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Kohut in Transition

Psychology of the Self and the Treatment of Narcissism

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from *Psychology of the Self and the Treatment of Narcissism* Richard D. Chessick, M.D.

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Review of Early Self Psychology

To summarize the psychology of the self in its first or "narrow" version, our self-assessment becomes closer to the assessment of us by others as our narcissism transforms and matures through a series of characteristic developmental pathways. In response to stimuli from the environment and due to an epigenetic preprogramming, these developmental pathways lead from autoerotism to primary narcissism—in which the infant blissfully experiences the world as being itself—and then, due to inevitable disappointment in such narcissistic omnipotence, the formation of the grandiose self and the idealized parent imago. The grandiose self carries the conviction of being very powerful, even omnipotent, with a demand for mirroring confirmation by the self-object; the idealized parent imago attributes all omnipotence to a magical figure which is then viewed as a self-object to be controlled and with which to be fused.

By a series of transmuting micro-internalizations in an appropriate environment, the grandiose self becomes incorporated into the ego or self as ambition (in the later theory it becomes a pole of the self), a drive or push which can be realistically sublimated and is itself drive-channeling (Kohut 1971, p. 187), resulting in motivated enthusiastic activity. The idealized

parent imago becomes infused into the ego ideal (or, in the later theory, becomes the other pole of the self), which attracts the individual toward certain goals and performs a drive-curbing function (Kohut 1971, p. 186). The proper integration of these narcissistic formations leads ultimately by further transformations to a sense of humor, empathy, wisdom, acceptance of the transience of life, and even to creativity within the limitations of the individual.

If the grandiose self is not integrated gradually into the realistic purposes of the ego, derivatives of it are disavowed (vertical split) or it is repressed (horizontal split) and persists unaltered in archaic form; the individual then consciously oscillates between irrational overestimation of himself and feelings of inferiority with narcissistic mortification due to the thwarting of ambition. If the idealized parent imago is not integrated into the ego ideal, it is then repressed as an archaic structure, and the patient becomes unconsciously fixed on a yearning, out of the need to resume narcissistic peace, for an external idealized self-object, forever searching for an omnipotent powerful person to merge with and from whose support and approval the individual may gain magical strength and protection.

As a consequence of this developmental arrest and failure to properly integrate these archaic structures, characteristic “self-object transferences” (Kohut 1977), previously called “narcissistic transferences” (Kohut 1971),

occur. These “self-object transferences” are the result of the amalgamation of the unconscious archaic narcissistic structures (grandiose self and idealized parent imago) with the psychic representation of the analyst, under the pressure of the need to relieve the unfulfilled narcissistic needs of childhood. It remains questionable whether they are to be called transferences in the strict sense. They are not motivated by the need to discharge instinctual tensions nor are they produced by cathecting the analyst with object libido. One may wish to think of them as transference-like phenomena, but I will refer to them here as self-object transferences, following Kohut’s later writing.

The goal of the idealizing self-object transference is to share magically, via a merger, in the power and omnipotence of the therapist. Occurring as the result of therapeutic mobilization of the idealized parent imago are two basic types of such transferences, with a variety of gradations in between. The most obvious type is a later formation, usually based on a failure of idealization of the father, which stresses the search for an idealized parent to which the patient must be attached in order to feel approved and protected. A more archaic type of self-object transference may appear or be hidden under the other type; this transference is usually related to a failure with the mother, in which the stress is on ecstatic merger and mystical union with the godlike, idealized parent.

Once such a transference has been formed, clinical signs of its disturbance are a cold, aloof, angry, raging withdrawal which represents a swing to the grandiose self; feelings of fragmentation and hypochondria due to the separation; and the creation of eroticized replacements by frantic activities and fantasies, especially those involving voyeurism, with many variations.

The typical countertransference to the idealizing self-object transferences (Kohut 1971) occurs through the mobilization of the archaic grandiose self in whatever unanalyzed residue is present in the therapist. This leads to an embarrassed and defensive "straight-arming" of the patient by denying the patient's idealization, joking about it, or trying vigorously to interpret it away. Such countertransference produces in the patient the typical signs of disturbance and retreat to the grandiose self mentioned above.

Three forms of mirror self-object transferences are seen as a result of the therapeutic mobilization of the repressed and unintegrated archaic grandiose self. The purpose of these transferences is to share with the therapist the patient's exhibitionistic grandiosity, either by participating with the therapist in the imagined greatness of the patient or by having the therapist reflect and confirm the greatness of the patient. In the archaic-merger type of mirror transference, the patient experiences the therapist as

part of the patient, expects the therapist to know what is in the patient's mind, and demands total control of the type one demands from one's own arm or leg.

In the alter-ego or twinship type of mirror transference, the patient insists that the therapist is like or similar to the patient psychologically or that the therapist and the patient look alike. In his final writing, Kohut (1984) gives this a separate status as a third category of self-object transference.

