

The renaissance of western politics: The 'good-enough' leader, relational economics and an empathic foreign policy

ANDREW SAMUELS

Over the past fifteen years the Jungian analyst, Professor Andrew Samuels, has worked as a political consultant to leading politicians, their advisers, parties and activist groups. In this article, he argues that personal growth, change, transformation, therapy or analysis, all depend on the ability to imagine a utopic move out of the social and political conditions in which we find ourselves. If psychoanalysis is to engage with the public sphere, the time has come to break some boundaries and learn how to transit the divides between the 'forbidden zones' of: clinical office and street; spirituality and politics; 'above' and 'below'; 'inner' and 'outer'; being and doing; extraversion and intraversion; feminine and masculine approaches to life. Samuels provides a psychoanalytic exploration of: the contemporary 'political disease' of hierarchical, heroic leadership and the need for a new story of the father; how the inner world works when it comes to economics—from economic sadism to relational economics; denationalizing the psyche; and the theme of sacrifice.

In 1996, just before the Presidential Election of that year, I spoke at a conference on psyche and politics in San Francisco. I then flew back to Britain to attend the Labour Party Convention. There I heard Tony Blair, for whom I was a consultant at the time, tell the party that Britain was 'a young country' with everything to look forward to. After Labour won in 1997, there was going to be an ethical foreign policy, a revitalized concern for citizens from the cradle to the grave, and the harnessing of the best elements from the market economy, as well as from social democracy. Hope was everywhere.

I dared to believe in it. I was ecstatic when my proposal for a series of public apologies was accepted, and naively dismayed when the media mocked Blair's public apology for the Irish Potato Famine—*'He'll be apologizing*

for the weather next', they sneered. Well, we all know how badly it turned out: the lowest rating of any postwar Prime Minister, true hatred and contempt directed against the man from all quarters of British (and world) society. Idealization, promise and hope transmuted into corruption, an obsession with celebrities, getting into bed with the City of London and Wall Street, betrayal and warmongering. It was a crippling and defining experience for me.

I almost loved him, and then I think I really hated him. And I hated myself too. What I am remembering from my own experience could be a parable, if it is not yet a parallel. I'll return to the theme of hope and disappointment throughout this paper.

Over the past fifteen years, I have built an international practice as a political consultant working with

leading politicians, their advisers, parties and activist groups in several countries—so what I will say is grounded in experience. In particular, I seem to have gravitated to work in the general area of nationalism, national identity, and nation building (in South Africa, Brazil, Poland and Russia) and this further informs what I write.

I hate realistic people. They have done a lot of damage. In our time, it would have been better to imagine a utopic move out of the social and political conditions in which we find ourselves. If we cannot imagine this, then there will be no personal growth, change, or transformation, no therapy or analysis in fact. All these things depend on a utopic fantasy of a kind. All too often, though, so-called realists point to the excesses of idealists as evidence of the dangers of dreaming. But this equating of utopic

vision with Stalin or Mao is not a detached and wise perspective—it is a highly political one, making a propaganda point against change and transformation in the polis. From a therapy standpoint, many practitioners

And things are changing in the clinic if not, as yet, in the world.

In terms of the engagement of psychoanalysis with the public sphere, the time has come to break some boundaries—to learn how to transit

between ‘being’ and ‘doing’, between extraversion and introversion, and even between what people still call ‘feminine’ approaches to life and ‘masculine’ approaches to life. Working these forbidden zones, and doing it in the company of a growing number of people world-wide, shows that it is legitimate and necessary to reframe the relationship of the public and the private, seeking new back passages between the fantasies of the political world and the politics of the fantasy world.

From a therapy standpoint, many practitioners now agree that every single client in personal distress has to have, or work on, a little bit of a utopic social vision.

now agree that every single client in personal distress has to have, or work on, a little bit of a utopic social vision. For social conditions to change, clinical practice has to change, and vice versa.

better the divides we have been told exist between clinical office and the street, between spirituality and politics, between ‘above’ and ‘below’, between the inner world and the outer world,

Good-enough leadership

I want now to look at one specific contemporary political disease, the problem of hierarchical, heroic leadership. Political theory and practice has assumed there are two



Illustration: © Savina Hopkins

main approaches to leadership. There is hierarchical and heroic leadership based on male authority (think Meir, think Thatcher, think Indira Ghandi) and using a masculine approach to knowledge that assumes there is but one objectively true social story. In this model, there are good leaders and there are bad leaders and we all have our lists of them. This kind of leader is our problem.

