

Dr. Bion: It's rather difficult to continue from the point where the legend finished and it's very interesting to hear the legend and at the same time to know far too much about what one is really like and what it is like to be one's self. Now, the first thing that I would like to say is that I think that I must be almost the only one participating in this series of lectures who is not a Kleinian. Now, that may seem a bit odd when I go on and tell you that, in fact, I went to Mrs. Klein for analysis but Mrs. Klein did not like being labeled a Kleinian. She strongly objected to it and she said that she was just a psychoanalyst. Not knowing very much about it, it did however, seem to me, more and more as I had this experience of analysis with her, that I got the idea of what she was talking about when she said that she was a psychoanalyst. Although the term itself is virtually meaningless its a very convenient for talking about psychoanalysis but what psychoanalysis itself is is an experience of another matter. However, there are plenty of people nowadays who are Kleinian and who have had a Kleinian analysis and are able to say something about that experience and what it feels like. What I want to do is to discuss for the short time that we've got here, this matter of observation. Now, there is no mystery about this. The scientists have always attached a very great importance to observation. Well, physically this is very comprehensible. If somebody says that they've got a pain you can say, well, where does it hurt. Then you can go on from there. You can palpate them, look at

them through ophthalmoscopes and so forth, take blood pressure, not needing to bother with all that because I think if you're quite familiar with it.

What did talk about
observation when Freud speaks of psychoanalysis as being the scientific approach. He does talk, of course, with great admiration, of Shako and of Shako's statement about going on watching to what is obscure begins to show itself as a pattern. I think that that itself gives a clue to the fact that Freud did, indeed, observe the human mind. The problem though, is not what it looked like and if he strayed off and difficulties that could apply both to what's it look like...these are words which are borrowed from the ordinary language in which one's talking about the physical appearance of something. What is the physical appearance of a mind? I think that... well, supposing you walk your dog, the dog behaves in a peculiar way and oftentime I think that you begin to feel that it's fair to say that the dog thinks or has a mind. Anyway, on the somewhat insecure foundation you have to erect a scientific structure. I think it is very difficult to know whatever reply to make if anybody challenges you to say on what grounds you call your observations as being scientific observations of the mind. Now, at this point, I have to fall back on how things appear to me. Whether it will be of any use to you or not, I don't know. But at any rate, what I am trying to consider now is the order in which events appear to me. Of course, some of it is fairly simple. I'd say that one could see a patient who comes to see one and one can observe the physical features and so forth so

you can give something of a description, a verbal description of what you see. But, as you do not know the patient, or the who comes to you, a person who comes to you for help, you're up against this problem of "What is this?" What is this person who has come to see me? Or come to seek your aid or help? Now, to some extent one can simplify this by saying, well the one is a psychoanalyst and one is concerned with the mind or character or personality of the person. But what does the character of a person look like? Now, here borrowing from from what I understand of Kant, I would say that the first thing is an imaginative conjecture. Did you imagine who or what this personality is? I think that if you, while you continue to watch, or observe as best you can, you might reach to what I would call a rational conjecture, which I think makes a slight difference in what I am talking about. Now, I don't think that conjectures of that nature would be accepted as being evidence of anything. So you're in a very vulnerable position when you are wondering who or what this is that has come to see you. If you have to fall back on imaginative conjectures or even rational conjectures, if you think they're rational. The situation gets more complicated when the analyst says that he had a dream. I can make four conjectures about what he means about that but I also doubt about his statement because it usually turns out that he means that he went to sleep and he had a dream. I don't know what ground he categorizes a dream or what validity to attach to a story about these events which, I gather, took place the previous night or whenever it was, whenever he said it was. But when he was