In the third type of mirror transference, or "mirror transference proper," the patient recognizes that the therapist looks and is different, but insists on assigning to the therapist the sole task of praising, echoing, and mirroring the patient's performance and greatness.

Kohut relates this to "the gleam in the mother's eye" as she watches her baby. It becomes very difficult at times to tell which type of self-object transference has formed, especially in the less primitive transferences where it is hard to distinguish between the grandiose demand for mirroring and the demand for approval by the idealized parent.

Disturbance of mirror transferences leads to a sense of crumbling self, hypochondria, and hypercathexis of isolated parts of either the body, various mental functions, or activities. Compulsive sexuality, characterized by exhibitionism and other sexual varieties and perversions, often appears in

order to combat the sense of deadness and an empty self; its purpose is to magically restitute the sense of self and the sense of being psychologically "alive." An excellent literary example of a prolonged desperate effort to restore a crumbling self is depicted in the novel *Money: A Suicide Note* (Amis 1985).

Typical countertransference reactions to mirror transferences (Kohut 1971) are boredom, lack of involvement with the patient, inattention, annoyance, sarcasm, and a tendency to lecture the patient out of the therapist's counter-exhibitionism, or to obtain control by exhortation and persuasion.

It follows that in clinical work we can pick up certain early signs of self-object transferences. We note that the patient reacts to our empathic lapses, cancellations and vacations, or even to the gap of time between sessions, with perverse or other sexual acting-out, hypochondriasis, irritable and arrogant behavior, painfully depressive moods, and a sense of emptiness and depletion. These signs may be understood as manifestations of partial fragmentation of the self due to the disruption of the self-object transferences and as attempts to restitute and discharge the painful tensions involved.

The purpose of the self-object transferences is to relieve the unfulfilled narcissistic needs of childhood for the self-object to joyfully accept and

confirm the child's grandiosity and for "an omnipotent surrounding," which Kohut and Wolf (1978) regard as "healthy needs that had not been responded to in early life" (p. 424). When these responses are forthcoming, a sense of narcissistic peace and equilibrium results.

Phase-inappropriate disappointment in the idealized parent imago that occurs very early in experiences with the mother leads to a need for optimal soothing from the idealized parent and a search for drugs, with a malfunctioning stimulus barrier. Such patients tend to become addicted to psychotherapy for just this reason. In the late preoedipal period, phase-inappropriate disappointment in the idealized parent imago attached to significant self-objects causes a resexualization of pregenital drives and derivatives with a high incidence of perversions in fantasy or acts.

In early latency the severe disappointment in the idealized oedipal object undoes the recently established, precarious idealized superego. This leads to the search for an external object of perfection, an intense search for and dependency on idealized self-objects which are conceived as missing segments of the psychic structure. For such patients each success can give only transient good feelings but does not add to the patient's self-esteem because the patient is fixed on finding an idealized parent imago outside of the patient and requires a continuing outside source of approval at this developmental stage.

IDEALIZATIONS

Idealizations can also appear in the transference neuroses and are related to the state of being in love in the transference. In the transference neuroses idealization does not lose touch entirely with the realistic features and limitations of the object. In typical neurotic situations, idealization can represent a projection of the analysand's idealized superego onto the analyst and form a part of the positive transference, or defensive idealizations can form against transference hostility.

In the narcissistic disorders, however, the unconscious is fixated on an idealized self-object for which it continues to yearn. Such persons are forever searching for external omnipotent powers from whose support and approval they attempt to derive strength. Thus, in the narcissistic transferences there is a sense of an eerie, vague idealization which becomes central to the material even to such an extreme delusion that the therapist is divine. One does not get the feeling of relating to the patient as one human being to another, but rather of an eerie quality of unreasonable exaltation to which the therapist reacts with embarrassment and negativism if the therapist does not understand the material conceptually. The intensity of the distortion gives the therapist an idea of how desperate the patient is. The greater the desperation, the greater the requirement for soothing from the therapist by presenting a consistent therapeutic structure, repeated explanations, and focusing on the

current reality.

WORKING THROUGH

In working with these developmental disorders, the therapist must participate by dealing specifically with responses to separation and disappointments in the transferences and by staying nearer to everyday experiences rather than offering deep interpretations of the past. In fact, interpretations of the past may come as a narcissistic injury because the patient cannot do much about the past and feels weak and impotent. Rage at such interpretations is the consequence of narcissistic injury and not, as it is often misinterpreted, part of the transference. The therapist takes a benign approach and fosters the development of the self-object transferences by patient, craftsman-like work.

The self-object transferences represent a new edition of the relationship between the self and the self-object from early life; infantile ambitions and idealizations are remobilized by the general ambience of the therapy and empathy with the patient's experience of the patient's needs. Small disappointments are recognized and interpretations are made with respect to the present and the past. Then, through transmuting internalizations, patients alter their inner world and self-regulation develops, paralleling the development of the child. Archaic grandiose demands are transformed into

self-regulation, and workable standards are set by the child in this process and later in a similar fashion by the patient in psychotherapy. How closely this parallels childhood development remains an uncertain and controversial issue.

