



Identity In Question

Kleinian and Object Relations

Voice-over

The discussion chaired by Jessica Evans, Lecturer in Cultural and Media Studies at the Open University. She talks with Ian Craig, Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex who has written widely on psychoanalysis and its relationship with sociology, and Margaret Rustin, Consultant Child Psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Together they discuss the central concepts of Kleinian object relation psychoanalysis, their use in the clinical context, and also their wider applications to social and cultural life.

Jessica Evans

I'm Jessica Evans and with me are Ian Craig and Margaret Rustin. We'll be talking about the central concepts of the Kleinian and object relations tradition, their use in clinical practice, and also their wider applications to the social and cultural field. Can I start by asking you to say a bit about the kind of clinical work you do and the context in which you do it? Margaret.

Margaret Rustin

I work at the Tavistock Clinic which is an NHS outpatient clinic which provides services for the whole population range. I myself work in the Child and Family Department and that means multi-disciplinary work, working with psychiatrists, psychologists, family therapists and others, and child psychotherapists is one of the NHS professions contributing to a child and adolescent mental health service. The Clinic's also a large training centre for all the mental health professions interested in psychotherapeutic approaches, and the integration of the training process and the clinical work does make it a highly specific context.

Jessica Evans

Ian.

Ian Craig

Well I work for two types of groups. I have patient groups with the local NHS psychotherapy service. I work with people who are referred from GP's, from psychiatrists, from all sorts of caring professionals in the area, and have a very wide range of patients and I also work with what we call experiential groups, which are groups of trainees or health service workers, who are using the group to find out about their relationships with each other, how they relate to other people, how they deal with being in a group, and generally finding out more about their own lives.

Jessica Evans

Clearly all roads in psychoanalysis lead back to Freud. I just wonder whether you can say something about what we can still learn from Freud. Ian.

Ian Craig

I think first of all what we can still learn is about the existence of the unconscious which is still quite a startling discovery I think for some people, people can still be shocked that they do things for reasons for which I don't know and which I can discover later or maybe not discover at all, and the idea that human beings are pushed or driven, or somewhere acted upon by part of themselves I don't know about, I think is quite a radical idea. Personally, the other part of Freud which I always go back to is the idea that people are divided between themselves, that they are to some extent most of the time and subsequently have some sort of internal conflict within us and that our allies and our psyches aren't simple.

Jessica Evans

Margaret, have you got something to add?

Margaret Rustin

Yes, there's one thing I'd like to say which is that Freud also discovered that the way in which we could learn about these aspects of ourselves which aren't obvious in an everyday way is through reflection and that reflection is most easy with someone to share and that's why he's also the inventor of a particular form of psychotherapy: psychoanalysis.

Jessica Evans

Well we'll come back to Freud later but first I'm interested to know which particular post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories have informed your clinical work. Margaret.

Margaret Rustin

Well as a child psychotherapist I think the most important person is Melanie Klein. Of course there was also Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, who developed child psychotherapy in a slightly different way, and there were very important debates between these two highly significant women analysts in the 1930's and '40's, but for me Klein's ideas have been particularly productive, and that is the tradition that the Tavistock broadly represents. I would add to that much of Winnicott's work and more recently and extremely importantly, Wilfred Bion's.

Ian Craig

Yes I think Bion is a theorist of groups and under the major group analysts has been particularly important for me, and I find it becomes more important. I'm fascinated by his work because he seems to move from constructing a sort of simplistic, almost scientific method of psychoanalysis, to moving off to notions of containing which I relate to medieval Christian mysticism and I find very important in a group, a sort of way of being in a group, a way of existing in a group which seems to pick up on sorts of unconscious processes and not necessarily make sense of them.

Margaret Rustin

The idea that Bion particularly developed is the concept of containment which I think is absolutely essential to all forms of psychotherapeutic practice, even though people don't always use that language.

Jessica Evans

Well there's another tradition of Lacanian Theory which has had profound importance, particularly in the academic context in the humanities, but you both as practitioners don't work within this tradition. I just wonder whether you had any thoughts as to why you don't use Lacan so much. Margaret.

Margaret Rustin

Well no doubt the answer is partly that, you know, one is trained in a particular context and that's how one grows as a professional thinker and Lacan wasn't part of my original context. However, I have had opportunities for some engagement, both in London where there are Lacanian analysts who are interested in dialogue and occasions when one has opportunities for that; also in France where in fact I've found that clinical Lacanian thinking is much closer to the British tradition and might appear the case if one looks at it through the more academic context. I think I would also add that Lacan and Klein, for example, are deeply close in their profound interest and respect for the unconscious and that these European traditions are very different from the way in which psychoanalysis has developed in the United States.

Jessica Evans

So that's the key difference in a way...

Margaret Rustin

I would say so.

Jessica Evans

... rather than between Lacan and Klein, it's more to do with different national contexts. Ian.

Ian Craig

I suppose our approach to Lacan as a social theorist as well as a practising therapist I think for reliance and language is far too heavy. I suppose clinically I've begun recently thinking of Lacan's Notion of Imaginary and relating it to what Klein has to say about that fantasy, in a group I found imaginary a more useful way of thinking about the very strong feelings and the very strong transferences that are made onto the therapist. Imaginary seems to carry a forceful, necessary illusion, but the idea of fantasy doesn't.