

## DIALECTICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM I

**Irwin Z. Hoffman, Ph.D.**

This course will explore the meaning, the clinical, existential, and moral ramifications of the perspective on the analytic process that I've called "dialectical constructivism." The main text for the course will be my book *Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process: A Dialectical-Constructivist View* (R and S) (The Analytic Press, 1998; pb 2001). We will also read a series of essays since 1998 that take the dialectical constructivist view to new frontiers.

In general I'm listing, in required and optional readings, my own responses to critiques and reviews. Needless to say, it would be best if you were able to read the critiques and the reviews first, but I think you'll be able to follow and, hopefully, get much from the responses alone. I do quote or paraphrase a lot that I take up to discuss.

I am offering two independent courses on Dialectical constructivism: Dialectical Constructivism I in the fall and Dialectical Constructivism II in the spring. Dialectical Constructivism I will focus on readings from my own work. It will entail study of philosophy, theory, and extensive clinical illustrations from my own experience. Dialectical Constructivism II will be organized largely around case presentations by students complemented by considerations from the fall readings as well as several additional essays, some highlighting the interface of psychoanalytic process and social consciousness and activism. The two courses are complementary. I personally would hope that people enrolling in the fall would also be inclined to enroll in the spring in order to achieve the level of integration that emerges from dialogue about one's own clinical work.

In the fall of 2019, the class will meet for two weekend workshops. The first will be Friday October 11 and Saturday October 12. The second will be Friday December 6 and Saturday December 7.

We will meet on the Fridays from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM, and on the Saturdays from 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM.

In addition to the readings, several movies are recommended as reflecting aspects of dialectical constructivism and as useful for discussion: *Cider House Rules*, *Thirteen Conversations About One Thing*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *The Savages*, *Revolutionary Road*.

### **FIRST FRIDAY (10-11-19)**

**Basic principles of dialectical constructivism; the ambiguity of experience; agency**

**and choice in the construction of meaning; the ironic moral authority of the analyst; the impact of mortality on the construction of meaning; critical thinking in dialectical constructivism; bridging “modern” and “postmodern” perspectives; the dialectics of meaning and mortality, of construction and discovery, of ritual and spontaneity. Fast-forward to recent discussion of a clinical case just to illustrate, at the outset, application of the “dialectical-constructivist” model in clinical work.**

**Required reading:**

**R and S:**

**Introduction (pp. xi- xxxii).**

**\*Chapter 1 (pp. 1-30)**

**\* Hoffman, I.Z. (2016). The risks of therapist passivity and the potentials of constructivist influence. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 26:91-97. (Originally presented as discussion of case by Francesca Colzani at plenary panel at the meeting of the IARPP, Toronto, June 2015)**

Optional reading

R and S:

Chapters 2 – On “death anxiety” based on my doctoral thesis (1972), published in 1979, the only chapter not about psychoanalytic process.

Chapter 3 – On the analyst’s ironic authority

Book Forum (1999), Irwin Z. Hoffman’s *Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process*: Three reviews by Jessica Benjamin, Louis Sass, and Lawrence Friedman and Hoffman’s reply. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. 47: 883- 920.

Review Essays (2001), Irwin Z. Hoffman’s *Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process*: Three reviews essays by Malcolm Slavin, Ruth Stein and Donnel Stern and Hoffman’s reply. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. 11:405-497.

**FIRST SATURDAY (10-12-19)**

**Epistemology of dialectical constructivism; from objectivism to constructivism,**

distinguished from movement from drive theory to relational theory; objectivism in relational theory; the emergence of the analyst's subjectivity in the context of the asymmetry of the analytic relationship; multiple dialectics and figure- ground reversals; for example, the analyst as patient and the patient as analyst; existential versus epistemic uncertainty; critical constructivism versus open-minded positivism (e.g. Pine); critical constructivism versus limited constructivism (e.g. Schafer). epistemology and ethics; uncertainty and conviction; the analyst's authenticity; enactment and interpretation; enactment and new experience; new experience in the context of elements of repetition; the analyst's participation before exploration and understanding; the ambiguity of the analyst's participation.

Deeper explorations of clinical implications of dialectical constructivism; dialectical versus dichotomous thinking; sources of therapeutic action; the struggle with uncertainty as a core feature of the "good object"; shelving versus throwing away the book; oedipal dialectics and therapeutic action; the analyst's "marriage" to analytic principles; the patient's interest in winning "battles" but not the "war"; constructing meaning in the face of mortality; the interplay of existential and neurotic anxiety; overcoming the dark side of the analytic frame and of the human condition.

Issues highlighted by prospect of termination; constructing good enough endings in psychoanalysis; Factors of chance and of the patient's will as they affect outcome; varieties of courses of analytic work; is termination always the wisest course and goal? reciprocal affirmation in the context of endings; recognizing the patient's maturity; postanalytic contacts; the impact of writing about patients on the analytic relationship; mortality and termination; The patient's idealization, envy, and choice to forgive the analyst his or her limitations; the patient's progress as a reparative gift; mortality as humanizing common ground; rituals of affirmation in the face of death and loss.