TRANSMUTING INTERNALIZATIONS AND CREATIVITY

Transmuting internalization differs from other internalization processes. Gross identification due to the unconscious need for the power and skill of the therapist is magical and impermanent. Kohut argues that it is a favorable sign in the treatment if such gross identification does not occur. Identification with the aggressor tends to occur when the analyst is experienced as an aggressor, either realistically, or out of a projection from the patient's unconscious. The process of transmuting internalization in childhood, and perhaps later in adult psychotherapy, is related to autonomous factors with inherent endowment balanced by the significance of the kind of external care the child received. The notion of transmuting internalization focuses on the spirit and appropriateness of the response of significant self-objects.

Self-psychologists beginning with Kohut (1977, p. 287) often quote the plays of Eugene O'Neill, for example *The Great God Brown,* which portrays a lifelong struggle of the protagonist against fragmentation of the self. The cold

unrelatedness with the father and the joyless pathological merger with the mother lead to a never-ending search for "glue" to hold the self together.

Sometimes highly creative individuals are able to find this "glue" within their own creative activities. For example, the biographer Leon Edel (1969) describes the profound narcissistic wounding of Henry James when his efforts at writing plays produced repeated failures. In spite of the assaults and misfortunes, a self-recreation took place, in which James turned to short story writing. Although he had no affectionately secure interpersonal relations in mid-life, he was able to accept his middle-aged loneliness by turning to the discipline of his craft. This indirect soothing of his psyche enlarged his vision of the world and produced a warmth to his personality and a sense of an invigorated self.

It seems to be a unique gift of certain human beings to soothe themselves through creating illusions and then internalizing their own created idealizations, providing narcissistic equilibrium. This may give a key to the formation of religions and artistic productions that would produce a view of these phenomena quite different from Freud's pejorative psychoanalytic interpretations of them.

In addition to an entirely different view regarding art and religion, the psychology of the self greatly influences the technique of psychoanalysis and

intensive psychotherapy. For example, Kohut

describes the aggressive image of the therapist created by Wilhelm Reich in his exhortations to attack the narcissistic "armor" of the patient: "Reich created an aggressive image implying hostility, fight, quarrel between patient and physician. The physician who wants to overcome the resistance turns into an attacker who undertakes breaking to pieces the armor of the analysand" (pp. 548-549). Another example given by Kohut is that of the analyst leaping on a parapraxis of the patient in the early stages of analysis: "All this must be interpreted carefully and with true empathy" (p. 552). Again, there is continuing emphasis on the proper tact, timing, and understanding on the part of the analyst of how an interpretation is *experienced* by the patient.

Narcissistic Rage

After Kohut's (1971) *The Analysis of the Self* appeared, one of the main complaints about the book was that it did not deal with the subject of narcissistic rage, since it represents the hardest aspect with which to contend in treating narcissistic patients. Perhaps in response to this difficulty, Kohut (1978) wrote one of his most important papers, "Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage" in 1972 which led him in the direction of applying the psychology of the self to major world historical problems as well as to the difficulties of the individual.

"Thoughts on Narcissism" begins by describing the great story *Michael Kohlhaas* (Kleist 1976) by Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811), who ended his short life by suicide and whose stature in German literature is only now becoming recognized in the West as surpassed only by that of Goethe (Maass 1983). More familiar is *Moby Dick* by Melville which, like Kleist's story, describes the fate of a man obsessed by interminable narcissistic rage. The outbreak of group narcissistic rage when the aspirations of the grandiose self are blocked, leading to a yearning for merger with the idealized self-object, is next applied to an understanding of the rise of Hitler and the ruthless warfare of Nazi Germany.

Kohut flatly disagrees with the hypothesis that there is an inherent human aggressive drive which is only thinly protected by the veneer of civilization and accounts for the outbreak of war. In his view, human aggression arises in its most dangerous form out of narcissistic rage, which in turn is a disintegration or byproduct as a consequence of the profound disappointment in self-objects. The narcissistically vulnerable individual responds to actual or anticipated narcissistic injury either with shamefaced withdrawal or with narcissistic rage, and Kohut's essay offers a splendid clinical description of the various forms of such rage.

The whole problem of "preventive attack" and the boundless wish for revenge in which every aspect of ego functioning is drawn into the service of

narcissistic rage—as so well illustrated by our current insanity of a nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union—becomes understandable as a situation in which narcissistic rage actually enslaves the ego. Even the smallest narcissistic wounds can produce the most astonishing demonstrations of narcissistic rage in individuals who are narcissistically vulnerable. The rage becomes aimed at the "enemy" (or "evil empire") who is experienced as a flaw in the patient's narcissistically perceived reality. The patient expects total and full control, so that the independence or balky behavior of the self-object is a personal offense.