in an entirely different state of mind. This story that I'm told that they had a dream is when he is wide awake. Now, this is typical. What seems to me to be a description of mental debris. Goodness knows what it's all about, I don't. But I can see that it's possible that when he is awake there is some debris left over of the experience, whatever it was, when he was asleep. Now, again, one has to look at this.. these remnants, his vestiges, his leftovers from a quite different state of mind, because ... supported by Freud's original ideas, dreams are worthy of attention, so I don't think that you can deal with that simply by say, oh well, you dreamt it. Period. Finish. Obviously one has to go further than that. If it seems to be the case that there is some validity in this idea that vestiges of something important, something valuable in this material. So as the patient goes on telling you that he had a dream or he had a most unpleasant experience or that he's just seen some most unpleasant accident in the roads, I think one needs to sift it, needs to look at it in order to preserve both elements in it which might be of value. I don't know quite why one should think that they might be of value excepting the fact that dreams seem to mean excited their curiosity of human beings for us relatively long time. You may even see a dog behaving as if he were dreaming, as if he were...his feet work, it looks as if he's running or he's yelping. So, one again has this kind of conjecture in which one imagines that the animal is dreaming. However, Freud seems to stress the importance of looking at these dreams and interpreting them. They've also got a long history. Even in Genesis you get these demands for

the interpretation of the dream of the lean kind and so forth. So that too has got a long history. One could think that the curiosity about the dream, so-called, also seems to be pretty well established in us. However, sometimes you get a person who behaves in a way which I could call was a dream if only he was asleep, but he isn't. So one of the conditions which I think are necessary before one can say somebody is dreaming, isn't there. But, then again, you know, names are attached to these things like delusions, hallucinations and so forth. And it is supposed that a psychiatrist can take a scientific view and come to conclusions about whether the patient is hallucinated or deluded...well, what's the difference in being deluded and simply being mistaken? I don't know, but what I want to draw attention to here is the question, because perhaps somebody could make an approach towards helping us to know how to discriminate. Anyway, to save time we will just fall back on the languages that exist and on terms like delusions, dreams, hallucinations and so forth. Making any use that we can of the existing language. Even psychoanalytic language, psychoanalytic terms like amnesia and so on. But, I think Freud describes the family here as something that you can use to fill in a space which is a blank because you can't remember. It takes the place of the vacant or the missing idea. Right. But now again, how do you tell the difference between the vast structure of the series of psychoanalysis and of amnesia. It's certainly true of the space. It's certainly true of mental space. And nowadays we are able to talk using these theoretical terms so one can go on elaborating this structure. I

think Freud describes it as a ... no, I think that Kant described it as an architectonic, a structure of the human mind. I think it is very convenient indeed if one could have some idea of what that structure is. You see, it's obviously a great advantage that books, very well illustrated books, of anatomy exist. Now these are pictures, they aren't of any particular anatomy but they enable you to have an idea about things which seem which not to fit in with that structure. If we knew what a mind was then we could say that you hear it working, apparently, betraying itself by talk, behavior and so on in front of you. There is something a bit odd about what I can observe here. There is something which seems to me to depart from the structure of the mind as I understand it.

To come back to the practice again of analysis, as I experience it, listen to what I'm told and going on the basis that the conversational behavior which I can observe, it seems to me to betray something. It's like the I made about the dog that appears to be chasing a rabbit or something when it's asleep. There is something about the behavior which may be very difficult to describe and yet, you can feel that there is something odd about the behavior. That it doesn't fit in quite with what you'd expect of a human mind or personality. Now, I said this is very difficult to describe, now I'm talking, of course, the verbal formulation of it. That depends a great deal on the fact that even when I'm talking what I consider to be the language that I know best, I don't find it easy to do it at all. It comes worse still if I would like to talk to somebody else about it, like

talking to you about it here. One of the clues that I collect or have collected, is associated with what for want of a better word I have to call beauty. So if I might be able to convey what I want to convey to you, if I could do it in the kind of way that artists seem to be able to do things. I'm afraid we're going to be limited to verbal communication, which is usually the case, and ... how are you going to be or how are you going to command artistic ability to express yourself? Shakespeare seems to be able to write case histories but they'r still interesting to read. And although its quite a bit more complicated now, because you have to employ people like actors and actresses who know how to read Shakespeare or how to perform Shakespeare in such a way that it could come over to us what it was that he was talking about. I don't think anybody is going to read my scientific papers. I don't think there is the slightest chance that I would ever write a scientific paper because sufficient artistic merit is needed to get more than a passing glance from anybody. But this problem belongs to all of us if we want to communicate what it is that we see or hear.

