

Alan's Civil Disobedience with the Psychoanalytic

An Open Letter to Dr. Pyles Re: Certification and TA Status

Re: Plan for "civil disobedience" to effect immediate cessation of Certification process and the severance of the linkage of TA status to membership in The American

Dear Bob,

I am addressing you in this informal fashion to communicate with you, and my peers, in a person-to-person fashion. We all belong to the same national psychoanalytic organization known as The American. I want to tell you personally, our colleagues nationally, and my friends locally, of my intention to commit what is, for lack of a better word, "civil disobedience." I will be doing so in an effort to force our organization to immediately suspend the Certification process and to detach Training Analyst status from membership in The American. I am taking this action for three fundamental reasons:

Firstly, the impact that Certification and its linkage to TA status has had, and is having, a terribly destructive impact on psychoanalysis in our country. The Certification process was not, and is still not, based on well-established, competency-assessment principles developed in the social sciences. Further, not only is the process unscientific, it inhibits American-affiliated psychoanalysts from passing through it. The Certification process also continues to be personally traumatic for many.

I am a longstanding member of the New Center for Psychoanalysis (NCP), and have now repeatedly observed the ill-effects of the American's failure to alter the Certification/TA process. Six months ago, a Clinical Associate told me of his intention to change Institutes because he was prohibited from remaining in analysis with his non-American affiliated TA. A year ago, I had lunch with a highly-respected psychiatrist-psychoanalyst at NCP who told me that he had failed the Certification process and would not attempt it again. I find these now-common stories disheartening. NCP is in fact struggling, and significantly so, as a result of the American's failure to reform the Certification process.

The average age of a TA at NCP is 74, and precious few of them exist. Many of my colleagues should be TAs, but they either fear or refuse to go through the Certification process. Six individuals, two psychiatrists and four psychologists, immediately come to mind. These psychoanalysts are at least as skilled as me, if not more so. They should be TAs by now. By appointing them as TAs, our local organization would quickly gain energy, clinical associates, and more.

Further, the Certification/TA problem has a huge impact throughout the Southern California area. I am extremely active in the San Gabriel Valley and have watched, with great pain, as the younger, vibrant psychotherapists seek psychoanalytic training from non-American affiliated psychoanalytic institutes. In fact, most psychoanalysts-in-training in the County of Los Angeles attend non-American affiliated institutes, namely the Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis (ICP), the Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies (LAISPS), the Psychoanalytic Center of California (PCC) and the Newport Psychoanalytic Institute (NPI). The American's membership is dropping due to deaths and potential members joining these other institutions. One need not know anything about mathematics or statistics to see where this trend is heading.

I passed through the Certification process from 2006 to 2008, requiring extensive written case material preparation, travel across the continent, and an intensive interviewing process. My psychoanalytic “competency” was “affirmed” when I was Certified during June 2008. I subsequently passed through a screening process at my local institute, NCP, earning the TA title towards the end of that year. To view it positively, my ability to achieve TA status was a result of my need to achieve; to look at it negatively, it resulted from my masochism. It was an expensive, time-consuming, and traumatic ordeal.

I have watched this controversy be endlessly debated for the past 20 years. It is irrefutable that The American — as it currently exists — can resolve it. In your column entitled “Republic or Monarchy,” (American Psychoanalyst, Volume 46, No 3, Fall 2012), you indicate your agreement. You promote yet another potential solution to the Certification/TA controversy, the PPP Proposal. You note that “some reacted to it as though the Apocalypse had arrived.” So here again, by your own description, hopeless debating descends towards the usual paralytic impasse. You offer further examples of how The American remains fatally constricted. You write that BOPS appointed a “Reference Committee” to explore the PPP proposal further, a process that will only delay reform.

As you directly noted in your article, the requirement that a TA belong to The American in order to maintain his or her TA status is a “clear conflict of interest.” You write:

While it is true that certification has undergone a considerable number of humanizing changes, nonetheless it remains an internal examination by the same body that is doing the educating, a clear conflict of interest. (p. 3)

While still significant, the last two reasons for my civil disobedience are less pressing. When I entered psychoanalytic training during 1992 at Southern California Psychoanalytic Institute (SCPI), now known as NCP, I was cautious of The American. I was in the first class in which psychologists were not required to go through the “waiver” process. I learned that this change had occurred only as a result of a class action lawsuit brought by the American Psychological Association (APA). My caution turned to concern when I later realized that The American had been responsible for the unfortunate “medicalization” of psychoanalysis in this country. I also later learned that a deal had been struck between The American and the International (IPA), requiring American members to join the IPA only via the American. I am troubled by these historical and current trends.

Also, because of the evolution of my own work towards more of a Object-Relations/Relational psychoanalytic approach, I have less in common with The American. The organization offers few educational programs in my area of interest. Many share this impression, a grave one that could be remedied were The American to change, as it must, to remain robust in the 21st century.

Because of the chronic internal political conflict, The American fails in its primary mission: To provide professional support for its members. Instead, much of the group’s activities center on internal meetings regarding unresolved Certification/TA issues, sapping the vitality of the organization.

As you know, TA status substantially enhances one’s professional reputation. I receive fairly frequent referrals for treatment and for supervision as a direct result of it. The TA credential carries considerable

professional esteem, as well as direct economic benefits. Yet it is unfairly, unethically, and potentially illegally tied to membership in our national organization, The American.

The Certification process has failed, as has linking TA status with American membership. We can no longer wait for this to be repaired. I fear that psychoanalysts, myself included, excel at exploration and discussion; we fail at making decisions. And now the time has come for action.

I urge you and other leaders of our organization to immediately suspend the Certification process and the policy that ties Certification to TA status. This will not only result in the positive changes described above, but will reduce the American's exposure to potential litigation due to the "clear conflict of interest" that you cite. During this suspension period, individual institutes should be allowed to appoint TAs. The American can then take all the time it needs to figure out how to reform the Certification process. But we individuals and institutes who cherish belonging to our national organization should no longer be forced to pay the high price for The American's failure to act.

Until The American makes these changes, I will be taking this action:

I will **not** pay dues to our organization, but at the same time I will not resign. Starting in January 2013, I shall place the dues in an escrow account, and I will advise you in writing when I have done so. I will provide you with a copy of the bank escrow statement. I will then wait and make decisions as The American goes through its due process related to my failure to pay dues. **I am hoping that my friends and colleagues will support me in taking the same course of action.**

Please note that I have great respect for you and my psychoanalytic colleagues and friends. I wish no harm to you or our organization. I am taking this step because no other strategy is working. I fully understand that I place myself at some financial and professional peril by assuming this stance. I am well-prepared to deal with the consequences should I be expelled from the organization and, thereby, lose my hard-earned TA status.

You can look forward to receiving the escrow statement, reflecting my having set aside the monies for the dues, in early January 2013. I am hoping for immediate action, and no further debate. But if you or our friends and colleagues wish to enter into dialogue with me, please do so only using email.

With kind regards,
Alan