

COMMENTS ON THE PSYCHOANALYTIC CURRICULUM

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From my experience as a teacher, a supervisor, an editor and a participant in various psychoanalytic panels, both as a discussant and as a presenter, I have reached certain impressions and conclusions about how psychoanalysis is taught. One of the reasons for the shortcomings in psycho-analytic education relates to historical developments. Psychoanalysis began as a movement clustered around an heroic figure and consolidated around a myth of struggling against hostile enemies. I have discussed some of the issues in several previous publications, notably, "Myth and Ritual in Psychoanalytic Education" (1969) and "Some Dilemmas of Psychoanalytic Education" (1972), other factors, the specific nature of the psychoanalytic experience, the master-apprentice relationship, serve to influence the philosophy behind the psychoanalytic curriculum.

Psychoanalysis should be taught as a natural science and not as a received tradition. The major portion of many psychoanalytic curricula consists of an historical reading and review of Freud's writings, sometimes beginning with preanalytic contributions, contributions that Freud often repudiated (e.g., "The Project"). In many places, it is possible for a beginning candidate to go through the entire first year having read no author other than Freud. We are, in fact, the only science that uses textbooks that are almost 100 years old. As a result, our candidates are indoctrinated with what psychoanalysis was and not what psychoanalysis is.

With these considerations in mind, I would propose the following approaches so that psychoanalysis can be taught as a natural science, divorced from the trappings of faith. It might be useful to use the analogy of medical school education. As the beginning medical student is introduced to the basic fundamentals of anatomy and physiology, so the beginning analytic candidate should be introduced to our current understanding of the nature, development and functioning of the human psyche. This means that, in the first year, emphasis should fall on the development of the mind. The concepts of determinism, dynamics, topography and the genetic principle and the pleasure principle serve as a conceptual background against which current knowledge of the development of the mind is explored. This would include fundamentals of child development, the evolution of the self and the object concept, the theory of drives, psychosexual development, the development of psychic structure in the course of the individual's life.

Parallel to this approach, which roughly corresponds to the "anatomy" aspect of the educational experience, should be a course in psychoanalytic theory and methodology. While the theory of drives has to be touched on in discussion of development, in this aspect of the experience the physiology of mental functioning should be explored. This should concentrate on the structure of the psychoanalytic situation and the nature of the psychoanalytic process. This course should be based primarily on demonstrations from actual sessions, with detailed process notes. Conflict and compromise formation and the nature of mental mechanisms, whether used for defense or other purposes should

be illustrated from real experience. The methodology of psychoanalysis would belong in this track. How does one reach conclusions? What is the nature of psychoanalytic evidence, the difference between an anamnesis and the conclusions one can draw from it and process material and the conclusions one can draw from that. This would be combined with the principles of psychoanalytic technique. Clinical presentations from process material should be used to illustrate the evidence for and the usefulness of the basic concepts of psychoanalysis, e.g., determinism, dynamics, drive, conflict, compromise formation, etc.

For the purpose of orienting the student to the analytic concepts and to enable him to appreciate Freud's writings in particular and the literature in general, there should be a third track for the first year -- the history of psychoanalytic concepts -- a rapid overall survey of development of Freud's concepts and later elaboration by other contributors up until the present time. In this track, emphasis should be placed on the observational considerations that led to changes in psychoanalytic theory and practice. The student should come away with an idea that certain things have indeed been discarded while other things remain valid up until the present time. He should also have some appreciation of why certain proposals for change, even though not yet accepted, are offered by what is called "deviant" approaches. The important overall principle guiding this first introduction to analysis and to the way analysis in general should be taught is to get away from the need for each individual in training to recapitulate the entire history of psychoanalysis, and also to have an objective understanding of the relationship between observational data (information derived within the psychoanalytic situation which is our laboratory instrument) and theoretical constructs. A specific objective would be to offset the tendency now widely used to impose comfortable and familiar paradigms on certain configurations of the clinical material, without regard for their dynamic setting.

This approach would suggest the omitting from the syllabus of many of the sacred cows of the psychoanalytic literature. Much of early Freud could be covered in summary fashion. I see no reason to include "The Project" in any syllabus. The "Studies in Hysteria" are interesting historical remnants. That work should not represent an introduction to psychoanalytic theory or practice, but that is how it is being used. The fact that there are germs in "The Project" and in Chapter 7 of "The Interpretation of Dreams" of ideas that Freud developed later does not justify spending a student's time by going into detailed analysis of them. All the papers about the actual neuroses and the contributions concerning pent-up libido being transformed into anxiety could be covered in summary fashion. "The Moses of Michelangelo" has no place in the syllabus. It is a bit of applied analysis which might be used in an elective dealing with that subject. The Schreber case is not a case; it is an exercise in analysis applied to an autobiographical book. Freud wrote that book before he had the dual instinct theory. Would anybody today try to explicate the phenomenology of schizophrenia or psychosis in general using only libido theory? These are the kinds of questions that we have to face up to. When we do so, we realize how much we are prisoners of tradition. What is required is a bold "fresh look at what we make our candidates read, especially in the first year.

The foregoing is intended as an overall approach to the philosophy of the curriculum. Exactly what would go into the syllabus of any particular course or track would depend upon the instructors. What I am trying to emphasize is that, as far as possible, instruction in theoretical concepts should be correlated with clinical data. Clinical conferences covering several sessions or weeks of a particular case and a continuous case seminar should be part of the experience of the student from the second year onward. The teaching of the standard nosological entities, i.e., hysteria, obsessive-compulsive neurosis, character disorders, perversions, depression, psychosis, should begin with contemporary views and be illustrated with clinical material, again process notes as opposed to histories. Dream interpretation, which should form part of the track on methodology, beginning in the first year, might constitute courses in the second and third years and be correlated with the teaching of nosological entities and discussed in the context of specific cases, rather than in the abstract.

There is much more which could be discussed on this topic, but I would leave that for some other time. I would say, however, that I consider the laborious dissection of Chapter 7 of "The Interpretation of Dreams" as counterproductive. Since the rest of the curriculum is or should be couched in terms of structural theory, Chapter 7 as such is unnecessary. The main ideas contained in it could be presented during the track on the development of psychoanalytic concepts.

I would like to emphasize that my approach is directed towards the general tenor of the psychoanalytic curriculum. The specific details, special types of courses, consideration of universal fantasies, applied psychoanalysis, all of these can be filled in according to the individual interests and qualifications of the members of the faculty. What I am trying to emphasize is the spirit rather than the precise content of the curriculum.

Bibliography:

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