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EDITORIAL

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Group analysis is prospering on the Continent, and it is also attracting new interest in the United States where until recently it had not made much of an impact. At the same time, and to some extent because of this rapid growth, there are signs of strain in the two London organisations which Foulkes founded to foster an interest and training in group analysis, the London Group-Analytic Society and the Institute of Group Analysis. A debate which has been going on for some time about the relationship between these organisations has gained a sense of urgency as the pressure to expand and develop meets the pressure to cut back in the face of a gloomy economic climate. The Correspondence Section of this issue of the journal is entirely taken up with letters concerning the past, present and future of the group analytic movement, letters which are far-ranging in their ideas and formulations but which sound a uniformly troubled note.

One theme which resonates through the correspondence is a question about the part played by S. H. Foulkes as a personality in shaping the institutions which he founded. Much of the debate has a quality of unresolved mourning about it, not unlike that seen in a family which has not yet come to terms with the loss of an idealised parent. The enmeshment of the Institute and Society, in which threats of disruptive separation are coupled with strong wishes for even closer merging, is quite characteristic of this sort of family. Only very tentatively is an effort now being made to examine Foulkes' limitations as well as his assets, and to link those with the theory and technique which he developed.

Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that Foulkes was undoubtedly a charismatic figure about whom very little is known before and beyond his professional life. In keeping with his philosophy of unobtrusiveness, which lay at the heart of his group analytic method, he drew a curtain around his early years, his family, his cultural roots, and the tremendous upheaval which he must have experienced in moving from pre-war Germany to England. All this may of course be none of our business, but it is fair to reflect that Foulkes was a great man in his field, and that great men deserve biographical attention, as much to throw light on their ideas as to enrich our understanding of themselves in their social and cultural context. In the case of the group analytic movement, biography could well have a liberating function. Foulkes' role in developing group analysis, and the part played by his immediate associates, could come to be seen from a more realistic perspective, and we would be able to dispose of some of the curious myths that have grown up within group analytic circles, not least the myth of the Founding Fathers which has drawn an inter-generational dividing line between those whom Foulkes gathered around him and those who came afterwards through a more formalised selection process. If this were done the way would then be cleared for a proper look at the very real practical and administrative issues which face us and which must in any case be confronted simultaneously.

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