

Psychoanalysis and Politics: Histories of Psychoanalysis under Conditions of Restricted Political Freedom.

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The historical relationship between psychoanalysis and politics has been the subject of recent debates among both historians and mental health practitioners. On one side, scholars have argued that psychoanalysis is inherently opposed to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Pointing to the cases of Nazi and Soviet repression of psychoanalysis, some historians have claimed that psychoanalysis requires a certain level of political and civil liberty to flourish. Similarly, clinicians in Argentina and Brazil, particularly those of a psychoanalytic bent, have argued that the violent dictatorships in Latin America during the 20th century repressed psychoanalysis because of its “emancipatory” character.

This volume edited by Joy Damousi and Mariano Plotkin successfully takes this “accepted knowledge” on the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics to task. In case after case – across Europe, Latin America, and even the United States – the authors demonstrate that psychoanalysis spread in both democratic and repressive conditions, that it supported emancipatory as well as fascist politics, and that it was co-opted by both leftist revolutionaries and rightist military officials during the 20th century. Rather than a simple one-to-one correspondence between psychoanalysis and a liberating politics, this volume depicts psychoanalysis as polysemic and flexible, adapting to a wide variety of political positions depending on local circumstances. As one of the editors, Plotkin, writes, if psychoanalysis has the subversive potential to question “the world taken for granted,” it also has the normalizing ability to reinforce that world (203).

This finding is, in large part, the result of a particular methodology. Instead of starting from an *a priori* definition of “true” psychoanalysis and seeing what historical material sticks, the authors in this volume take a more anthropological approach that relies on actors’ categories of what constituted psychoanalytic thought and practice in diverse circumstances. As Damousi and Plotkin argue, “really existing psychoanalysis” has been subversive, neutral, and conservative depending on the social and cultural context in which it was situated (xxvi). The overriding message is that an honest examination of the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics cannot begin in the abstract. One has to look and see.

As a volume with an international scope, this text is a welcome addition to the literature as it broadens an argument that had been originally situated in Latin America. In keeping with prior historical research, the essays on Latin America here reinforce the position that the dictatorships in Argentina and Brazil were fertile ground for the development of a “psychoanalytic culture” in both countries. Jane A. Russo’s discussions of psychoanalytic complicity with the authoritarian Vargas regime in Brazil during the first half of the 20th century and the role of psychoanalyst Amilcar Lobo in the torture of political prisoners are particularly chilling. However, as the editors note, the basic historical material that supports the position that psychoanalysis requires some minimum amount of political liberty comes from the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes in interwar Europe, not Latin America. Though interesting in and of itself, are these Latin American cases simply an exception to the European rule that psychoanalysis is anathema to repressive government? The four essays on Europe in this volume offer a definitive “no.” In addition to providing material on countries that are generally overlooked in histories of psychoanalysis

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(Spain and Italy for example), the essays on Europe collectively demonstrate that the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics was similarly multi-faceted and complex. In Mauro Pasqualini's essay on Italy, for example, he shows that Fascist bureaucrats were often receptive to a brand of psychoanalysis that was expressed in more militant terms during the Italian "psychoanalytic spring" in the 1930s, while anti-Fascists at the time (e.g. Benedetto Croce) vehemently opposed psychoanalysis. When psychoanalysis was repressed in countries like Italy, Hungary, and France, it often had less to do with psychoanalysis as a system of thought *per se* and more to do with Anti-Semitism and politics. Annick Onhayon's essay on France demonstrates that with the exception of a handful of cases, the politics of individual French psychoanalysts under the Vichy regime were not tied to their views on psychoanalysis, but to their divergent and individual "ideological choices and social awareness."

The complexity of the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics is impressive even in the seemingly out-of-place section on psychoanalysis under democracy in the United States. Eli Zaretsky artfully shows that psychoanalysis was both normalizing and liberating at different times in the intellectual culture of postwar United States. Though American psychoanalysis in the 1950s protected the private, domestic sphere and traditional ideals of masculinity, femininity, and paternal authority, psychoanalysis a decade later represented an emancipatory theory of revolution that could overturn traditional ideals and finally, in the 1970s, it became a theory of "politically correct" feminist and gay worldviews.

While the essays in this volume do seem to converge on a particular argument emphasizing complexity and a bottom-up, empirical approach, there are also important differences between them. On one end, several of the essays take a social, biographical point of view that interprets the politics-of-psychoanalysis as the politics around individual *psychoanalysts*. These authors trace the social and political life of psychoanalysts, but leave psychoanalysis itself – as a system of thought – in a black box. Danto's essay, for example, illuminates how North American fears about leftist European intellectuals during the Red Scare of the 1950s impacted the lives of European psychoanalyst émigrés in the United States, but leaves any intellectual or conceptual ties between psychoanalysis and politics unexamined. On the other end, Eli Zaretsky's essay represents a staunchly intellectual approach that focuses on the conceptual connections between psychoanalysis and different political visions in the 1960s, but does not explore the concrete actions of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic institutions (beyond writing books and holding conferences). The better essays of the bunch skillfully combine and intermix these socio-biographical and intellectual approaches. For example, in the essay on psychoanalysis during and after Argentine Peronism in the 1940s and 60s, Alejandro Dagfal not only discusses how psychoanalysis became an intellectual hermeneutic frame for understanding political changes in mid-century Argentina, but also how this hermeneutic approach fit in with official psychoanalytic organizations and society at large.

For an edited volume with such a sweeping scope, this volume holds together remarkably well. This is in large part thanks to the shorter introductions before each section, which relate those sections to the central theme of the book. Damousi and Plotkin's introduction to this volume situates the work in the relevant historiography on psychoanalysis and politics and renders this book accessible to specialists and non-specialists interested in politics, social movements, and the cultural development of psychoanalysis.