is another difficulty. Because, as well as having something to convey, something to which one wants to draw attention, you have to have somebody who will listen to what you say. There's got to be somebody who hears it. Now the person who hears it can interpret what they hear. I won't bother you with the many diagnosis that I've heard of my own character or personality. I'm quite familiar with being told that I'm just crazy or nuts and so forth but so far I've escaped, as it were, being incarcerated

in a mental hospital. Partly because I'm lucky enough to be involved in cultures in which that isn't done but also we all know in Soviet Russia that it is. So that state of mind, whatever it is, certainly seems to exist and makes it dangerous therefore, to be in this vulnerable position

All you can fall back on is imaginative or rational conjectures about what you see or hear. In that state of affairs, I don't think its possible to say that you know something. I think that you might go so far as to say that it's probable. Mathematicians have even tried to elaborate theories of probability. The trouble, of course, with that method of communication that it takes a long training or experience to be able to understand the art of mathematics. However, it's awkward if you feel that there is such a thing as mathematics. The people have manipulated numbers in all kinds of ways. In fact, ancient hebrew literature is full of examples of it, of the actual use of numbers in a way which we are not familiar today. Similarly, an outstanding person like Euclid produces geometry which seems to be pretty satisfactory for a few hundred years. But gradually it becomes clear that it is inadequate. It breaks down over matters like parallel lines and then you have to wait in the hopes that somebody will turn up as like who breaks through with his coordinates which

makes it possible to make further advances. Now, this doesn't mean that that mathematics didn't exist. It did, but it was

implicit before somebody came along who could make it explicit. Now, our problem is how to make it possible for somebody to come along who may understand what it is that we are trying to say. It's curious that so much depends on a collection of people that the individual contribution is so

trifling. The individual is so short lived, is so efemoral. It is most unlikely that he can solve a problem but only that he might be able to take it on from where got to. Now, all this has become recently much more pressing. When I say recently, I mean within two or three hundred years. Because it seems pretty clear that there is a mind and that it has got something to do with thinking.

Bion - Problems of Observation in Therapy
Side 2

I think that the philosophers, so called, have appreciated this point for a long time and have attempted to think clearly themselves and even to persuade others to do likewise.

However, there are other discoveries as well and one of them could be said to be the discovery and practice of violence. Now, the use of violence can be to provoke and evoke very powerful feelings. And it is very difficult to think clearly when your powerful emotions have been stirred up. Now, in the extreme positions, I think everybody is familiar with it, you don't really think clearly when you are in fear for your life. So from this point of view there seems to be a tremendous advantage in being able to be a terrorist. You can put a stop to people who want to think or debate or discuss. But I think that arousing particularly powerful feelings of fear to overwhelm the capacity for thinking clearly. Now, militarily this kind of thing is dealt with by what we call discipline. People are drilled, and drilled and drilled so that they have a kind of automatic response which enables them to tolerate or be unaware of the dangerous situation. But when it should happen then with regard to this imaginative conjecture because that seems to me to lay the gate wide open for absolutely undisciplined thinking. And this is what I think that any really practiced scientist would bring up against the attempt of psychoanalysts and psychoanalysis to be scientific. So I think that you do have to have some capacity for withstanding that pressure. It isn't, I think, peculiar simply to psychoanalysis. I

I remember a play of Emery Williams (?), more of an auto-biography really but in which the Welsh miner is seduced by a young woman. Now the actor who played the part of the seducer was very highly, technically qualified, very capable. I think technically qualified. Now in London, no particular difficulty was caused but when this play was transferred to Wales and the hero is the Welsh boy who is being seduced, there the feelings that were stirred up by that presentation were quite unmistakable. So much so that the protection which is afforded by the stage, or being on the stage, seemed to be somewhat flimsy. However, that particular actress was, I think, a real actress and did not depart at all from the hideous caper which she was portraying. When that part was taken as it had to be once or twice, or on one or two occasions, by an understudy the understudy was also a very capable actress. Very technically equipped. Now when the audience rose against her she flinched and that seems to me to illustrate the difference between technical equipment and something else. I don't know how one would describe this something else, but it is absolutely unmistakable.