#### Required readings:

##### In R and S:

Chapter 8 (pp. 193-217)

\*Chapter 9 (pp. 219-244)

\*Chapter 10 (pp. 245-273)

\*Hoffman, I.Z. (2000), At death's door: Therapists and patients as agents.

*Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10: 823-846

\*Afterword to "At death's door" in *Relational Psychoanalysis* Vol. 5

#### Optional readings:

R and S Chapters 4-7. Chapters 4 and 5 are probably the most widely known and cited. They've also been reprinted in other edited volumes.

Greenberg, J. (2001), The analyst's participation: A new look. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 49: 359-381. (Critique of aspects of relational theory, includes critique of my work with Diane in Chapter 8 of R and S)

Altman, N. and Davies, J.M. (2003) A plea for constructive dialogue. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 51: 145-161. (A reply to Greenberg)

Hoffman, I. Z. (2004) Commentary on case presentation (Miss A) by Peter Fonagy in "The Analyst at Work." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 85, 807-822.

## **SECOND FRIDAY (12-6-19)**

**Psychoanalysis and science; some false assumptions underlying so-called "systematic empirical research"; advantages of the intensive case study as "research" appropriate to this discipline; the uniqueness of each analytic pairing and the need for creative "application" of theory. Epistemology and politics. The dialectic of the existential and the political.**

### **Required reading:**

**\*Hoffman, I.Z. (2009). Doublethinking our way to "scientific" legitimacy: The desiccation of human experience. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 57:1043-1069. (Plenary Address: The American Psychoanalytic Association. New York, January 19, 2007).**

**Hoffman, I. Z. (2012). Response to Safran (critique of "Doublethinking our way to scientific legitimacy"): The development of critical psychoanalytic sensibility. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 22:721-731.**

### **Optional readings:**

Hoffman, I.Z. (2013). Response to Fonagy (critique of "Doublethinking our way to scientific legitimacy"). *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*.23:123-127

Hoffman, I.Z. (2013) Response to Strenger (critique of "Doublethinking our way to scientific legitimacy"). *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 23:225-229

Hoffman, I.Z. (2012). Response to Eagle and Wolitzky. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 60:105-119.

**SECOND SATURDAY (12-7-19)**

**Reflections on the responsibility of the patient and of the analyst within the analytic process and as political agents in the world. Overcoming the “influence taboo” in psychoanalysis. The dialectic of influence and responsiveness. The whole—that is, the analyst as a person, the patient as a person, and their encounter—is greater than the sum of its parts; The challenge of differentiation; From repetition to new ways of being: implicitly a movement from positivism to constructivism. Conventional psychoanalytic “escapes from freedom” via psychic determinism, free association, and evenly hovering attention. Technical rationality versus creative improvisation. The dialectic of the patient’s and the analyst’s caregiving responsibilities. Conformist versus critical psychoanalysis. The challenge of integrating psychoanalysis and politics. Is there a way? Is there such a thing as an apolitical psychoanalysis?**

**Required readings:**

\*—————(2009b) **Therapeutic passion in the countertransference. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 19:617-637. (Plenary Address: Division 39 of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, April 22, 2007).**

\*Hoffman, I.Z. (2006a). **Forging difference out of similarity: The multiplicity of corrective experience. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 75:715-751.**

—————(2006b) **The myths of free association and the potentials of the analytic relationship. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 87:43-61.**

\*Hoffman, I.Z. (unpublished) **Willing to be willing; Willing to be good. Presented originally at the IARPP meeting in NY in March 2012. Expanded versions presented at various subsequent meetings in Chicago and New York.**

**Optional readings:**

Tolleson, J. (2009) **Saving the world one patient at a time: Psychoanalysis and social critique. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 7:190–205.**

Nussbaum M. C. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hoffman, I.Z. (2013). **Response to Layton: Considering the Sociopolitical Context of Dialectical Constructivism *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 23:287–295, 2013**

Hoffman, I.Z. (2013). Response to Slavin: Considering the Evolutionary and Existential Contexts of Dialectical Constructivism *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 23:315–323, 2013.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will learn the meaning of “dialectical constructivism” as distinguished from “technical rationality” and “positivism” as they affect the psychoanalytic process and the analysts’ understanding of patients’ and analysts’ ways of relating and participating.
2. Students will learn the meaning of “dialectical thinking,” which distinguished from dichotomous thinking as applied to various polarities in the analytic situation such as ritual and spontaneity, enactment and new experience, action and understanding, asymmetry and mutuality.
3. Students will learn the implications of ambiguity as it applies to many aspects of the psychoanalytic situation: For example the ambiguity of the analyst’s and the patient’s states of mind, attitudes towards the other, expectations regarding the future, etc in the course of their encounter