

Foundations of Interpersonal and Humanistic Psychoanalysis

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**with invited presenters Ann D'Ercole,
Darlene Ehrenberg, and Donnel Stern**

While interpersonal theory has contributed to the relational turn in psychoanalysis, the early theorists had a startlingly direct approach that can differ significantly in emphasis from relational psychoanalysis. When Harry Stack Sullivan wrote, “everyone is much more human than otherwise,” he signaled a view of psychoanalysis that is both deeply humanistic and has an egalitarian political spirit (Sullivan, 1953, p. 32). Interpersonal psychoanalysis began as a critique of classical theory and went on to become a strikingly original theory in its own right. Early interpersonalists embraced several of Freud’s seminal contributions including the importance of unconscious processes in understanding psychological suffering and the primacy of early childhood experience in the development of neurotic conditions. However, they departed radically by taking the position that interpersonal relations are the basic units of human experience which in turn influence all areas of major concern to psychoanalysts including a view of mind and dissociation; the developmental processes involved in adult problems of living; a theory of motivation; and innovative approaches to psychotherapy and psychoanalytic treatment.

In this course, we will read classic writings by Harry Stack Sullivan, Sandor Ferenczi, Erich Fromm, Clara Thompson, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, and Edgar Levenson, among others. The classes will include three classes taught by scholars who have made and continue to make original contributions to the field. In one class, Donnel Stern will talk about unformulated experience. Ann D’Ercole will teach about Clara Thompson, who made substantial contributions to the understanding of gender and interpersonal theory, and Darlene Ehrenberg will lead a class about her innovative approach to psychoanalytic treatment. The method of interpersonal theory has been used not only for psychoanalytic treatment but also for cultural studies. The class will survey the contributions of early thinkers to the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, and will also introduce Erich Fromm’s and Clara Thompson’s contributions to cultural studies in the areas of gender studies and political psychology.

Candidates will need to purchase the following books.

Sullivan, H.S. (1953). *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*. (1953). New York: Norton.

Levenson, E. (2005). *The fallacy of understanding and the ambiguity of change*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press

Please note that the first reading assignments are to be completed **before** the first class.

Class I: Conceptions

In this class, we consider the basic terms and concepts central to Harry Stack Sullivan's theory of the interpersonal mind. Sullivan wove together threads of self and other as he considered the origins of personality in early life. He presented what he called an empathic view of anxiety that the primary caregiver's anxiety is "caught" and induced in the infant. With the concept of participant observation, Sullivan introduced the idea of field theory to psychoanalysis.

Required Reading Before the First Class:

Sullivan, H.S. (1953). *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* Chapters. New York: Norton. Chapter 1 The Meaning of the Developmental Approach, Chapter 2 Definitions, Chapter 3 Postulates: pp. 3 to 45.

Greenberg, J.R. and Mitchell (1983) *Interpersonal Psychoanalysis in Object relations in psychoanalysis*, pp. 79-95.

Additional Reading:

Evans, Barton F. (1996). *Harry Stack Sullivan: Interpersonal theory and psychotherapy*. Chapter 1 Introduction pp. 3-21; Chapter 3 Basic Concepts pp. 55-73.

Class II: The Infant and Caregiver Matrix

Sullivan was influenced by the American and British empirical schools that emphasized operationalizing theoretical concepts and applying parsimonious explanations. Using this pragmatic approach and careful observation, Sullivan described the mothering one and the infant as an interactive system. Because human infants are biologically dependent for a prolonged period of time, infants needs are met by caregivers in affectively toned social interactions that shape the infant's interactive skills and their developmental experience of both pleasure and anxiety. Even before the word and the felt concept of I crystallizes, the infant interacts with the caregiver through biological zones of interaction. When these interactions are rewarding, they are accompanied by the baby's euphoria, and when they are out of synch, or lead to deprivation or punishment, they can evoke intense anxiety. Anxiety induced by the caregiver in the dependent infant can disorganize, and dis-integrate previously learned behaviors. Precursors of object relations, which Sullivan called personifications, arise from these charged transactions which are basic motivational patterns. The integrated behavioral exchanges between mother and infant become the earliest units of motivation.

