# Editor's Column

## Gregory B. Sullivan, M.D.

*. . . Far from the doctrinaire past of the old ones,*
*They think in their prudent meditations*

*Not about ecstasy (the soul leaving the body)*
*Nor enthusiasm (the god entering one's person)*
*Nor even about sanity (which means*

*Health, an impossible perfection)*
*But ponder instead relative truth and the warm*
*Dusk of amelioration.*

Robert Pinsky
from *Essay on Psychiatrists* (1)

In selecting, or as now in introducing the table of contents of each new issue of the Jefferson Journal, or in response to some occasional question as to the *orientation* of the Journal, the ghostly concept of *eclecticism* reappears. In choosing a residency training program in psychiatry, the nascent resident of the 1980's was usually met with a chorus of "eclectic" brochures and training directors, each describing their own version of this ideal. Having comfortably accepted this pleasingly vague and democratic ideal, it was disconcerting to hear my own training director, Dr. Harvey Schwartz, challenge this descriptive term. He brought attention to the intellectual laziness which can lurk beneath this approved label, and thus refocused my thinking about the use and abuse of the *e*-word, and about some larger issues of defining not just the ideal training program (see Dr. Tasman's In Response contribution in this issue) but the evolving field of psychiatry itself.

José Ortega y Gasset, in his *The Revolt of the Masses,* wrote:

> Every concept, the simplest and the most technical, is framed in its own irony as the geometrically cut diamond is held in its setting of gold. The concept tells us quite seriously: "This thing is A, that thing is B." But the seriousness is that of the man who is playing a joke on you, the unstable seriousness of one who is swallowing a laugh, which will burst out if he does not keep his lips tight-closed. It knows very well that this thing is not merely A, or that thing just merely B. What the concept really thinks is a little bit different from what it says, and herein the irony lies. What it really thinks is this: I know that, strictly

> speaking, this thing is not A, nor that thing B; but by taking them as A and B, I come to an understanding with myself for the purposes of my practical attitude towards both of these things. . . . The concept is one of man's household utensils, which he needs and uses in order to make clear his own position in the midst of the infinite and very problematic reality which is life. (2)

The *concept* of eclecticism in psychiatry continues to provoke serious debate. Although this may seem an "unstable seriousness" to those for whom the debate over the relative value of psychodynamic or biological paradigms has achieved some of the stagnant status of the nature/nurture, wave/particle, or chicken/egg debates ("That dead horse?" said a colleague upon learning the topic of the debate at last May's APA Convention (3)), it is still a practical issue grappled with by each cohort of entering residents. It remains a pointed issue for senior residents on the exiting end; in consulting with a physicians' placement service recently, I was asked to describe in n-words-or-less my own orientation. When I instinctively replied "eclectic," the interviewer laughed, then quickly assured me that "everyone says the same thing."

There must be, then, some need for this *eclectic,* this shorthand term to encompass some more subtle, complex and perhaps unreachable integration of our field. Something for which *eclectic* is a secondary revision of the sort by which we organize our dreams in recollection. For myself, the process of selecting a Journal issue has provided again some additional insight toward a closer approximation of defining eclectic as a process itself, a way of reading and not a list of readings. The Journal should embody this continual evaluation and resynthesis of approaches to the mind, much as we help test and revise our patients' view of the world. This, then, a roundabout way of explaining our current orientation and describing this issue's varied and fascinating table of contents.

## REFERENCES

1. Pinsky R: Essay on Psychiatrists, in Sadness and Happiness: Poems by Robert Pinsky. Princeton University Press, 1975
2. Ortega y Gasset J: The Revolt of the Masses. Norton, 1932
3. "Resolved: The Teaching of Psychodynamic Theory and Therapy Need Not Be a Central Focus in Psychiatric Training Programs of the Future"; Borus JF moderator, Stein M, McHugh PR, Havens LL, and Cooper AM. 141st Annual APA Meeting, Montreal, May 9, 1988