INTRODUCTION TO A DISCUSSION OF THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

At the American Society of Psychoanalytic Physicians, Gracie Square Hospital, December 18, 1990 Arnold D. Richards, M.D.

The science of psychoanalysis is today a field of rival theories. This trend, which Robert Michels has termed theoretical pluralism in psychoanalytic dialogue, shows no sign of abating. We are now a discipline comprising classical analysts, object relations analysts, relational analysts, interpersonal analysts, self psychologists, Kleinian analysts, and Lacanian analysts, to name only the most important schools of thought. This theoretical ferment, well attested by the lively dialogue at our meetings and in the pages of our journals, is constructive, as the vitality of any science can be measured by the vigor with which issues are debated. Nonetheless, the status of psychoanalysis as a conglomeration of divergent theories, each of them claiming, at times stridently, to be psychoanalytic, has evoked varying responses. Some of these I have discussed in a paper (which appeared recently in the Psychoanalytic Quarterly, [Vol. 59, pp. 347-369]) on the future of psychoanalysis. This evening, to facilitate our discussion, I would like briefly to consider three different responses to this situation of theoretical pluralism: Robert Wallerstein's espousal of a clinical common ground, Fred Pine's view of psychoanalysis as the sum of four separate psychologies, and Leo Rangell's advocacy of

what he calls "total composite psychoanalytic theory."

Since each of these solutions to theoretical pluralism involves a philosophical decision about the status of psychoanalytic knowledge, it is important to bear in mind the distinction between correspondence and coherence theories of truth. The first holds that truth consists in the correspondence between an object and its description. Long equated with realism, this theory takes as its basic premise the view that objects are able to cause our senses to form more or less accurate observations of the objects as they actually exist; there is a real world out there to be perceived. Accordingly, this view maintains that theories can be objectively tested and that minds are part of nature. Scientists from Galileo and Newton through Darwin, Einstein, and Freud have held a correspondence theory of truth.

Proponents of the coherence theory, however, maintain that objects in the world make sense only within a theory of description. The coherence theory holds that truth is the coherence of beliefs with each other and with our experiences as these exist within a system of beliefs. Here truth does not correspond to some mind-independent "objective" state of affairs. The key epistemological premise of this theory is that our ways of thinking and perceiving unavoidably condition what we observe. Since facts are themselves theory-bound, observations are understandable only within a context. Thus, advocates of the coherence

theory believe there is more than one true description of the world. Within philosophy this theory has been referred to as idealism: among its proponents are Thomas Kuhn, Feyer Abend, Putnam, Ricoeur, and Merleu-Ponty. Within psychoanalysis it gains expression in hermeneutic theories that replace psychic determinism with uncaused choice.

Wallerstein's response to theoretical pluralism is to argue for a unity of clinical purpose and clinical understanding that subsumes theoretical diversity. He maintains that the shared definitional boundaries of analysis involve the facts of transference and resistance, understood from the point of view of conflict. Referring to Joseph and Anne-Marie Sandler's distinction between the past unconscious and the present unconscious, he argues that clinical theory bearing on the present unconscious and guiding day-to-day therapeutic work constitutes the unity among analysts. By contrast, the general theoretical perspectives that address the past unconscious and aim at a "more causally developmental account of life from its earliest fathomable origins" account for the diversity among analysts. For Wallerstein, overarching theories such as self psychology or object relations theory are metaphors, however scientifically necessary, that "we have created in order to satisfy our variously conditioned needs for closure and coherence and overall theoretical understanding." Wallerstein's belief that analysts must for the time being rest

content with the fact of theoretical diversity does not for him imply the impossibility of an eventual mediation among theories that will result in a single "true psychoanalytic theory that corresponds to reality...." His point is that analysis as a scientific enterprise is still in its infancy, so that the various theoretical perspectives are not yet "amenable to comparative and incremental scientific testing." Wallerstein's view is that for now we must accept multiple theories as different explanatory metaphors heuristically useful to their proponents.

In reading Wallerstein, one discerns a tension between his personal commitment to psychoanalysis as "the science of the mind" and his realization that analysts are having more and more difficulty reconciling divergent theoretical perspectives in a way that assures the solidarity of the psychoanalytic profession. On the one hand, he appreciates how a given theoretical perspective can be more intellectually satisfying to its adherents than are rival theories. On the other hand, he speaks of a time when theories will evolve "beyond the metaphoric and therefore scientifically untestable status that now characterizes them, leading in the direction of greater correspondence with the truth. Such an evolution will finally grant these constructs a truer ontological status as a reflection of real relationships between phenomena in nature." Wallerstein takes the position that analysis must rest content with a coherence theory of truth for now

but should aspire to and will eventually meet the requirements of a correspondence theory.