Required Reading:

Sullivan, H.S. (1953). *The Interpersonal theory of psychoanalysis*.

Infancy: Beginnings; Infancy: The Concept of Dynamism Part 1; The Concept of Dynamism Part II. New York: Norton. Pp. 49-109.

Recommended Reading:

Shafran, R.B. (1995), *Handbook of Interpersonal Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge.

Class III: The self-system and childhood development

For Sullivan, the individual's development is shaped and organized by two great themes of interpersonal relations: the first theme is the satisfaction of needs which brings pleasure and euphoria to the young child, and the second is the gradient of anxiety which results from punishments and empathic induction from the mothering figure. The self-system is the collection of psychological processes that protect the organisms from anxiety and are related to personifications of good me, bad me, and not me. Sullivan carefully describes the evolution of the self-system across childhood experience.

Required Reading:

Sullivan H.S. (1953). *The interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*. Chapter 10: The Beginnings of the Self-System; Chapter 11: The Transition from Infancy to Childhood: The Acquisition of Speech as Learning; Chapter 12: Childhood; and 13. Malevolence, Hatred, and Isolating Techniques;

Recommended Reading:

Crastnopol, M. (1995). Anxiety. *The handbook of interpersonal Psychoanalysis*. M. Lilonells, J. Fiscalini, C.H. Mann, and D.B. Stern, (eds.) New York, Routledge.

Sullivan, H.S. (1954). *The psychiatric interview*. New York: Norton pp. 89-106.

Class IV: Patterns of Personality, Security Processes, and Syndromes

In this class, we will consider how the security operation of selective inattention operates and influences one's capacity to think, feel, and act. We will also assess for ourselves various criticisms of Sullivan's theory and consider criticisms that have been made by psychoanalysts.

Required Reading:

Sullivan, H.S. (1956). Obsessionalism and early referential processes in *Clinical Studies in Psychiatry*. Pp. 12-35.

Sullivan, H.S. (1956) Selective Inattention in *Clinical Studies in Psychiatry*. New York: Norton. Pp. 38-77.

Recommended Reading:

Greenberg, J.R. and Mitchell, S.A. (1983). Interpersonal Psychoanalysis In *Object relations in psychoanalytic theory*. Cambridge MA: Harvard U. Press, pp. 79-118.

Sullivan, H.S. (1953). Dreams, and Myths. *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 329-336.

Review of Sullivan's Interpersonal theory of psychiatry. Jacobson, E. (1955). *J. of the American Psychoanalytic Assn.* 2, 239-262.

Class V: The view and practice of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis

Having considered interpersonal psychoanalysis as a theory, what are the implications for psychotherapy and psychoanalysis? Sullivan began with patients often diagnosed as schizophrenic who would not ordinarily have been treated by classical analysts. We will consider how he and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann thought and practiced psychotherapy.

Required Reading:

The Detailed Inquiry (1995). Cooper, A. In *Handbook of interpersonal psychoanalysis*. M. Lionells, J. Fiscalini, C.H. Mann, and D.B. Stern, (eds.) New York, Routledge.

Sullivan, H.S. (1956). The Interpersonal theory of the mental disorder in *Clinical Studies in Psychiatry*, pp. 3-11

Fromm-Reichmann, F. (1950). *The Principles of intensive psychotherapy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 80-127.

Class VI: Clara Mabel Thompson: American Culturalist and Architect of the American Interpersonal Tradition with Ann D'Ercole

The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Clara Mabel Thompson promoted a radical approach to the field of psychoanalysis following her analysis with Sandor Ferenczi. She famously revolted against the leadership of the New York Psychoanalytic Society and Institute for what she perceived as scientific dogmatism and entrenched political power. She wrote important papers on clinical issues and the psychology of women. The "Todschweigen" or death by silence that clouds her legacy will be exposed as we discuss her as the architect of the Interpersonal tradition.

