

## TAVISTOCK POLICY SEMINARS

“CONNECTING PUBLIC POLICY AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS”

# What's Wrong with Happiness?

**Speaker:** Professor Michael Rustin

**Discussant:** Dr Alessandra Lemma

**Date:** Thursday, 15 March 2007 (6pm-8pm)

**Venue:** The Tavistock Centre, Lecture Theatre

***The publication of Richard Layard's book Happiness: Lessons from a New Science (2005) has stimulated a debate in Britain about the mismatch between increased standards of living, and self-reported well-being and happiness among citizens, which appears not to have improved significantly in 50 years. There is a burgeoning literature on these issues both in Britain and in the United States, which suggests that these questions may now become part of the mainstream political agenda. Michael Rustin will provide an introduction to this debate, and some of the recent writings in economics and philosophy which inform it.***

***So, is it possible to “train” ourselves to be happy? Lord Layard believes it is. He also believes that CBT can help us in this endeavour. Layard's proposals have raised the profile of psychological therapy and placed it firmly on the political agenda. However, his exclusive emphasis on CBT as the treatment of choice not only ignores the value of analytically informed treatments, but is also in danger of doing a great disservice to CBT because such an idealised endorsement can only set it up to fail.***

In her response to Michael Rustin, Alessandra Lemma will argue that if we are genuinely committed to helping people in emotional distress, it is vital that both analytic and cognitive practitioners engage in open and constructive dialogues to understand what each contribute to the other's practice.

As well as noting the weak links between prosperity and happiness, Layard's book draws attention to the very high incidence of mental illness in Britain, as another indicator that something is wrong. His analysis suggests that failures of social integration are the primary source of the problem - he was earlier a significant advocate of full employment policies - though in this book his most specific and controversial recommendation is for the large-scale provision of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy as the treatment of choice for depression.

Layard declares himself an enthusiast for Jeremy Bentham, but Michael Rustin will argue that utilitarian doctrines which favour the maximisation of pleasure provide an inadequate foundation for thinking about good lives or good societies. What kind of alternative philosophical underpinning might be found for social policies which put “human flourishing” and creativity, and the social relations which support these, above the accumulation of wealth? Would greater philosophical coherence be helpful in developing our ideas on good social policy and practice?

### **Speaker**

Michael Rustin is Professor of Sociology at the University of East London and a Visiting Professor at the Tavistock Clinic. He has been a member of the organising group of the Tavistock Policy Seminar since its inception. He has written widely on psychoanalysis and its social and cultural applications, and on social theory and politics.

### **Discussant**

Dr Alessandra Lemma is a consultant clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst. She is Head of Psychology at The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. She has published several books in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

### **Programme**

Seminars will begin at 6pm with the main presentations. There will be a short break for refreshments at 6.45pm after which the seminar will resume with an opendialogue and end with brief commentaries from the speakers.

### **Contact**

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