In Drive, Ego, Object, and Self, Fred Pine offers a different solution to the problem of theoretical pluralism. In contrast to Wallerstein's common ground approach, which suggests that any higher-level theory is for its proponents heuristically adequate, Pine's thesis is that any single theory is necessarily inadequate, given the restricted domain it covers and the limited explanatory strategies it yields. Pine's solution seems to be to claim, a priori, the impossibility of any comparative assessment of theories. This claim rests on his judgment that each of the four "psychologies" (of drive, ego, object, and self) is valid within, but restricted to, its specific domain. Advancing an approach he calls pragmatic, which aims not at "theoretical integration" but at "phenomenological synthesis," he advises analysts to follow the clinical material, drawing successively on each theoretical perspective as the need arises.

The openness to different theoretical perspectives Pine commends is unassailable, but his claim that the phenomenological content of different theories can be isolated and then additively summed into "a phenomenological synthesis" is fraught with problems. His distinction between "developing a theory" and "making sense of phenomena" is particularly problematic, as the goal of a theory is, after all, precisely

to make sense of phenomena. Compounding the problem is Pine's own recognition that the phenomena associated with the respective psychologies are themselves continuous and overlapping rather than categorical. In addition, he never provides us a clear definition of what he means by a psychology. Descriptively, the term seems to refer to a loose grouping of phenomena falling within a domain, but at what explanatory level are we to understand that domain? At various points in his discussion, Pine refers to the four psychologies as four contents, four phenomena, four models, and four motivational systems. The proponents of each of the four psychologies would certainly contest Pine's assumption that their theory is adequate only within a limited domain. Any theory worth its salt orders phenomena hierarchically according to certain criteria. Certain kinds of phenomena have explanatory priority in the sense that they are believed to subsume other kinds of phenomena. This understanding would militate against any <u>a priori</u> assumption that all theories are deficient outside their domains. A theory can aspire to be more than simply a member of a federation of theories, more than a single tributary flowing into the bewildering ocean of insight that is the yield of most multiple perspectives.

Pine's presentation of the four psychologies as a whole that is the simple sum of its parts raises other questions. Does he provide us a new theory; a theory

about a theory; an antitheoretical theory; or a pretheoretical, modular approach to phenomena? He seems close to taking a position that involves his elevating himself to a platform of theoretical and clinical superiority from which are surveyed the partial contributions of the four separate psychologies, each adequate within its domain but by definition inadequate outside it. For Pine "the four psychologies" approach as a summation, an additive totality, not only corresponds to reality but in a sense marks the end of theory-building per se. For Wallerstein, as for Marshall Edelson, the psychoanalysis of the future--perhaps the distant future--will be a single theory that meets the requirements of the correspondence theory of truth. For Pine the future is here, and we have come to it without resolving the knotty epistemological and empirical issues that enter into theory choice. It is simply a matter of extracting "experiential truths" from each of the four psychologies and drawing on them as clinical circumstance requires. This approach provides no conceptual space, and no rationale, for the continual growth and refinement of individual theories, a process that aspires to developmental and clinical comprehensiveness. For Pine such theories are by definition inadequate outside their domains; further, he has already isolated the experiential truths each of them contains.

Leo Rangell's solution to the problem of theoretical

pluralism differs radically from both Wallerstein's and Pine's. Anchoring his position in what he calls "total composite psychoanalytic theory," a term he prefers to "classical" or "orthodox" psychoanalysis, he contends that psychoanalysis can be "advanced only by accretion rather than by repetition of new, partial theories." By "accretion" Rangell has in mind a filling in of gaps and a correction of the deficiencies in Freud's theoretical system, the structural model in particular. As examples of such theoretical accretion he offers his own ideas of "unconscious choice conflict," "unconscious ego decision-making," and "unconscious ego will," constructs developed in response to the fact that many approaches offered as new psychoanalytic theories have as their basis a sense that the structural model inadequately addresses considerations of intention and choice. Rangell believes that the structural model can be adapted to include these considerations; for him, the selective emphases of the new theories result in "necessarily <u>partial</u> theories that risk the eclipse, stagnation, or even regression of the total accumulated body of theory." A case in point is Kohut's self psychology, in which a fundamental focus on deficit occasions the neglect of conflict, oedipal issues, and castration anxiety.

