

Journal Interview, 8

In this occasional series we record the views and personal experience of people who have specially contributed to the evolution of ideas in the Journal's field of interest.

Conversation with Mark Keller

Mark Keller, as former and long-time Editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* (now the *JSA*), as scholar in his own right, and as an early member of the Yale Center, has for many years exerted a profound influence on the direction and quality of thinking in this field.

B.J.A. You are on record as saying that you were present at the moment of the re-birth of scientific interest in alcoholism. Can you tell us something about that happy event.

M.K. Yes. My boss Dr Norman Jolliffe, of New York University Medical School, had been studying nutritional diseases at Bellevue Hospital, in the Psychiatric Division, and most of these diseases were found in alcoholics. That Hospital was admitting something like 10,000 alcoholics a year. That was in 1933-35, just after the end of Prohibition. so we had lots of 'clinical material' and Jolliffe was curing those patients with something which was then fairly new — vitamins. But at the end of one day, when we were discussing some cases we had just reviewed, all of whom were re-admissions, Jolliffe said, 'You know, Mark, I must be doing the wrong thing. I keep curing these guys, and they keep coming back. Why are they drinking that way? That's what we should be studying!' I think that was one of the most dramatic moments in my life, because I almost jumped out of my skin when I heard him speak those words — they were so true. And I hadn't realised it, I hadn't observed it, I didn't know we would have to think that way, at that time. But he did. The very next day we started to design a research on alcoholism. We thought that it was going to take a couple of weeks or so but it just got bigger and bigger. We began to see more and more involvements. We could see that we had to turn not just to psychiatrists and biochemists, but that we were going to need sociologists and social workers. Jolliffe said, 'If we are going to find out about the drinking of these

patients, we are going to have to go into their neighbourhoods and into their homes, we can't do this only in our laboratories'.

B.J.A. What happened next?

M.K. It took some months to design a study, which ended up as a proposal for a 7-year project. Jolliffe didn't immediately succeed in getting support. He took the proposal to Dr John Wyckoff, Dean of the Medical School, who thought it was the most wonderful thing that had ever been proposed. But he said, this is going to take a lot of money. The only place where you can get that kind of money is the Rockefeller Foundation. So, in order to do that, he went to Chancellor Chase, Chancellor of New York University, and they went to the Rockefeller Foundation. Dr Alan Gregg was the Rockefeller man for medicine in those days. He came around and looked us over and he liked what he saw. But the Rockefeller people decided that if they were going to put all that money in this direction (I think it was half-a-million dollars, which doesn't sound very big today) it was important that they should help Jolliffe to build up his scientific reputation. He was quite a young man, an assistant professor. So they thought he should become an international expert, and gave him 20,000 dollars to take a trip to Europe and visit all the people there who knew about alcohol research. And Jolliffe did that.

B.J.A. What happened when he came home?

M.K. Unfortunately, while Jolliffe was still in Europe, Dean Wyckoff died suddenly, and the Rockefellers used that as an excuse for withdrawing from supporting this research. I have always suspected that there was some other reason and that this was just an excuse — we always have had difficulties in getting the big foundations to fund alcoholism research. But in the meantime Dean Wyckoff

and Chancellor Chase had decided that this project needed a wide basis of sponsorship and they had formed a national committee to support it. This national committee included practically all the great names in science at that time. And this group was disappointed that the research was not going to be funded after all by the Rockefeller, and they didn't want just to go out of business. So they formed themselves into a scientific committee and created a Research Council on Problems of Alcohol with its main purpose to seek money to aid such work. Actually, this Research Council never succeeded in raising a lot of money — I don't understand the whole story and I was not personally involved. But the most important funding that they got was a grant of 25,000 dollars from the Carnegie Corporation for a review of the biological literature on the effects of alcohol on man. This grant was to my boss, to Jolliffe, and I credit myself a little bit that we got that help because without quite knowing what I was doing I had begun to gather and systematise the literature about alcohol. So we had this grant to review the literature, and we needed somebody to run the review. It was for this purpose that Jolliffe went to Worcester, Massachusetts, and persuaded E. M. Jellinek, who was the biometrician in the schizophrenia research project there, under Roy Hoskins, to come to New York to manage this alcohol review.

