

## IMPOSSIBLE PROFESSION

by Robert Marchesani

Last December, analysts from around the world and throughout the United States came together in a historic conference, *The Future of Psychoanalytic Education*, held at the Lycee Francais in New York City. For the epigraph of chapter four, "Central Functions in Psychoanalytic Training" in his book *Hate and Love in Psychoanalytic Institutions*, keynote speaker Jurgen Reeder chose Freud's statement about psychoanalysis and the impossible professions: "It almost looks as if psychoanalysis were the third of those 'impossible professions' in which one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying results. The other two, which have been known much longer, are education and government." (Freud, 1937.)

There was no law governing psychoanalysis and the education of its candidates in Freud's day as there is today. The fact that education and government survive as impossible professions may give us hope (and some company), as well as a pang of despair, as we settle into this reality. Now, government is involved with psychoanalysis and its education. How does our profession tolerate unsatisfying results especially if we know this beforehand? How does education? How does government?

\*In his address "Ethos and Care: Themes for Reflection Upon the Future of Psychoanalytic Education," Reeder spoke about a need for change, for renewed self-reflection, and about professions as vocations or callings, "a good associated with a spirit of equity, honesty, altruism, and care." At the heart of his address is the spirit of psychoanalysis, which has survived cultural as well as professional differences and complaints. So have government and education! Addressing the controversial distinction between psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy, Reeder noted, "As things look today, psychoanalysts spend most of their time seeing clients one or two sessions per week. Psychoanalysis four to five times a week – or what is usually referred to as standard or 'full' psychoanalysis – has become considerably [rarer]. "Yet there are institutes that uphold the minimum of four-weekly sessions, at least for training. For some, one session per week can hardly contain all of the dreams, reflections, experiences, and questions - in short, the need to talk in 45-50 minutes once every seven days. For others, 45-50 minutes once a week is all the contact, both with the analyst and with their unconscious, they can tolerate. The decision is also said to be determined by finances and time.

Reeder recognized the importance of the spirit in which psychoanalysis is conducted, moving away from such concrete notions of time as constituting the frequency of sessions. Rather, he advocated for what might be called the frequency of the session itself. "The psychoanalytic ethos is a vital aspect of our work, whether we see our clients one time or five times a week. Therefore, as long as clinical practice is guided by psychoanalytic understanding, psychoanalytic theory, and psychoanalytic values, I regard it as 'psychoanalytical.'" "The very use of the term 'psychoanalytic psychotherapy' suggests that psychoanalysis is a form of psychotherapy. Freud himself writes about 'psychoanalytic therapy' in his paper *On Psychotherapy* (1904). If psychoanalysis is not therapeutic to the psyche in the broadest sense, what is it?

Responding to the debate that ensued during a discussion about frequency of sessions, Pamela Armstrong-Manchester read the following from Freud regarding transference and resistance: "Any line of investigation which recognizes these two facts and takes them as the

starting point of its work has the right to call itself psychoanalysis, even though it arrives at results different from my own (On The History Of The Psychoanalytic Movement, 1914). Reeder spoke of the psychoanalyst as the "keeper of the setting" which Jennifer Harper, president-elect of NAA, addressed in her response: "The psychoanalytic task that I believe is worthy of our collective focus is that we are keepers: of silence and relatedness. This is badly needed space in the world in which we live." Harper elaborated: "Where we are and where to go from here has far-reaching implications for the evolution of our profession and for how we offer the particular spaces that we keep, for intimate self/other reflection. Currently, there is little that compares with psychoanalysis in its unique formula for cultivating silence and relatedness."

And it might be relatedness which speaks to the importance of the subtitle of the conference, Together Everyone Achieves More (TEAM). Not only was it a plea for a collaboration of the otherwise separate and separated schools of psychoanalytic thought and their associations, professional and otherwise, it was also a plea for a reason to consider psychoanalysis itself as a joint venture, a collaboration where two may create more than one could without the Other. But where there is collaboration there is conflict, which Reeder sets up in the title of his book, Hate and Love in Psychoanalytic Institutions. "Why did you put hate first?" I asked Reeder after his keynote address. Reeder paused, smiled, and said, "Because there's more hate than love." He then added a second thought, "I think it may have had more to do with marketing." If so, does hate sell more than love these days? There was a time when love sold more: consider psychoanalyst Eric Fromm and his international bestseller *The Art of Loving* (1956). If the opposite of love is indifference, not hate, there is certainly room for both on the same page.

In his book, Reeder writes, "Hate is, of course, a close neighbor of love, and they demonstrate some similarities, both surprising and terrifying. Freud said of love's instinctual energy that it is afflicted with a degree of 'adhesiveness,' making it reluctant to let go of objects once chosen. Even though the fact was never pointed out by Freud, the same seemingly applies to hate, which will frequently evolve into an ardent passion, a symptomatic madness that tends to bind the subject in a common fate with a fellow human being or sometimes a social institution or even an idea." In his address about the personal relevance of metapsychological reflection, Reeder clarified his conviction that "philosophy is one of the very best discussion partners for psychoanalysis to get involved with." It may come as no surprise, then, that the first psychoanalytic studies degree program in a U.S. university was housed in the department of philosophy at the New School for Social Research, under the leadership of Richard J. Bernstein, author of *Freud and the Legacy of Moses*, who taught Freud and the philosophers with as much passion as respect for both. Reeder proposed that psychoanalysis be considered a craft and not a form of applied science. "A highly sophisticated craft, at that," he added, "with an accompanying discipline that can stand up to comparison with some of the highest achievements when it comes to interpreting and understanding the human condition."

Furthermore, he called for more vigilance in recruiting students with a scholarly attitude, "beside a knack for the clinical craft" of psychoanalysis in our institutes. And this particular craft, Reeder noted, is a method that is "carefully designed to help people whose inner conflicts hinder them from leading a good life. The discipline is a form of contemplation necessary for the method in the craft to function properly and to develop. In addition to that, we can confidently assert that the psychoanalytic experience is a valuable gift to our culture." Even in its impossibility, the

value of psychoanalysis, like education and even government, may best be understood if we consider the words of the animated cartoon film pioneer, Walt Disney: "It's kind of fun to do the impossible."

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