In his 1982 paper entitled "Transference to Theory," Rangell goes so far as to suggest that the development of divergent theories is often fueled more by irrational

forces and unresolved conflicts in the theorist than by new data requiring new explanatory principles. One need not join Rangell in this ad hominem to agree with him that divergent theories tend to be deficient because "in each there has been the fallacy of either pars pro toto or the selection of one pole of what in life is a duality. The external environment at the expense of the internal was selected by Horney, the interpersonal by Sullivan, the downing of the intrapyschic, object relations rather than drives by Fairbairn. Pregenital determinants are pointed to exclusively, without the role played by the oedipal. The here and now was sought instead of reconstruction, deficiency rather than conflict, empathy over interpretation, new experience rather than insight into the past."

Given these views, it is not surprising that Rangell rejects Wallerstein's notion of common ground. Rangell sees no need to make common cause with proponents of theories that overemphasize one aspect of psychoanalytic theory at the expense of other essential components. He would be unsympathetic as well to Pine's additive strategy. Here Rangell would maintain that one cannot finesse the serious limitations of new theories by agglomerating them, as if one theory's neglect of a crucial variable can be offset by its emphasis in another theory. Rangell believes that his total psychoanalytic theory meets the requirements of a correspondence theory of truth. It not only includes

considerations of drive, ego, object, and self, but it includes them in a balanced and nuanced way that attends to the richly interactive relationships among these four realms. Epistemologically, Pine is closer to Rangell than to Wallerstein, in that he grounds his four psychologies on the four moments of experience in infancy, the experiential realities that serve as the wellsprings of each psychology. In this sense, Pine espouses correspondence now, as does Rangell, and not correspondence later, as does Wallerstein. An obvious objection to Rangell is that his take on psychoanalytic knowledge is no less impartial than that of the revisionist theories he opposes. Many psychoanalytic theoreticians--analysts as broadly ranged as Melanie Klein, Kohut, and Arlow and Brenner--lay claim to the mantel of Freud and his immediate followers. For Rangell, total psychoanalytic theory is adequate to the challenge of clinical work with patients of all types, including those included only within the widening scope of psychoanalysis. But theorists like Kohut, Gedo, Mitchell, and Greenberg have assessed the scientific and clinical adequacy of Freud's formulations less generously in identifying the need for new psychoanalytic theories.

We should also take note of the postempiricist philosophy of science, whose proponents argue persuasively that there is no possibility of objective scientific knowledge, as all knowledge must be located in a social context and understood in terms of values inhering in that context. Rangell's concept

of theoretical advance by accretion may foreclose on the more far-reaching kinds of scientific advance in which the clash of opposing viewpoints eventuates in the acceptance of a new paradigm, a new way of seeing phenomena, and a new vocabulary for describing the fundamental issues of a field. Is Rangell's concept of advance by accretion an adequate basis for understanding everything we mean by scientific progress? If late nineteenth-century physicists and astronomers had agreed in advance that Newtonian mechanics was subject only to advance by accretion, would Einstein ever have won acceptance for his view of the universe? On the other hand, can a science like psychoanalysis, whose subject matter is subjectivity, be compared with sciences whose subject matter is the physical world? How do Wallerstein, Pine, and Rangell line up on the issue of theoretical pluralism? For Wallerstein there is one operational, experience-near theory that joins together analysts who espouse different grand theories. These theories are heuristically useful metaphors that help analysts organize the data of observation according to their own sensibilities. Wallerstein believes that our similarities as psychoanalytic clinicians enable us to live comfortably for the time being with these diverse metaphors. For Pine there is one aggregative theory that juxtaposes, without integrating, the contents, motivational principles, and visions of therapeutic action of four separate psychologies. Analysts who subscribe to his version of theoretical federalism end up working more

clinical pragmatism. In my view, the role of clinical pragmatics has been insufficiently explored in the debate between proponents of correspondence and coherence theories of "psychoanalytic truth." Two other ideas may also be helpful in mediating among rival theories: Larry Lauden's differentiation of "scientific research traditions" from "theories," and Martin Bergmann's notion of psychoanalytic theorists as either "extenders" or "modifiers" of traditional theory. Perhaps we can touch on some of these issues in our discussion.