A second approach is much more collaborative and non-hierarchical, involving a kind of sibling take on leadership. But although appealing and sometimes usable in community projects, sibling leadership is just too demanding on citizens to be in operation all the time. People dive for cover—they don't necessarily mean to

position 'success' and 'failure'. I know the word 'failure' hurts people's feelings because it is so in-your-face. Failure means falling short, being imperfect, fallible, only passable, 'fucking up'—an all too human lack of potency. Yet maybe what we need nowadays are 'can't do' politicians, impotent politicians—they are that, anyway, are they not?—as the financial crisis has shown us.

Maybe being only and always 'in control' isn't always valuable. Winnicott said *'the parent fails the baby, but in the baby's own way'*. I'd add that failure by a leader paves the way for greater contributions and more autonomy on the part of citizens. The leader fails the citizens, but in the citizens' own way.

An initial idealisation, then a failure to deliver things perfectly, then denigration? ... this is how we respond to leaders, first by passively following the idealized leader, then seeking out feet of clay.

become bystanders but they don't see any other way to manage the burden of being collaborative leaders.

So there is heroic leadership and there is collaborative leadership. For many years, I've been advocating a third kind of leader—*'the good-enough leader'*. It is an idea about the family taken from therapeutic thought. Donald Winnicott said that parents and babies have to find a middle way between the baby's idealization and denigration of the parent. There's a natural tendency of a baby to idealise her parent, but when things go in a less than perfect way (as they surely will), it flips over into denigration.

Sound familiar? An initial idealisation, then a failure to deliver things perfectly, then denigration? It's meant to sound familiar. The media depends on it. Because this is how we respond to leaders, first by passively following the idealized leader, then seeking out feet of clay. What can we do about the pattern?

We must try to change how we

Bob Dylan nibbled away at the success-failure binary when he sang *'There's no success like failure and failure's no success at all'*. And in July 2008, Bill Clinton spoke of the inevitability of failure in politics. I believe it was the first time he'd ever done that. When Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, was asked by a journalist in 1963 what had brought him down, he replied *'Events, dear boy, events'*.

The Sufi poet Rumi wrote that *'failure is the key to the kingdom'*. Good-enoughness always involves failure. The key thing is how to manage failure, even to see failure as an art—Samuel Beckett wrote that we have to *'fail better'*. Disappointment is difficult, for sure, but it, too, has to be managed.

So the good-enough leader can accept the likelihood of failure, in a post-heroic take on leadership. But there's a head-heart problem here. Truly, we are caught up in a cultural complex as defined by San Franciscan Jungian analysts, Tom Singer and Sam Kimbles. In our heads, we often

know that the old-style leaders are dangerous, but in our hearts and guts we feel we need the fatherly protection they offer. In our souls, we are in love with the heroic leader whose Führer-eroticism turns us on. In our heads, we agree with Brecht's Galileo, who Bill Bradley used to quote many years ago: *'Unhappy is the land that has need of heroes'*. Could we become more aware of our abusive love affair with heroic leaders?

So far so good (-enough). But what happens to our good-enough leaders when things get violent? This is where good-enough leadership appears to hit a rock. Where does good-enough leadership leave us with respect to violent action? This question will not go away whether we are talking about legitimate war, illegitimate war, state terror and violently repressive action, or suicide bombing and the cult of the martyr.

Don't we need straight and traditional masculine virtues then? In a time of 'terror' and war without end, aren't the conservatives right? Don't we need paternal security and a national father's protection then? The hell with nurture! Let's see about that, as I turn now to some discussion of fathers. As stated, I'm preparing the ground for suggestions about new ways to think, imagine and manage conflict.

I see psychoanalysis as being on the verge of constructing and creating a positive account of the father that does not stupidly build him up to an unrealistic degree. An account that makes it much more difficult for our old-style political leaders to masquerade as the only kind of fathers-of-the-nation that there could be. An account that does not dwell on the malevolent power of the father's body but on its affirming physical warmth, a warmth as much aggressive as erotic. Not on his holding the mother who holds the children, but on his holding of the children himself. The stay-at-home weekend father. The sensitive and affirming father, the playful father, the wounded and unhappy father, not the punitive, stern self-contained father. Not the commander-in-chief father. We need a story of the father in which emotional security is as important as physical security. That would be a useful beginning to an

equally new and analogous story about political leadership.