B.J.A. What year was that?

M.K. This was now 1939. While the grant was probably made in '38, we started the review in 1939. We took a small suite, two offices, at the New York Academy of Medicine, next to their library which was, at the time, and perhaps still is, the second best medical library in this country. Only what is now the National Medical Library is greater. (It was then the Library of the Surgeon General.) We made this review over a period of about 18 months and reports were beginning to come out and needed publication. One of the scientists on the scientific committee of the Research Council was Dr Howard W. Haggard, Director of the Laboratory of Applied Physiology at Yale University, famous for a number of reasons. His research on alcohol, which was done very soon after Prohibition, created a great deal of public interest, and resulted in the Laboratory at Yale receiving many questions about alcohol which Haggard realised that his staff, who were physiologists and biochemists, were not able to answer. So Haggard was interested in a broader perspective on alcohol problems and in 1940, when the review was almost finished, he founded the *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*.

B.J.A. Initially as a medium for publishing your reports?

M.K. Initially to help with that task, but he was a man with a lot of vision, and he immediately saw it as a journal which would publish many other research reports on alcohol. When the review was finished Haggard invited Jellinek to come to Yale to complete writing up the reports from the review, and also to take on some other work. Jolliffe remained in New York. And Haggard also invited Jellinek's staff to come with him. Martin Gross, a psychiatrist, Anne Roe, a psychologist, Vera Efron, a linguist and mathematician, and myself. Another person who came along with Jellinek to Yale was Dr Giorgio Lolli. He was originally a physiologist who had been trained at Serianni's Laboratory in Italy, and who eventually became a psychiatrist, interested in treating alcoholism primarily and later other things.

B.J.A. What were you — have you given yourself a professional title?

M.K. Nobody was ever able to figure out what I was, but Selden Bacon, when once asked that question, decided that I am a semanticist.

B.J.A. What was the general response to the research which then came out of Yale — to Jellinek's project?

M.K. The general response was one of great interest and appreciation. Nobody at that time was doing anything along those lines and a lot of people realised that such work was needed. Society had had a great deal of trouble with alcohol and the great experiment with Prohibition hadn't succeeded. People were worried over what was going to happen next. The various States of the USA were adopting masses of laws about alcohol, really the same things as had been tried for thousands of years, as the records will show, beginning with Hammurabi, King of Babylon 4,000 years or so ago.

B.J.A. Already existing academic institutions were not interested?

M.K. The Universities were not interested. I think it had to do with the stigma on alcohol. The academic world shied away from it. So that we were, in the 1940s, really alone in trying to do something in this line at Yale. We started with a small staff, but we kept acquiring more people. We acquired a sociologist — Selden Bacon. He

came around to the laboratory one day because he had a project in the jails, where he did some research for the Connecticut Prison Association at their request, and had discovered that most of the people were in jail because they had been drunk. We acquired a legal scholar, a former Dean of a law school, Edward G. Baird. We acquired an educationist, Raymond G. McCarthy. We acquired another sociologist, Robert Straus, an experimental psychologist, John Flynn, a librarian, Rhoda Jackson, an industry specialist, Ralph Henderson, and for brief periods an anthropologist, an economist, and others. My documentation staff grew steadily as with Vera Efron, Hulda Rees Flynn and Sarah Spock Jordy in the lead we undertook the total abstracting and indexing of the world scientific literature on alcohol and many documentation and publication tasks besides the Journal, among them the classified *Abstract Archive*, the *International Bibliography*, and a series of popular pamphlets and a series of scholarly monographs. So now we had a lot of characters around in the Laboratory who had nothing to do with physiology or biochemistry. They were studying alcohol from all kinds of perspectives, and this 'social' representation was bigger than the Laboratory staff of 'hard' scientists. We founded, in about 1943, the Yale Plan Clinics, which were the first public clinics to treat alcoholism, and founded a Summer School of Alcohol Studies, directed by Jellinek with a very broad perspective and with an inter-disciplinary faculty, about the same time. Eventually we became the Center of Alcohol Studies.