Required Reading:

Thompson, C. (1942) Cultural Pressures in the Psychology of Women (in Green (1964) *Interpersonal Psychoanalysis: The selected papers of Clara M. Thompson*, pp. 229-242.

Thompson, C. The History of the William Alanson White Institute. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 53:1, pp.26-28.

D'Ercole, A. (2017) On Finding Clara Thompson, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 53:1, pp.63-68.

Class VII: Ferenczi and The Confusion of Tongues

Freud initially took the position that hysterics suffer from reminiscences of sexual assaults oftentimes perpetrated by their fathers. Shortly after Freud presented this theory, he retracted it, and in its place Freud proposed that hysteria results from the repression of incestuous wishes of a child who also has a fixation at an earlier stage of psychosexual development. Like Sullivan, many of Ferenczi's patients were considered extremely difficult and too disturbed for psychoanalytic treatment. In his clinical diary and papers, Ferenczi presented novel treatment methods for dissociative patients whom he believed had been sexually abused during childhood. In *The Confusion of Tongues* (1933), Ferenczi challenged Freud's retraction of the childhood seduction hypothesis and thought about how how childhood sexual assaults influence the adult.

Required Reading:

Ferenczi, Sandor (1933). Confusion of tongues between adults and the children. In *Final contributions to the problems and methods of psycho-analysis*. (1955). J. Richmond (ed.) New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Recommended Reading:

Sandor Ferenczi (1928). The elasticity of psychoanalytic technique. In *Final contributions to the problems and methods of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. J. Richmond pp. 87-101

Ferenczi, S. (1988) *The Clinical Diary of Sandor Ferenczi*, Judith Dupont (ed.) Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Class VIII: Erich Fromm: A psychoanalytic vision of freedom and authoritarianism

Erich Fromm was born in Frankfurt Germany in 1900 and trained as a sociologist and a psychoanalyst in Berlin during the Weimar period. Fromm believed that problems of living proliferate in a society when there is significant conflict between one's basic psychological needs and the demands of society. As a sociologist, Marxist, and humanist, Fromm developed a theory that social forces are expressed as a social character that makes citizens conform and perform what society expects of them. Fromm considered freedom to be a person's capacity to observe, reason, and make choices that are not unduly influenced by others. The positive aspect of freedom is the expression of one's wishes, and interests, and it is oftentimes pleasurable. However, freedom also has a painful valence referred to as negative freedom that follows positive freedom like a shadow and cannot be separated from it. Fromm thought that freedom requires individuals to sever their primary ties with family and community. To be able to act independently one has to be able to stand outside of one's own family and community, and this triggers a deep sense of anxiety surrounding the experience of being powerless and alone. The impulse to escape the inevitable anxiety of freedom gives rise to individual and social processes that can be usefully psychoanalyzed. Based on this innovative idea, Fromm developed a psychology of how authoritarianism works. This analysis contributed to the beginning of the field of political psychology and humanistic psychoanalysis.

Fromm, E. (1941). The Emergence of the individual and the ambiguity of freedom. In *Escape from freedom*. New York: Rinehart & Co.

Fromm, E. (1941). The Mechanisms of escape. In *Escape from freedom*. New York: Rinehart & Co., pp. 136-178.

Recommended Reading:

The Problem of the Will (1988). Mitchell, S. *Relational concepts in psychoanalysis.: An Integration*. pp. 239-270.

A psychodynamic view of action and responsibility: Clinical studies in subjective experience (2017). Shapiro, D. London: Routledge.