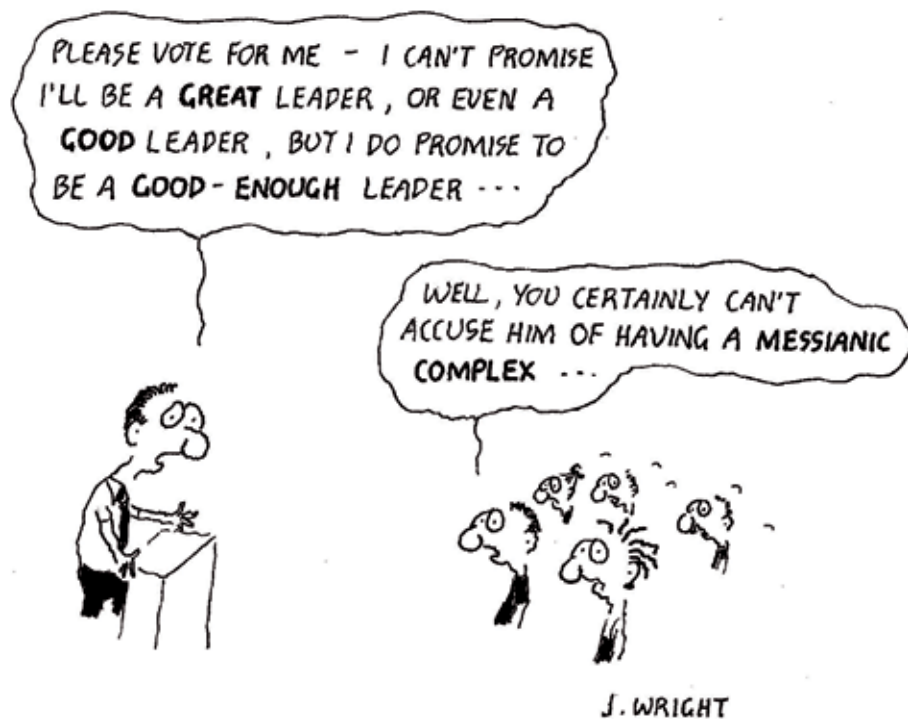
If we change what we think about fathers, alter what we expect of them, engage with these questions—perhaps what we think about leaders, what we expect of them, can change as well.

But there'll still be this nagging doubt. What if there's real, actual political conflict and violence, war, terror? Won't we need the martial values then? Didn't Winston Churchill say that *'courage is the virtue that guarantees all the others'*?

I can't resist complexifying this a bit, challenging my own thesis, so to speak, and doing it by introducing something that some liberals might find a bit difficult. From the perspective of the political psyche, I think we need to seriously re-value the presence of aggression in the pursuit of social justice. My long study of South African politics suggests that without the forceful military contributions of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation, the military wing of the African National Congress), plus the South African Communist Party, and the mainly Black Cuban troops in Angola, we'd not have seen the new South Africa. No Mandela, no Truth and Reconciliation Commission, no books on restorative justice. And, to complicate it even more, all of these were financed and supported by the Soviet Union.

It's the psychology stupid! From economic sadism to relational economics

The economic psyche is in the midst of a huge shift in values and in collective consciousness—a profound, complex, nearly unbearable, perhaps doomed to fail psychological shift in our philosophies of life with powerful implications for world and soul alike. Notions of sustainability and fairness to families sit alongside passionate concerns that the aesthetic and emotional value of economic activity be part of an insistence on its spiritual probity. Yet, amidst these very shifts we still see dramatic and unmistakable evidence of retrogressive tendencies. The growth of inequality in countries like the United States and Britain in the past 30 years has been repeatedly charted and it is not going to get better



any time soon. The best way to get rich is to have rich parents and live in a rich country. Basta, Genug.

Thinking about inequality for a moment, it is clear that a relationship exists between class and the individual's inner world. Many people have achieved a higher socioeconomic

about these dreams was in terms of a thorough, many-layered, compassionate and healing comparison of his entire situation with that of his father's. Not competition with the father. There's more to intergenerational male relating than Oedipus, and the work with this guy reminded me of that.