When the self-object fails to live up to absolute obedience expectations, narcissistic rage appears, characterized by no empathy whatever for the offender. The ego functions only as a tool and rationalizer for the attainment of revenge. Chronic narcissistic rage is even more dangerous, as secondary process thinking gets pulled into the archaic aggression and the ego attributes all failures to the malevolence of the uncooperative self-object.

Such rage may also be directed at the self as an object, which leads to depression, or at the body-self, leading to psychosomatic disorders. Again this is applied to group processes when, through the blocking of acceptable outlets for national prestige or the destruction of group or religious values, the "flavor of narcissistic rage" (p. 658) appears, carrying an ominous threat to the peace of the world.

This also gives us an important clinical indicator of progress in treatment. As the patient matures, narcissistic rage begins to be transformed into realistic adult assertiveness in the service of worthwhile goals, and away from the many primitive explosions that characterize the early phase of intensive psychotherapy of narcissistic and borderline patients.

The Increasing Importance of Empathy

With the passage of time Kohut shifted his emphasis over the mid-1970s away from the accurate interpretation of structural defects involving primitive grandiosity or idealization and focused on empathy. He gradually decided that the truth value of analytic interventions was less important than their effect on the therapeutic relationship; he began to stress the actual healing power of the analyst's "empathic" ambience. In practice this meant adherence to a therapeutic stance stressing the legitimacy of the patient's claim on the caretakers.

With this step Kohut's system crossed gradually into the realm of the nurture psychologies, and Kohut began stating that the basic point of difference between himself and analytic traditionalists was one of values. He insisted that psychoanalysis must become the pacesetter of a major shift in values, from emphasis on a truth-and-reality morality toward the idealization of empathy; from pride in clear vision and uncompromising rationality

toward pride in the scientifically controlled expansion of the self. The world of yesterday, as he calls it, is the world of the independent mind, of the proud scientist standing tall and clear-sighted. The world of today and of tomorrow is the world of Kafka's "Gregor Samsa" in "The Metamorphosis," of his "K" in *The Trial* and *The Castle*—the world of a family and a society indifferent to "K," who wanders through the world empty, flat, yearning for something he cannot understand. In such a world it is human empathy that forms an enclave of human meaning within a universe of senseless spaces and crazily racing stars, and prevents pairing finiteness and death with meaninglessness and despair.

The series of papers making up Volume 2 of *The Search for the Self* (Kohut 1978) traces Kohut's expansion of his psychology of the self into many other fields of human interest. The concept of the self remains an experience-near notion stemming from a nuclear self, but Kohut gradually revises his early notion that the self forms from the coalescence of a set of primordial nuclei; he now believes there is in rudimentary form a self present soon after birth. The introduction by Paul Ornstein (Kohut 1978) to this series traces in greater detail than possible here the development of Kohut's concepts.

Empathy becomes a central issue, expanding beyond the status of a mode of observation to the "positively toned atmosphere" and emotional climate in which interactions between humans take place; empathy as a

psychological bond and nutriment can produce "wholesome social effects" (p. 707). Thus empathic observation becomes increasingly redesigned into the provision of an empathic milieu. The importance of this empathic milieu in the psychotherapeutic situation, in the situation of every human being, and as a necessity for world peace, becomes increasingly central to Kohut's thought.

Psychoanalysis as a Vital Cultural Force

One of the most remarkable aspects of the psychology of the self is how readily it lends itself to an understanding of a great variety of human phenomena; this may explain why it has eagerly been taken up by workers in numerous scholarly disciplines, as various publications of conferences on the psychology of the self (Goldberg 1980, Lichtenberg and Kaplan 1983) demonstrate. Proponents of the psychology of the self have argued that Kohut and his work have revitalized the entire field of psychoanalysis and contradicted the common complaint that everything possible to be discovered by Freud's techniques has been discovered.

Let us look briefly at this important series of transition papers (Kohut 1978, Vol. 2) that roughly extend from around the time of Kohut's (1971) *The Analysis of the Self* to the appearance of Kohut's second book in 1977, *The Restoration of the Self.* In 1970 Kohut lectured at the Free University in Berlin on the 50th anniversary of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. He said,

"Everywhere are dying the Zhivagos who are incapable of adapting to the new conditions without the loss of the core of their life-sustaining traditions and ideals" (p. 513). This is a moral presentation in which Kohut argues for psychoanalysis as an important civilizing force in contrast to "my colleagues who, in quiet restraint, want to focus their whole attention on the concrete problems of their therapeutic activity without spending sleepless nights over the course that mankind is taking" (p. 517).