Frie, R. (2008). Introduction: The situated nature of psychological agency. In *Psychological Agency*. R. Frie (ed.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Class IX: The sane society and human happiness

Fromm places society on the couch in *The Sane Society* (1955). He considers how social ideologies including capitalism and patriarchy invisibly influence one's capacity to think, feel and act with others. Mental health is conventionally defined by a lack of symptoms. Fromm thought this definition is a silent accommodation to the social character of one's society so that what one's society expects of an individual is necessarily considered to be normal and healthy. He critiqued this accommodation because it concealed the negative impact that such a submission has on the lives and potential of individuals. He critiqued Sullivan's and Freud's views of the self which he thought were shaped by this implicit assumption. Informed by humanism and Marxist theory, he presented a very different view of the existential needs of human beings. He thought that individual problems of living proliferate when there is a conflict between the social character of one's society and the individual's actual psychological needs.

Humanism and Psychoanalysis: (1964). Fromm, E. *Contemporary psychoanalysis* 1(1) 69-79.

Fromm, E. (1955) Social Character. In *The sane society*, pp. 78-83;

Recommended Reading:

Frie, R. (2018). Psychoanalysis, persecution and the Holocaust: Erich Fromm's life and work during the 1930s. In *Fromm forum 23/2019: Putting society on the couch* R. Funk and T. Kuhn (eds.). Berlin and Tübingen: The Erich Fromm Institute.

Class X: Unformulated Experience with Donnel Stern

Unformulated experience is a concept that Donnel Stern has been elaborating since he introduced it in 1983. In this class, Dr. Stern will try to cover the developments that have taken place since then, which include these topics: dissociation; imagination; curiosity; enactment, which he defines in a particular way having to do with dissociation; the link with hermeneutic philosophy; the interpersonal field, particularly its emergent properties;

and the broadening of the theory to include the formulation of nonverbal experience. All of these topics are rooted in emergent clinical process.

Required Reading:

Stern, D.B. (2019). Introduction: Meaningfulness: More than Just Words. In *The infinity of the unsaid: Unformulated experience, language and the nonverbal*. London and New York, pp. 1-40.

Recommended Reading:

Stern, D. (2003), *Unformulated experience* (2003). Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, pp. 3-84.

Class XI: Constructing the Psychoanalyst

The psychoanalyst like the patient lives in an interpersonal field. Hoffmann asks what are the social forces that shape the psychoanalyst at work? Moreover, what is the source of the analyst's authority? In his answer to these questions, Hoffman emphasizes that knowledge emerges as a composite in the experience between patient and analyst.

Hoffman, I.Z. (1998). The intimate and ironic authority of the analyst's presence. In *Ritual and spontaneity in the psychoanalytic process: A dialectical-constructivist view*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, pp. 69-98.

Class XII: The Intimate Edge with Darlene Ehrenberg

Darlene Ehrenberg has an approach to psychoanalytic work that is highly attuned to the ongoing flow of communication between the immediate experience of the patient and the therapist.

Required Reading:

Ehrenberg D. (1992). *The intimate edge: Extending the reach of psychoanalytic interaction*. New York: Norton, pp.13-49.

Class XIII: Edgar Levenson and the Fallacy of Understanding:

The analyst is interested in how patients perceive and relate to their world, and what it is like for the analyst to relate to them. Levenson introduced the view that the analyst's and patient's experience is a continuous enactment and this is the basic material of psychoanalytic treatment. His views have gone on to help shape the relational turn of psychoanalysis.

Required Reading:

Levenson, E. A. (2005). The Fallacy of understanding. In *The fallacy of understanding and The ambiguity of change*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.

Recommended Reading:

Stern, D.B. (2005). Introduction. In *The fallacy of understanding and the ambiguity of change*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press

XIV. The Ambiguity of Change

In this classic paper, we will read how Levenson's ideas matured and we will assess for ourselves his view and its potential impact on our clinical work.

Required Reading:

Levenson, E. (2005). The ambiguity of change in *The fallacy of understanding and the ambiguity of change*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press