

FOREWORD

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The relevance of an American edition of Dr. Douglas Kirsner's book cannot be exaggerated. It is a fundamental contribution to the concerns of the North American psychoanalytic community with the present challenges to psychoanalysis in our culture. Severe problems face psychoanalysis: the increasing questioning of the effectiveness of psychoanalysis in the scientific and cultural environment; the decrease of psychoanalytic patients in the practice of psychoanalysts; the weakened relations between psychoanalysis and departments of psychiatry and clinical psychology; and the corresponding shift in the proportion of psychoanalytic candidates from doctorate to non-doctorate professional backgrounds. In recent years, numerous studies have drawn attention to this situation, and a major developing focus has been on the quality of the educational structure of psychoanalytic institutes, their chronic problem with intellectual isolation, their perceived elitism and arrogance, autocratic quality, and dogmatized teaching.

This is not an exclusive problem of North American psychoanalysis: similar concerns have been expressed by authors in Germany, Brazil, Mexico, the Scandinavian countries, and others. There has been a gradually evolving agreement within the psychoanalytic community that it needs to address its cultural and social environment. Both at the level of the International Psychoanalytical Association and of the American Psychoanalytic Association, important efforts have been carried out to address the problem of public relations, clarify misunderstandings regarding psychoanalytic treatment, and connect or reconnect with university settings wherever feasible; in short, a concerted effort to improve the position of psychoanalysis in the social and cultural realm. At the same time, however, there has been an uneasy feeling that psychoanalysis is not dealing adequately with scientific challenges, particularly those posed by the development of psychopharmacology and of cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy. These concerns, in turn, have reinforced the question about the dysfunctionality of the analytic educational system.

What Dr. Kirsner brings to these concerns is a unique, detailed sociological exploration of the intimate structure of several leading

North American psychoanalytic institutes. In contrast to many authors describing their personal experiences in psychoanalytic institutes and deriving generalized statements about psychoanalytic education from those experiences, Dr. Kirsner provides a detailed description, based on over 150 personal interviews, of psycho-social developments in the New York Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute and Society, the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute and Society, and the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute and Society, elaborating general conclusions on the basis of similarities and differences among these institutions. His observations regarding the generally stultifying educational atmosphere, the divisions between leading subgroups often linked to charismatic personalities, the idealization of a particular local approach in contrast to that of other psychoanalytic centers, and the dysfunctional exercise of power on the part of the group of training analysts emerged as common features in all those institutes.

In all fairness, Dr. Kirsner points out how the recognition of these problems has led to efforts to improve the system, a tendency to soften the elitist atmosphere, reduce the politically influenced selection of training analysts, increase the participation in the educational process of faculty at large, and how the dynamic between conservative and progressive forces is slowly operating toward change. The basic structure of the educational program centered on the training analysis system, however, has remained relatively unchanged. In the epilogue of this edition, Dr. Kirsner has spelled out some of those changes, and, even more importantly, the parallel struggle occurring at the level of the American Psychoanalytic Association between the organizationally representative body, the Executive Council, and the Board of Professional Standards. He points to the effort to reform this bi-cameral system of governance in the present struggle for increasing the authority of psychoanalytic institutes—in contrast to the Board of Professional Standards to appoint training analysts.

Again, the importance of this volume resides in the provision of detailed information regarding the dysfunctional consequences of the present educational system that militates against the development not only of the psychoanalytic profession, but also of the scientific and cultural impact of psychoanalysis. The enormous potential power of psychoanalytic theory to contribute to the understanding of complex social phenomena, in addition to all the presently known clinical applications of modified forms of the standard psychoanalytic technique,

all are neglected. Only the standard technique that is indicated and feasible for a minority of patients remains the focus of the training. Thus, psychoanalysts are being trained to employ a technique that, in practice, will apply only to a minority of patients, and not for wider applications of the psychoanalytic method to a broad spectrum of patients. The isolated nature of psychoanalytic education prevents it from intimate contacts with related boundary sciences, limits the expansion of psychoanalytic knowledge, and contributes to the external questioning of the profession.