



## **Identity In Question**

*Ethics and Psychoanalysis*

### **Jessica Evans**

I'd like to change direction now and turn to the issue of the relationship of psychoanalysis to wider cultural forms. To what extent do you think psychoanalysis as applied to organisations has a strong ethical dimension? I mean many analysts have talked about the relationship between healthier or less healthy forms of relating in organisations – I just wonder whether you felt that psychoanalysis does have this strong ethical dimension. Ian.

### **Ian Craig**

I think it's got a strong ethical dimension whatever you're working with – individuals or organisations or groups. You could learn a lot about some organisations and I think particularly Kleinian concepts are useful for either commissions or projection, the way in which problems gets projected around the organisation. It's extremely useful. Whether you can then go on to prescribe a healthy organisation is another matter, I suspect the truth is that human beings do this to each other. You could maybe look for organisational means to limit it but not actually change it fundamentally.

### **Margaret Rustin**

Could I add that I think a psychoanalytical approach is to do with trying to understand and not to judge and it's extremely important, and that it does include an interest in human beings' ethical relation to themselves which they have, whatever mode that takes, so it's an interesting morality rather than a prescription of forms of morality.

### **Ian Craig**

I think that the background for psychoanalysis there is an ethic which is different, an emphasis on people, the importance of actually thinking about what one does and of knowing one's other self.

### **Jessica Evans**

Do you think it's possible to say that the kinds of psychic problems that individuals have can be typical of their historical time or change over time? Margaret.

### **Margaret Rustin**

I think there are some specifics and obviously it's been very much commented on that Freud started with hysteria – here we are a hundred years on and hysteria is much less the name of the game at this point and in many of the changes in forms of life very different sorts of families now from the kind of families that were typical when I was growing up, many single parent families, many different kinds of combinations, and of course all the time new things which are going to create new forms of experience. What does a surrogate baby make of who their parents are? So I don't doubt that we will have to go on learning more all the time so in that sense, indeed historically specific, but at the same time I would feel that there are core factors which will have some continuity.

### **Jessica Evans**

That's an interesting point you make about hysteria. I just wonder whether Ian had something to add.

### **Ian Craig**

Well I've been impressed by Elaine Showalter's book – she calls it *Hystories* – where she argues about a whole series of social scripts which enable people to explain their miseries without actually looking at their misery psychologically – it's a way of avoiding a sort of psychological understanding of oneself - so she moves through from things like ME through to alien abduction, arguing that normal human misery can be expressed in all sorts of different

ways and there are ways which catch on collectively especially – I would add as a sociologist and a society which has been highly individualised so we no longer have a sort of collective groups around us which will sort of route us in reality and we're left searching individually and separately for explanations of their miseries and I think she gets hold of that process very well.

**Jessica Evans**

I suppose Giddens as well comes out of that way of thinking about individuals as flexible and protean – what's your view on Giddens?

**Ian Craig**

I think Giddens was far too simplistic actually. I see him as producing a sort of ideology for late capitalism basically, I mean he says that this sort of personality is suited to what he calls late modernity and I think he's right, but it's not necessarily a good form of living, a good form of being, a good form of being a person, it seems to me that the Giddens individual loses any sense of morality, of base, of depth and just becomes a surface, a free market trader looking for satisfaction, as much satisfaction as they could get as cheaply as possible.

**Margaret Rustin**

With an avoidance of the experience of anxiety and relationship which are fundamental to, I think, a richer form of human life.

**Jessica Evans**

Well that brings us to our final question really which is linked very much to what we've just been discussing. Freud argued very much that the aim of psychoanalysis was to turn hysterical misery into common unhappiness. What do you think about that?

**Margaret Rustin**

Modern developments in psychoanalysis have also alerted us to the developmental potential which Freud was tapping through the ideas that he introduced us to and I think make us more aware of the endless potential for revisiting things, the sort of point that Ian was making earlier in fact, that there's childhood, there's adolescence, there's finding a partner, there's having children, there's growing old and so on and so on, and these are all more opportunities to address things which are quite fundamental to our existence and to do it differently the next time round.

**Jessica Evans**

Those are very important points and I think 'cos they do very much go to the heart of the values of psychoanalysis itself. Thank you very much Margaret and Ian for a most stimulating discussion.