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John M. Ingham

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John M. Ingham reviews recent developments in psychological anthropology and argues for an inclusive approach that finds room for psychoanalytic, dialogical, and social perspectives on personality and culture. The argument is developed with special reference to human nature, child development, personality, and mental disorder, and it draws on studies set in many different cultures. He also shows the relevance of some recent work in psychoanalysis and child development to current concerns in anthropology with agency and rhetoric.

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Preface

In this book I review work in contemporary psychological anthropology. I also consider psychoanalysis and the social analysis of cultural forms, among other things. As I see it, psychological anthropology is a good deal more than a branch of cultural anthropology that studies the individual; it is the place where we can begin to reimagine a holistic understanding of human beings and the human condition.

Throughout this book I resist theoretical extremes, reductionism, and one-sided formulations and hold instead that human behavior is complex, dialectical, dialogical, even paradoxical. Rather than emphasizing either the psychological determination of culture or, what is now more common, cultural influences on the individual, I look for tension and interplay between individual subjectivity and collective thought and behavior.

The notion of dialogue captures some of this sense of complexity, dialectic, and interplay. In dialogism, human subjects are subjects as well as objects; they speak as well as listen, and they influence each other. There is dialogue within persons as well as between them. Internal dialogues may result in various sorts of compromise formations, while interpersonal dialogues may move toward provisional social contracts and shared symbols and values. Alternatively, internal and interpersonal dialogues may end in unresolved tension and conflict. In either event, they influence each other; the conversations that go on within the person can influence communicative interaction and discursive practices. These interpersonal conversations can, in turn, influence internal conversations.

Another notion here is that classical and post-Freudian psychoanalysis offers the most comprehensive and anthropologically useful framework for thinking about personality. Implicitly dialogical, it can accommodate the observations of other dialogical perspectives. It is also more suggestive than other psychologies when it comes to interpreting and theorizing about the motivational underpinnings of social relations and the symbolic content of myth, ritual, folklore, and other cultural practices.

Admittedly, this favorable assessment of psychoanalysis runs counter to commonly expressed opinions. Psychoanalysis is often said to be

reductionistic and antisocial and to lack scientific credibility. Throughout this book I challenge these reservations. I show that psychoanalysis describes a social creature, one who lives in society and takes shape through social experience, and I argue that classical and post-Freudian psychoanalysis are surprisingly consistent not only with ethnographic observations but also with what is now known about human nature. To be sure, some psychoanalytic ideas and propositions are questionable or outmoded (e.g., Freud's ideas about female psychology). But it is important to realize that psychoanalysis is a loose and evolving collection of ideas and observations, not a timeless, rigidly integrated theory; a few erroneous ideas do not impugn the whole enterprise.

Yet another theme here is an emphasis on social relations and social practice. Culture in my view is always and everywhere socially grounded. Social relations underlie expressive culture because social relationships are emotional matters for human beings. Since drive and emotion are important features of personality, social relations are where we are apt to find connections between personality and culture.

Here again I recommend a dialogical framework. Culture is not simply an expression of childhood experience or fantasy, as some psychoanalytically oriented writers once implied. Unconscious fantasies and desires are often too idiosyncratic or too generic to account for the peculiar characteristics of particular cultures in any case. What actually seems to happen is that the expression of the individual unconscious is mediated by internal dialogical processes and again in dialogue between individuals. Unconscious desire is modulated by common sense and moral reasoning. As individuals interact, they may further temper their thoughts and desires, consciously and unconsciously, to fit social expectations, and they may appeal to emotion or to unconscious fantasy in their interlocutors in order to strengthen the rhetorical effects of their discursive practices. These discursive practices may rekindle or strengthen unconscious fears, wishes, and fantasies. Over time, they may gradually restructure or retranscribe the unconscious residues of childhood experience and fantasy. In the social psychoanalytic perspective I formulate here childhood experience is still important, but it does not offer the reductionistic explanation for culture and cultural differences it seemed to promise in the earlier culture and personality studies.

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I am thankful to Kathleen Barlow for providing me with a copy of her dissertation and an unpublished paper on cognitive development among the Murik Lakes people of Papua New Guinea, and to David H. Lipset for allowing me to draw on his description and analysis of Murik myth and ritual in his work, to be published later in 1996 by Cambridge University Press as *Mangrove man: The embodiment of society in the Sepik estuary*. Other acknowledgments are the following:

Figure 2: The trine brain. *The trine brain in evolution: Role in paleocerebral functions*, by Paul D. MacLean. Copyright © 1990 by Plenum Publishing Company. Reprinted with permission of author and publisher.

The dialogue between Billy and Mother. Kurt W. Fischer and Malcolm W. Watson. "Explaining the Oedipus conflict," p. 84.

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The passage on depression. *Black sun: Depression and melancholia*, by Julia Kristeva. Copyright © 1989 by Columbia University Press. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Part of the section on Hindu India. John M. Ingham, “Oedipality in pragmatic discourse: The Trobriands and Hindu India.” *Ethos* (in press). Reprinted with permission of the American Anthropological Association.