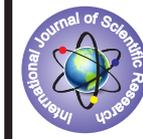


The Unconscious in Functional and Dysfunctional States



Clinical Science

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to give insight into the nature of the unconscious and to postulate that its dysfunction accounts (at least in part) through positive feedback mechanism for the necessity of psychotic patients to be on long term treatment. The paper also postulates that through negative feedback mechanisms, the unconscious maintains normal physiological functions. It is argued that if researchers show more interest in the study of the mind, our understanding of psychopathology will improve.

Introduction

When we contemplate issues and come up with ideas and solutions to problems, we always say the thought is our conscious thought. If there is a body of water close to us to which we have easy and unrestricted access to fetch water, we can equally claim ownership of the water. Our conscious ownership of any thought or ideas can be linked to our ownership of the river or ocean.

This ocean indeed is the unconscious. It contains all thoughts, images and solutions to human problems. Good and bad ideas, errors and all that we can ever imagine reside in the unconscious. We can do nothing about any idea or thought which emanates from the unconscious and reaches the conscious level. It cannot be changed the moment it reaches the conscious level. We may only approach the unconscious and select another thought or idea. We may select a combination of thoughts and ideas as there is no limit to the number of permutations and combinations of ideas in the unconscious.

The Unconscious is the source of all Inventions.

But a large part of materials of the unconscious are actually from physical and conscious sensation. This is the case; for even those materials in the unconscious which are not the products of current repression were actually conscious materials at sometime in our evolutionary journey in the past. What is conscious to us today will contribute to our unconscious in the future. Thus we can say that our conscious state represents the outward and visible manifestation of our inward and unconscious state.

In the same way the unconscious is the basis for every conscious activity such as painting, music, and interventions. Though there may be exceptions, one can say that whatever proceeds from the unconscious to the conscious translates to form or activity. What is it that determines the form or activity to be taken by any idea that proceeds from the unconscious and reaches the conscious state? We must not forget that everything is energy. The idea that issues from the unconscious is energy, and every unit or particle of energy will ultimately assume a form that is most consistent with its nature. It is like saying that if a small amount of water is poured on the floor of a room, the water will definitely gravitate to the most dependent part of the floor!

Implications for Psychiatry

In our management of patients with psychotic disorders we often encourage our patients to use their drugs for a long period of time. Why must patients use their drugs for a long period of time when neurotransmitter functions can be regulated within a fairly short period of time? It is easy to maintain that it is the nature of psychotic disorders to last for a long period of time. What is there in their nature to make them last for a long period of time?

My explanation is in the form of a hypothesis for which I have no empirical proof. The issue of how I came about it is not as important as the examination of the hypothesis itself.

I am of the opinion that every hypothesis should have sufficient intellectual appeal as well as a prospect for further examination and

exploration of the issue. At any rate, how do we learn if we do not free our mind and think across frontiers? The time has come to re-examine our ideas and if possible re-formulate our methods.

With the above background I now proceed to give my explanation as to why many psychotic disorders last for a long period of time. Maladaptive ideas and materials streaming from the unconscious, approaching the conscious level are held at the preconscious level. Being at the subjective or preconscious level, the individual is not in contact with objective reality and therefore behaves in a way that is unusual and abnormal. An unfortunate positive feedback mechanism is triggered off and more of the maladaptive ideas and materials are called forth from the unconscious. Treatment only gives symptom relief but has no effect on the established positive feedback mechanism; the cycle continues. I am not aware of any treatment method that is aimed at breaking this cycle. Thus, most of the time, the patients must be on drugs to maintain symptom relief.

I must add that I do not consider that this hypothesis can explain all cases in which psychotic patients need to be on long-term treatment. Psychotic disorders are so diverse and so complex that I do not think they can be explained by a single mechanism. I maintain that whatever number of mechanisms involved, the one advanced above is a prominent and very important one.

Homeostatic and Negative Feedback Mechanisms

Let us go further to explain the proposal that all our homeostatic and negative feedback mechanisms are part of the unconscious program. The fact that the normal heart rate remains within a certain range is not our conscious decision. Hunger drives us to eat and a sense of insecurity makes us leave a particular environment.¹

The circadian rhythm and other homeostatic mechanisms that regulate our sleep have their root in the unconscious. When we reproduce, we have only obeyed a command from the unconscious. The desire to live for a long time becomes a command to us to exercise our body and avoid certain food items.

In all that I have said, the role of biology remains relevant. In actual fact I have talked about the unconscious within a biological system.

Conclusion

The unconscious plays very important roles in the affairs of mankind. Studies of the human mind have regrettably suffered a significant neglect compared to studies in other areas of life.

Even if science is making great progress in the understanding of psychopathology, the progress will definitely be greater if more workers show interest in the study of the mind.

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Reference

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