I see psychoanalysis as being on the verge of constructing and creating a positive account of the father that does not stupidly build him up to an unrealistic degree.

status than their parents. And yet, in their inner worlds, encountered in therapy, in dreams perhaps, the social class they grew up in is still the social class they are in in terms of psychic reality and narrative truth. My first ever banker client dreamed of his father's coal mine all the time. The (male) solidarity of the miners—for example, when there was a disaster underground—struck him as different from the atmosphere and ethos of a large Wall Street investment bank. We did, of course, play a little with what we were 'mining' in the analysis but the main thrust of our dialogue

Like everyone, I have my own passionate views about all aspects of economics ranging from doubts about the viability and fairness of the principle of wealth inheritance, to questioning usury, the practice of charging interest, to the perception that market economics works a bit like Victor's justice—if you're making it, you're liking it. If you're in rural Africa or much of America today, you probably aren't liking it very much.

Differing economic systems reflect different ideas about human nature. Altruism versus self-interest, cooperation versus the survival of the

fittest. But responses to the financial crisis made me realise that we do not have much of a handle on how people really experience economic life intrapsychically. In the economic psyche, images of wealth, poverty and money have become numinous. We are captivated whether we want to be or not.

As a thought experiment, I've been trying to imagine a society in which all income is earned income or stems from pensions and social security. There is little or no private ownership of capital. Estate taxes are very high. Inequalities of wealth are consensually regulated. Markets are tempered by collective commitment to collective well-being. When I first wrote this fantasy down, I noted in the margin: *'not such a madly utopic utopia, really'*. Please join me in imagining such an economy.

What follows now is a psychoanalytic exploration of how the inner world works when it comes to economics. It is personal and experiential, and I would ask you respectfully and sincerely to help me by trying to conjure up stuff from your own personal past history and present situation in order to engage with the questions I am asking. The present day dynamics of the economic psyche are heavily inflected by money memories from the past.

My hope is also that what I say in this section, and what you experience, will go beyond the personal to play pretty directly into clinical work in the session of an everyday kind. All the questions I am putting to you stem from, and can be directly and responsibly used in, an expanded version of what constitutes good analytical practice. But, following the tradition of the training analysis, you have to do the economic psyche work on yourself first. Many will have done some, but I think it is a good thing to make it more systematic, thorough and focused on economics.

After alerting and sensitising you, let me continue by asking you:

- *What are your memories of how money was handled in your childhood? Are these good or bad memories?*
- *Did it matter what sex a person was when it came to money in your family? Were men, for instance, supposed to know and care more?*

Women to be grateful? Or vice versa?

- *How did money move around within your family? Who controlled budgets? Was this control disputed at all?*
- *Could money be talked about openly in your home?*
- *How at ease are you when negotiating fees with clients? Does your answer connect with what you felt about the previous questions about money in your family?*
- *Have you done 'better' than your parents? If so, have there been any emotional problems over that? Yours, or theirs, or both? If you have not done 'better', how do you feel about it?*
- *How do you think you are doing in terms of handling money issues in your current relationship or family? Rate yourself on a scale of 1–10 where 1 is very bad and 10 is very good. I'll ask for feedback on it in a moment.*
- *When you fantasize having a lot of money, what are you doing with it? If you've never had such fantasies, try it right now!*

Some answers to this last question about fantasizing having a lot of money are benevolent and maybe ten percent of those are true! What interests me is eliciting economic sadism. This is where I think we may find the deal-breaker, bar, delimiter or stopper on our present-day progressive, altruistic, benevolent and idealistic economic aspirations. Most people have pretty nasty fantasies in the money zone, fantasies of getting rid of rivals, attaining superiority, eliminating awkward othernesses whenever they are encountered. In analysis, some, but surely not all of this may emerge in the transference. But perhaps there is an ineluctable cruelty attached to money and this may be one area where 'tragic vision' is all we can muster. Humans love their inequalities and that is that. On the other hand, with economic sadism brought to consciousness, economic benevolence (the term introduced in this context by Adam Smith, and which the polls tell sputters altruistically below the surface in Western politics) may flower as electoral support for fiscal and other programmes to reduce economic inequality.

Reflecting on our economic sadism.

I think many of us are more complicit in the Great Crash of 2008 than we can bear to admit. At workshops on 'the economic psyche', I ask participants to fantasize about the most shameful, sadistic, controlling, horrible thing you would do if you had a very large sum of money at your disposal—trillions of dollars. A professor of philosophy at one workshop in Pittsburgh said, *'Well, if I had unlimited funds, I'd buy thousands of acres of skiing land at Aspen and fence it off so no-one could use it.'* I did not think this was very sadistic, to say the least. Then he blurted out: *'And I'd hire the US Marine Corps to machine-gun anyone who came near.'* He burst into tears and told us about his tycoon father and the relationship they had, and other personal information.