B.J.A. Haggard's influence? How could he effect all this at Yale?

M.K. He was one of the two most popular professors in the University. And also a very good money raiser. So the University let Haggard be.

B.J.A. What was behind the move from Yale to Rutgers?

M.K. We are 20 years later. It sounds like a title of a Dumas book. Twenty years after. A new President was appointed at Yale in 1950. He did not like the Center of Alcohol Studies at all. Worse still, it was located practically across the street from the President's residence. He didn't even like the Laboratory of Applied Physiology. He had an image of Yale in which such activities did not belong, really. He wanted to get rid of the Center, in fact he let us know it in a not very subtle way very soon after he became President. It happened

that at the same time, within the next year or two, Haggard retired, first informally, then formally. I think his formal retirement came in the mid-50s. It fell to Selden Bacon to fight the President on this issue. The reason it fell to him was that when Jellinek left Yale to go to the World Health Organization, Bacon succeeded him as Director of the Center of Alcohol Studies. And Bacon is a Bacon of the Bacons. He fought the President and fought him off for 10 years. But finally, in 1960, the Yale Corporation voted that the administration should help the Center of Alcohol Studies to find a more appropriate home.

B.J.A. Like the Bowery.

M.K. Yes — that's what the President hoped.

B.J.A. So you had your walking papers in 1960.

M.K. Well. Bacon did a very shrewd thing. He sent the news that the Center was going to move to the newspapers. It made nationwide headlines. It made the front page of the *New York Times*. There had been jokes, probably originating at Harvard, such as, 'What does Yale have? Yale has Levi Jackson, and the Center of Alcohol Studies'. Levi Jackson was the captain of the football team. And more than the President at Yale didn't enjoy that kind of humor. The result of the newspaper release was that many universities, all over the country, enquired, and we began to negotiate with universities. Now Selden had to be in on all these negotiations, so he took himself a partner to each one. We really had serious negotiations with only three universities, Brown, Columbia and Rutgers. I was the partner in the negotiations with Rutgers. And I liked Mason Gross, the President of Rutgers, very much. And I wanted us to go to Rutgers. We ended up going to Rutgers.

B.J.A. The timing?

M.K. We completed these negotiations in 1961 and went to Rutgers in 1962. I moved the documentation division in February 1962 and the rest came two or three months later. Soon after, we were helped by Mr R. Brinkley Smithers and the Christopher D. Smithers Foundation, as well as with Federal Government money, to erect our own building on the Rutgers science campus.

B.J.A. Now, 20 years after, in 1962, had the social climate toward alcohol research changed very much?

M.K. I think it had. For one thing, we were by then able to get considerable support from the Federal Government, from the National Institute of Mental Health. They helped us to make the move to Rutgers and supported us with grants, especially supporting the documentation division with grants, from the beginning in 1962. We had earlier, about in 1945, founded what was to become the National Council on Alcoholism. We called it the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism and we housed it for its first few years. Marty Mann's office was in our building. It could be believable to people that the committee was not another temperance organisation — if it was at Yale, and connected with the Center, if it had this scientific connection. We had also founded the first organisation of educators on alcohol and narcotics. So that there had been a broadening out of interest. A lot of people came to the Summer School each year and went out with a broader conception of alcohol problems and began doing something about them. We — Bacon — also had a very strong hand in creating the Connecticut Commission on Alcoholism, the first such State commission. A lot of things we did became models for people to do in other places. Other State commissions were created, other Summer Schools were created, other alcoholism clinics were opened, other study centres started to come into existence. And even other alcohol journals began to be published, to the dismay of my staff, — for we had had a corner on the market, except for the *British Journal of Addiction*. But I told them, the more other journals that are published, the bigger our circulation will be. And that's how it turned out.

