unified principles or configurations such as Burrow outlined.

It is evident that Burrow's early studies in group analysis had a considerable influence upon the later developing group psychotherapies, though this influence often remained unacknowledged. In fact, his investigation of the individual's neurotic deviation as part of the deflection within the interrelational structure of groups, was the only forerunner in the United States of dynamic group psychotherapy. However, there are distinguishing marks in that Burrow's group- or phylo-analysis was (1) essentially an investigative procedure, (2) it included in its scope the behavior defect in community life, as well as in the observer himself, and (3) it made use of specific proprioceptive measures for bringing about constructive behavioral modifications on the socio-individual level.

I should like to mention that these behavior studies, especially in their later phases, were not without reintegrative influence upon individual participants, as evidenced by lessened subjugation to parental images and coincident liberation of inherent constructive and creative capacities. In my own therapeutic work with neurotic patients, I find the background of Burrow's inclusive behavior studies most valuable.^(36, 41, 42) However, the essential goal of the phylobiological studies continues to be the development of measures and concepts that will release healthy functions throughout the community by eliminating immature and destructive involvements in their individual and social expression.

It may be in order to add a few remarks regarding the response to the concepts and procedures introduced by Burrow, on the part of various established schools and systems of thought. The "breaking down and revamping of our up-to-the-now formulations",⁽²¹⁾ which is a prerequisite to real scientific pursuit, is especially difficult where these formulations are tied in with or are part of our socially validated self-structure. Although there has been a thorough revision of concepts during the last fifty years in other fields of science, notably in physics, in the field of human behavior we are confronted with an especially intricate situation. I know from my own experience as a participant in group analysis how intensely the socially patterned self tends to cling to its own systematization, to its prejudices and emotional defences. On a social scale these resistances are indeed formidable—in the writer, the reader and in the community generally. Perhaps the complexity of Burrow's style was also an expression of this same resistance—at least he himself thought so.⁽²⁵⁾ In any case there was lack of response on the part of Burrow's colleagues to the specific issues to which he drew attention on the frequent occasions when he presented his observations and concepts at psychiatric and psychoanalytic meetings. Freud, himself, in accordance with his high stature, acknowledged in a letter to Burrow⁽²⁵⁾ that his irritation with some of the latter's statements had led him to misinterpretation. Certain of Burrow's formulations reappeared later in the writings of others, but the specific problems toward which he directed his research efforts were largely disregarded. Several scholars have commented

on what have been called "conspiracies of silence"—an almost neurotic hesitation to acknowledge one's own involvement in man's behavioral predicament, and a failure to recognize the urgent need to approach it by consistent scientific methods.

It is true, we are faced with a seemingly insoluble dilemma. But while the individual investigator may feel that he can make hardly a dent in the vast problem of human discord, he can perhaps realize that he is part of a socio-biological process to which he may make a positive contribution. The generic conception of behavior disorder does not necessarily imply that we are dealing with unalterably set dynamic formations. Rather we may have reached a stage of development in which man, as individual and group, can take an active and constructive hand in guiding his own evolution.

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