Psychoanalysis can become a powerful potential cultural force which may help us with the terrible problem of unfettered aggression that is rampant in the modern world. Man seems unable to control his cruelty toward his fellow man: "He appears to be forced to respond to differences of opinion or conflicts of interest in one mode only: through the mobilization of his readiness to fight and to destroy" (p. 526). Kohut's solution here is the intensification, elaboration, and expansion of humanity's inner life, perhaps illustrated by the work of the creative artist and performer and the psychological activities of those who are able to obtain pleasure from the arts. This inward shift toward the exercise of self-contained mental functions can be a fulfilling activity for those who are adequately endowed intellectually and emotionally, allowing them to enjoy life and satisfactorily employ their energies, according to Kohut.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE SELF AND THE EGO

In a talk on the self first published in 1970, Kohut shifts from a view reminiscent of Nietzsche in which it is an "abstraction" to a view reminiscent of Bergson in which it is "enduring." He states, "The self, however, emerges in the psychoanalytic situation and is conceptualized in the mode of a comparatively low-level—i.e., comparatively experience-near—psychoanalytic abstraction, as a content of the mental apparatus. While it is thus not an agency of the mind, it is yet a structure within the mind since it is cathected with instinctual energy and it has continuity in time, i.e., it is enduring" (pp. 584-585). Kohut is having a struggle in this transitional paper between structural theory and the psychology of the self, while the two theories are rapidly diverging.

The mutually enhancing relationship between the cohesive self and a strong cathexis of ego functions is an important clinical aspect of Kohut's work, and in my opinion remains one of the principal arguments for differentiating the concept of the self from the concept of the ego with its substructures. Clinically, a person must have a secure feeling of who he is as a precondition for the ego's reliable ability to perform its functions. If the self is poorly cathected, ego functions are performed without zest, disconnected from one another, and lacking in firmness of purpose. Conversely, everyday phenomena of the activation of ego functions to provide an enhancement of the sense of cohesive self are also common. For example, Kohut lists recovery from a blow to one's self-esteem through physical exercise (which brings

about a heightened cathexis of the body-self) or through the performance of intensive mental activities, which leads to self-confirmation.

An important clinical example is offered from the study of schizophrenia. During the prepsychotic phase the patient is aware of the fragmentation of the self; the patient feels "different," less "real." The patient may try to counteract this fragmentation through the frantic hypercathexis of ego functions of "forced thinking, talking, writing; forced physical and mental work" (p. 588). This "overwork" is then often incorrectly assessed by the patient and by his family not as an attempt at self-healing, but as a cause or precipitant of the disease; actually, it is an attempt to consolidate the crumbling self and prevent the schizophrenic fragmentation.

Kohut continues his struggle to conceptualize the "self" in a brief discussion in 1972, where he defines the nuclear self as the one that is experienced as most basic and is most resistant to change. This nuclear self firms up in adolescence through the help of peer relationships that act as confirming reflections for the maintenance of empathic contact.

In this discussion Kohut gives us a glimpse of himself, mentioning that he was in his own adolescence a member of a secret society from which he feels he derived as an adult a "characteristic idealism" (p. 661). He attributes to himself the capacity to be enthusiastic and also the ability to inspire

enthusiasm in others for the causes in which he believes, a fact borne out by the energy of his followers. He admits, however, that the influence of aging produces a shift even in the nuclear self: "There is less enthusiasm in me now (and less Pollyanna) and more concern for the continuity (i.e., for the survival) of the values for which I have lived" (p. 661).

He ends with a remarkable statement about the movie *The Last Picture Show,* which has an extraordinary resemblance to Nietzsche's description of the last man: "There is parental disinterest in the younger generation, and the whole dying town, the dying society of the town, is a symbol for the unresponsiveness, the unempathic self-absorption of the parents" (p. 662).

KOHUT'S "REVALUATION OF VALUES"

Kohut's paper on "The Future of Psychoanalysis" presented in 1973 could be subtitled "Revaluation of Values," and again has a Nietzschean ring about it. He begins, perhaps because this is on the anniversary of his 60th birthday, by telling us about the father that he set up in himself:

> That internal ally who helps me maintain the integrity of myself under psychologically trying circumstances, has taught me, from way back in my life, to turn to reflection, to the search for meanings and explanations. And I have learned that the enjoyment of these mental activities must often take the place of the direct gratifications that are hard to keep in bounds, (p. 665)

Kohut argues that psychoanalysts must replace their archaic object (Freud) by a strong set of ideals and values that will lead to a new surge of independent initiative, for Freud was wrong on such subjects as religion and the psychoses. He quotes what he calls Freud's "touching admission" regarding the insane: "I do not care for these patients, that they annoy me, and that I find them alien to me and to everything human" (p. 672). Elsewhere (1980) I have summarized Freud's views on religion.

