Ego Psychology (Year I seminar)
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February 26, March 5, 12, 19, 26, April 2, 9

Thirty years ago, psychoanalytic training at BPSI and other like institutes was framed entirely in the terms of ego psychology. Today, ego psychology has throughout the psychoanalytic world been superseded by many relational, transference-countertransference, and interactional theories (self psychology, relational psychoanalysis, contemporary and classical Klein, the British independent tradition, field theory, and so forth).

This class begins from the premise that ego psychology, in its classical and contemporary forms, has much to recommend it, both to the beginning and to the experienced analyst. Indeed, it is impossible to conceptualize the mind from a psychoanalytic perspective or to think about doing analytic work without this essential approach to theory, technique, and the mind.

Growing out of “middle” and “late” Freud, particularly works like “Two principles of mental functioning” (1911), “On narcissism” (1914), “Mourning and melancholia” (1917), The ego and the id (1924), and Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety (1926), but encompassing concepts that we meet in Freud’s first writings (for example, repression, resistance, defense, conflict, and, from the Studies on Hysteria, “a psychical group divorced from the ego”), ego psychology describes, and looks at how we address clinically, the basic neurotic and normal development and functioning of the psyche.

This course introduces you to some of what came in the early 1940s to be called ego psychology, named especially after the writings of Anna Freud (1936, The ego and the mechanisms of defense) and Heinz Hartmann (1939, Ego psychology and the problem of adaptation). We will look at founding classical writers whose thinking remains germane to our work today, creative rethinkers like Loewald, and contemporary writings by those whose thinking is in the ego psychological tradition.

Following upon your study of Freud, the course is organized around central ego psychological concepts and writers. Along the way, we will pay attention to how concepts developed historically. We begin with the writings of Anna Freud in relation to the ego defenses, followed by the contributions of early infant researchers Spitz and Mahler to our understanding of ego development. We then consider, through the writings of Hartmann and Brenner, conflict and compromise formation; Paul’s Gray’s contributions to the analysis of drive and defense, and Schafer and Schlesinger’s reconsiderations on resistance and defense. We study the evolution of ego psychology into a contemporary intersubjective ego psychology initiated by Loewald, and we conclude with reflections by the course’s instructors.
1. **February 26**: The ego and the mechanisms of defense: Anna Freud and A. Kris

2. **March 5**: Conflict and compromise formation: Hartmann and Brenner

3. **March 12**: Developmental perspectives: Spitz and Mahler

4. **March 19**: Defense and resistance, different views: Gray, Schafer, and Schlesinger

5. **March 26**: Intersubjective ego psychology: Loewald

6. **April 2**: Intersubjective ego psychology, an American independent tradition: McLaughlin, Poland, and Chodorow