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Affect logic

SIR: The current resurgence of interest in mental mechanisms and in unconscious mental processes is a healthy development in modern clinical psychiatry. It should help to redress the balance between the biological and psychological exploration of mental illness and to facilitate the correlation of psychopathology and the pathophysiology of the brain. Ciompi's erudite paper on affect and the psyche (*Journal*, July 1991, 159, 97–105) is a heartening addition to the literature.

The author proposes a possible basis for a new, inclusive, three-level, functional model of the psyche. Most psychiatrists would agree that human behaviour is produced by some underlying psychological structure. It is impossible, however, to infer the complete details of this mechanism and we must content ourselves with formulating more general hypotheses (Deutsch, 1962), and reconstructing the more important, albeit more abstract, design of the mechanism whose external behaviour we observe. Ciompi succeeds admirably in finding the middle road between the absurdities of the pseudo-psychologist and the sterility of positivism run wild.

I was disappointed with the discussion of developmental issues and their considerable influence on the functioning of the psyche. The inner life of the mind can only be understood as a development from something more primitive in every man's behaviour. The valuable contribution of psychodynamic theory received only scant recognition despite the fact that the author was stalking mutual hunting grounds (Gottschalk, 1990). Furthermore, little was said of the role of language in general. Human beings are from the beginning recognised as potential language-users, and as potential observers of social conventions which they will later learn to formulate. The conditions of application of the vocabulary of feelings to human beings are determined by the fact that two capacities – the capacity to control their inclinations, and the capacity to identify their inclinations, and their circumstances, in words – are gradually developed together (Clark & Clark, 1977).

Ciompi's 'new' psychosocial/biological model bears a striking resemblance to the ideas and theories

expounded by the 19th-century French psychiatrist Pierre Janet (1889) and the German psychiatrist Albert Eulenberg (1878). Janet was the first to systematically study dissociation as the crucial psychological process with which the organism reacts to overwhelming experiences and show that traumatic memories may be expressed as sensory perceptions, affect states, and behavioural re-enactments. Janet provided a broad framework that unifies into a larger perspective the various approaches to psychological functioning which have developed along independent lines in this century. Eulenberg believed that 'psychic shock', in the form of sudden vehement emotions such as terror or anger, could better be called psychic trauma. He regarded this 'sudden action of vehement emotions' as an actual molecular concussion of the brain, which he likened to the *commotio cerebri* postulated in physical trauma. Ciompi's formulation should be welcomed not as a new theory but as a rediscovery and improvement of these 19th-century contributions.

Finally, concerning the psychiatric applications of the proposed model, the author confines his discussion to possible uses in the psychoses. Potential applications in the study of the dissociation disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and personality disorders, especially borderline states, go unmentioned. Hopefully this will be addressed in future contributions!

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Exposure therapy for PTSD

SIR: Richards & Rose (*Journal*, June 1991, 158, 836–839) describe a treatment programme for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but use outcome measures for depression, phobic anxiety and social adjustment. This is clearly a problem in PTSD