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British psychoanalysis and politics

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The first thought this title brings to mind is that it is inappropriate, since British psychoanalysis is ostensibly apolitical, but this is quickly followed by the certain knowledge that to be "apolitical" is to tolerate the status quo. British psychoanalysis is centrist in the sense that most of its practitioners are neither socialists nor ultra-conservatives as voters, upper middle class economically and socially, and their clientele are the same. These descriptions are true, if only because there is practically no psychoanalysis or psychotherapy available on the National Health Service, so they are, for the most part, available only to people who can pay, on average, twenty pounds per session. There are some "low fee" clinics, and a few places in some National Health Service clinics, but these are likely to be group therapy or short-term.

The other thing to be said about British psychoanalysis is that it is not one thing. Only members of the British Psycho-analytical Society can call themselves psychoanalysts. There are about four hundred members, a fair number of whom live abroad. There are only about a dozen new candidates per year in training. It is said that because the American non-medical psychotherapists successfully sued the medical psychoanalysts for being "in restraint of trade", that is, in effect, operating a form of monopoly, there are plans afoot to broaden entry to the International Psychoanalytic Association.

Some countries have, by one means or another, several societies and tolerate pluralism in this way, for example, France, Argentina, Brazil. In

the 1940s Britain contained its schism into followers of Anna Freud, followers of Melanie Klein and people ("Independents") who wished to avoid this form of doctrinal-cum-personal loyalty. They did this by setting up an intramural compromise embodied in tripartite representation on committees and, in effect, three streams in training. The Freudian group is significantly smaller than the others but includes the current President of the International Psychoanalytic Association, Joseph Sandler (a South African emigre). The Kleinians are growing in numbers and influence, but the size of the group is rate-limited by their reluctance to nominate training analysts. The Independents are the majority and do not have this inhibition, so are likely to grow more rapidly. I share the widely-held opinion that the "historic compromise" which has maintained the apparent unity of the British Psycho-analytical Society has become as much a hindrance as a help. There are signs that the self-preoccupation of the society has produced some sclerosis and a lot of blinkering with respect to the rest of the world. On the other hand, a lot of important theoretical and clinical work has been done during the decades of inward-lookingness. The time has come to attempt to relate the work to a vision of culture and politics.

Partly in reaction to the elitism of the British Psycho-analytical Society, a number of other training organisations have grown up. It must be said that most of them are, to a considerable degree, deferential to the psychoanalysts. For example, psychoanalysts are (often justifiably) much-preferred as training therapists and supervisors, but as long as other organisations kowtow in this way, they will also tend to remain deferential in other ways. The most respected alternative training is the Tavistock Clinic, whose Chairman, Anton Oberholtzer, is also a psychoanalyst (and a South African emigre), but unless you are a member of staff of the clinic, you must train as a child psychotherapist before becoming eligible for their adult training. The most respectable adult training (though not necessarily the best) is the British Association of Psychotherapists (which also offers a child training and a Jungian one. There are other child trainings and Jungian ones, but I am confining my attention to psychoanalytic organisations.) Other highly-regarded trainings are the London Centre for Psychotherapy, the Guild of Psychotherapists (both eclectic), the Lincoln Centre and Clinic (mainly Kleinian). Other trainings have less secure reputations, but each has its striking features and strong supporters. The Association for Group and Individual Psychotherapy includes an experiential group in the training. The Arbours Association requires work in a residential crisis center. The Philadelphia association has a broad

curriculum which includes philosophical issues. The Institute for Psychotherapy and Social Studies has wide social and political concerns. The Westminster Pastoral Foundation has close ties with religious traditions.

At the moment there is a ferment in the world of British psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Partly as a consequence of concerns raised by the excesses of Ron Hubbard's Scientology and latterly because of issues raised by European integration, including common professional standards, there is a standing conference working out the definition of psychotherapy with a view toward an eventual register. (The standing conference has a number of other sections, e.g. humanistic, behavioural, child therapies, but I am concerned with the psychoanalytic ones.) The deliberations of this body are very political, indeed, but it has managed to keep going with a surprising amount of cooperation and mutual tolerance. Not surprisingly, some of the more elite bodies have made some moves to outflank or undermine the standing conference, but for the present the centre has held and good will is prevailing, even though there are rumblings about treachery and betrayal from time to time. Material issues about accreditation and livelihood are in the air, while quite legitimate concerns about standards can easily get mixed up with questionable matters. For example, if a training organisation does not require its trainees or training cases to attend for three times per week, should its graduates be allowed to call themselves psychotherapists? It may be that the organisation which cater more for minorities or the less wealthy are clustered at the "low" end of the pecking order of prestige, number of sessions per week of trainees and training cases. Standards, class, race, economics and the hegemony of the psychoanalysts are all mixed up in these debates, and there are no easy or obvious ways of untangling them.

Psychoanalytic and psychotherapy trainings are expensive and take a long time. Blacks, Asians and working class people are much less likely to embark upon them or to be patients in therapy. There are efforts being made to understand the low take-up rate of psychotherapy among Blacks and Asians in the West London areas around Acton and Southhall, where the proportion of non-Caucasian therapists is high, while the use of therapy by them is low. There are important matters of family traditions, world views and alienation from helping professions which are almost exclusively white. There are also a small number of centres catering for special groups, for example, NAFSIYAT Therapy Centre for Blacks and Indians preferring non-Caucasian therapists and the Women's Therapy

Centre for feminists and women preferring female therapists.

