LOS ANGELES PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIETY AND INSTITUTE

Thursday, June 20, 1968

Friends, Fellow Members, Honored Guests:

It is a pleasure to assume the presidency of our Society and Institute in a period of hard-won stability and effective functioning. We are grateful to the previous administration under the leadership of Dr. Maimon Leavitt which has brought our organization to its present state of maturity. We can now devote ourselves more fully to the scientific and educational potential of our group.

I would like to discuss with you some of the issues and problems that will face our Society and Institute in the coming year. These concern our relations with ourselves, our students, the Southern California psychoanalytic organization and our responsibilities as individuals and psychoanalysts in the community and the world.

We have gone through a period of enormous struggle which has had its destructive as well as many constructive aspects. I believe that out of this we have developed workable solutions to the problems of morale, identity and undergraduate education. These approaches which are embodied in our by-laws appear to be working and our very recent past history has demonstrated that by effort and enthusiasm we can work together, educate candidates and in general further the interests and scientific traditions of psychoanalysis.

It has been predicted by some that our current organizational approach will fail in the near future both on the Society-Institute level of providing a scientific meeting ground for our members and on the level of educating candidates. Some would say: "Well, let's wait and see; we can hope for the best, but if it doesn't work, we can always modify the philosophy and orientation."

I am not against modifications where they are indicated and our by-laws provide the mechanisms by which this can take place. On the other hand we should be quite aware of the nature of self-fulfilling prophecies. By waiting and seeing, by remaining on the side lines and by sitting on one's hands because of lethargy or passive-agressive attitudes or out of resentment over past injustices, fantasied or real; members who could be real contributors to our mutual welfare, can instead sap the strength and vitality from our organization and contribute to its failure.

I don't think this is going to happen! I believe that there will be continued growth of that spirit of enthusiasm and dedication to psychoanalysis which pervades our group and which led our society to seek the re-organization and to adopt the present by-laws.

It is not enough to wait and see whether the new philosophy and approach can work. What is necessary will be more of the same kind of effort that has been successful in the past year and a half with our first administration under the new by-laws-------- which was a determined effort to make the thing work, overcoming resistances to change and achieving a working through of our changes. Most impressive and meaningful for the future of our organization and psychoanalysis, locally, has been the determined effort of our members to value and respect each other scientifically and personally which is after all the counter-part of having a genuine respect for ourselves as individuals and as psychoanalysts.

The climate has become a good one for undergraduate, that is candidate education. The committees of the Faculty which are concerned with undergraduate education are functioning well and their work has been well co-ordinated by the co-ordinating council. Under the Director of Education and the Assistant Director the Faculty has taken an active interest in candidate education and has vigourously enunciated policies to guide the various Faculty Committees.

However, many of the appointed committees of the Society and Institute have functioned unevenly, some well but others need to be strengthened. Those challenges of the coming year concerned with education and with community action are of the highest priority. The committees concerned with these functions will be enlarged and perhaps have to function with active sub-committees. The responsibilities and work of these committees is so crucial to giving meaning to our group, I am thinking of appointing an Associate Chairman to each of these three committees. Responsibility must rest with the chairman, but he or she will need an enthusiastic and dependable right hand who will serve as the associate chairman.

Post graduate education should assume a high priority in our thinking. I am concerned with the paucity of continuing study groups among our graduates. Such groups in other psychoanalytic centers have proven to be a most productive avenue to therapeutic excellence as psychoanalysts, to scientific productivity and to the development of future generations of intellectual as well as political leaders in psychoanalysis.

Two types of such groups are needed. One type is the study group that exchanges intellectual ideas and reaches for new challenges within psychoanalysis. Another vital type of group is one that offers the opportunity to discuss clinical cases, day by day routine psychoanalytic work, problem cases and therapeutic failures. Theory and clinical orientation are intertwined--both groups are needed.

These clinical groups should be small; small enough that each participant will have a frequent opportunity to present his work to colleagues. It seems to me, only actually talking about our work in a candid fashion can we find out more of what psychoanalysis is really about and how it functions.

Those who wish to analyze candidates as well as all others should participate in clinical presentations.

The fostering, encouragement and facilitating the organization and good functioning of such groups will have to be a primary task of the Professional Education Committee-sometimes referred to as the Program Committee. All the other tasks of programming will require effort and planning but are of a routine nature. The job of facilitating the formation of study groups and helping them function well will not be simple nor routine but will take extraordinary effort and creativeness.

If there be concern that there will be too many scientific meetings let me assure you it seems likely there will be too many meetings for everyone to attend all of them. But isn't it desirable that there be available a forum for all sorts of psychoanalytic interests which cannot possibly be shared by all.