When I knew, in the sense of having the full, close contact you have when you're being analyzed by Melanie Klein, it seemed to me that she did not flinch. She gave a very provocative and evocative interpretation. I can't say I like them much myself but I grew to admire after I'd finished my analysis, the way in which she stood up to it. I wonder whether...it's strange she doesn't describe some time when he talks about Freud's discussions with Herr Steckel and Jung when they decided that

was entitled to use the term psychoanalysis. That he was the person who was most entitled to use it. Because describes a situation in which he thinks that Freud began to show signs of the rare with these...of the constancy of these attacks. I think that by that time Freud was already even physically ill. But one can see that it can be very difficult to withstand that sort of attack. These continued attacks... I've had to put the problem to, perhaps rather more simply, by taking something more extreme. What are you to do if as people engaged in this kind of work, one wants to stick to discussions within the limits of fairly ordinary, civilized behavior. Ordinarily politeness and so on. It seems hard to believe that the attempt to behave in a civilized manner is going to stand up against barbarism. I've had a little dose of this kind of thing in war in which it is very, very difficult to go on thinking clearly in a situation in which you feel that next moment will probably be your last. I don't know how clear the situation is today with regard to this attempt to discuss these mental difficulties. These difficulties, the suffering of the person. As likely as not, even your patient is liable to make you forget that in fact, you're dealing with a suffering person who wants help. So while in theory one can go on giving one's interpretations, in practice, I'm not so sure. Certainly not in my practice, anyway. I find that the emotional situation is a very powerful one. It's misleading because in an office one is usually pretty comfortable. Circumstances are quite simple and there is nothing particularly alarming or unpleasant about it. But if you are sensitive to these

peculiar things, I don't know what you'd call them, these mental phenomena, then you feel the pressure all the time on you to depart from the limitations of civilized or polite behavior. In other words, putting it in rather extreme language, the civilized person is under pressure to become uncivilized. Now, that strikes a curious reminiscence in my mind of the remains of, the vestiges of biochemistry which I'm supposed to have learned. About adrenalin and the adrenals and so forth. What has that got to do with the mind anyway? So one's narrowed down the view in which one likes to think one is only concerned with the mind, none of this stuff, biochemistry and the rest of it. Yes, but that can be all right in a kind of theoretical, mental construct which is quite convenient to put things in packets in the kind of way that one does when one talks about fear or sex or love or hate, but in reality it isn't like that at all. In reality, although it may be just an ordinary conversation that you're having, your adrenals may be working overtime and you can have pretty considerable pressure from within either to fight the person or the state of affairs that you find yourself in or you run away from it. I think that if you are a practicing analyst, especially in your more vulnerable and inexperienced years, you can feel that the pressure on you is sufficiently great to make you want to leave the room. Fortunately, of course, there is a plentiful supply of rational explanation for that. You can say you want to go to the loo and so forth. So you can use quite convincing, you hope, statements to explain your departure from the room. Unfortunately, since one is dealing with a human being, and

as indeed, I think there is very little evidence indeed which suggests that the sort of people who come to us for help are stupid. It is very unlikely that they would be deceived by that subterfuge and indeed, isn't at all good for them anyway. If they are able to be deceived by that substitute, theoretically as I understand it, we are supposed to have the aim of truce so these lies and deceptions and subterfuges and so forth are not really available to the person who aspires to be helpful. Doctor or psychoanalyst.

