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Musings on **'Psychoanalysis in Crisis: The Danger of Ideology' by Arnold D. Richards**

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Arnold D. Richards has been sounding the alarm for decades, warning that psychoanalysis is in crisis. His focus has not been on the superiority of psychoanalytic theory or therapy and all the unjust external assaults it suffers. No, his focus has been on internal threats, self-inflicted damage, and self-sabotage. He directs his attention to those that are excluded, the theories that are left out, and those who wield the power to decide what and who to leave out. He approaches the problem from several converging angles: the scientific status of psychoanalysis, the history of the psychoanalytic thought collective, and the problems of power in psychoanalytic organizations.

The Scientific Status of Psychoanalysis

Is psychoanalysis a science? Richards considers the different scientific models with which psychoanalysis might identify, points out the arguments of those that say it is a science and the arguments of those that lean more in the direction of psychoanalysis as an art, and notes, "I don't think this problem is going to be resolved anytime soon."

I think the reason this is such an important issue is that in modern society saying psychoanalysis is a science is like saying psychoanalysis is real. Nonetheless, I don't think psychoanalysis is a science in the way popular culture uses that term. Furthermore, in my clinical work, I've never felt the need to call myself a scientist. In both my theoretical and clinical work I feel far more comfortable aligning myself with what Freud called a "psychoanalytic mode of thought".

William I. Grossman (1998) wrote a compelling article looking at *Totem and Taboo* (1913) along with two clinical papers of Freud's written at the same time: *The Dynamics of Transference* (SE 12, 1912/1958) and *Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis* (SE 12, 1912/1958). He pointed out, "In the technical papers that appeared concurrently with his [Freud's] book, he applied to the clinical situation the ideas on transference, narcissism, primitive mental mechanisms, and unconscious communication that he had explored in *Totem and Taboo*" (Grossman, 1998, p. 469). He was addressing specifically the stratification of psychic material being subjected to rearrangement or retranscription. Grossman noted, "According to this principle, the processes of defense lead to compromise formations and the progressive build up of complexity" (p. 471). Grossman noted that for Freud, "the disposition to neurosis was the result of the variable interplay of constitution and experience. The outcome of this interaction in turn interacted with further experience to produce neurosis, a new structure" (pp. 471–72). And then Grossman quoted Freud: "The neuroses themselves have turned out to be attempts to find individual solutions for the problems of compensating for unsatisfied wishes, while the institutions seek to provide social solutions for these same problems" (1913/1955, SE 13, p. 186).

In 'The claims of psycho-analysis to scientific interest' Freud wrote, "...the psychoanalytic mode of thought acts like a new instrument of research" (Freud, SE 13, 1913, p. 185). Wouldn't we do better in affirming and elaborating our psychoanalytic mode of thought than arguing whether psychoanalysis is a science or not? I'm okay calling psychoanalysis an instrument of research but feel no need to defend psychoanalysis as a "science". The fact that science can be defined in so many inclusive and exclusive ways distracts us from the psychoanalytic mode of

thought and assures us that this problem is not, as Richards predicts, “going to be resolved anytime soon.”

Any scientist can create a scientific experiment to evaluate psychoanalytic principles, conduct scientific outcome research, or define psychoanalysis as a social science, a historical science, a hermeneutic science, or as Siegfried Bernfeld did, as a science of traces. But we have a much more positive, affirmative, and less defensive conversation when we speak of a psychoanalytic mode of thought in search of analogous relations between early childhood trauma and adult personality, metaphorical relations between dreams and one’s life story, “points of agreement” between individuals and cultures, the analysis of resistance in figures of speech, the analysis of transference in the structure of narrative, and so on.

Ideology in The Psychoanalytic Thought Collective

The history of the psychoanalytic thought collective is a history of identity formation through positive assertions of what is embraced and negative assertions of what is repudiated and excluded. Konrad Lorenz (1963) described the dance of the cranes, in which a crane engages in intense threat and attack behavior in front of, but not directed toward, a partner crane. Lorenz explained that this dance sends an easily understood message that the attack is not directed against his partner but away from him, implying a comradely defense:

“Now the crane turns again toward his friend and repeats this demonstration of his size and strength, only quickly to turn around once more and perform emphatically a fake attack on any substitute object, preferably a nearby crane which is not a friend, or even on a harmless goose or on a piece of wood or stone which he seizes with his beak and throws three or four times into the air. The whole procedure says as clearly as human words, “I am big and threatening, but not toward you—toward the other, the other, the other.”” (pp. 174–75)

We’re cranes. We form attachments to each other by attacking substitute objects. I’m with mother against father. I’m with father against mother. I’m with my group against the other group. In Freud’s *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (1914) he defined what psychoanalysis was and clarified the boundaries so clearly that the positions of the revisionists (Adler, Jung, etc.) also came into focus.

Freud wrote, “It may thus be said that the theory of psycho-analysis is an attempt to account for two striking and unexpected facts of observation which emerge whenever an attempt is made to trace the symptoms of a neurotic back to their sources in his past life: ***the facts of transference and of resistance***. Any line of investigation, which recognizes these two facts and takes them as the starting-point of its work has a right to call itself psycho-analysis, even though it arrives at results other than my own. But anyone who takes up other sides of the problem while avoiding these two hypotheses will hardly escape the charge of misappropriation of property by attempted impersonation, if he persists in calling himself a psycho-analyst.” (p. 16)

Flash forward to 2021 and we have people calling themselves psychoanalysts who openly and proudly repudiate the transference in favor of a supposedly real and authentic relationship. Some discount the fact of resistance as proof of a failed relationship. Others repudiate infantile sexuality, the Oedipus complex, the repetition compulsion, the role of metaphor in psychoanalytic therapy, and the interpretation of dreams. I honestly don’t know why anyone would want to call themselves a psychoanalyst if they repudiate the basic facts of observation in psychoanalysis.

Richards describes the history of the North American psychoanalytic thought collective in relation to the exclusion of non-medical analysts and the institutional power brokers who decide who will be certified and who will become training analysts. At the heart of his critique is 1) the question of valid qualifications for deciding who’s to be let in and 2) the results of the current system. The lack of valid qualifications for deciding who’s to be let in takes us right back to the scientific status of psychoanalysis because if there isn’t a scientific basis for certification or promotion to training analyst, upon what basis are those decisions made? Theoretical preferences?

Power relationships? Coercion? Conformity? And as for the results of the current system we have aging members, decreasing numbers of candidates, decreasing numbers of analysts, isolation from allied professions, and a skeptical public. That sounds like a crisis to me.

Problems of Power in Psychoanalytic Organizations

I am an outsider to the problems of power in psychoanalytic organizations as I am not an analyst (I'm a clinical psychologist), don't belong to a society, and never went to a psychoanalytic institute. So the only thing I can really comment on is based on my research into the early history of psychoanalysis in San Francisco where one of the major issues was whether to build (in 1942) a psychoanalytic institute oriented to a creative teaching and learning experience or a psychoanalytic institute oriented to the regulations of the APsaA. If it were to be a creative psychoanalytic institute the spirit of psychoanalysis would be sure to thrive but the long-term stability of the institution would be in question. If it were to be a psychoanalytic institute oriented to the rigid and exclusionary regulations of the APsaA, in 1942, it would be more likely to survive but the creative potential of teaching and learning would be in question (Benveniste, 2006, pp. 195-233). That, of course, is what makes psychoanalytic education one of the impossible professions.

The answer to the dilemma is not this way or that but rather a lively on-going debate for which Arnie Richards has provided much in the way of critiques for American psychoanalysis to consider.

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