The trend to have many of our meetings jointly with the Southern California Group will continue. There has developed considerable good will between our organization and the two organizations which together form the Southern California Psychoanalytic Group - their Institute and Society. We have many psychoanalytic interests in common and much of the bitterness and controversy which once resulted in the schism of the nineteen fifties have now healed.

Within the two groups in Los Angeles, different and divergent interests have inevitably developed alongside our shared and mutual interest in classical psychoanalytic theory and technique. For example the Southern California Group has evolved a special interest in group and family therapies, psychoanalytically influenced and oriented, briefer psychotherapies, psychosomatic illness and social and community psychiatry.

Our Psychoanalytic Society has developed groups involved in research and treatment of psychoses and borderline states and we have also seen the development of another but related trend, that is an interest in the object relations theories of Klein and Fairburn. There has been much serious pre-occupation in our society in systematizing psychoanalytic theory and technique. Many of us have been involved in an attempt to deepen and broaden our understanding of the psychoanalytic process. In addition, our group has been in the forefront in the development of child psychoanalytic therapy and in the training of child psychoanalysts.

There are advantages and disadvantages for the existence of the two separate psychoanalytic groups. The advantages lie in the opportunity for a full and mature development of our unique interests so that we can find ourselves in the position where we can confront each other in mutually useful dialogues which can lead to cross fertilization of ideas and further growth.

The disadvantages of retaining two separate societies lie in the unnecessary duplication of energy and efforts. In an attempt to overcome such unnecessary duplication but in no way to interfere with each other's individuality, our respective organizations now have committees at work to explore possible areas of co-operation.

Will this or can this lead to eventual merging of our two groups. Only those who can read a crystal ball can tell. Certainly it is not possible nor desirable to go back to pre 1950's when the split occurred. It may be that in the intervening years we have grown in such divergent directions that a merging would not be useful. It may also be that we have developed such different philosophies of organization and education of candidates that although equally valid for the respective groups it does not provide enough of a meeting ground for merger.

At any rate I am pleased to report that our relationships are good!

Another question is one reflecting the internal relations within our group. During the past few years there has been a growing interest in the early childhood and object relations theories and techniques of Klein and Fairburn.

What place is there within our organization for these interests?

Formerly these approaches have been treated as controversial and deviant psychoanalytic theories alongside those theories of Horney, Rank, Adler, Jung and so forth. I believe this is no longer our attitude, especially since early childhood and object relations have become major considerations of the psychoanalytic body of knowledge. Those psychoanalysts influenced by Klein and Fairburn are prominent within official psychoanalysis throughout the world. Some of our own serious and respected members have focused their attentions on these points of view.

Well known representatives of these views from England came to visit us and recently Dr. Wilfred Bion, former president of the British Psychoanalytic Society has settled here.

All of this has attracted the attention of the psychoanalytic community. Dr. Charles Brenner, the recent Past President of the American Psychoanalytic Association devoted several minutes of the traditional Sunday morning address before the Plenary Session of the Boston Meeting to this developing interest in Los Angeles.

Dr. Brenner discussed the topic Psychoanalysis and Science and challenged some of the premises of Kleinian theory. I regard such a discourse as essentially constructive if it can be conducted on the proper level of a scientific discussion rather than glossing over the differences on the one hand or degenerating into polemics on the other.

I am not concerned over the development of different psychoanalytic points of view within our organization and regard it as an expression of healthy and constructive scientific interest--that which keeps psychoanalysis vital and fascinating.

However I would be seriously concerned if such developing interest resulted in schisms within our Society and Institute. I would be seriously concerned over tendencies on the part of those interested in new theories to segregate themselves off from the mainstream of psychoanalysis, from the mainstream of our Psychoanalytic Society and Institute. I would be equally concerned over efforts to sequester Kleinian and Fairburnian ideas and people interested in these ideas into a segregated container or into a new organization outside of the main body of our group. I believe this unfortunate possibility would result in a loss to all concerned. It would foster cultism and dogmatism on the one hand and sterility on the other. Growth depends on open and mutual interchange of all relevant psychoanalytic and related ideas.

I will close with just a few words from a colleague of ours:

"Each crisis in our growth and development brings with it new drives and new anxieties, new possibilities for development, and new limitations, new achievements, and new frustrations. The fact that the human ego must derive its strength from the dependencies of a long step-by-step progress through childhood determines the form of its learning and the necessity of its being anchored in a tradition."

We have our tradition and have had our crises and now we must try for new growth and achievement.

Norman B. Atkins, M.D.
President

NBA:tf