Shameful economic fantasy tells us how even people of progressive views are deeply invested in a system of economic injustice. If we want to change this system, we need to recognise what we are up against. It's about owning our own bit of the system, a piece of shadow from which we can all too glibly detach ourselves. The lesson is that economic sadism is not something you can escape just because you want to leap out of the pit.

The sooner we admit our economic crimes to others, to other peoples, creeds, genders, species, the better and lighter the human future will be. The more even the middle classes deny their economic sadism, the greater will be *'the horrors and the vengeance of time that wait silently in the wings of the bloody dramas of our future'* (in Ben Okri's words). It's not just the hubris of the bankers. It's ours, too. Not being Odysseus, most of us got seduced by the Circe of easy personal debt. How many credit cards are there in your purse or wallet? As the Baal Shem Tov put it, *'Sinners are mirrors. When we see faults in them, we must realise they only reflect evil in us.'*

I composed the next part of my paper in an attempt to discover some deeper and even more beautiful aspects of economic activity. Reviewing my words one lovely Spring morning, I found what you have just heard to be a bit too downbeat, too tragic, even sentimentally so, and hence conforming to the expectation that

a psychoanalyst must have a tragic vision. You see, I can't see how something as ubiquitous and universal as economic activity can only be bad! It'd be like saying sex is bad! Perhaps it is time to set psychoanalysis aside for a moment.

Let me begin with a brief excursion into Islamic conceptions of, and rules for, economic activity. Not for the first time, I have found utility and inspiration in what Muslim writers have to say about pressing issues for us in the West. Earlier, as some here may

Now, as so often when the work is intercultural or interfaith, we need to regard ourselves as antithetical or antipathetic to this moral repudiation of money by Islam. For there is also something to recuperate in Western conceptions of money.

The etymology of the English word 'money' is that it stems from the Latin 'moneta', which was also the name (Moneta) the Romans used for Menemosyne, memory and the mother of the Muses. The deeper root is 'mens' which means conscience, reason and

Most people have pretty nasty fantasies in the money zone, fantasies of getting rid of rivals, attaining superiority, eliminating awkward othernesses whenever they are encountered.

know, I wrote about the idea of Ta'aruf, a Qur'anic idea in which conflict between groups of people, nations and even the sexes is understood to have been created by Allah so that people can get to know one another better. Ta'aruf means 'that you shall come to know one another'. I found that much psychoanalytic theorising on aggression parallels this idea of Ta'aruf.

Similarly, in terms of the economy, there is increased discussion these days of what is involved in 'Sharia'-compliant banking in which the earning of interest is forbidden. ('Sharia' means stemming from the Koran and its secondary literatures). Central to Islamic finance is the fact that money itself has no intrinsic value. As a matter of faith, a Muslim cannot lend money to, or receive money from someone and expect to benefit—interest (known as 'riba') is not allowed. To make money from money is forbidden—wealth can only be generated through legitimate trade and investment in assets. Money must be used in a productive way. The principal means of Islamic finance are based on trading—it is essential that risk be involved in any trading activity. Any gains relating to the trading are shared between the person providing the capital and the person providing the expertise.

rationality. Money as suggesting conscience, reason, rationality? How amazing. Something certainly has got lost concerning money in the West, and not only in translation!

Getting out of the western box

Now for the final segment of the paper. This is about denationalizing the psyche, stopping the pattern in which individuals are educated to think like states. We need to re-image ourselves, not as citizens of one country, and not as citizens of the world (which is such a cliché), but more as nomads, bums, traveling folk, itinerants, of no fixed abode, homeless, drifters.

Why? To see if we can get outside of our national box or worldview, to go beyond what is best for Americans, Brits or Australians—getting out of our places to put ourselves in the places of others, part of a quest for a more empathic connection with other countries and groups. This could actually be economically effective, a sort of win-win approach to international relations. Or, to be more dignified, part of a truly ethical approach to foreign policy in which, following Levinas, we love the other 'because he is yourself', or following Rozensweig we call 'speaking-listening', or adapting Buber 'we-we' relating.

On occasion, I've asked American

audiences to imagine a world that did not have America in it, so that taking an American viewpoint becomes much more difficult. Then to think of something like 9/11. How hard it has been to see that people outside the US did not all automatically agree that something had to be done, by the UN if not by the US itself. How maddening and infuriating it must have been for many Americans, maybe the majority, to find that some people with other national backgrounds didn't respond to the towers tumbling down in an American way. Did it increase the pressure for the war on terror? Remove the chance of a more imaginative and far-seign response?