If one stands back and looks at the culture of British psychoanalysis, several other political features stand out. By far the majority of practitioners are in London, and most are in one postal district: NW3 - Hampstead. Outside London there is very little, although there are serious efforts to change this, and groups are growing in Edinburgh, Bristol, Cambridge, Oxford, Yorkshire - all centres of academic excellence. Some others - Liverpool, Birmingham, Sheffield - are much less well-served, and the rest of the country is something of a desert as far as provision of psychotherapy is concerned.
Psychoanalysis in its pure form is practically nowhere to be seen in most parts of the country.

This partly reflects the fact that the country's cultural life is centred on London, but it is also true that therapists feel the need for collegial support - supervision, clinical meetings, referral networks. Both the Institute of Psycho-analysis and the Tavistock clinic are engaged in serious outreach programmes, but the distribution of therapists through the country is still dreadful. There is a strong bias against psychoanalytic thinking in British psychiatry, so the number of posts for psychotherapists in the National Health Service is small, while most psychiatrists who practice therapy have had little or no training which a psychotherapist would credit.

Looking at the broader psychoanalytic culture one sees some more promising signs. British universities are notoriously narrow in their views of psychology. Human nature hardly gets a look in. Sensation, perception, learning theory, artificial intelligence, brain and behaviour research, animal behaviour, - these are the staple diet offered to students who turn up at universities seeking insight into humanity. But some of them are, at last, opening their doors to psychodynamic thinking. There are significant initiatives at Cambridge, Warwick, Essex, Middlesex Polytechnic and the Polytechnic of East London. But by far the most interesting development is the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury. It offers an MA in Psychoanalytic Studies (attracting 300 applicants for 15-20 places), a doctoral programme and plans for integration with a clinical training. The teaching programme is a broad one, including philosophical, political and cultural aspects usually ignored by the London trainings. It is highly-regarded and is already having an influence in Britain and abroad. Above all, it is keen to make connections.

There is also a new organisation concerned to create a network of people engaged in psychoanalytic teaching and research called THERIP (The Higher Education Research and Information Network in Psychoanalysis), also non -sectarian, which sponsors lectures and workshops. Recent series have included "Psychoanalysis and Threatre", problems of teaching and research seminars on racism. There is an annual Register in which members spell out their interest, and there are plans to expand it to include research reports.

Another center of non-sectarian activities is the Freud Museum (the London house to which Freud moved when he fled Vienna in 1938) which has sought to promote a wide range of points of view. Alas, its director was given notice when he recently mounted an international conference with a large Lacanian contingent.

Free Association Books has also sought to enliven the culture of psychoanalysis by creating a space for wider and deeper investigations. The quarterly journal, **Free Associations**, has as its subtitle: Psychoanalysis, Groups, Politics, Culture and has opened its pages to writings on, for example, interrogation methods in South Africa, radical psychoanalysis in Central and South America, analyses of works of art, plays, novels, etc. The publishers also co-sponsor (with the Polytechnic of East London) an annual conference on "Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere". These conferences play a catalytic role by soliciting papers on a wide range of cultural and political topics and by providing a forum for their discussion and eventual publication. The 1990 conference included papers on working as a black analyst and on working with resistance fighters in South Africa. Two volumes of essays related to the themes of the conference have appeared: **Capitalism and Infancy** and **Crises of the Self**, both edited by Barry Richards. Further collections are planned on **The Social Construction of Inferiority** and **Psychoanalysis of Popular Culture**.

Most psychoanalytic writings have been concerned with individuals. Ventures into the social and political realms have been prone to two sorts of reductionism: attempting to read the social off the intrapsychic or attempting to reduce the mental to the socio-economic. Some writings published by Free Association Books attempt to move beyond these simple one-to-one correlations. For example, the collected writings of Isabel Menzies-Lyth provide case studies of institutions in which the fine texture of the activities in, for example, nursing or the fire service, are

carefully interpreted psychoanalytically. Similarly, where psychobiography tends towards appalling oversimplication, Victor Wolfenstein's biography of the American Black Muslim, Malcolm X (**The Victims of Democracy**), provides a lovely integration of careful social history with a profound understanding of the inner worlds of black radicals, including the contradictions of Malcolm's struggles. Paul Hoggett, in **Partisans in an Uncertain World**, provides a psychoanalytic interpretation of the plight of leftists in the face of the hegemony of the Right in most metropolitan countries.

Attempts to integrate psychoanalysis and progressive politics need to proceed on a number of fronts - training, education, publications, availability of therapy, penetration into existing institutions. There has been progress on some of these fronts, much less so on the last two. There is little reason to expect that the National Health Service, beleaguered in so many ways, will soon improve its provision of therapy. Existing institutions are also relatively refractory, but there is a ferment which will eventually tell.

I think that no political movement which does not take full account of the lights and shadows of human nature - in their full complexity and including their shameful and distressing aspects - has any hope of enduring. Some that thought they could prevail by pure force or pure commitment and party discipline have found themselves undermined from within by the return of the suppressed and the repressed. This has shown itself to be true of '68 visionaries, Maoists, Stalinists, dictatorships of the Right and any number of other heartless ideologies. In the light of this profound truth, the task of psychoanalysing politics is no effete luxury. It is the prerequisite of a decent and humane world.