B.J.A. So there was a growth and groundswell of interest by 1962, very different from the earlier days.

M.K. Yes.

B.J.A. Looking back, do you see any turnings that were missed or wrong steps taken?

M.K. I would say, from my viewpoint, that the separation of the National Committee, which was to become the National Council on Alcoholism, from Yale, that divorce, which occurred around 1949 approximately, that was very bad. I was terribly disappointed that it occurred. What happened apparently was that the Committee concentrated totally on alcoholism and helping the suffering alcoholics. It was very natural, because the people who worked in this Committee were mostly members of Alcoholics Anonymous — Marty Mann and Yev Gardner and others. They had started to be

interested in alcohol problems, and our staff thought that the National Committee, or the National Council, was going to be a public health organisation like the cancer organisation, or the poliomyelitis or heart organizations, which would, for instance, raise money to support research. The National Council didn't do that. Research was the most important thing to the Center, and we were specially interested in the possibility of prevention. The National Council, influenced by its A.A. membership, was not interested in prevention, even though they gave it lip service, or in research. They were interested in helping the alcoholic. Our staff, and especially Haggard and Bacon, and I guess Jellinek, went along with the split, and actually promoted the divorce. I think I was the only one who didn't want it to take place.

B.J.A. A different question — with your interest in archives, do you think there may be great sources of important information lying around untapped?

M.K. Yes. For example, in Bellevue Hospital I once dug up from the basement all the old records of alcoholic admissions, going back I think to the middle of the last century. At the beginning, the age of admission for alcohol intoxication began at something like 12 years. I then noticed a very interesting fact, that the lowest age of admission rose steadily over time. It got so that 16 became rare, 17, 18. At the beginning of that period very young boys used to go to work, 11 or 12 years old. And getting a paycheck was an entitlement to 'drink like a man.' But later on, youngsters went to school to a later age, and this caused the age of alcoholic admission to rise. Now that's an interesting social phenomenon which might be worth exploring. It makes one wonder what's going on today, when apparently the age of boys and girls getting drunk is dropping. Something has had to have happened in our society to effect such a strange reversal.

B.J.A. What have been the real underlying changes in society's attitudes to drinking and drinking problems?

M.K. There are fashions in the way of looking at things. We had a time when alcohol was blamed for everything. It was blamed for poverty, it was blamed for crime, it was blamed for disease, and this led to doing something extreme and eventually to Prohibition. That produced such problems that you had to get rid of Prohibition. And there followed a reversal of viewpoint. There followed a period when alcohol was unblamed by everyone — it's not alcohol which is causing these diseases, it's the lack of vitamins. It's not alcohol which is causing the poverty, it's

that the poverty is causing people to drink, and so on. I think that actually we are now beginning to see the next reversal, so alcohol is again beginning to be blamed for everything. Therefore I think I can predict that after a period of time we will have another shift to unblaming.

B.J.A. The future of research?

M.K. I think that not enough has been done by the people who are most strongly concerned about alcoholism to emphasise the need for research and support of research. It's almost as if people who are interested in alcoholism don't really believe that we are ever going to learn why some people become alcoholics and others don't, and don't really believe that we are ever going to learn to understand what there is behind alcoholism, why it's a disease and how it could be prevented, as has happened with other diseases. I think there is a lack of

faith in that kind of outcome which is behind the lack of widespread general public concern for research in this field, such as there is, for example, for research on heart disease and on other diseases, some of which have been essentially conquered as the result of research. There's a different kind of feeling apparently about alcoholism. People who are working in this field should, though, do more to gain public confidence in the possibility — personally, I believe it's probability — that if we keep on researching, we will find out enough about alcoholism not only to be able to treat it successfully in those who already have the disease, but to prevent it through understanding what it is. I would not advocate any one line of research. In such a complex of problems — and benefits — as alcohol use entails, in a disease as complex as alcoholism, we surely need multidisciplinary, multifaceted, multi-directional researches. Someone will eventually integrate them — I think of another Jellinek.