Kohut calls for a shift of emphasis from "a truth-and-reality morality toward the idealization of empathy, from pride in clear vision and uncompromising rationality to pride in the scientifically controlled expansion of the self" (p. 676). His next call is for an end to "tool-and-method pride" which leads to the wasteful isolation from one another of various branches of science. He argues that the scientist standing alone was a suitable ideal for the world of yesterday, but for the world of tomorrow a new, expanded inner self will be necessary as an avenue of escape. In addition to this solution, he offers a second way of coping with the world of tomorrow: "The expansion of the self, its increasing capacity to embrace a greater number and a greater variety of others through a consciously renewed and cultivated deepened empathy" (p. 682).

This essay ends with little to suggest how all this is to come about, and leads directly to the next essay, "The Psychoanalyst in the Community of

Scholars," delivered in 1973. Here again Kohut gives some personal information, suggesting that if he had another life to live he would try to become a historian—his son is a historian. The essay deals with some of the thorniest problems in epistemology and the philosophy of science, after again reviewing the problem of tool-and-method snobbishness that separates each discipline in the university and leads to internal rigidity and lessened vitality.

Kohut also tries to explain the nonacceptance of psychoanalysis in the community of scholars not on the basis of any primary defect in the epistemological foundations of psychoanalysis as stressed by Grünbaum (1983, 1984), but on the basis of resistance "out of fear that the acceptance of its methodology will undermine the constructed edifice of scientific thought" (p. 696). The mind of modern man, which has worked so hard to achieve objective scientific investigation, has had to rid its thought processes of certain archaic or infantile qualities such as subjectivity, the animistic conception of nature, and immediate sensory impressions that lead to *post hoc propter hoc* hypotheses. Returning to the study of the inner life of man threatens the breakthrough of modern man's "unacknowledged still persisting temptation to return to animistic thought and to anthropomorphic concepts" (p. 696).

Kohut comes down firmly on the side of psychoanalysis as a science and not an art; empathy or vicarious introspection are the unique psychoanalytic

tools of observation and gathering data, data which are then treated by the usual rigorous method of the empirical sciences. This is an important and frequently misunderstood point about Kohut, who writes, "I must object when psychoanalysis is welcomed among the fashions of the day on the basis of the erroneous notion that it is no more than a specific, sophisticated art—an art of understanding people via the resonance of empathy" (p. 701).

Kohut would also disagree with those who insist that psychoanalysis will be eventually superseded by traditional methods of scientific observation, for example, empirical studies of the development of children and statistical studies of therapeutic interaction (Eagle 1984). This position disregards what Kohut claims to be the decisive step that psychoanalysis has taken in the development of Western thought. It has combined empathy and traditional scientific method; the data of psychoanalysis are defined and limited by the method of empathy or vicarious introspection. In this argument, there is a curious parallel to that of Ricoeur (1970, outlined by Chessick 1985) who also feels that psychoanalysis took a decisive new step epistemologically in combining hermeneutics and energetics into a new process of gathering knowledge.

Kohut hopes that psychoanalysis can also introduce empathy into other sciences as an observational tool and as a matrix, if we are not to isolate science from humanity and allow science to become our inhuman master.

Thus for Kohut the importance of empathy in human life is three-fold: by the recognition of the self in the other, it is an indispensable tool of observation; by the expansion of the self to include the other it constitutes a powerful psychological bond between individuals; and "the accepting, confirming, and understanding human echo evoked by the self" (p. 705) is a psychological nutriment at all stages of human life. Empathy in the first sense is a tool which can be wrongly used; it is "value neutral." In the second sense it can diminish rage and destructiveness by increasing the empathic bridge between disparate peoples; again Kohut emphasizes that the psychology of the self is not proposing "the nonscientific methods of a cure through love which characterize so many therapeutic cults" (p. 707).

Using empathy in the third sense, Kohut attempts to explain the widespread existential malaise of our times, not on a philosophical basis but on a concrete experiential basis. He states that "our propensity for it is due to the insufficient or faulty empathic responsiveness we encountered during the crucial period when the nucleus of our self was formed" (p. 713) in a view which seems consistent with Lasch (1978) in *The Culture of Narcissism.*

The remainder of this essay, which should be studied in basic philosophy courses because it throws psychoanalytic light on some important and urgent contemporary philosophical problems, describes "divinity schools and . . . departments of philosophy where, all too often, lines of thought are

being pursued uneasily, whose irrelevance the best of the faculty have themselves long recognized within the silence of their souls" (p. 716). He hopes to revitalize these departments and remobilize the university as a genuine community of scholars by introducing a new kind of humanitarianism based on the notion that man "cannot fulfill his essential self in any better way than by giving emotionally nourishing support to man, i.e., to himself and to his like" (p. 715). There is a striking similarity of this view to the basic stance shown in the later work of Sartre, despite the different terminology. Sartre argues that the individual cannot be free unless all men are free, and engagement is an act, not a word (de Beauvoir 1984).

