

Presentation at the 14<sup>th</sup> Hellenic Psychoanalytical Society Conference

Topic: “Does Psychoanalysis Cure?”

The question posed by the 14<sup>th</sup> Hellenic Psychoanalytical Society Conference is a challenge for psychoanalysts. It reminds them of the intrinsic requirement of their field of study to subject their hypotheses to constant scrutiny and to try to bridge the necessary theoretical pluralism while risking theoretical fragmentation and the resulting confusion.

Psychoanalysis is a theory of the psyche and a method of treatment established by Freud to treat hysteria. Throughout its relatively short history, psychoanalysis has met with a host of theoretical positions regarding its therapeutic action. This polyphony is the result of the different ways in which various psychoanalytic schools of thought attempt to answer questions such as whether psychoanalysis is a science or an interpretive art, the nature of the structure and function of the psychic apparatus, what the goals of psychoanalysis are, and what the appropriate technique is in the field of its clinical applications.

Freud did not doubt the therapeutic efficacy of psychoanalysis:

*“If it was without therapeutic value it would not have been discovered and would not have gone on developing”* (Freud, 1933). But he warned psychoanalysts that the removal of the symptoms is not a specific, but is achieved, as it were, as a by-product (Freud, 1922). His clinical failures led him to systematically revise his views on the structure and function of the psychic apparatus and how treatment outcome is achieved.

Freud’s pre-psychoanalytic period was characterized by the use of hypnosis and suggestion as therapeutic agents for the treatment of hysteria. The introduction of the topographical model of the psyche indicated the critical importance of the interpretation of transference as a tool for overcoming resistances, lifting repression and gaining insight. After his presentation of the structural model of the psyche in 1920, Freud enriched the method for gaining insight through the use of constructions and set the strengthening of the Ego and increased impulse control as a therapeutic goal.

Subsequent theorists of the Object Relations School (Klein, Winnicott, Bion) stressed the importance of the preoedipal phase and brought to the fore the concept of countertransference as a valuable tool to better understand the analysand’s psyche. This development marked the beginning of an ongoing debate on the importance of the relationship between analyst and analysand within the psychoanalytic process.

This debate has focused on the following two opposing views:

1. The interpretation of the transference and the reconstruction of the patient’s story play a dominant role in the process and outcome of the analysis.
2. The analyst-analysand relationship and the shared experience created in the ‘here and now’ and within the analytic situation constitutes the determining factor for therapeutic change.

These views raise even more questions about how the interpretation (specifically in the analysis of non-neurotics), the analyst’s scientific theory, the analyst’s authority and/or seduction, and the role of the subjective experience of each member of the analytic dyad, affect the process and outcome of analysis.

Modern theorists (Gabbard, Kernberg) support the synergy among interpretation, analyst-analysand relationship and common therapeutic factors (controversy, clarification, teaching) in an attempt to integrate the opposing views mentioned above.

Alongside the issues raised above, an important question arises as to how to validate the therapeutic effect of psychoanalysis. This question encourages fruitful debate within the psychoanalytic community between those who support the use of empirical methods and those who reject the necessity of such methods by arguing for the need for research using purely clinical criteria within the psychoanalytic process.

Psychoanalysis continues its historical journey in the face of rapid social and cultural changes. There is much talk about the crisis facing psychoanalysis and the need for adaptation to new developments. The 14<sup>th</sup> annual Hellenic Psychoanalytical Society Conference focuses on the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis and looks forward to an open and fruitful dialogue.

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