I wonder what it is that makes an analyst an analyst, a good analyst. What makes a actress a good actress? Certainly not technical ability. It happens to be quite a serious matter because you know the language of psychoanalysis can be very easily acquired technically. I remember the time when one heard these phrases. you know, had the rather sound, like father figures and so on and so forth, which became almost part of the jargon of the time. And that kind of thing is what helps, what contributes to psychoanalysis being very rapidly in danger of extinction. Extinction by the mere fact of its being so easy to appear to be a good analyst by virtue of having all the cliques and so forth at your disposal.

simply dependent on some kind of series of happy accidents or is there any way in which one could cultivate or foster the qualities which could lead to somebody being a real analyst or a real mathematician or a real painter or a real musician and not simply an artificial representation of an analyst. An artificial representation of an actor. The difficulties are that these artificial

respect. And how much can he rely upon whatever it is that enables him to feel that he is on the right track or off it.

All that, of course, involves being aware of yourself. And for some reason it does seem as if the awareness needs to be formulated by such means as are at your disposal. Musical composition, mathematical composition, painting or even verbal. So when it comes to the question of verbal formulation we're having to fall back on a relatively recently acquired capacity. I don't know how, what sort of a date could be ascribed to the capacity for thinking and also for verbal formulation. But certainly its quite a recent acquisition. Now there again, as you will have further problems, according to Mendel certain characteristics are transmittable by generation. It used to at one time to be thought that this didn't apply to acquired characteristics. But I'm not so sure about that. It seems to me that acquired characteristics are transmittable.

Speaker: At this point we'll interrupt so that you'll have a chance to use whatever rooms that you need and return in about 10 minutes...to try and accomodate as many questions as possible we'll go along...I have one written question here and Jim has another and then we'll be open to questions by hand and I'll respond to those. This is a question to Dr. Bion and the person asking the question says, "Did I understand you to say the patient knows when he has the right helper?' How about people who repeatedly connect with wrong helpers, who seem to repeat the experience that patient originally had with a parent who was not a good enough mother who was thought to be so. These people stick with the bad therapist and can't connect with the healthy, nourishing ones. I would appreciate a

comment."

Dr. Bion: There seem to be two or three points which are involved with this. Now, one of them depends on the patient, who the patient is. Now that, as you can see, is a difficult business to...you can take...acquire some time, analysis and more than that to get anywhere near knowing who the patient is, but the point is when we're aware they're not a point of evidence which would lead you to feel the direction in which the patient was traveling. Now, when the patient gives you an indication that they are able to chose the wrong person, one question that arises is, what is the driving force behind that? The other point could be though, that you can see that the patient doesn't really mean to chose the wrong person, they really aren't very good, apparently, at choosing the right one. Now, I would like to draw attention to one of the difficulties it seems to me to crop up in thinking about this kind of thing. It's so very often spoken of that a patient is idealizing somebody. Yes, but there must be something behind that if the patient is idealizing somebody. Something like a realization that there is something better than real people and the need for having a contact with something better than the patient's experience with real people can make the patient idealizing the analyst. Can make him make the best of a bad job by, although he feels that the analyst is, well, like anybody else, or worse. Nevertheless, his craving to believe in something good would lead him to persist in the belief that the analyst and psychoanalysis are something good. You have to make allowances for that peculiar slant. And, indeed, one of the points is the analyst's need to get a, what I call

a vortex, a point of view, from which you can see something that you can't see from a more ordinary vortex or position of seeing. It requires a certain degree of effectibility or mental mobility by which you can change from one position where you can't see anything to another one in which that gets clearer.

Speaker: There is another written question about the... how to account for the transmission of acquired characteristics genetically. One of the last statements Dr. Bion referred to in his discussion.

Dr. Bion: The question is can one answer that problem within that frame of reference of how can you experience genetically. I don't know that it can be experienced genetically because the theory that I am more familiar with is the Mendelian theory which seems to be varied over quite a large area of phenomena but on this one. In fact, I think its got to be a change of ideas about what is transmittable. Because the theory of Mendelian inheritance isn't wide enough. I don't think it is adequately experienced. In much the same sort of way that geometry turns out not to be in a position to explain certain phenomena which are apparent as we through the parallel lines that I mentioned. So I think that either we'll have to know a great deal more about the nature of genetic inheritance or one has to revise one's views of what constitutes genetic inheritance, or genetic transmission.