Finally, he suggests that we study the university hospital, a splendid testing ground for the investigation of the dehumanizing effect of the large institution, which any patient in a large hospital certainly has painfully experienced. Following the same orientation as Nietzsche, he concludes, "It is man's ultimate purpose to support the survival of man" (p. 722), even in our new mass society. To put the matter in a nutshell, Kohut writes, "The university's failure has been to carry on its traditional labors in the pursuit of specialized endeavors while closing its eyes to the tragedy of man, who suffocates in an increasingly inhuman environment that he himself continues to create" (p. 724). To my knowledge, little serious attention has been paid to Kohut's views on these matters by the academic hierarchy.

Emergence of the Psychology of the Self in the Broader Sense

A letter regarding the formation of the self-written in 1974 may be regarded as the turning point in Kohut's transition from the "psychology of the self in the narrow sense" to the "psychology of the self in the broader sense." It begins with his clinical observation that the self reacts three ways to self-object failure. First, there may be temporary fragmentation marked by symptoms of hypochondriasis, disorganization, a disheveled appearance, and strange talk and gestures. Second, there may be regression to the archaic forms of the grandiose self and the idealized parent imago with their intrusive and disruptive demands. Third, there may appear empty depression and a drop in self-esteem. He reiterates that psychoanalysis is an empirical science and not art, and that the self does not form through the coalescence of parts. The child's self-experience arises separately from the body part experiences, and the fate of the self, which has a separate developmental line, is "beyond the pleasure principle" (p. 753).

Our understanding of the human condition is now approached by two roads: the traditional psychoanalytic approach conceives of the individual in conflict over the pleasure-seeking drives as "Guilty Man," and the approach of the psychology of the self defines "Tragic Man" as the individual blocked in the attempt to achieve self-realization. Freud's Guilty Man is pleasure seeking and struggling against guilt and anxiety, but this refers to the realm of

parental responses that the individual receives as a child to single parts of his body and single bodily and mental functions. However, there is another realm of parental responses "attuned to his beginning experience of himself as a larger, coherent and enduring organization, i.e., to him as a self' (pp. 755-756).

Certain basic ambitions and ideals are laid down early in life; Kohut labels this the nuclear self. The self, whether in the sector of its ambitions or in the sector of its ideals, does not seek pleasure through stimulation and tension-discharge but strives for fulfillment through the realization of these nuclear ambitions and ideals. Its fulfillment, says Kohut, does not bring pleasure, as does the satisfaction of a drive, but, beyond the pleasure principle, it brings triumph and a glow of joy. Similarly, its blocking does not evoke the signal of anxiety but instead evokes shame and empty depression, "anticipatory despair about the crushing of the self and of the ultimate defeat of its aspirations" (p. 757). Thus Tragic Man fears a premature death which prevents the realization of the aims of the nuclear self, in a view reminiscent of Sartre's description of humanity as a useless passion.

Kohut worries that these considerations may appear speculative, philosophical, and unscientific, just as Freud (1920) worried in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Kohut insists that this duality of the individual's major goals accounts for important clinical phenomena since the two major human

tendencies—searching for pleasure and striving to realize the pattern of the self—can either work together harmoniously or can be in conflict with each other.

The remainder of this difficult letter-essay deals with the possibility of creativity arising from disharmony between these strivings. Kohut suggests a third type of basic parental attitude, besides those responding to the child's body parts or the child's nuclear self, which acknowledges the child as a new separate individual or new independent creative self in the next generation. This may lead to a separate line of development of the individual's capacity to enjoy a self-contained, creative aloneness. Here Kohut seriously attempts to apply his psychology of the self to an understanding of creativity.

Two brief subsequent essays, "The Self in History" and "A Note on Female Sexuality," deal with narcissistic injury and so-called "penis envy" from the point of view of self-psychology. I have discussed this topic at length in two previous publications (Chessick 1983b, 1984a). The final transitional essay is entitled "Creativeness, Charisma, Group Psychology" and presents Kohut's reflections on the self-analysis of Freud. By 1976, when this essay was written, Kohut had moved a great distance from traditional psychoanalytic theory and considerations, and, one might suspect from this essay, was subject to increasing criticism and perhaps to some social ostracism from organized psychoanalysis.

KOHUT'S STUDY OF FREUD

Kohut begins by remarking how difficult it is to be objective about Freud, whom he calls "a transference figure par excellence" (p. 793), because we are prone either to establish an idealizing transference toward Freud or defend ourselves against it by reaction formation. Analysts usually get acquainted with Freud during the crucial early years in which the formation of their professional selves takes place. Kohut believes that this idealization of Freud produces cohesion among the psychoanalytic group, borrowing from Freud's (1921) own statements in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.* Sterba (1982) provides some personal recollections of the "glorious admiration" of Freud among the early Viennese psychoanalysts.