It is understood, isn't it, that I am not asking Americans listening to me to imagine yourselves as not existing? Nor could I rejoice at what happened to the Twin Towers. This isn't my sadism and the response I seek isn't your masochism! I am trying to create a moment's space for an experiment in political thinking, that's all.

If you can get out of the American box with respect to 9/11, then it is surely possible with respect to many other less terrible though no less important issues and images. Outside the American box, ask yourself about the possibility of not responding or retaliating militarily to 9/11 at all? Doing nothing?

When Brazil's President Lula stated on March 26th 2009 that the economic crash was the responsibility of white men with blue eyes, and that black people were the victims, many of us were shocked. Having worked for Lula's party, I knew exactly what he was getting at in terms of domestic political consumption so I feel free to claim his remark as inspiration for our attempt to leave the American or Western box.

Whiteness it was that developed the mind-body split, global warming, unsustainable economics, nuclear technology, and free market economics. Whiteness got the bonus. Whiteness it is that can contemplate brown and black people dying as if they mattered less than white people—they get killed these days in a kind of video arcade by unpiloted drones steered from underground chambers thousands of miles away back home in the States.

For sure, race and ethnicity play out in myriad ways according to history and cultural context. But we have to contend with this constant whiteness, American whiteness, Western whiteness—the box we are in. These whitenesses have been allowed to become essentialised, universalised, removed from history.

In our clinical work, we understand how clients struggle to stop thinking like their parents. In our political work and in our professional gathering such as this one, psychoanalysts have to experiment trying to stop thinking like a nation or like a state. In order to claim the freedom to stop thinking like the state, we have to make sacrifices—a sacrifice of identity, security and having one's feet on the ground in a place called 'home'. It's time to leave home, to set outside the box, to press for a relational economics, to help the leader become good-enough, to fight for an empathic foreign policy devoted to standing in the shoes of the other. To do this, we have to make some sacrifices: sacrifices in which we act to lose home, suspend identity, refuse the offer of security—in the yearning hope of finding them—home, identity, security—once again.

I'll conclude on the theme of sacrifice, with climate change and sustainable and just economics very much in my mind. Sacrifice is a widespread psychological and historical theme. Sacrifice lies at the heart of the Abrahamic religions (the aborted sacrifice of Isaac) but is much, much older as a propitiation of the Gods. Asceticism has a long, long cultural history as does martyrdom, including that of suicide bombers.

In Jungian psychology, we think of the sacrifice of the ego for the flowering of the wider personality in individuation. In art and religion, we contemplate the sacrifice of autonomy and control to something experienced as 'other', whether inside or outside the self.

What if we don't make those sacrifices? I answer indirectly by turning to the great First World War poet, Wilfred Owen, and a few lines from his great poem, *'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young'*. This offers a completely different ending to the story of Abraham and Isaac that we all—Muslim, Jew, Christian, those of other faiths or those of none—could take as a profound warning of a terrible future. We pick up the narrative at the point the Angel of the Lord appears:

*Lo! an Angel called him out of heaven
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him, thy son.
Behold! Caught in a thicket by its horns,
A Ram. Offer the Ram of Pride instead.
But the old man would not so, but slew
his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.*

AUTHOR NOTES

ANDREW SAMUELS is recognised internationally as one of the leading commentators on social, cultural and political issues using therapy thinking. Clinically, he seeks to integrate approaches from Jungian and Post-Jungian analysis, with humanistic psychology and relational psychoanalysis.

Samuels is Professor of Analytical Psychology at Essex University, Visiting Adjunct Clinical Professor of Psychoanalysis at New York University, Visiting Professor of Psychoanalytic Studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and Honorary Professor of Psychology and Therapeutic Studies at Roehampton University. He is a Training Analyst of the *Society of Analytical Psychology*. He is Chair of the *United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy*. Samuels is a Founding Board Member of the *International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*. He works internationally as a political consultant, was co-founder of *Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility*, and created the journal *Psychotherapy and Politics International*.

His books have been translated into 19 languages and include *Jung and the Post-Jungians* (1985), *The Father* (1986), *Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis* (1986), *The Plural Psyche: Personality, Morality and the Father* (1989), *Psychopathology* (1989), *The Political Psyche* (1993), and *Politics on the Couch: Citizenship and the Internal Life* (2001).

Professor Samuels will offer a two-day training in Sydney and Melbourne in April 2011 with PsychOz Publications.

Comments: andrew@andrewsamuels.net