Course Description and Goals

The class will be devoted to clarifying and enriching our own sense of how we view and understand the way the world/life works (our frame of reference), with an emphasis on unconscious forces, encompassing the personal, political and cultural. We will explore a perspective on psychoanalysis as a radical/revolutionary approach to understanding and addressing critical problems in the world and conversely how politics and culture impact psychoanalysis. Toward this end we will reconsider what psychoanalysis is or ought to be - science, art, religion, belief system, moral code, critique, path to liberation, life style, some or all of the above or more.

Historically, the psychoanalytic enterprise has primarily been rooted in the consulting room while also exerting influence in the arts, language, childrearing, popular culture and so forth. This is in contrast to the spirit of Freud’s end of life conviction that the main contribution of psychoanalysis would and should be in the realm of solving social problems. We will consider how we define social problems, which at the core are grounded in our own frame(s) of reference or point(s) of view as to the way the world/life works, and how and why it should be different.

The class will be clinical/personal (as well as theoretical) in the sense that we will start with how we have come to our individual way(s) of experiencing things with our history and unconscious life as cornerstones. Whereas in the consulting room we are involved with the space between two people and at times more (and the creation of an analytic third/other), herein we will be exploring the space between the individual and the world insofar as how we get from one to the other and vice versa (and what might be an analytic other in this context). We will consider the meaning and implications of the “normative unconscious” (that which derives from something general about a society) and how individual aspects of our unconscious life relate to this. As things change in the world, what are the consequences in terms of how our unconscious life evolves?

Throughout our journey we will endeavor to keep a focus on how what is at our core becomes manifest in ourselves, families, organizations, and other social, political and economic identifications that may involve class, gender, race and age, and vice versa. In this spirit, we will keep a regular eye on current events, considering them through a psychoanalytic perspective (a kind of societal case study). All of this is meant to help us clarify and develop our own frame(s) of reference from which we look at/from ourselves (essential and/or multiple), and from what is other than ourselves (the rest of the world).
Requirements and Evaluation

The class is pass/fail and of course attendance is expected, as our participation is critical to what we all get from the experience. Everyone will be responsible for a class presentation regarding any related aspect of these issues, which might be a current, planned or potential dissertation proposal, or a case study at the individual, professional, organizational or societal level.

Readings will be offered in accordance with the issues we decide to primarily be focusing upon. One major arena will involve health care politics wherein many of the themes and issues we will be talking about come together. Other favorites include the media, sports and science. I’m eager to learn about yours! Of course we will talk more about all of this when we meet.

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