Psychoanalysts' idealization of Freud leads to conformity and over-caution in the putting forward of new ideas. Idealization also creates psychological conditions unfavorable to creativity because too many of the potentially creative narcissistic strivings of the individual psychoanalyst are committed to too large a proportion of the idealized goals of the group. The assumption is that original creativity is energized predominantly from the grandiose self, while the work of more tradition-bound scientific and artistic activities "is performed with idealizing cathexes" (p. 801). Kohut maintains that the idealization of Freud protects the psychoanalyst against shame propensity, envy, jealousy, rage, and disturbances of self-esteem; therefore

any attempted de-idealization of Freud would create tremendous resistances against taking an objective, realistic attitude toward Freud.

Turning directly to Freud's self-analysis, Kohut describes Freud's relationship with Fleiss as a transference of creativity; Fleiss was used as a transference figure, but the transference was not dissolved by insight. According to Kohut, people during periods of intense creativity have a need for another person that they may idealize, similar to the idealizing transference that establishes itself during the psychoanalytic treatment of narcissistic personality disorders. This is not to suggest that creative people have personality disorders that drive them to seek archaic merger experiences, but rather that the psychic organization of certain creative people is characterized by a "fluidity" of basic narcissistic configurations.

Periods of narcissistic equilibrium with stable self-esteem and secure idealized internal values are accompanied by steady persevering work characterized by attention to details. This is followed by a pre-creative period of emptiness and restlessness, in which there is a decathexis of values and low self-esteem as well as either addictive or perverse yearnings and difficulty in working. Finally, there is a creative period in which "unattached narcissistic cathexes which had been withdrawn from the ideals and from the self are now employed in the service of the creative activity: original thought; intense, passionate work" (p. 816).

This has been described in the psychological literature, for example by Ellenberger (1970) as a creative illness, but Kohut's explanation is the first detailed metapsychological discussion based on the psychology of the self. The transferences established by creative minds during periods of intense creativity represent the striving of a self, which feels enfeebled during a period of creativity, to retain its cohesion by a mirror transference or by the need to obtain strength from an idealized object, resembling an idealizing self-object transference, not primarily involving the revival of a figure from the oedipal past.

This is followed by an example of the aging artist who regresses to homosexuality as a delaying action during the disintegration of his artistic sublimation, described in Thomas Mann's famous story, *Death in Venice.* We have now come full circle, as demonstrated by Kohut's first paper, written in 1948 (reprinted in Kohut 1978), which deals with the same story.

Kohut concludes that the resolution of Freud's transference to Fliess did not take place by any form of interpretation, but because the idealizing transference of creativity which Freud had formed to Fliess became superfluous and naturally dropped away after Freud's first creative work was finished. Freud was able to dispense with the illusory sense of Fliess's greatness, in contradiction to resolution of a transference by insight, after he finished his creative task at that point. A careful study of the recently

published *Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess* (Masson 1985) strongly supports Kohut's conclusion.

KOHUT ON GROUP PSYCHOLOGY

The remainder of this long 1976 essay may be considered Kohut's addendum to Freud's (1921) *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.* The characteristics of an individual suitable for group idealization are an unshakeable self-confidence and a voicing of opinions with absolute certainty. Kohut describes the charismatic individual who identifies with his grandiose self and the messianic individual who identifies with his idealized parent imago and becomes the "natural" leader. Such people have no elasticity and come in all shades and degrees from the narcissistic personality to the psychotic.

Kohut draws a parallel between normal times and crisis times in the history of a group, with group crises producing a situation similar to the temporary need of the creative person, for example, the need for a charismatic individual like Churchill during the Battle of Britain. The discussion includes the childhood of these charismatic and messianic individuals with examples such as Schreber's father, Hitler, and perhaps Fliess who

> seem to combine an absolute certainty concerning the power of their

> selves and an absolute conviction concerning the validity of their ideals with an equally absolute lack of empathic understanding for large segments of feelings, needs, and rights of other human beings and for the values cherished by them. They understand the environment in which they live only as an extension of their own narcissistic universe, (p. 834)

The essay ends with the suggestion of a parallel between the nuclear individual self and the nuclear group self. Therefore, we may apply to group phenomena what we learn from a study of the individual self. In a footnote (p. 837), Kohut tells us that a person who does not achieve the pattern of the unconscious self—the central unconscious ambitions of the grandiose self and the central unconscious values of the internalized idealized parent imago—will feel an overriding sense of failure in his life regardless of the presence or absence of neurotic conflict, suffering, symptoms, or inhibitions. Kohut suggests that group phenomena can be studied in a similar fashion. By the time he wrote an essay in which he stated that "group processes are largely activated by narcissistic motives," Kohut had formulated an elaborate psychology of the self which had been criticized as betraying some of the basic discoveries and theories of Freud. His answer is: "I am certain that decisive progress in the area of depth psychology is tied to personal acts of courage by the investigator who not only suffers anxiety but tends to be maligned and ostracized" (p. 843).

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